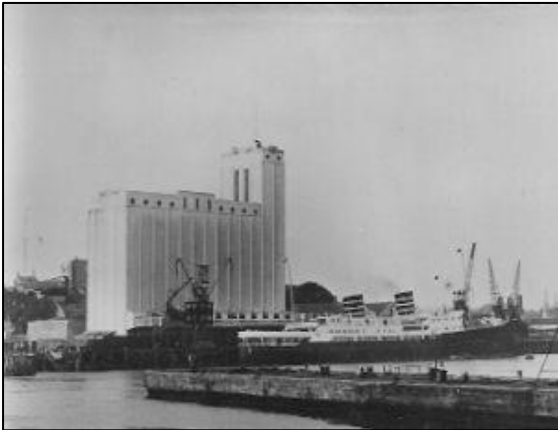


GRAIN SILO



One of Plymouth's most well-known landmarks has been demolished after over sixty years - the Spiller's grain silo at West Wharf, Millbay Docks.

It was designed by Mr Oscar Faber CBE, DCL, DSc, MInstCE, and one of his senior assistants, Mr Kenneth George Hope Montgomery-Smith. They were both advocates of using reinforced concrete for the construction. [1]

Work started on the project in October 1939, although most of the official plans are dated November 17th 1939. The silo was to be erected on the site of units 36, 90, 91, 92, 93 and 93A. [2]

Planning consent was granted by Plymouth City Council on December 22nd 1939, subject to some minor amendments required by the City Engineer [3].

The building was 195 feet long and 60 feet wide. The main body of the building, excluding the tower, comprised individual bins around 15 feet square and 122 feet tall. Although the drawings give their measurements as 15 feet, the architect's son, Mr John Faber, states that the bins were a standard 14 feet square. The difference can possibly be accounted for in the width of the concrete walls as the drawings take the measurements from the centre of the dividing walls. [3]

Internally, there were three rows of twelve bins with the fourth row being divided into smaller bins of half and quarter size. Each bin had a hopper at the bottom and from that point to the top of the bins measured 114 feet. The bins could hold between 23 and 24,000 tonnes of grain. [3]

The massive tower, which held the conveyor belts for transporting the grain from the intake point to the top of the storage bins, was 122 feet in height from the ground floor level to the top of the bins. In addition there was another 10 feet to floor 1; a further 18 feet to floor 2; another 14 feet to floor 3; 10 feet to floor 4; and finally another 12 feet to the roof. The total height was therefore approximately 186 feet. [3]

One of the most amazing facts about this Silo is that it was erected during the Second World War, probably in 1940. In fact, this gleaming white, concrete block cannot have failed to become a landmark for the enemy planes. It took an intervention by the Lord Mayor of Plymouth, Lord Astor, to get the thing camouflaged. On October 11th 1942 (over a year after the Blitz) he wrote to the Town Clerk at Pounds House: '*I saw the Commander-in-Chief last night and gathered from him that everybody was agreed that that huge silo ought to be camouflaged but the reason it has not been done yet is that somebody in authority has not settled who is to bear the cost. This seems to be one of the worst illustrations of red tape*'. [4]

Mr Oscar Faber died on May 7th 1956 and Mr Montgomery-Smith passed away at St Alban's, Hertfordshire, in August 1986.

After lying empty and unused for many years and after the failure of several attempts to find a new use for the building, the grain silo was demolished in 2009.

Sources:

[1] "Faber, John, "Oscar Faber: His Work, His Firm and Afterwards", *Quiller Press*, London, 1989.

[2] Plans and drawings held at the Plymouth & West Devon Record Office, Plymouth, accession number PCC60/1/14580.

[3] Plymouth City Council minute number 781 dated December 22nd 1939.

[4] Plymouth City Council, Lord Mayor's files, 1941, held at the Plymouth & West Devon Record Office, Plymouth, accession number 1495/9.

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