

# RIBA

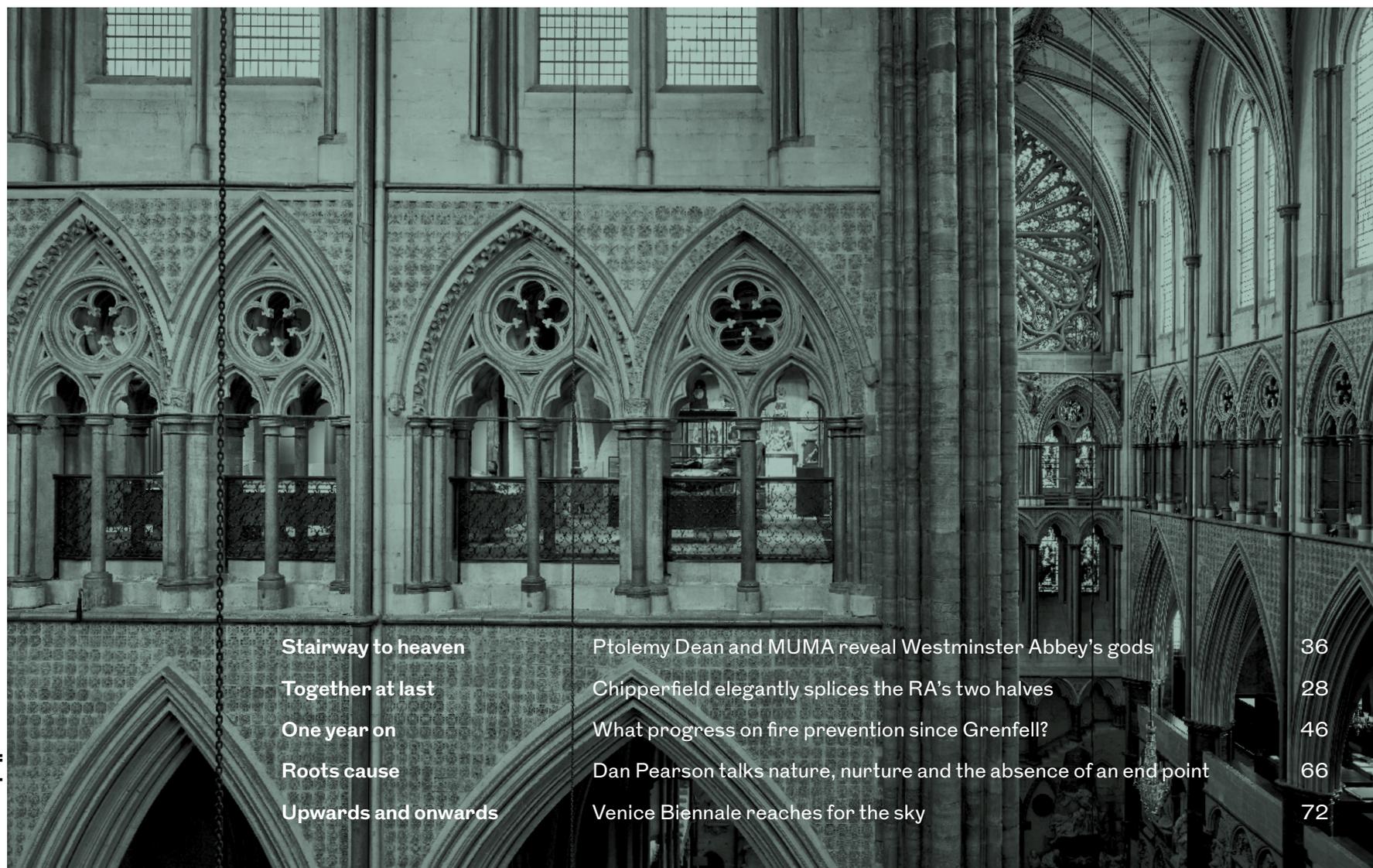
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## July 2018



**Stairway to heaven**

**Together at last**

**One year on**

**Roots cause**

**Upwards and onwards**

Ptolemy Dean and MUMA reveal Westminster Abbey's gods

Chipperfield elegantly splices the RA's two halves

What progress on fire prevention since Grenfell?

Dan Pearson talks nature, nurture and the absence of an end point

Venice Biennale reaches for the sky

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# Full beam

Feilden Fowles' timber barn shines in its urban context

Words: Eleanor Young Photographs: Peter Cook

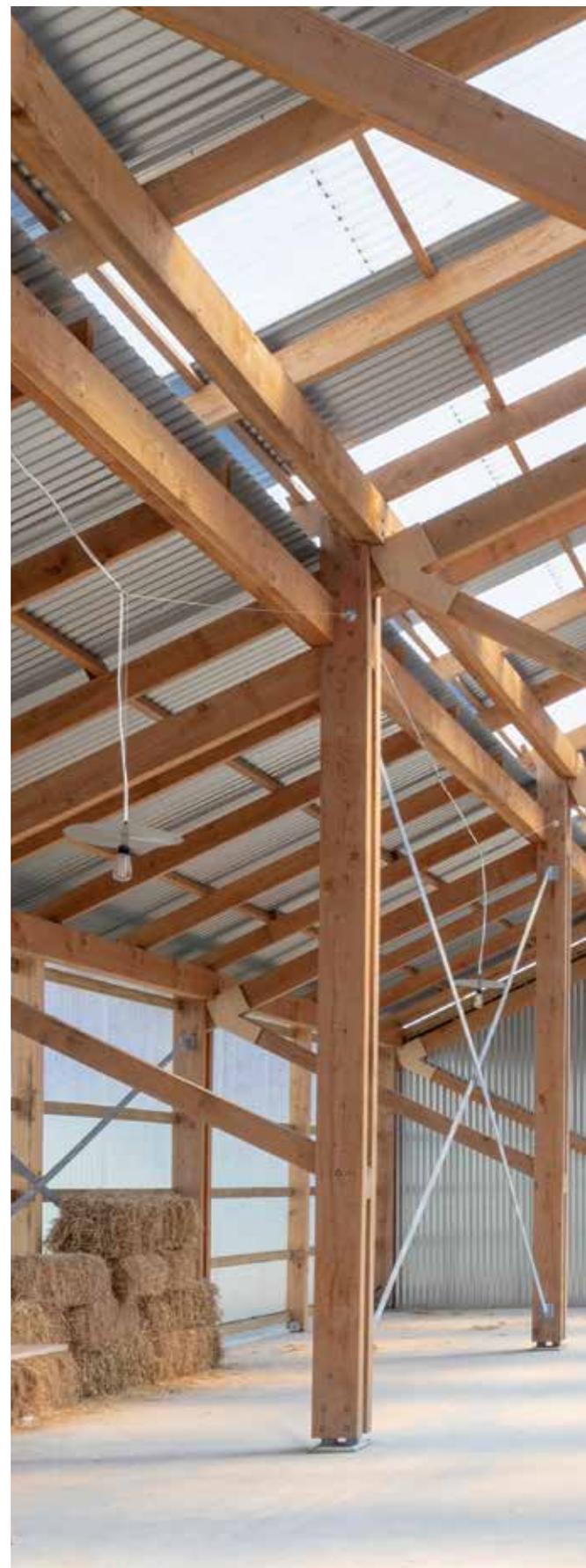
In many a small once-rich village the massiveness of a tithe barn stands out as symbol of communal hope and plenty. There are few such symbols today: rebuilt churches have front doors squeezed in beside the flats that funded them, flimsy-looking new schools are secured by high fencing.

But on a tight sliver of site, in hailing distance of the bright blue of Grimshaw's former Eurostar terminal at London's Waterloo Station, is a remarkable symbol of generosity and gathering in. Here the enormous doors are thrown open to the excluded children of the city to experience the pastoral pleasures of feeding animals and growing your own food. As you emerge from the

darkness of the grimy railway arches you come across a play on wood, spinning out into a hexagon on the outsized gable end.

This energetic wooden edifice doesn't suggest a city farm. That form, drip-fed by small grants and busy volunteers, is pretty established: animal pens, concrete and straw gradually upgrading to sheds with maybe a Portakabin office and loos and some polytunnels. Perhaps a wholesome café set away from the mucking-out.

Waterloo City Farm is more invested in its place. Here the half-acre leased from Guy's and St Thomas' Charity is likely one day to be part of a redevelopment of St Thomas' Hospital. But with the completion of the





#### IN NUMBERS

**290m<sup>2</sup>**  
barn area

**£143,000**  
barn construction value

**£493/m<sup>2</sup>**  
barn cost

**1,630m<sup>2</sup>**  
total farm area  
(barn, studio, annexe,  
pens)

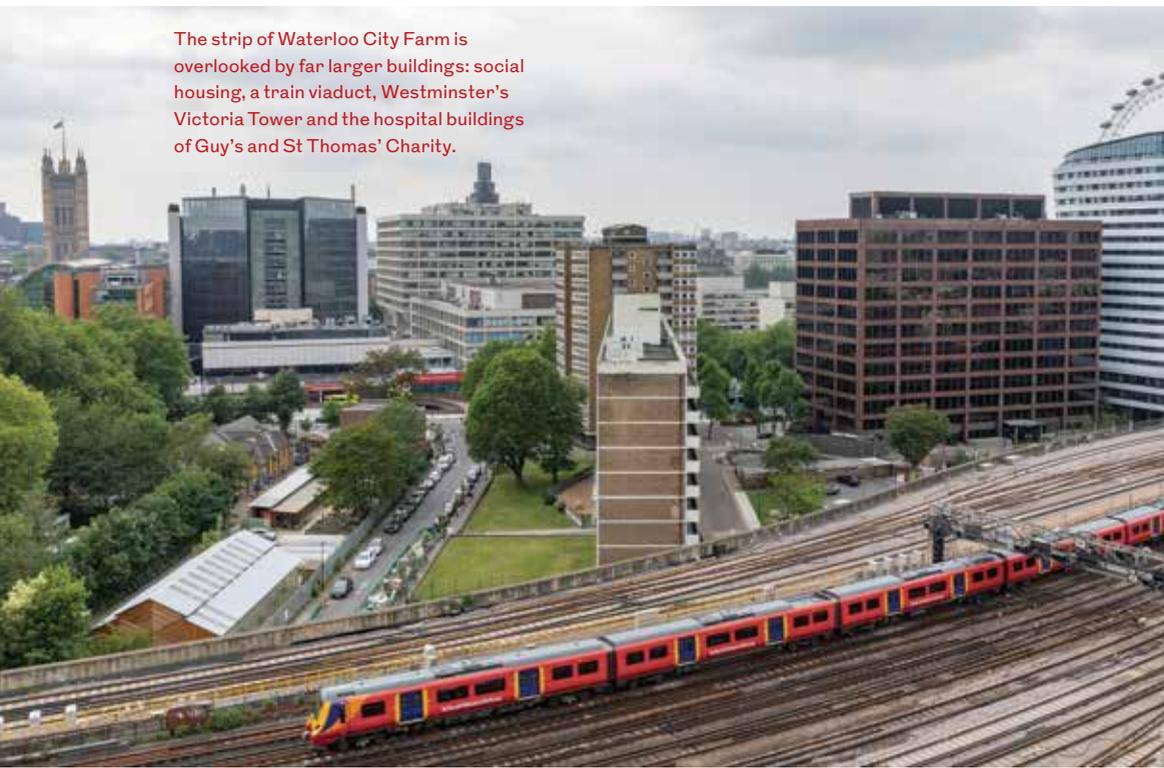
**£343,000**  
farm construction value

**£210/m<sup>2</sup>**  
farm cost

**Left** Four rows of columns spread the load evenly on the London clay. Supporting trusses and ties, like the suspended lights, seem as if they might have been summoned up for spatial delight.

**Opposite left** The larch timbers catch the light to give animation to what could otherwise be a blank wall.

The strip of Waterloo City Farm is overlooked by far larger buildings: social housing, a train viaduct, Westminster's Victoria Tower and the hospital buildings of Guy's and St Thomas' Charity.



The galvanised doors roll open to a structure that quite distracts you from the straw bales

barn it has the appearance of more committed neighbour than that temporary permission would suggest.

This is the city follow-up base for Jamie's Farm, a social enterprise which takes children in danger of exclusion from their urban school to the countryside for a week for activities and therapy at farms around the country, or gives them a six-week version of the same in the city. It is also the base for architecture practice Feilden Fowles, whose co-founder Fergus Feilden is brother to the eponymous Jamie Feilden of Jamie's Farm. It is Feilden Fowles' pro bono design work that led to the neatly planned animal pens and to the elegant studio offices it leases, offering desk space for the charity administration looking onto a delicate Dan Pearson-designed garden. And now to the barn.

The way the barn sits across the whole site at one end gives it an enormous presence – while transforming the rest of the linear site into a more comfortably compact shape. The larch and corrugated glass-fibre form reaches up 6.1m and the galvanised doors roll open to a structure that quite distracts you from the straw bales: three-bayed, with tall Douglas fir columns creating a nave of diamond trusses which are beautifully awkward. The full-length 'transepts' of the outer bays have angled members that impinge just enough on head height to feel like there should be long tables under them at which to gather and sit. Slots at skirting height and between the cap of the roof and the lower plane keep air moving, letting in just the occasional gust of weather.

Early ideas for a steel portal frame were scuppered by the soft London clay beneath. The raft of concrete foundation needed the load spread fairly evenly across it, thus the bays. Instead of time-consuming mortice and tenon joints or individually drilling each screw hole for the joints Feilden Fowles has used ply gussets, each plate CNC-drilled (a

**Full site axonometric**

- 1 Barn
- 2 Growing plots
- 3 Pens
- 4 Kitchen
- 5 Studio
- 6 Courtyard garden
- 7 Annexe



**Credits**

- Architect** Feilden Fowles
- Client** Oasis Waterloo Hub Jamie's Farm
- Structural engineer** Peter Laidler, Structure Workshop (studio and farm)
- Landscape design** Dan Pearson Studio (courtyard garden)
- Barn timber frame and east gable** Timber Workshop
- Cladding and classroom** Mansel Land
- Studio timber frame** Timber Workshop
- Cladding and fit out** Miles Builders
- Lighting design for education barn** Re:Lit (of Michael Grubb Studio)



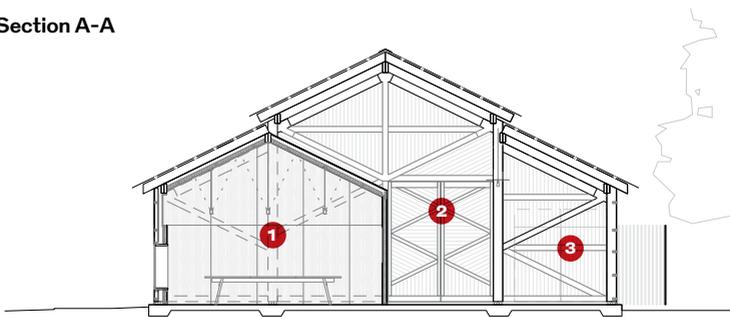
**Top left** Despite its small scale, the barn has a generosity in its simplicity, the patterns on the gable end falling into a comfortable unity.

**Below left** Feilden Fowles' spare, elegant studio was completed earlier – a low timber and steel building running along one edge of the site.

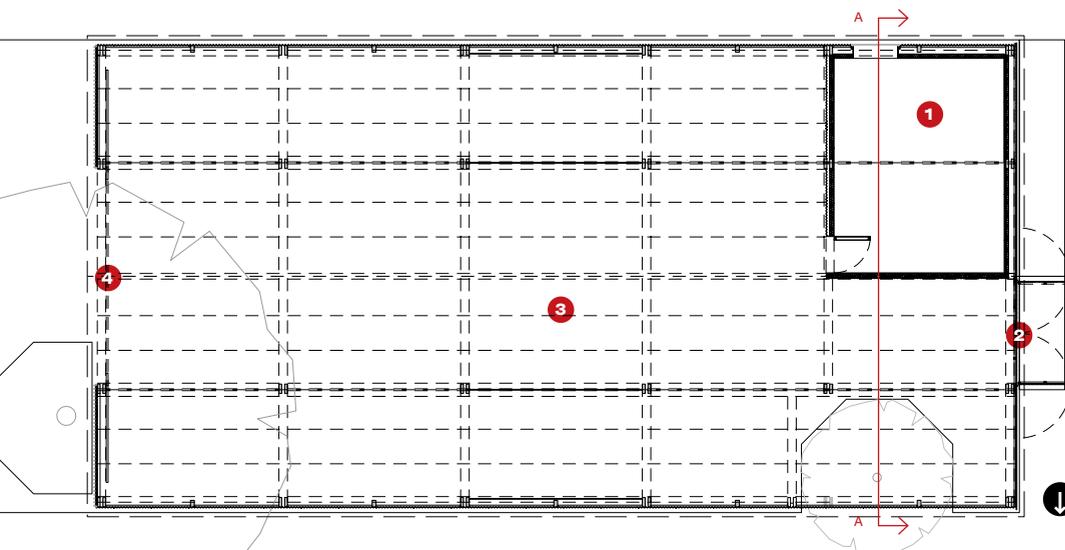
**Below right** The barn in use for teaching before the walls were added.



Section A-A



Plan



total of 1800 connections) if the meanwhile use should end, this also makes the structure more easily demountable. From the inside the huge doors are made more human with a condensed, smaller-scale version of the pattern on the outside.

In the corner is a galvanised crinkly tin enclosure, a watertight classroom. There is not attempt to seal the rest of the enclosure, it is an airy space. And light too thanks to the daylight filtering in through the glass fibre. Grant funding was tied to construction packages which meant that this sat first as a slab for some time, then as roof and structure before being enclosed over the last year, with the practice putting £20,000 into the build.

Despite the simplicity of the barn – no loos, only one window – the thought that went into it at all stages is palpable. And, as well as being covered learning space, this gives the opportunity to bring people together who might contribute by hiring the space to the charities running the farm.

Animal security and the importance of creating a sanctuary in this intense urban environment means that most of the time the barn looks inwards towards its farm. But, like a tithe barn, it can be opened right up on either side – and if what is brought is not grain, then it is at least good things in another form. ●

