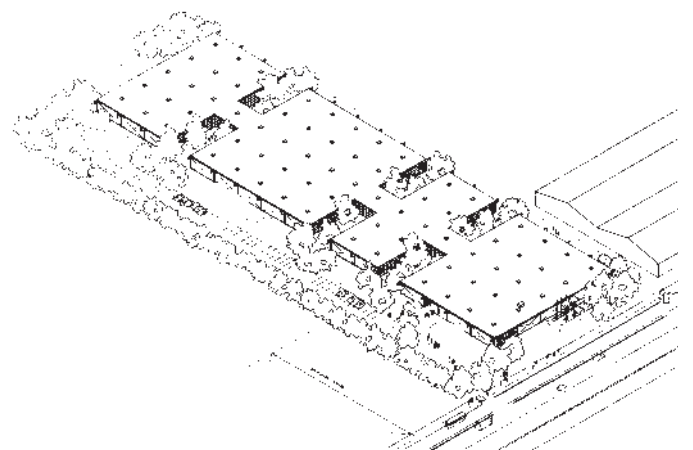




Reliance Controls Factory

Swindon





Place
Swindon, England

Date
1967

Client
Reliance Controls Ltd

Cost
£3/13s per ft²

Area
11,000m²

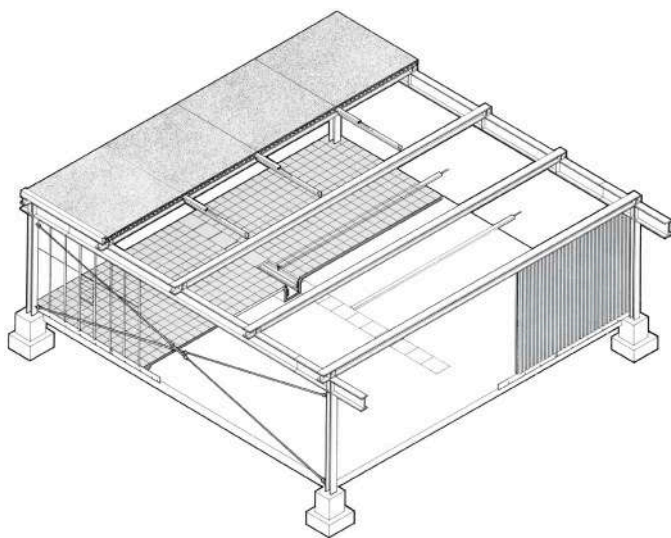
Structural Engineer
Anthony Hunt Associates

Services Engineer
GN Haden & Sons Ltd

Quantity Surveyor
GA Hanscomb Partnership

Main Contractor
Pope Brothers

Reliance was a turning point in the way we constructed buildings – it had an enormous influence on our subsequent approach to design



Awards

1967
Industrial Architecture Award

1966
Architectural Design Project Award, Financial Times

Reliance Controls is neither a factory, nor an office building nor a research station but a combination of all three. After its completion, the work of Rogers and of Norman Foster turned in increasingly radical (if divergent) directions.

Though it has become one of the models for the new industrial and commercial architecture of the late 20th century (it was clearly the progenitor for later developments such as Stockley Park), Reliance Controls took its inspiration initially from the Case Study Houses, especially Charles and Ray Eames' famous Californian house of 1949 (which, in due course, inspired several early Rogers houses), although the water-tower, a quotation from Alison and Peter Smithsons' famous Hunstanton School, can be related to the Modernist tradition in Britain.

The brief demanded economy, speed of construction – the client laid down strict cost guidelines and insisted that the building be ready within ten months: it was finished early and to budget. The building also had to reflect the changing relationship between 'worker' and managers: it is essentially a

'democratic', anti-hierarchical shed which made a nonsense of the old division of factories into 'shop floor' and managerial space.

The idea of the building was clearly expressed in its structure – with everything contained within the grid of the steel frame and sheltered by one large roof. The intention was to create a common-sense model for the workspace of the future. Reliance Controls made use of ordinary, cheap materials yet the result was a building of extraordinary elegance and integrity. The steel sheeting used for the cladding had never been used in this way before in Britain – 3.6 metre-high panels without intermediate support were considered daring.

The building was in essence a highly flexible building, with moveable internal partitions allowing production, research or managerial space to grow or contract as required, but when Reliance Controls vacated the factory and it faced demolition, Rogers accepted the situation stoically: he deplores the idea of preserving what is functionally obsolete.