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the interior glazing its own adjustable blind. The aim here was to equip the occupants with a tool to play with which would give them every option from complete privacy to complete exposure. But for technical and financial reasons the system would never work as presented the blinds pull down instead of, as originally planned, up from the floor, they are sometimes awkward and, in the larger rooms, time-consuming to handle.

As a social unit the building doesn't encourage communal activities largely due to the client’s insistence that it shouldn’t provide an alternative attraction to the main college building in the High Street. This was one reason for suppressing the sitting and cooking facilities originally planned for the angles of the corridor. The only large communal room is the breakfast room, which is a somewhat claustrophobic space due to the fact that there is no low-level window looking over the water. The ostensible reason for this is that it would have opened the room to view from the intended public footpath along the river. One suspects that in this particular room most students would have preferred view to privacy, and that a somewhat specious practical argument has been used to bolster up Stirling’s desire to preserve the integrity of his brief position. (At Leicester, Stirling solved the problem of a necessary door in the similar podium by giving it a brick skin.) The decision to keep the room partitions from butting against the glazing was a less defensible sacrifice of user comfort to visual preference, for the sound insulation between the rooms has suffered in consequence. Other minor irritations, troubles which can reasonably be described as teething problems arising out of the contract, and the reactions of first-year students arriving with preconceptions of what an Oxford college building should look like, have given the building a tricky passage. There is little that can’t be remedied, and in five years time the fact will probably have been forgotten. But in the meantime the critics are provided with fuel, which is a pity, for in a situation where even the best buildings tend to be divided between the over-clever and the worthy pedestrian Stirling is an asset which English architecture can’t afford to waste.

The buildings already built or designed by Stirling since the Florey make it clear that this particular series is now complete. There are suggestions even in the Fliey that he was beginning to find its particular formal discipline constraining. In the free space under the raised main body of the building the porter’s flat and the ante-room to the breakfast room follow a free flow of lines and curves altogether unrelated to the remaining geometry. His preliminary sketches show that at one time he thought of molding these curved elements much more prominent. The competition entry for Derby Civic Centre, produced in 1970 three years after the Florey design, was based on a similar motif of an amphitheatre turning its back on an unsympathetic environment but it was a synthesis of curved and angular geometries. It was based on a radial plan, with a covered arcade curved in both plan and section, but the 45 degree section survived prominently in the roof of the amphitheatre and delightfully in the 45 degree tilt given to the re-erected facade of the old assembly hall. An increasing fascination with the juxtaposition of curved and angled forms on the one hand and with the advantages of repetitive units and the aesthetic of assemblage buildings on the other have led naturally to experiment with glass reinforced plastic. The Olivetti building at Harlow provides the first instalment of a whole new range of techniques and forms from which architects the world over can crib.