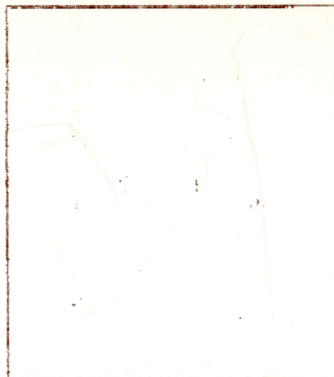


ARCHITECTURE

Mary Rose finally finds shelter from the storm



By Mira Bar-Hillel

Professor Christopher Alexander, the architect chosen by the Mary Rose Trust and its president, Prince Charles, to design a permanent home for the famous Tudor ship in Portsmouth, is well-known to readers of *CSW*.

The Mary Rose is the first big commission in this country for this important architect. Born in Vienna in 1936, Professor Alexander came to England as a child. After Oundle School he studied architecture and mathematics at Trinity College, Cambridge, and, after becoming disillusioned with the dominant Modern movement there, chose to go to Harvard for his PhD. In 1963 he went on to become professor of architecture at the University of California at Berkeley, a position he still holds.

Professor Alexander came to the notice of Prince Charles through his books, which are now texts in many universities, and especially the planning tome, *A pattern language*.

When his review of the prince's book, *Vision of Britain*, appeared in the influential American magazine *Metropolitan Home* at the end of 1989, the prince was gratified by Alexander's support for his stance on today's architecture and his own own stronger views about the 'cabalistic fraternity of architects who have been perpetrating a gigantic scam on the unsuspecting public for 40 years'.

The prince invited him to take part in his international conference at Charleston last February and in his summer school in Italy in September. The relationship continued and by a happy coincidence Professor Alexander was in England when the Mary Rose

Trust saw - and rejected, after consulting the prince - another architect's idea sketches for the Mary Rose building. Professor Alexander's approach was considered more sympathetic and he was formally commissioned on 23 January 1991.

The professor has described to me his views on the exterior treatment: 'It must be imposing, yet sombre and straightforward, reflecting the atmosphere of the great medieval barn at Great Coxwell and the dock buildings at Chatham as much as that of a church. This sombreness is reflected in dark materials and in a

the raising of the Mary Rose will be shown to prepare visitors for the main exhibit.

'The experience of seeing the Mary Rose herself, glistening wet and in the midst of the cold interior, should be almost ghostly,' Alexander says. 'One needs to experience the fact that she lay underwater for 450 years.'

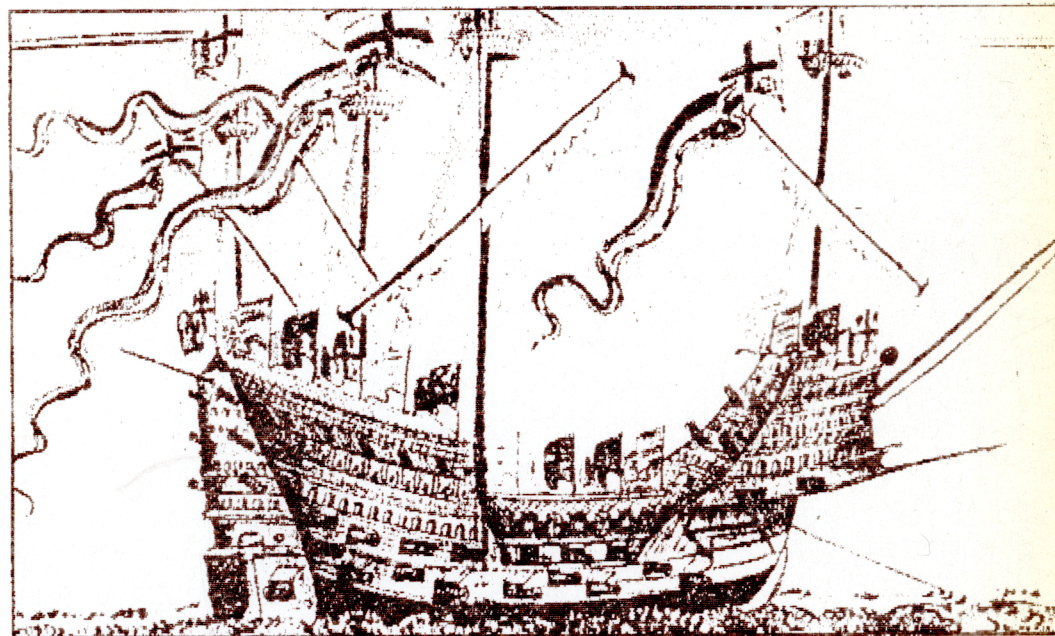
Various views of the ship are to be punctuated and contrasted with displays of pageantry of the time - colours, flags, dress and guns - and reconstructed interiors like the barber-surgeon's cabin and kitchens.

Exhibits will allow visitors to

Alexander is not a classical architect, but he shares the prince's affinity for buildings which please and inspire people.

Among his favourites - out of dozens of projects - is a college outside Tokyo, the success of which he measures by the fact that students now go home hours later than they used to. A 100-bed hostel for the homeless in San José, California, completed two years ago, is considered the best of its kind in the USA.

Unlike some architects, Professor Alexander is not only an architect but also a master builder: he has been closely involved with



sparseness and simplicity of line,' he says.

Inside the building, the challenge is, if anything, even greater. The intention is to create a total experience of identification with the Mary Rose by combining a succession of views of the historic ship itself, now kept in a carefully controlled environment, with explanatory exhibits and reconstructions of its various sections and functions.

Ideas now under discussion include an entrance featuring the Anthony Roll painting of the Mary Rose on parchment, and a colonnaded ramp, leading to a film theatre and to the ship itself, lined with exhibits explaining the history and military technology of the period. The film of

flex a bow or load a breech-loaded gun, use weaving looms and try out musical instruments of the time. An extra dimension could be added by 16th-century food and drink with their different smells, tastes and textures. The simulation of a full-scale war experience could be followed by a close viewing of the main gundeck of the ship itself.

At the exit, Professor Alexander hopes to have a giant image of the ship, projected in space and moving, 'so that you experience the full colour, drama and movement of the man o'war on the high seas, with all sails set and all flags and pennants flying'.

Unlike Prince Charles's favourites to date, Professor

The Mary Rose as she would have looked 450 years ago

the practical construction work of almost all the buildings he has designed and has also pioneered innovative yet practical techniques like pressure-spraying of concrete to achieve beautiful and unusual results.

He says: 'Architects all over America are beginning to wonder about architecture, and feel they are trapped in a soul-destroying activity. They want to make something beautiful and realise that the present organisation of the profession makes it all but impossible. They are looking for a new way which makes better sense.'

Perhaps the Mary Rose building can be a step along that way.