

NATURAL SELECTION

Ex-Terry Farrell and Robert Venturi employee, David Quigley, designed this attractive building for a wildlife park in Kings Cross. Alan Thompson reports.

THE industrial wasteland that lies behind London's Kings Cross railway station is much more famous historically for its highwaymen, rubbish dumps and low life than anything else. It seems an unlikely setting for a wildlife park but there it is complete with frogs, toads, newts, birds, plants shrubs, trees and, usually, lots of schoolchildren.

Camley Street Natural Park is rather special for city dwellers because it exists to preserve a piece of land next to Regent's Canal as an unspoilt refuge for nature in the area. Designed and developed by the GLC landscape architects and ecologists, the centre is still funded by ex-GLC grants. But as those main funds dry up, and Camden council's budget and ILEA's allocation get slowly eaten away by running costs and mainten-

ance, it doesn't leave much cash for major building projects.

The building was initially required as a new doormat and entrance area to the park, where introductory talks and slide shows could be given to explain to people what was available and how the park should be used.

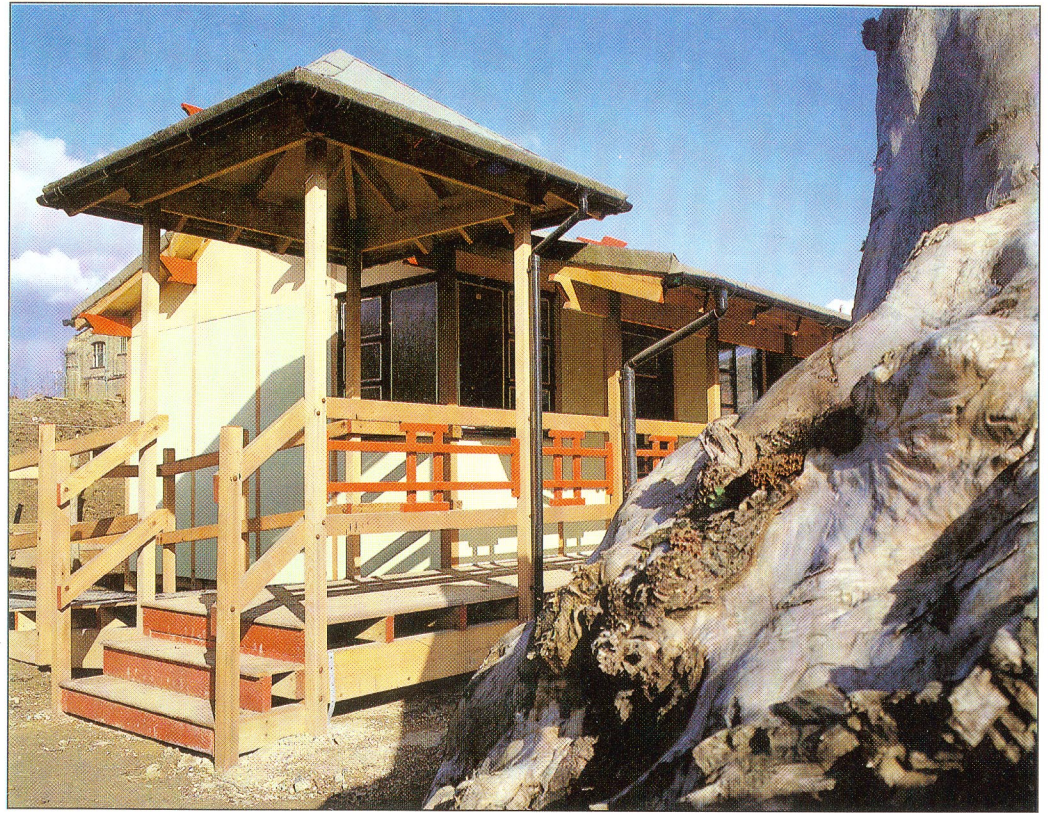
Quigley came up with a timber building, that was fast to erect, cheap, simple to build allowing voluntary labour to be used, and looked good.

As the scheme developed, it was decided that a new building extension would double up as a nature club room where local schools and interest groups would come and look at elements of the park in the classroom. The other role the building played was that of being the entrance and the visual beacon that drew people into the park with the continuous timber deck giving link and continuity with the existing building.

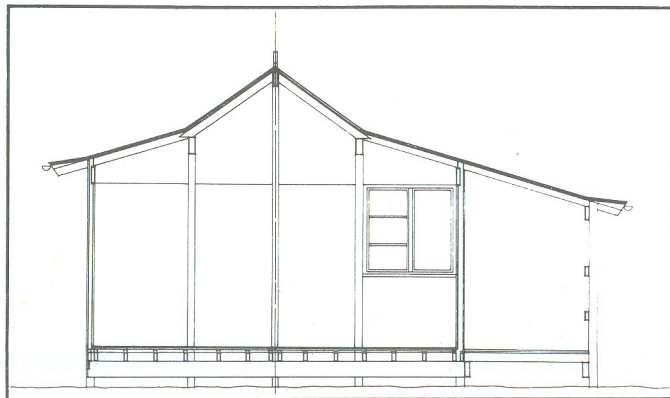
There was limited cash available from the London Wildlife Trust (funded partly by the Greater London Council and Camden council) so the building was designed with a very close eye on costs and value for money. The result is well liked by all, even though the construction cost of £16,000 stretched the budget to its limit.

Local builder and skilled carpenter Chris Lewis was employed for the construction and he and a few helpers built the main shell in about 16 weeks. Voluntary labourers completed excavations for footings, assisted in site clearance and landscaping and prepared the site for building and interior decorations.

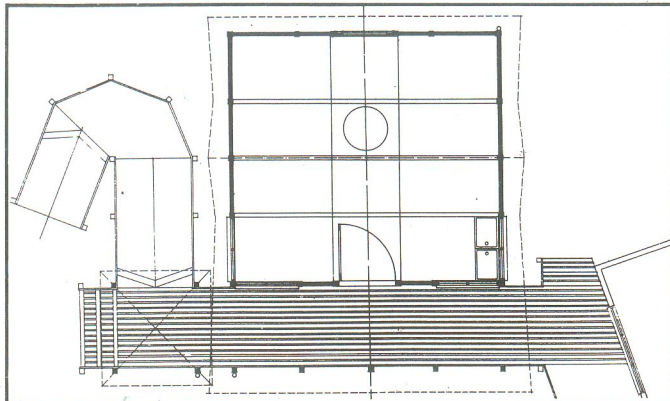
The structure of the building



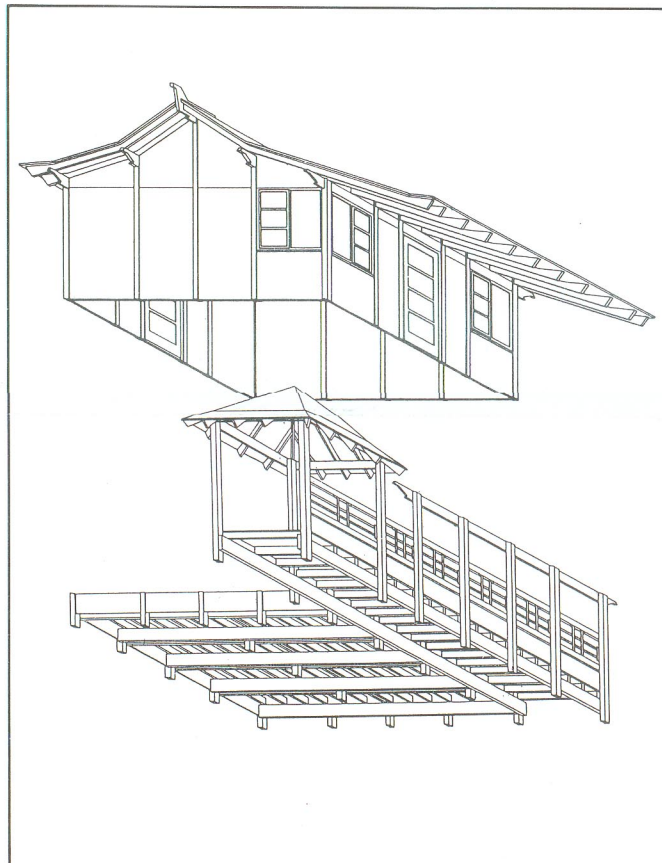
Pavilion and main building showing cross beam end detailing.



Cross-section through main building.



Ground-level plan.



Exploded isometric showing timber floor, balcony and main structure.

is left exposed making the final product simple and using its own construction for decoration. Timber details like the internal scarf joints which join beams together provide natural focal points.

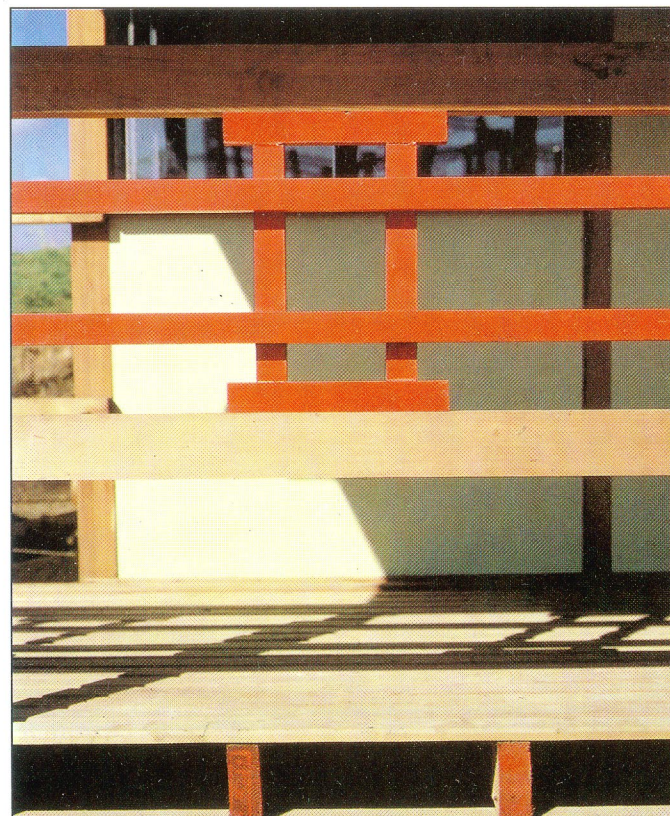
The porch at the walkway signifies the entrance once more when you are inside the natural park.

The ramp provides wheelchair access as well as being the easy way in for anyone with heavy loads or pushing a baby buggy, who is unable to tackle the two steps.

As the main components are the wooden cross beams they were emphasised and used, along with the timber walkway, to give the building an oriental flavour.

Quigley used this particular vocabulary to express the nature club's relationship to the landscape because he feels oriental designers of pavilions and gardens have managed to find the most tranquil and peaceful relationship between buildings and the landscape.

Architect, David Quigley Architects; builder, Chris Lewis Builders; structural engineer, BDL Design Services; client, London Wildlife Trust. Photos: Clive McDonald.



Oriental style detailing on the walkway balustrade.



South elevation with entrance pavilion and timber balcony.