deal of rather equally, if temporarily, clutter. The combination of a hollow, amphitheatre, plan with a sloping section, and a transparent upper floor means that all the sets of rooms get the view; only a short section faces due north and the maximum sun gets into the north-facing courtyard; at the apex of this is a platform raised above the breakfast room which catches the sun when the rest of the court is in shadow. The sloping section and angled plan has other practical pay-offs: each visible section of the corridor is modest in length and so the services and storage zone is discontinued at the angles so that they widen out into spaces originally intended to be fitted up with seats, sinks and cooking facilities. This conceptually simple plan could have been carried out with complete symmetry in the form of a regular half-octagon amphitheatre with the entrance and breakfast room to north and south on the central axis. As executed by Stirling it is complex, experimental and sophisticated. The patterning of the courtyard tiles (see ground floor plan on page 202) gives the principal planning grid, and another grid at 45 degrees to it makes up the basic form. But a twist of 22.5 degrees, provided by the lines bisecting the courtyard angles, gives a secondary set of grids, expressed internally by the circulation walls at the angles and externally by the breakfast room podium and the flights of steps that cut up from the clster into the courtyard. The breakfast room (basically a square with two cut away corners) has its diagonal on one of these two angles, and two of its outer edges on two others. These boundary lines push it over asymmetrally to one side of the courtyard (making corridor access into the main body of the building shorter). Symmetry is replaced by balance because, in the opposite half of the courtyard, one of the other side is an extended aisle. As a result the basic shape is a distorted half octagon with the east side pushing further to the north than the west. A little of the extra ground space gained in this way on the west is taken up by the slow twist of the river, the rest given for a mooring bay for punts which likes in next to the breakfast room.

The sectional countepoint is equally sophisticated. But though the geometry may be complicated the visual impact isn’t. Like the engineering and history faculty buildings, the Florey is immediately and convincingly there, a single coherent, glinting, precise and totally convincing object. The main image—the scooped out shape, the glassed front and tilted back, the slope of the supports running against the slope of the tiles—is simple and memorable but subordinate to this are all sorts of visual pay-offs as one geometry runs into and overlaps another: the court steps cutting into the courtyard, the side staircases drooping out of the sloping tile walls, the different sections of front and back playing against each other at the flat tile cut-outs at the ends of the building. Inside, as well, the shape of the building provides continual pleasant surprises: the flights of the side staircases, for instance, instead of being concealed one above the other are all laid out in instantaneous views, layer after layer; as in all Stirling buildings, moving through the circulation spaces is a constant source of variety and pleasure.

As with its two predecessor’s nature is kept out. There is no place for grass, let alone a tree, in the court; instead there is a highly enjoyable conent, a kind of machine-made tree in the form of the ventilating shaft to the breakfast room kitchen, fitted out with a wind vane and cowl. But the relationship of the building to the natural objects is not aggressive, only separate, like a submarine which has landed on the seac, allowing its crew to gaze at the underwater vegetation through a glass screen. Especially submarine are the views at the bottom of each flight of the small stone-tiles of glass through which appear disconnected slices of reeds, water or leaves. The rooms have as much exposure as they want, but ventilation is by louvres and there is no possibility of filling open windows to let in summer smells and breezes or talk to a friend. If this barrier is integral with the patent glazing system one suspects that its existence doesn’t especially worry Stirling to him inside is inside and outside is outside, just as a building is a building and a tree is a tree.

This separation is a built-in part of the Stirling aesthetic and it is arguable that what is acceptable in an office or teaching building is less so in a domestic one; in spite of its differences of function there is little difference in tone between the Florey and its two predecessors. It is less domestic where perhaps it should be most so, in the porter’s flat; admittedly this is a view of the river, but its image is a chilly one, a curved edge of glass is an unattractive court overlooked from the entrance approach and the adjacent public car park.

The student rooms have qualities which deserve to be stressed, in view of the criticisms that have been made of them. The split level rooms on the top floors, spatially delightful and with superb (and quite different) views in both directions are supremely desirable. On the lower floors, though the columns are alternatively where they occur in the smallest rooms, elsewhere the combination of glassing and the occasional slope column delicately relocates the rooms from cellular anonymity. But in the rooms where shutters provide privacy, people, like snails, have the option of retiring into their shells, and the option of sticking their heads out. If the glassing at the Florey impedes the latter, the former is catered for by giving each section of the

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