

DAVE ALLEN

The Halifax Bank Head Office, in the centre of Halifax, isn't a bank that you or I can use. It's a place where the management of banking or the machinations of trading take place. It's an impressive building. I think it's a bit of a curate's egg, though, as far as its qualities as a landmark are concerned.

First off, this building is very big. When seen from the vantage point of Beacon Hill, it dwarfs most of the buildings in the town centre. But its impact as a landmark is not about its size. You'd think size = visibility, but the way this diamond-shaped building is placed, on a kind of crossroads junction¹, means that this is only partially true. Fountain Street and Ward's End give the pedestrian or driver no real view of the building until you're very close to it, negating its power as a landmark.

The Commercial Street axis of the crossroads is a different matter, though. Here, its effectiveness as a landmark increases with its visibility. From the town side of Commercial Street you can see the corner of the building in a reassuring way from quite a distance. And from the Huddersfield Road side of Commercial Street, towards the Esso garage, the Halifax Bank Head Office looks powerful and foreboding. *Keep out!* it screams. *I'm big and I'm powerful and I'm secure - like a bank should be.* The steeply sloping wall adjoining the pavement barely needs the sign telling people to keep away.

Staying on the theme of security, there's only one obvious way into the building: people are funnelled through the corner entrance, where access can be easily monitored. After all, it's not a public building. It all makes sense: the bank as a symbol of power, security. A cathedral of the modern world.

The diamond-shaped ground plan has two acute and two obtuse corners. One of the acute corners falls on a back street, St. John's Lane, and isn't seen much. The other projects out over the street like the bow of a huge ship - over the junction mentioned above. For me, this is its *pièce de résistance* as a landmark. It rises higher than the surrounding architecture, is modern where the others are older and, crucially, has powerful shapes that contrast with their neighbours. Look up from underneath the overhanging corner and a black triangle is silhouetted against the sky. Move further away and different triangular arrangements start to show.

Continued

Overall I really like this building, but its power as a landmark still leaves me with some mixed feelings. As a way-finder or pointer it works to some degree, but not as much as you'd imagine. As a part of the town's visual identity it looms very large in the population's mind, though, and as a reassurance that you have reached the town centre it unequivocally works.

1. I call it a *kind of crossroads* because the one-way system doesn't give full access to crossing the junction.

© Dave Allen

14th August 2023