

95 Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain Newsletter No. 95 Autumn 2008

ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY IN TIME

AN ABRIDGEMENT OF THE PLENARY ADDRESS GIVEN TO THE 59TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS AT SAVANNAH, GEORGIA, 2006

The Society's invitation to me to deliver this plenary address has arisen partly in recognition of the fiftieth anniversary of its sole Corresponding Society, the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain, and I would like to thank the officers, directors and staff of SAH both for allowing us to present an academic session on the British tradition of architectural historiography as part of SAHGB's half-centenary celebrations and for continuing to nurture the bonds of academic interchange and friendship that have tied our two organisations together since 1956. Anniversaries may be regarded as moments for looking back, as well as for considering where we stand now and for looking forward. This has led me to take the theme of 'Architectural History in Time' as my subject and I intend to reflect on some past issues concerning our discipline, inspect some current ones, and speculate about some future ones.

In her plenary address of 2002, Eve Blau looked back to the foundation of SAH in 1940 and to early debates in the pages of its journal as a way of scrutinising present practices, concluding that the American founders had been prescient in envisaging the need for what they called a 'New History of Architecture'. John Coolidge, in particular, had identified two directions that this 'new history' might take: first, that historians would seek to explain architecture in terms of a web of structural, aesthetic and sociological concerns, as they had already begun to do; and second that they would somehow engage with what he called 'that vague complex of studies known as intellectual history'.¹ Coolidge's vision of that 'vague complex of studies' is an especially useful one for us to think about today – not because we are indistinct in our use of particular intellectual models, but because those models are now drawn from such a wide range of possibilities that it may be questionable whether architectural history itself is currently capable of any singular definition as a discipline with universally shared criteria. SAH has been at the forefront in examining that very question over the past few years, and the upshot of the 1999 special issue of the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* on the state of the field, of the 2002–3 global survey of the teaching of architectural history, and of the essays in the December 2005 and March 2006 issues

is that we should recognise our current practices to be inherently and positively interdisciplinary, intradisciplinary, multi-disciplinary, transdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary.

These terms do not all mean the same thing, of course, nor do they imply indecisiveness of approach. They express the different ways that architectural historians are now engaging with one or more cognate disciplines that have taken an interest in, or may be brought to bear upon, the heterogeneous nature of architecture. Since that range of disciplines is, as Mario Carpo has observed, 'virtually unlimited over time', there is perhaps good reason to think that architectural history itself has become or will become lost between disciplines.² To accept this proposition, however, would surely be too easy for us – and also, in my view, unnecessarily self-effacing. I would like to propose an alternative way of regarding our present situation and of looking to the future: by thinking of architectural history as a single but *multi-faceted* discipline. The metaphor that comes to mind here is of a polyhedron, the faces of which may not be pointing in the same direction or even looking at each other, but which nevertheless cohere around a central body or space.

A brief glance back at the early history of SAHGB suggests that there is, in fact, nothing essentially new in this idea, even if the particularities have changed over the past fifty years. The founders of SAHGB were almost all architects who had begun teaching after 1945 in English Schools of Architecture, influenced by a pre-War generation for whom a certain level of historical culture was regarded as an essential attribute of the academic architect. A number of them had taken doctorates. But diversification was already afoot. Writing in the first volume of *Architectural History* in 1958, William Singleton noted that 'there has never been more widespread interest in the architecture of the past than there is now' and that the new journal was necessary to fill a lacuna left by the architectural press, which 'used to publish papers and original documents in the architectural field' but was 'now more concerned with technology, or with contemporary criticism, than with historical research'.³ Public interest in the history of architecture was growing just at the moment that the interest of professional architects in buildings of the past was becoming more tectonic or concerned with

THE SOCIETY'S OFFICERS

President: Frank Kelsall

Past President: Peter Draper

Chairman: Professor Andrew Ballantyne, School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU; a.n.ballantyne@ncl.ac.uk

Honorary Secretary: Simon Green, RCAHMS, 16 Barnard Terrace, Edinburgh EH8 9NX; secretary@sahgb.org.uk

Honorary Treasurer: David Lermon, Beech House, Cotswold Avenue, Lisvane, Cardiff CF14 0TA; treasurer@sahgb.org.uk

Editor: Professor Judi Loach, 30 Africa Gardens, Cardiff CF14 3BU; loachj@cardiff.ac.uk

Newsletter Editor: Dr Zeynep Kezer, School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU; newsletter@sahgb.org

Reviews Editor: Kathryn Morrison, English Heritage, Brooklands, 24 Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge, CB2 8BU, reviewseditor@sahgb.org.uk

Events Secretary: Dr Stewart Abbott, 18 Hubert Road, St Cross, Winchester SO23 9RG; s.j.abbott@ntlworld.com

Joint Conference Secretaries: Olivia Horsfall Turner (For 2008 Kent, kentconference@sahgb.org.uk),

Dr Elizabeth Green (for 2009 Liverpool, liverpoolconference@sahgb.org.uk)

Publications Officer: Dr Simon P. Oakes, St John's College, Oxford OX1 3JP; publications@sahgb.org.uk

Membership Secretary: Dr Alex Bremner, Department of Architecture, University of Edinburgh, 20 Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1JZ; membership@sahgb.org.uk

Registrars of Research: Dr Kerry Bristol, k.a.c.bristol@leeds.ac.uk; Dr Paul Snell, paulsnell83@hotmail.com

Education Officer: Dr Julian Holder, English Heritage (North West), Suites 3.3 and 3.4, Canada House, 3, Chepstow Street, Manchester, M1 5FW; education@sahgb.org.uk

Minutes Secretary: Olivia Horsfall Turner

Website Officer: Dr Robert Proctor, webadmin@sahgb.org.uk

Other Members of the Committee: Dr James Campbell, Andy Foyle, Peter Guillery, Dr William Whyte

The Society's officers all hold honorary posts.

Contributions for *Architectural History* should be sent to Professor Judi Loach and books for review to Kathryn Morrison. Items for inclusion in the *Newsletter* should be sent to Dr Zeynep Kezer. Enquiries about the Society's publications should be sent to Dr Simon Oakes. Correspondence concerning membership (for example, new membership enquiries, payments of subscriptions and change of address) should be sent to Dr Alex Bremner. Enquiries about events should be sent to Dr Stewart Abbott. Enquiries about the Research Register should be sent to Dr Kerry Bristol. Enquiries about the Essay Medal prize should be sent to Dr Julian Holder. Queries about mail inserts should be sent to David Lermon. Matters related to fundraising should be referred to Charles Keighley (tel: 01993 831403, charles.k@tiscali.co.uk). Correspondence on all other matters should be sent to Simon Green.

design as an abstract quality. Also growing was the role of non-architect academics. Rudolf Wittkower's contribution to the precursor volume *Studies in Architectural History*, edited by Singleton in 1954 and styling the author as 'Professor', stands as representative of the impact of German scholarship on the British scene, while early contributions to *Architectural History* itself included a whole volume by Helen Rosenau (the first by a member of a department of art history) and an article by Carroll Meeks of Yale's History of Art Department (the first American academic contribution). Meanwhile, Mark Girouard's 1962 volume on the collection of drawings associated with the Smythson family marked the arrival of the architectural historian trained in a cognate humanities subject. Whether educated in classics, like Girouard, or in history or literature, these scholars came to cohere around a central understanding of what constituted the discipline of architectural history, in which the unifying factors of study were careful material analysis of buildings and close study of primary documentary and drawn evidence.

The thirty-year hegemony established by this type of architectural historian, supremely bolstered in the British case by the work of Howard Colvin, came under challenge in the late 1980s as Coolidge's 'vague complex of studies known as intellectual history' began to make itself explicit. While Marxism and perhaps Feminism belong with the 'sociology' that Coolidge linked to structural and aesthetic interests among architectural historians, the still newer approaches might be grouped under three broad headings:

psychology, linguistics and cultural geography. Alongside the largely academic practitioners of various disciplines associated with these headings, however, we have seen exponential growth in architectural history within the heritage sector. Indeed, the majority of those with doctorates in the history of architecture and who are currently writing architectural history in the UK do not work in the academic world at all, but in the heritage sector. The 2006 SAHGB Executive Committee exemplified this, since nine members were drawn from the university sector, whereas the heritage sector accounted for fourteen — working, moreover, for eight separate institutions in which architectural history is practised in various forms.

'Heritage' is hardly a good term in the context of a discipline such as ours that rightly aims to be intellectual and forward moving. Relating as it does to the words 'heir' and 'inheritance', it brings with it moribund implications of disciplinary immutability, while its more recent connotations are of leisure pursuits, even of cultural tourism. In fact, our colleagues employed in this sphere are attempting to meet an unprecedented demand for architecture to serve as an organ of education and of national and social identity among groups and numbers of persons far beyond the relatively small body of architectural students, professional architects and university-based architectural historians. To do so requires a different kind of intellectual placement from that found in the world of academics, no less quality of scholarship



Members of SAHGB studying the concrete hyperbolic paraboloid roof of Sam Scorer's St John, Lincoln (1962-3), during the 1999 Conference. (photograph by Frank Salmon)

and arguably greater effectiveness in communication. It is significant that three times between 2001 and 2007 the Alice Davis Hitchcock Medallion has been awarded to books emanating from the heritage sector, lucidly written studies setting extensive fieldwork into a wide range of social and economic contexts.

We are looking here at just one face of the multi-faceted polyhedron that is architectural history today, and it is one that reminds us that, adjacent to the many ways in which architectural history is being written, we now have multiple audiences with a legitimate stake in architectural history. What is it, then, that ties us all together? What is that central space, to which I alluded earlier in my address, which might be seen as uniquely occupied by architectural historians? Perhaps we can begin to answer that question by considering where architectural historians stand *vis-à-vis* the twin nuclei that we mean to define by the two words 'architecture' and 'history' themselves.

Hélène Lipstadt has recently spoken about the distinctiveness of architecture, as a medium, as lying in the collective nature of its production and subsequent usage.⁴ We might usefully take that understanding further and think of the distinctiveness of architectural history as lying in a collective *consumption* of the building or of the city. All architectural historians, in other words, should surely be able to find a point of meeting in the materiality and spatiality of the building and the urban landscape themselves, or when reading and discussing the constituent elements of architectural and urban design: plans, technologies and so forth. This is not in any way to reduce the value of the studies we undertake as individuals, nor to denigrate the particular questions we may ask ourselves about what we are looking at, but rather to point to what we stand to gain by bringing our expertise to bear when

we collaborate in this way — principally the propensity to view architecture heterogeneously. Which of us, I wonder, has not seen a building in terms other than those we have framed for ourselves when considering it on-site, or even discussing it remotely, with other architectural historians? To my mind this is the central value of the SAHGB Annual Conference, a tradition of mutual study that derives from the 'Summer Meetings' organised by the Royal Archaeological Institute, founded in 1844, but also from mid-nineteenth-century architects who insisted on taking their pupils on group sketching and measuring trips around Britain. In other words, it is an inherently architectural thing that we can do, and if we subsequently write in terms that recognise the dialogues we share when speaking to each other on site, I believe we will maintain a point of disciplinary unity.

More contentious, doubtless, is what might be meant by the term 'history'. Daniel Abramson has recently written of 'the need for architectural historians to identify themselves as historians' in the face of his concern at what he calls the hemming in and 'instrumentalisation' of history in US schools of architecture.⁵ It is certainly a welcome call and Professor Abramson makes an eloquent case for what architectural history stands to gain by taking such a view. But if architectural schools have indeed instrumentalised history to suit their purposes, and mainstream historians use different skills and resources to those we have at our disposal, what are the appropriate operational rules for deployment between these two poles for us specifically as architectural historians? One fundamental principle, I would suggest, should derive from the meaning of the word 'history' in its original Greek form — where it first denoted 'learning or knowing by inquiry' (to quote the *OED*) and secondarily the written

narrative produced as a result of those inquiries: in other words, these two aspects of the process of historical study must be separated out and systematic research should be seen as prerequisite to writing, whatever theoretical model we may wish to apply. This may seem self-evident, but in my own experience I have come across some alarming instances where this basic understand of historical process has lost its currency. On one occasion in the 1990s, for instance, I recall being asked by a colleague to confirm a mark of distinction for a master's dissertation on the grounds that the *ideas* it presented were clever, even though the *facts* that were meant to support those ideas were demonstrably wrong. Facts do not in themselves comprise history, of course, but, to draw an architectural analogy, facts, as far as they can be ascertained, must surely form foundations on which we build historical superstructures, if what we write is not to become fiction.

The example I have given is an extreme one. I do not mean to argue for a facile view of historical study which is, of course, not an objective process, but rather to reiterate that to be an historian one must accept one's responsibilities towards the material and documentary evidence of the past as well as to the effects of creativity and to the realm of ideas, past and present. We do not have the freedoms of, for example, philosophers, who seem to be able to discourse effortlessly across the centuries. In a 2006 obituary that I read of Peter Strawson, the Oxford philosopher, Strawson's ideas were discussed alongside those of Hume and Descartes as though the three men were sitting in a bar together. As historians, we know that we can never converse like this with the past, nor escape from our own personalities and prejudices into an idealised state of knowledge. However, having made our assessment of the available evidence, we *are* obliged to say what we think happened and why it happened. Herein, surely, lies the stimulus and particular attraction of writing history at all. It requires both caution and confidence: it is an ordered and yet a bold thing to do! As architectural historians we have the additional advantage of dealing with material objects and even spatial configurations that, in certain key functional and formal respects, have not changed over time, in that they were made by and for people whose bodily and emotive experiences were not so different from our own. Provided that we work from these understandings of historical inquiry outward, rather than the other way around, we will have another point of disciplinary unity and there need be no limit to the possible meanings we may subsequently attribute to architecture from our very different methodological standpoints.

Related, finally, to this question of how we write history is the question of why we write it. The novelist E.M. Forster, when asked by the BBC on his eightieth birthday why he wrote, responded with two reasons: to gain money; and to win the respect of people he respected. Now, I doubt that any of us are going to make our fortune through what we write, and while it may be true that winning respect from our peers is a gratifying and stimulating thing, there is more than that to the writing of

history. Surely our ambition must be not simply to offer a reading of the past that exemplifies the preconceptions of self-hood and the present, as a strict Post-Structuralist might have it, but to offer one that will continue to provide useful insights on the past in the future. It is no coincidence that our discipline, as one now old enough to have its own history, has recently seen the rise of scholarly interest in the study of historiography itself and even in the biographies of architectural historians. This development moves us forward from the temptation to dismiss the work of our predecessors as merely formalist, iconographic, amateur and so forth. It does not deny their conceptual limitations but contextualises them and thereby allows for revalidation of their writing. This is encouraging, both for the present richness of our research and teaching and on a more personal level – in giving us the hope that the limitations of our own work will be similarly understood in a century's time, so that our insights may continue to be valued. This wish for the future is not a matter of vanity, but rather part of a belief that, as historical writers, we are all in a position to make distinctive contributions to the understanding of the past. It is a belief bolstered, moreover, by the unique amount of time we have to devote to the purpose, time that is not available to others with professional or academic interests in architecture.

How, then, will future generations look back on and judge our practices and performances as architectural historians of the early twenty-first century? The answer probably lies in our own hands right now. Is our response to the tremendous changes that have occurred in the study of the history of architecture going to be to accept our discipline as a fractured one, or to see it as a multi-faceted one in which, although we may be pointing in different directions, we share a common centre, rooted in the realities of architectural design and production and, for all our methodological variety, retaining systematic principles of historical enquiry? One thing is certain. The degree of self-examination that architectural history has gone through over the past few years has made all of us more explicit about the methods we are deploying. My principal hopes for architectural history are that the recognition that our writing is *of* the moment does not lead us to write as though it is *only* of the moment; that it will contain unique and substantive insights on the past that will be valued in the future; and that, to conclude by paraphrasing a famous American writer, the report of the architectural historian's death will be seen to have been an exaggeration.

FRANK SALMON
(SAHGB CHAIRMAN 2003–6)

- 1 E. Blau, 'A Question of Discipline', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 62:1 (March 2003), p. 126.
- 2 M. Carpo, 'Architecture: Theory, Interdisciplinarity, and Methodological Eclecticism', *JSAH*, 64:4 (December 2005), p. 426.
- 3 W. Singleton, 'Editorial', *Architectural History*, 1 (1958), p. 7.
- 4 H. Lipstadt, 'Sociology: Bourdieu's Bequest', *JSAH*, 64:4 (December 2005), p. 435.
- 5 D. Abramson, 'History: The Long Eighteenth Century', *ibid.*, p. 420.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

AWARDS AND BURSARIES

Grants for Publication and Education

The Society distributes a number of small grants, twice annually, to support research in architectural history, in either of the two categories of Publication and Education (see below for details).

Value of Awards

Individual grants will not normally exceed £500, but in exceptional circumstances a grant of up to £1,000 may be awarded.

Eligibility

- (a) Awards are open to members of the Society, and non-members, in any category.
- (b) Candidates may apply for a second award, but in cases of equal merit priority will be given to the first-time applicant. No one may receive more than two awards.
- (c) The topic in the application may relate to any aspect of the history of architecture.
- (d) Applicants must either be resident in the British Isles, or working on the history of British architecture.

Application

Applications should include the following information:

- title and description of project
- CV
- detailed estimate of costs
- date of start of project and estimated completion date
- two letters of recommendation to be sent directly by referees to the Secretary

Applicants are responsible for asking their referees to write. Six copies of the application should be submitted to the Honorary Secretary, Simon Green, with a SAE if acknowledgement is required. The deadlines for application are 30 April and 31 October each year.

Awards

The award decisions will be made annually in May and November. Payments to successful applicants will be made only after documentary evidence of each major item in the proposed expenditure has been supplied. This may be a receipt or invoice, or confirmation of travel booking or conference enrolment. The Society must be acknowledged in any published work arising out of the application.

Copies of books, or in the case of shorter publications, an offprint or photocopy, should be sent to the Secretary of the Society. A brief report of the use made of the grant must be submitted to the Secretary within a year of its receipt and, if the work extends beyond twelve months, a second report should be submitted on its completion.

Stroud Bursaries (for publication)

Any of the following expenses may be claimed:

- subsidy to defray publication costs
- cost of purchase of illustrations
- payment of copyright fees
- contribution to the costs of mounting an exhibition

Ramsden Bursaries (for education)

Applicants must normally be students registered for higher degrees. Awards will be given for research expenses, such as:

- travel
- building survey
- photography
- conference attendance

Grants will not be awarded for:

- maintenance at home
- purchase of books or equipment
- secretarial help
- tuition fees

Post-Graduate Research Bursaries

The Society awards two bursaries, each subject to identical terms and providing support for two full-time postgraduate research students in the field of architectural history. A vacancy exists for a Vickers Bursary holder, commencing with the 2008/09 academic year.

Jonathan Vickers Postgraduate Research Bursary

The first Vickers' Bursary holder, Matthew Walker, a student at York, will have completed his research on the architectural career of Robert Hooke (1635 – 1703).

As a result of a generous bequest from the estate of a late member, Jonathan Vickers, together with support from English Heritage and many members, the second Bursary will be offered (see below).

Ernest Cook Trust Postgraduate Research Bursary

This Bursary arises as the result of the generosity of the Trustees of the Ernest Cook Trust, and of other donors including the D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust and the Thriplow Trust.

This bursary is currently held by Joanne O'Hara, University of York, who is researching the preparatory drawings for Vitruvius Britannicus by Colen Campbell, in the RIBA Drawings Collection.

Bursary Available

It is the Society's intention to fund a three-year Vickers bursary, subject to the candidate's satisfactory performance and to the Society's financial resources at the time. A grant of £10,000 for each academic year will be made to the successful candidates, subject to AHRC funding not being available.

Applications are requested before 22 September 2008 for an award for the 2008/09 academic year. Applicants should send a CV, a report (of not more than 500 words) outlining their research proposal, a statement of their financial position (including details of other grant applications made or pending) and proof of UK university registration, along with a covering letter (to include full contact details) and two academic references to Simon Green (Honorary Secretary, SAHGB), RCAHMS, 16 Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh EH8 9NX. Full terms and conditions are available on request from the Society's Education Officer (education@sahgb.org.uk), or on the Society's website.

DR JULIAN HOLDER, EDUCATION OFFICER

THE SOCIETY'S PUBLICATIONS

The Society's publications may be ordered and paid for online: please go to www.sahgb.org.uk, and click on 'Publications' for further details. As usual, Members may also write to the Publications Secretary, Dr S.P. Oakes, at St John's College, Oxford, OX1 3JP (email publications@sahgb.org.uk).

DEADLINES FOR COPY

The SAHGB Newsletter is published three times a year. The deadlines for copy to the editor are listed below:

Issue	Publication date	Deadline for Copy
Spring	early February	December 10
Summer	late May	April 15
Fall	early September	July 15

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

THE SOCIETY'S EVENTS

SAHGB ANNUAL LECTURE, 24 NOVEMBER 2008

The speaker at this year's annual lecture and awards ceremony will be the outgoing SAHGB President Frank Kelsall. The event will take place on Monday 24 November at the Courtauld Institute in London. The lecture entitled *Not as Ugly as Stonehenge: Architecture and History in the First Lists of Historic Buildings* will start at 6.30, following a drinks reception and the presentations of prizes. For additional information about the SAHGB Annual Lecture, please refer to the insert included with this issue of the Newsletter.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE, 3-6 SEPTEMBER 2009 LIVERPOOL

The SAHGB 2009 Annual Conference will be based in Liverpool Britannia Adelphi. The conference Secretary is Dr Elizabeth Green (liverpoolconference@sahgb.org). Further details and booking forms will be enclosed in the Spring 2009 issue of the newsletter.

SAHGB-EAHN ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM, 16 MAY 2009

Call for papers: British Architecture Seen From Abroad

Our annual symposium for 2009 will be organized jointly with the European Architectural History Network, with the aim of broadening our understanding of British architecture in the wider world. Proposals are invited for papers that illuminate aspects of British architecture from non-British points of view. They might include accounts of British architecture by foreigners travelling in Britain, gleaned from letters or journals, or reactions to British architects travelling abroad, whether as Grand Tourists, or carrying out work overseas. Accounts of British architecture by non-British scholars will also be welcome, for the light they shed on what it seems important to say about British architecture. Hermann Muthesius and Henry-Russell Hitchcock gave important interpretations of British architecture, for example, and historiographic papers will be welcome, but there are people now researching British topics from various parts of the world, and we would be interested to hear from them. There are

Please take note of the interval between each issue and the time lag between deadline and publication, and contact us about your announcements well in advance.

We welcome brief details of forthcoming lecture series, symposia, conferences, and exhibitions both in the UK and overseas. We also invite short notices about recent discoveries and requests for information. Contributions may be sent as attached Word compatible files to newsletter@sahgb.org as attachments or on disk, or on paper with double spacing and wide margins, to the address provided on page 2.

important postcolonial perspectives to be opened up, and assimilations of celebrated British architects into the world of globalized commodity fetishism.

In the first instance we will need a proposed title with and abstract of about 300 words, which should reach the conveners no later than 1 December 2008. A selection will be made, and if your proposal is selected you will need to produce a finished paper to be delivered at the symposium on 16 May 2009. The conveners are Andrew Ballantyne, Newcastle University (a.n.ballantyne@ncl.ac.uk) and Dirk van den Heuvel, TU Delft (d.vandenheuvel@tudelft.nl).

OTHER EVENTS

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS: THE BUILDINGS OF ENGLAND

2008 marks the quarter century of the large-format *Buildings of England* series. The first volume, Bridget Cherry's *London 2: South* (1983), showed how Nikolaus Pevsner's concept of scholarly, aesthetically informed architectural guidebooks could be expanded to embrace the more inclusive interests of later generations. Twenty-one revised *Buildings of England* hardbacks have followed, and volumes planned or in preparation will take the total for England to more than forty.

This impressive total nonetheless leaves ten counties or areas for which an author has yet to be identified: Derbyshire, Dorset, Co. Durham, Hertfordshire, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Staffordshire, Surrey, Wiltshire, and Yorkshire (North Riding). Yale University Press would be very interested to hear from any SAHGB member who may want to explore the possibility of taking on one of these areas.

As users of the books will appreciate (and existing authors will confirm), the revision of a *Buildings of England* volume presents many challenges. Physical and mental stamina is certainly required, as well as the ability to work briskly through a great deal of research, fieldwork and writing. Buildings of every age and type must be visited, assessed and described, Modernist and contemporary architecture included. The text of the existing edition must be approached in a creative but respectful spirit, and its scholarly standards maintained or enhanced. The rewards include the opportunity to get to know buildings in exceptional depth,

widening one's own knowledge and appreciation, and the chance to make fresh discoveries and interpretations.

Some current authors are working on the basis of a modest royalty, others are funded through the Buildings Books Trust, a charity established in 1994 to support the expanded series. Progress of the work also depends on continued fundraising by the Buildings Books Trust. If you can help us, whether in support of work on the counties currently outstanding or more generally, we would be very pleased to hear from you at the address below.

SIMON BRADLEY

Pevsner Architectural Guides, Yale University Press, 47 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP. Tel: 020 7079 4900 Fax: 020 7079 4901 email: pevsner@yaleup.co.uk

VICTORIAN SOCIETY ANNUAL BANISTER FLETCHER LECTURE

Dr Ian Dungavell, Director of the Victorian Society, will give the London Society's annual Banister Fletcher Lecture on 'London as it Might Have Been' on Wednesday 10 December 2008. For further information contact London Society on 020 7253 9400 or info@londonsociety.org.uk.

MONUMENTS INSTALLATION AT THE MARTINS BANK BUILDING, LIVERPOOL BY TERRY DUFFY

The *MONUMENTS* installation will encompass the major historic 1930s 'Martins Bank' building in central Liverpool. The building was once regarded as the finest banking hall in Europe and still retains its original fittings. This will be the first time the building has been open for years and it will be one of the largest installations during the biennial. *MONUMENTS* questions, challenges and informs architectural and spatial democracy, contemporary aesthetics and humanities cultural legacy. *MONUMENTS* is a powerful fusion of architecture, fine art, democracy, legacy, humanity and reinvention. Through the appropriation of the building Duffy will bring its significant history re slavery, global finance, architectural iconography to bare upon today's diverse social and cultural issues, ie: multiculturalism, the democracy and ownership of public spaces.

Opening times: 12-5 Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and 10.30-1pm Saturday between 20th September - 30th October 2008. (Thereafter by appointment.)

Address: 4 Water Street, Liverpool L2 8UY . For further information see <http://www.monuments.eu.com> or contact Clare Sheppard at info@british-art.org.uk

INFORMATION EXCHANGE

2008 IHBC GUS ASTLEY STUDENT AWARD

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC), the UK's professional body for historic environment conservation specialists, has called on current students to enter their best coursework in the institute's award, the 2008 IHBC Gus Astley Student Award. The competition is open to all students *engaged in taught courses in 2007-08*. *Entries may cover any aspect of Historic environment conservation including evaluation (eg history, pre-history or research), management (eg policy or finance) and/or*

intervention (eg design or technology). Simply submitting course work by e-mail can lead to a £300 award, a chance to speak at the institute's next Annual School, in Buxton in June 2009, and even to getting published in the IHBC's own highly respected journal, *Context*. Please send entries digitally to studentaward2008@ihbc.org.uk, with agreement from the course tutor. See www.ihbc.org.uk for forms & details. The closing date for submissions is December 31, 2008.

SOCIETY'S NEWS

REPORTS FROM THE SOCIETY'S EVENTS

SAHGB SYMPOSIUM, 17 MAY 2008: 'BRITISH ARCHITECTURE AND THE VERNACULAR'

I was once introduced to an art historian based in Florence as working on vernacular architecture in the north of England, which met the splendid response: "But it's all vernacular in England!". This symposium goes even further, on the premise that 'all architecture is vernacular, more or less.' The vernacular, as the organisers emphasise in their prospectus, is a matter of perspective. As Peter Guillery explained in his introduction it was part of the purpose of the day to rethink vernacular approaches, to extend the study of the everyday and context-specific to areas of architecture not previously seen as possessing vernacular qualities. Guillery advocates an approach, applicable to buildings of any status, which captures their local context, individual creativity and relationship to larger traditions. This sort of contextual approach is to be

welcomed, particularly if regional dynamics and economic forces (notably the market) are given due emphasis in the creation of architectural variety. Whether the concept of the vernacular is in fact necessary to such an approach – particularly if the results are to be readily understood by those outside architectural history – remains debatable.

The idea of the vernacular in British architecture emerged in the nineteenth century as an aspect of the architectural criticism which sought to revive the art and craft of traditional building techniques. It was thus wonderfully appropriate that this meeting was held in the Art Workers' Guild. An important achievement of the meeting was to bring together architectural historians and vernacular specialists to demonstrate their shared concerns. Starting us off, Frances Holliss described the relationship between living and working in single spaces over the *longue durée* in an effort to inform the successful design of contemporary live/work architecture. Live/work emerged in 1970s New York, when artists occupied vacant industrial buildings in SoHo – largely in

response to zoning restrictions, which prohibited exclusively domestic use and created cheap rents. Note the role of the market! Next, Paul Barnwell discussed late medieval English parish churches, demonstrating how a forensic examination of the archaeological evidence and its interpretation in close historical context can yield insights into cultural practice. Although concerned with the community context of these churches, this could just as well be termed a contextual as a 'vernacular' approach.

Focusing upon the construction process, Laurie Smith sought to demonstrate the continuities in geometric design from medieval cathedrals and barns, through to the plan-forms of seventeenth-century houses. Craftsmen drew daisywheels to provide accurate angles and generate proportions, which would explain better than 'ritual practice' why so many buildings, particularly barns, have daisywheels inscribed somewhere on their fabric. Without further evidence of craft practice, however, it is impossible to say whether the geometric patterns discernible in plan were actually applied. In at least some of these buildings the geometric 'system' may well be an unselfconscious – even fortuitous – aspect of building practice.

The next three papers dealt with architectures that were very definitely self-conscious. Elizabeth McKellar demonstrated that the self-consciously polite suburban villas on the fringes of seventeenth and eighteenth-century London are best understood not as lesser versions of the aristocratic rural retreat, nor as Palladian style trickling down and fizzling out, but as a protean housing form that met the varied requirements of professional and commercial commuters who were transforming the villages north of London into suburbs. Likewise, Anne-Marie Akehurst explained that the Quaker hospital in late eighteenth-century York was self-consciously restrained in its architecture – related to but distinguished from broader Yorkshire Georgian. Esmé Whittaker discussed the influence of Wordsworth and Ruskin on the architect Dan Gibson's Arts and Crafts houses in the Lake District. Whittaker perfectly illustrated the nineteenth-century conception of the vernacular through Gibson's deliberate yet playful re-creation of the white-walls and grey slate of Cumbria's seventeenth-century housing stock.

Andrew Law gave a lively presentation on 'Tudoresque', summarising the AHRC project led by Andrew Ballantyne on the development of Tudor-revival architecture from Joseph Gandy's eighteenth-century proposals through to the early twentieth-century Ideal Home. Law and Ballantyne rightly emphasise that the critical disparagement of 'Tudoresque' has led to a neglect of its social and cultural significance. Regrettably, not all of the

historical context suggested by Law for the English attachment to home and house ownership was convincing.

The two final papers dealt with vernacular modernism, usefully reminding us that the idea of the vernacular has been an aspect of modernist as well as historicist architecture. As Erden Erten explained, the *Architectural Review* from 1947 onwards sought to promulgate the need for place-specific architecture, with regional variety promoted in opposition to the anonymity of the international style. Miles Glendinning then showed how the micro-politics of specific cities generated variations in the form and feel of mass housing in Glasgow, London, or Sheffield. While some post-war planners were endeavouring to create a modern vernacular, the Vernacular Architecture Group was formed in the 1950s by individuals concerned to record historical vernacular buildings under threat from modernisation. It was no coincidence that the VAG's early emphasis on the construction and use of buildings had a communitarian and functionalist focus, since, as Nicholas Cooper has observed, this was partly derived from modernist architectural criticism.

Ideas of the vernacular, as we were reminded throughout the day, have been the creation of perspectives within architectural criticism. Advocates of the vernacular have traditionally aspired to recover authenticity – whether through the study of ordinary everyday buildings in the past, or through injecting modern architecture with place-specific qualities in the present. The idea of the vernacular might even be seen as an intrinsic critical response to 'modernity'. The critical context has changed, though within architectural criticism it seems that the term vernacular is not easily dispensed with. What really matters, as Martin Cherry indicated in his closing remarks, is making all species of building a meaningful part of historical interpretation.

ADRIAN GREEN

DONATIONS RECEIVED

The Society has received two important donations. We were granted a generous legacy from the estate of Sir Howard Colvin. More recently, the D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust has made a further donation of £3,000 to be used to support the Postgraduate Research Bursary. We would like to express our thanks for these valuable contributions.

DAVID LERMON

EXHIBITION REVIEWS

Back to the Future: Sir Basil Spence (1907-76), RIBA Gallery 1, 22 February – 22 April 2008

This exhibition was essentially a reduced version of a larger show, organized and curated in 2007 by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland and the National Galleries of Scotland. Timed to commemorate the centenary of Spence's birth, the initial show was able to draw heavily on archive material presented to the RCAHMS by the architect's family in 2003. An associated touring exhibition was also organized although the only English venues were Coventry Cathedral and Swiss Cottage Library; both, of course, Spence buildings. But the RIBA headquarters is also an apposite setting for a celebration of Spence's career, as he served the institution in a number of roles, most notably as President in 1958-60.

The compact exhibition was divided into a small number of sections covering pavilion designs, public and ceremonial commissions, his own private residences and the building that has kept his name alive in the public consciousness, Coventry Cathedral. Other major projects

covered were the 1951 Festival of Britain Sea and Ships Pavilion, Hyde Park Barracks and the British Embassy in Rome. Less familiar works included a design for a traditional house for the Scottish countryside and his last project, an unrealized scheme for a cultural centre in Bahrain. These selected works were depicted through an engaging mixture of architectural drawings, models, photographs, art works, newspaper cuttings and examples of building materials. Contemporary film and television footage gave an impression of a dapper and charming man. But because of space constraints, large swathes of Spence's diverse oeuvre – notably social housing, educational and commercial buildings – could only be represented by a continuous slide show. Nonetheless, one aspect shone through the entire exhibition: the importance of art to Spence, achieved most famously through his artistic collaborations at Coventry but also by his ability to create bold visualizations of his own buildings.

For further information on the architect and his archive see: <http://www.basilspence.org.uk> and <http://www.rcahms.gov.uk>

JOANNA SMITH

BOOK REVIEWS

MARGARET SPARKS: *Canterbury Cathedral Precincts: A Historical Survey* (Dean and Chapter of Canterbury, 2007, xii plus 258 pp, 50 b&w illus., 16 plans, £20.00, ISBN: 9780950139203)

Review first published in *The Canterbury Cathedral Chronicle*, No. 102, March 2008, p.51.

Despite the pioneering efforts of Robert Willis, the nineteenth-century scholar who could be seen as the patron saint of Margaret Sparks's important new book, the study of the Cathedral precinct in England is still in its infancy. Few comprehensive surveys have yet been attempted, and even fewer sites have received recent scholarly attention. For anyone with an interest in Canterbury Cathedral and its extensive precincts this book is an absolute must. For the first time since the publication in 1868 of Willis's pioneering work, the fascinating and complex history of these buildings in the shadow of the great cathedral receives the attention it deserves. As historical consultant to the Canterbury Archaeological Trust (CAT) and Consultant Historian to the Dean and Chapter, Margaret Sparks is exceptionally well placed to tell this extraordinary story. Her particular skill lies in her ability to bring together a mastery of the documentary sources with a thorough understanding of the archaeology and architectural history of the complex site. This is a combination found in few works of this kind. The book is a thoroughly readable account of the community and its buildings. It maps their architectural development throughout the medieval period, a response to the demands of a large, wealthy and busy Benedictine monastery serving a Cathedral in possession of one of Europe's greatest tourist attractions, the body and relics of

the martyred Thomas Becket, through their transformation in the years after the Reformation and their changing fortunes into the early modern world. As the Dean and Chapter are poised on the brink of a new period of investment in the Precinct in order to fulfil its potential as a twenty-first century tourist and pilgrimage destination, the publication of this book is especially timely.

There have been losses along the way, but fortunately Canterbury has been very well served by its chroniclers and antiquarians, who have left an exceptionally rich trail of evidence. The survival of the extraordinary twelfth-century waterworks drawing, first published in 1755 and republished with analysis and interpretation by Willis to such effect, provides an unrivalled window on the medieval world in which the effective circulation of water was of paramount importance. The twelfth-century buildings connected with the supply of water were not just functional – they were also beautiful, as the surviving water tower in the infirmary cloister attests. The 1541 Distribution List can be used to chart the division of the monastic properties between the Canons of the secular cathedral. The needs of the post-Reformation Dean and Chapter were very different from those of the medieval monks, and any structure serving a communal function that could not be adapted for use in the life of the secular cathedral community was immediately at risk. The Parliamentary Survey of 1650 contributes another snapshot of the Precinct, a record made at another time of great peril for the institution, following the sequestration of the Cathedral foundation in 1644 and its abolition in 1649. The Precinct survived the Commonwealth, albeit not unscathed. The next period of serious threat came in 1862, when a reduction in the numbers of Canons and a loss of

estates, and thus income, precipitated the demolition of 'surplus' buildings, including houses built into the ruins of the monastic infirmary, recorded in watercolours of c.1865. The Precinct was badly damaged during the Second World War, in a 1940 Baedeker raid and again in 1942 when the New Library of 1867-8, which had incorporated part of Lanfranc's enormous Dormitory, was destroyed. From the 1950s onwards the story has been one of restoration and modest reconstruction, in which the work of local architect J. L. Denman stands out. From 1976 the CAT undertook a series of excavations and investigations to which the author's contribution of documentary and historical research was essential. The survey drawings of the CAT are used throughout the volume.

Each building group and section of the site is treated to its own 'biography'. Sparks wisely divides her account into two parts, dealing first with the Monastic buildings of the pre-Reformation Benedictine community and then with the Precinct of the New Foundation, brought into being on 8 April 1541. While this means that a good deal of the site is visited more than once, the approach ensures that the account is underpinned by a strong chronological narrative and an explanation of the circumstances and drivers of change. This means that it is also a book about people and the lives they lived. And in the post-Reformation story the growing King's School plays a leading role; today it is the purposeful bustle with which the scholars dash from one class to another that evokes most effectively the traffic of the medieval monks and pilgrims around the site. Through the pages of this book the reader is able to reassemble what is now a somewhat disjointed environment, the consequence of adaptation and demolition on the one hand and limited public access on the other. Both our understanding and our experience of the Canterbury precinct will be transformed by this book. If the process of post-medieval adaptation and sub-division makes unravelling the precinct of today such a puzzle, in Sparks we have an authoritative and articulate guide.

The book has some irritating characteristics that might well reflect its gestation in a non-commercial publishing house. Navigating around the volume is seriously compromised by the lack of a contents page – an incomprehensible omission. The captioning and numbering of the illustrations is also rather inconsistent and the absence of any colour illustration is regrettable. These are minor quibbles, however, and this book will be the definitive work of reference for many years to come.

SARAH BROWN

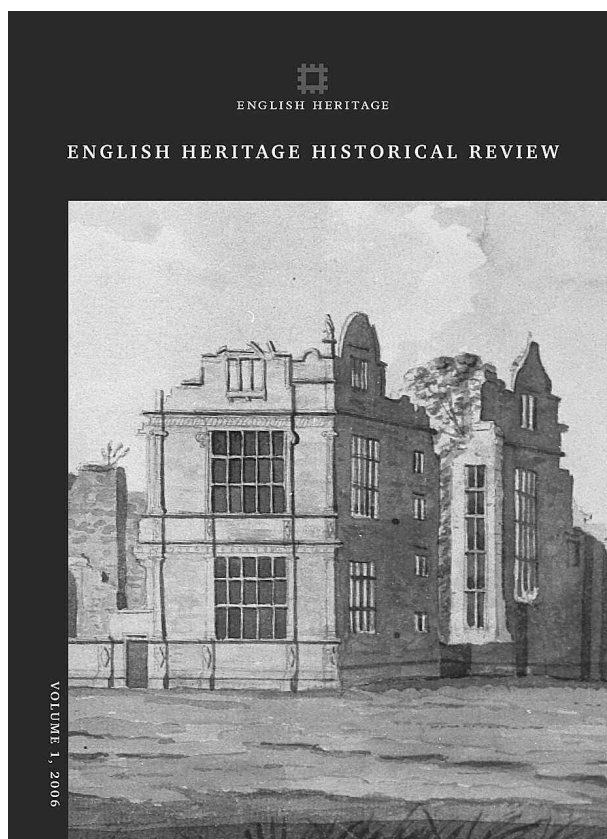
English Heritage Historical Review (Richard Hewlings ed; vol. 1, 2006, 116 pp; vol. 2, 2007, 148 pp; £25 each, or set of two vols for £35; ISSN: 1752-0169).

Anyone who has attempted to find out more about English Heritage properties than is offered in today's guidebooks will be familiar with the difficulties of tracking down up-to-date information. These two handsome volumes in A4 format are a new venture which aims to provide an outlet for some of the considerable historical research which informs the conservation and

presentation of sites throughout England, but which so often remains inaccessible to the outsider. The nineteen articles provide an interesting if somewhat random insight into trends in recent research. The scope is broad, stretching from the Romans to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The generous quantity of well produced colour illustrations includes paintings and drawings from a wide range of sources. They do more than give the volumes visual appeal. The value of illustrations as historical evidence is a recurrent theme. Topographical views assist Richard Hewlings in reattributing to Guelfi the statues of Inigo Jones and Palladio at Chiswick House (vol. 2). Elaine Harwood's study of Moreton Corbet Castle (vol. 1) elucidates its elaborate Elizabethan rebuilding and later decline into a romantic ruin through the help of eighteenth-century drawings and the evidence of a sixteenth-century court book. It was the background detail in a portrait of the military engineer Sir Thomas Hyde Page that inspired Paul Pattison to investigate Page's late eighteenth-century defences at Landguard, Felixstowe (vol. 1), and to follow it up with an exploration of the same engineer's work at Dover Citadel (vol. 2). Words and illustrations complement each other so well in these cases that it is a disappointment to turn to the Kenilworth Castle Inventory of c.1578 (vol. 1) and find that most of the pictures have nothing to do with the text, although the latter, with its pages of carpets, cushions, beds and hangings, is instructive enough on its own, drawing attention to the lavishness of portable furnishings at this time.

Given the character of English Heritage's portfolio, it is not surprising that castles and defences play a prominent role in these studies, but they are treated in refreshingly unexpected ways. The eccentric great



gatehouse at Dunstanburgh Castle is interpreted as a theatrical seaward gesture by the Earl of Lancaster, while Calshot, best known as one of Henry VIII's coastal forts, is examined in its role as a later defensive structure (both vol. 1). Concern with historical continuity is indeed another current theme: the article on the Chester amphitheatre includes discussion of the post-Roman periods and its effect on the development of the town (vol. 1). The Roman Pharos at Dover is given a similarly multi-period analysis, giving due credit to the eighteenth-century investigations by William Stukeley (vol. 2). Other contributions are of a more familiar type, in that they add to knowledge of major buildings and architects, but through discussion of unexecuted projects, an aspect often ignored. The little known Office of Works architect Henry Hawthorne is identified as the author of a scheme for sixteenth-century Kenilworth (vol. 2); Francis Smith may have designed for Compton Verney rather than Sutton Scarsdale as formerly proposed (vol. 2); John James made drawings for the Foundling Hospital (vol. 1). Roger Morris was involved in elaborate but largely abortive plans for a Palladian recasting of Apethorpe, but a smart existing dovecote can now be attributed to him (vol.2).

Other articles focus on the contents of English Heritage properties. Some fascinating detective work on the patrons of the later Stuart Portraits in the Suffolk collection by Anna Key (vol. 1), the intriguing story of the 'Spanish Gift' at Apsley House, (vol. 2) and a discussion of tapestries at Audley End (vol. 2) are all tellingly illustrated. A portrait acquired for Chiswick House is attributed to Edward Haytley, and is the starting point for a discussion of his work. An oddity is the paper reconstruction of a grand seventeenth-century staircase from Anderson Place, Newcastle upon Tyne, found in fragments in the attic at Brinkburn Priory (vol. 1). Most of the research presented here discusses historic fabric in the context of traditional art-historical and documentary evidence. The exception is a brief and succinct account (vol. 1) proclaiming the eleventh-century Pyx door at Westminster as the oldest scientifically dated door in Britain.

BRIDGET CHERRY

JAMES STEVENS CURL: *Victorian Architecture, Diversity & Invention* (Spire Books, 2007, 635 pp, numerous b&w and col. illus., £69.95, ISBN-10: 1904965067 ISBN-13: 9781904965060)

The architecture of this splendid book – its structure, design, form and articulation – is as illuminating as its content. The history is everything we would expect from its author, as he covers his period with a rigorous respect for the scholarship within which this history sits – Summerson, Pevsner and the like. He has no less regard for the formalist historical methodologies upon which such scholarship developed, of Eastlake and the earlier architectural histories shaping that apparent pandemonium of Victorian styles, of Hope, Rickman, the Pugins, Parker and so forth.

The book adopts a firmly structured chronological and stylistic framework of chapters, interposed by typological and technological thematic asides. Chapters are fronted by descriptive titles ('Some Styles other than Gothic'), stimulating quotes (Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, '... nothing is but what is not') and contextual prefatory

remarks ('... in the previous Chapter . . . This Chapter will re-trace . . .'). They are ordered further by subsections headed for ease of reference ('Italian and Other Influences'). All is enlivened by pertinent and beefy illustrations with full references as to subject, source, date, and occasionally including summary directions ('Lanyon's elevational treatment [of the former Head Office of the Belfast Bank] was clearly derived from the style of Barry's London clubs'). This rigorous framework is then varied just enough between and within chapters to ensure clarity and comprehension, so that even the most summary scan will bring the reader some beneficial enlightenment.

The wider intellectual aspirations might be labelled as reactionary by some – perhaps most enthusiastically by the author himself. Yet 'accessibility', clarity, image, style and pithy summaries (befitting the 5-second attention span of the YouTube generation of students) are all pillars of communication in twenty-first century media. The author, and Spire Books, the publishers, evidently have worked very hard at making this history, in the best sense of the phrasing, an easy read and reference source for the student and specialist alike. The book has the character of a uniquely serviceable reference, especially for those seeking quick access to just the right byte of information to sharpen a conclusion or, in the world of conservation, to help save a threatened Victorian building by focussing on its 'special interest'.

Indeed, this is a history book that, for all its substantial weight, is assertively accessible, a character deriving not a little from its reliance on all the good sense and media-savvy ingenuity that secured such high profiles for Pugin, Ruskin and similar popularists of that age. As such, it poses an interesting question: by returning to a more classical



structure, are such histories actually producing the most contemporary of educational resources. Could the inclusion of 'diversity' in the title be a subliminal bow to this unintended modernity?

Modern architectural scholarship, interestingly, can suffer from the same aggressive conceptualisation of the mundane that distances modern art, for all its celebration of ordinariness, from modern needs. Tracy Emin's bed leaves rich pickings (so to speak) for the critic seeking (again, so to speak) column inches. So too the socio-archaeological analysis of, say, the Georgian 'common man', founded on new insights derived from, for example, the distances between schoolboys' bogholes, might well inspire funders of new research. However, it leaves people working with historic places wondering quite how our priorities have been so perilously diverted.

Traditional research into historic places – answering such basic questions as who built what and why – has been funded so poorly of late that those seeking to inform constructive conservation, as English Heritage pitches it, still find it much too hard simply to identify the architect of a fine Victorian house threatened by imminent destruction. We rely too much on the enthusiasms of encyclopaedic specialists such as Professor Curl and other grand masters of British architectural history – Walker, Gomme, Howell, the late Sir Howard Colvin, etc – to help understand, and defend, the true value and potential of our built heritage. This history is peppered with an awareness of how much we have lost, and could have lost.

The five pages of preface and acknowledgements set the stage well for the author's contribution to the wider issues. Historically self-aware, logical, polemical, authoritative – 22 footnotes for this section alone! – and avowedly selective (social housing, Dublin, Scotland and industry all fail to figure as highly as others might pitch them), it is necessarily a small summary of a very big age.

The author's polemic is particularly acute in his refusal to balance the case he makes for Victorian over modern with a recognition that modern architecture now faces the same scandalous presumptions of endemic failure that littered popular thinking about Victorian architecture a couple of generations ago. He has worked hard to rescue his favourites from such 'looking with ears', as it is termed in the preface, too hard surely to threaten modern with that same baggage. With the splendid illustrations of some of the century's most majestic architecture to hand, supported by the informed judgement and critical acuity of one of the great historians of the architecture of that age, he should not be so concerned for the Victorian legacy as to undermine the modern inheritance. He makes the case brilliantly for Victorian architecture, and in many ways this most manageable of books (apart from its necessarily unwieldy scale) – like a gigantic Thames and Hudson – is a summation of how far the popular appreciation of Victorian architecture has progressed over a generation.

The more recent history of the complex of St Pancras station ('the greatest of all railway-terminus sheds in Britain') and Midland Grand Hotel ('a *tour-de-force* of eclectic Gothic treated with tremendous assurance') shows exactly how conservation wins when the energies of a caring civic interest succeed over the presumptions of partisan and prejudiced popular opinion. Various

threatened with redundancy, demolition and recasting, this complex today marks the centre of a rejuvenation that boasts direct links to Paris and 'the longest champagne bar in the world'. It is a place that is easily loved by modern users, unhampered by the knowledge of a less caring past, and is now seen at once as a credit both to the nineteenth and the twenty-first centuries. I think it was Hugh Pearman who once described regeneration as being 'like urban domestos; kills 99% of all known character', and while much has been lost under the regeneration banner, I'd be very keen to hear from this author what he thinks of the turnaround of this particular site, for all its faults.

As to the rest, I must be brief; an easy task, as this is such a splendid and engaging resource. Illustrations: generous, but never to a fault; high quality, balancing well space and relevance (see, for example, the splendid Martin Charles image of St Giles, Cheadle, capturing so well the strength of Pugin's maturity) though perhaps a little short on plans. Index: credited (rightly), extensive, clearly explained and unusually user-friendly. Design: classic, but engagingly quirky in detail, not least in the super-sized page numbers. Bibliography: one of the most useful and complete for its scale. Summary: a unique meeting of diversity and accessibility, altogether a construct that should grace the bookshelves of anyone with an interest in architecture.

SÉAN O'REILLY

HERMANN MUTHESIUS: *The English House*, translated by Janet Seligman and Stewart Spencer; edited with an introduction by Dennis Sharp (Francis Lincoln, 2007, 3 vols, 697 pp., 766 b&w illus., £120, ISBN-10: 0711226881; ISBN-13: 9780711226883)

Herman Muthesius's 'Das englische Haus' – the ardent devotee would use the German words rather than their translation – is, first of all, a work that is placed at the centre of some of the great myths of twentieth-century design. So often, myths gloss over much of the more intricate detail of history. The first of the great stories is of a historical development which holds that, at its briefest, Germany took over and moved on from where Britain was leaving off, a myth which is best known in Nikolaus Pevsner's famous phrase, 'from Morris to Gropius'. The nub of this grand narrative is Muthesius's own stay in London from 1896 to 1903. Its result was deemed to be the sudden revelation of the forward-looking nature of British Arts & Crafts design. However, the knowledge that British design was offering something new went back 20 years or more. It was Parisian critics and furniture designers in the late 1870s, and then some French architectural critics, who first recognised it, with other countries, including Germany, following on in the later 1880s. The mid-1890s, then, marked the time when France's and Belgium's interest in English art and design was waning, while Central Europeans 'got hold' of England's gurus, first Walter Crane and then, by the late 1890s, Ruskin and William Morris. By 1897–99 German Jugendstil, and then the new Vienna Secession style, largely eclipsed the message of the Arts & Crafts while, after 1900, it was essentially the English garden city ideal which fascinated the continentals. For Muthesius, the Arts & Crafts movement

chiefly meant the propagation of high art in design, and he had no truck whatsoever with Morris's or Crane's socialism. The eventual solution of 'good taste for the masses' would lie within a new 'pure form' in industrialised design. English artistic vision and individuality was turned into German sobriety and objectivity ('Sachlichkeit'): thus ran the eventual simple formula distilled from the complex mesh of the relationship between English design and the continent.

One great myth can be combined with another, which then may also contradict most of what the first holds dear. The myth of trans-national Modernism was combined, in Muthesius's work and writings, with the belief in a pure Englishness of the English House, tied in with the character of the Englishman, and this character was an eternal one; that 'rugged English individuality' (in German 'knorrig', meaning 'rugged', but also 'knotty', vol. I, p.1). Furthermore, what England had achieved, according to Muthesius, was 'a completely national style of house-building based on the old vernacular building' (here, again, the translation is rather brief: '... auf der Grundlage der alten Volkskunst aufgebaute ... Baukunst', literally translates as 'a building art, built onto the basis of the people's art', vol.I, p.209).

However, the term 'Volk' – though, admittedly, often purposely left undefined – is a highly misleading one in the context of this book. Again a new myth partly cancels out the previous one. For the author, the ideal 'English House' meant predominantly the medium-to-large detached house in the outer suburb or in the country; indeed, 'country house', or at least, 'house in the country', rather than just 'house', would have been a more adequate title for the whole book. Only a short section is devoted to small detached houses, even less to urban houses and flats, while the smaller terraced houses that constitute the overwhelming majority of English houses in towns and suburbs merit just half a page.

The word 'house', in German and in English, is one that is meant to speak volumes, it conjures up a whole culture of the home and its holistic rightness. What this book chiefly values, though, is the architecture of the house, or more simply and to the point, the contribution of the modern British élite of architects. Muthesius here follows a claim which emerged in late nineteenth-century German architectural circles, namely that a proper house must be designed by an architect and that anything not so designed cannot come under the 'house' ethos at all.

That said, there is also a quite different way in which one can study and enjoy the book, a way diametrically opposed to the strict meaning of architecture as the design of masters, namely as information on standard ways of planning and constructing. In that respect it is very satisfying to use the new edition as it includes all the parts which the earlier Seligman translation had left out: the one third of volume II on construction, the earlier history of the interior in volume III, as well as the long introductory early history of the larger house in volume I, and some pages on the history of gardens.

Muthesius was fascinated with Robert Kerr's meticulous planning methods in *The Gentleman's House, or How to Plan English Residences* of 1864. But of course his compendium of details cannot be compared with the pedestrian-sounding multi-volume building manuals published so copiously at the time. There is a constant

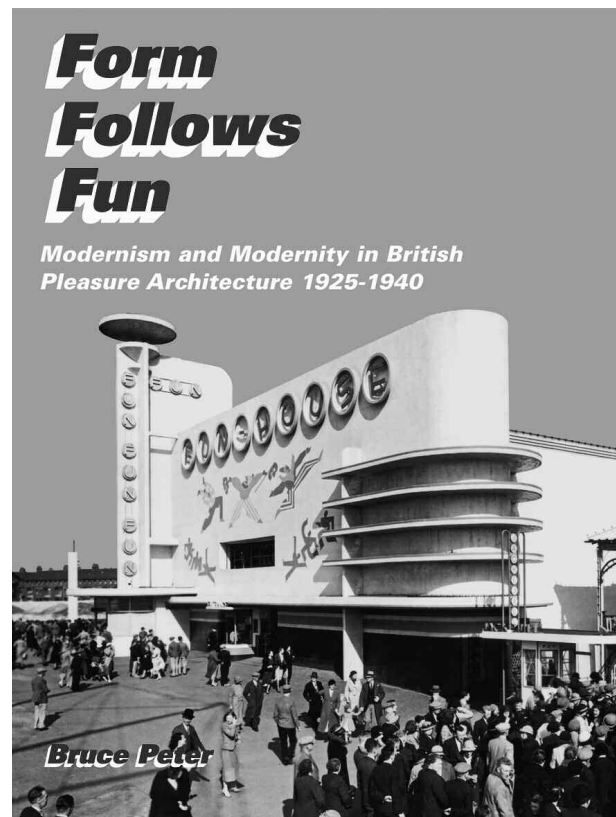
reflection in the descriptions, and it is at those points the foreign observer comes into play: he or she will notice things that might never strike the native as peculiar, such as the fact that, in contrast to German habits, rooms are never rented out furnished (vol. II p.155), or that doors are now made 'no larger than necessary' and are rarely wider than 91cm or 3ft. Muthesius actually misses the continental, or at least the German kind of sliding doors, with which one can throw two rooms into one (vol. III, p.142) – a point where one actually doubts his information, given that wider openings between the two main reception rooms were frequent, at least in later Georgian and early Victorian regular houses.

All in all, this definitive new English edition is a treasure trove, with its 766 photos and plans, beautifully produced as a quasi-facsimile edition of the original German volumes, and well worth acquiring, even by those who already possess the Seligman version. The introduction by Dennis Sharp could have been a little longer and the information on the present-day state of Muthesius studies somewhat more extensive, but still this work is worth every one of its £120.

STEFAN MUTHESIUS

BRUCE PETER: *Form Follows Fun: Modernism and Modernity in British Pleasure Architecture 1925-1940* (Routledge, 2007, 224 pp, 132 b&w illus., £35, ISBN-10: 0415428181; ISBN-13: 9780415428187)

Modernism offered a new design for living, impacting on everything from grand architectural projects down to simple floor coverings. Many architects of new houses, hotels and apartment blocks were keen to embrace this continental import, where patrons wanted it and local residents and politicians failed to resist it, but these were



normally exclusive buildings or developments that the masses could only marvel at from outside.

Buildings for entertainment could be experienced by everyone. For the price of admission, cinemagoers, families visiting a zoo or people wanting a flutter at the dogs could enter 'wholesome, hygienic and determinedly respectable' buildings that could be stridently modern and architecturally adventurous. New technology, as simple as the film projector at the cinema or the motor to power the rabbit at the dog track, prompted a revolution in certain building types, and by the 1930s specialist architects were arriving at definitive, elegant solutions. But modernism was about more than just architecture; it embraced new approaches to the provision of components, lighting and services, and established a new accessible attitude to the visual arts within architecture. Still admired in the twenty-first century, the modernism of the inter-war years contained a fatal flaw. Its short lifespan, rigorous forms and frequently rapid construction, made it vulnerable to another wave of almost post-futurist architecture in the 1960s, and today there are few, if any, untouched examples surviving. It is perhaps fitting that Bruce Peter began his voyage through the architecture of pleasure at the De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill-on-Sea, a building that can still be appreciated in something approaching its original form, a result of recent extensive restoration that made it fit, at the same time, for the twenty-first century.

The book covers all the major types of entertainment buildings in broadly equal terms, but this causes an imbalance in the story. Cinemas were the only truly universal and democratic modernist entertainment available. During the inter-war years, nearly 5,000 cinemas were built, compared with around a dozen greyhound tracks, two seaside pavilions and one international exhibition. Of the 116 permanent holiday camps and 59 temporary ones that existed in 1939, barely a handful had any architectural merit, and most of these feature in the book. The vast majority of the permanent ones were fairly makeshift structures, cheap and cheerful rather than elegant and modernist. And as Peter recognised, many of these new delights were located on the fringes of towns or, in the case of the seaside, the fringe of the island. In the case of seaside pleasure buildings, their pleasures could only be experienced by most people while on their brief holidays or day trips.

A key aspect of the modernist achievement in the inter-war years was that it took place against a backdrop of economic depression, which was later supplanted by growing fears of a future war. Yet the worst economic conditions that faced twentieth-century Britain are simply described as 'a difficult economic climate' and the 1932 Town and Country Planning Act is seen as a more important part of the story. The absence of a firm historical context, and the research that would lie behind it, is illustrated by the use of the term 'Wages Weeks' when the traditional Lancashire holidays were in fact the 'Wakes Weeks'. This betrays a lack of wider historical context, a short-coming that may be due to the book deriving from the author's PhD thesis.

Nevertheless, the book does provide a wealth of material on an important part of the inter-war architectural scene, and is full of detailed insights into the only architectural expression of Modernism that could be truly popular and universal.

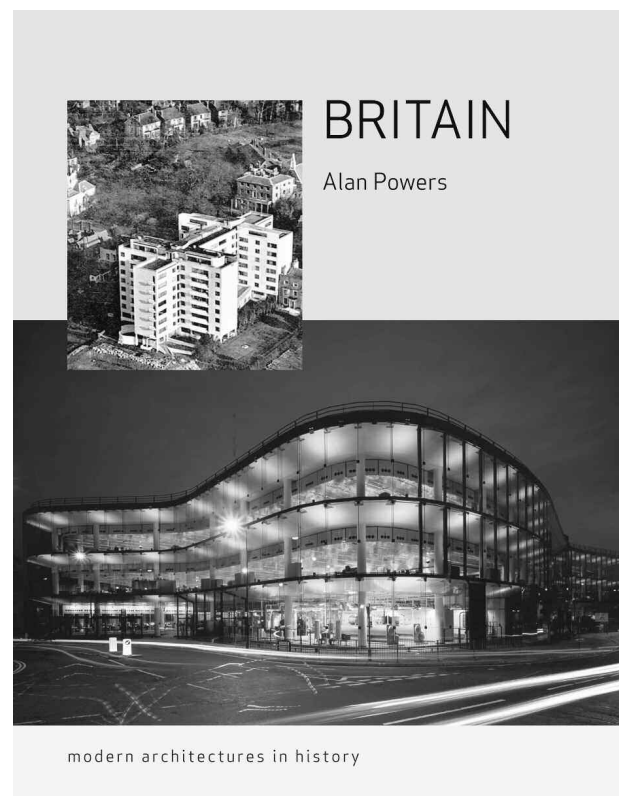
ALLAN BRODIE

ALAN POWERS: *Britain: modern architectures in history* (Reaktion Books, 2007, 304 pp, b&w illus. throughout, £16.95, ISBN-10: 1861892810; ISBN-13: 9781861892812)

CHERYL BUCKLEY: *Designing Modern Britain* (Reaktion Books, 2007, 256 pp, col. and b&w illus. throughout, £17.95, ISBN-10: 1861893221; ISBN-13: 9781861893222)

Both these books address a central issue of twentieth-century architecture and design: the impact and meaning of modernism in Britain. While the subject retains the capacity to divide families, historians are readier now to take the longer view, recognising the diversity and pluralism of modernist expression in a country that has long enjoyed a reputation for eschewing it. Even ardent sympathisers of those whom Powers calls the 'white hats' of Modernism – believers in the power of technology, radical design and intellectual rigour to create a good society – might now recognise the contribution of the 'black hats': a delight with decoration, a respect for human scale and an appreciation of tradition, even of national and regional identities – themes both authors tackle. At last, the appreciation of 'otherness' in this heated sector of the discipline can no longer be dismissed as 'bad architectural history'. The series of which Powers's volume is the first to appear, is entitled 'modern architectures in history' (all lower case with the now fashionable plural) and Buckley frequently refers to the various 'modernisms' that contributed to the variety and range of allusion of the applied arts in Britain.

All this prepares readers for a catholic *tour d'horizon* and they will not be disappointed: both Powers and Buckley are refreshingly free of dogma and partisanship. Even though both books are from the same publisher, they do



not appear to have been actively marketed together – a shame since it is instructive and a pleasure to read the two in tandem. They both provide excellent and accessible introductions for students and the general reader – Powers’s book is the best available concise introduction to twentieth-century British architecture – as well as providing interesting and sometimes surprising perspectives for the specialist. What is particularly refreshing is that the authors each place their analysis in a firm historical and cultural context: this should make these books required reading for those students who are tempted to overlook the importance of architecture and design as key classes of historical evidence. It is a difficult trick to bring off – occasionally Buckley’s various canters through aspects of modern British history impede the flow of an otherwise compelling narrative – but both writers stimulate reflections about the nature of art in society and, indeed about Britishness and more local distinctiveness (or perhaps we should say ‘distinctivenesses’). Cheryl Buckley directs her emphasis to the regions, especially Newcastle and the North East (where she teaches) but her analysis tends to reinforce an impression of high levels of local activity and creativity rather than a design legacy that is rooted in the local vernacular.

Central to both books is the role of tradition – both in terms of craft and vernacular form – in the formation of a distinctive British modernism. Powers’s chapter headings (Happiness, Compassion, Poetics etc.) echo Ruskin; Buckley’s (“Englishness” and Identity’ and, paraphrasing Paul Nash, ‘Going Modern but Staying British’, etc.) flag her theme that design was an agent of ‘Britain’s self-fashioning by referencing the past, present and future’. One could derive some comfort from Alan Powers’s suggestion that plurality may have been a ‘constant condition’ of English architecture, and that its Anglo-Saxon (innate?) fluidity may not have been a disadvantage. Cheryl Buckley is less reassuring: perhaps it is partly because dress fabric design, ceramics and graphic art are even more susceptible to the vagaries of fashion (with its tendency to favour modernity and its instinct to plunder the past indiscriminately rather than borrow, refine and learn from it) than is architecture. Modernism in the popular mind has been tarnished by the elitist thinking that resulted in the *dirigiste* modernist-inspired housing and road transport systems of the 1960s and ’70s – so wonderfully sent up by Louis Hellman’s cartoons, reproduced in considerable numbers in Powers’s book. Possibly less well appreciated is the increasingly didactic and interventionist tone of government bodies, especially between 1930 and the 1950s regarding matters of design and taste. This is well covered by Buckley who traces a sinister thread of manipulation and persuasion from the Council for Industrial Design to Habitat (via the Design Council).

These books are to be highly commended to SAHGB members: Powers brings new and sympathetic insights into what many might consider – but will find is not – familiar ground; Buckley ranges perceptively across the less well-known territory of pots, logos, storage units and regional art schools where the big cultural struggles were often the more fiercely fought out. Profusely illustrated (Buckley enjoys the advantage of colour) and well designed, these books deserve a wide readership.

MARTIN CHERRY

MURRAY FRASER with JOE KERR: *Architecture and the ‘Special Relationship’: The American Influence on Post-War British Architecture* (Routledge, 2007, 592 pp, 272 b&w and 20 col. illus., £55, ISBN-10: 0419209107; ISBN-13 9780419209102)

This extraordinary book offers much more than its title implies. For the many of us who learned our architecture in the 1960s and ’70s, and the few of us who then moved across the Atlantic to learn it again, this book provides both a reawakening of half-forgotten memories and a fresh perspective on familiar scenes. Although the focus of the book is the post-war years, the first chapter (83 pages) takes the story of Anglo-American architecture up to the Second World War, thus setting the following chapters in a firmly-rooted historical context, before starting the second chapter with the D-Day invasion. The breadth of the study is truly awesome and ranges from a detailed analysis, for example, of the contribution of the late Peter Reyner Banham (pp.30-35), who certainly inspired me to discover America, to pithy asides such as the observation that ‘The first parking meters in London were deployed, fittingly, outside the American Embassy in Grosvenor Square, Mayfair, in July 1958 ...’ (p.153). This book, as very quickly becomes clear, is not just an architectural history but also a cultural commentary, which makes us realise, as we turn the pages, how much the Special Relationship has changed our lives in the last half century. The authors note how a young British architect, Theo Crosby, deplored the fact that, in 1965, the average American watched four hours of television a day (p.157). In Britain today, that might seem modest.

As an example of original scholarship, this book immediately fills a gaping hole on the architectural bookshelves between the histories and the monographs. The former, often broad in their scope and hermetic in their content (consider the 36 chapters of William J Curtis’s *Modern Architecture since 1900*, 3rd edition, 1996) rarely interweave the Anglo with the American, while the latter, of which examples are legion, are almost by definition separatist. Yet here Fraser and Kerr move seamlessly from Yale to Oxford, when discussing ‘The Cult of Kahn’ (pp.353-359) or back and forth across the Atlantic, and ultimately to Paris, when explaining ‘High Tech Dreams’ (chapter 5) and their genesis in ‘The Right Stuff’ (chapter 4). In Chapter 5, the authors affect an authoritative and original analysis of one of the most significant post-war industrial buildings, the Reliance Controls Factory at Swindon (Team 4, 1966), discussing it alongside the Cummins Engine Company Plant at Darlington (Kevin Roche, 1964-63) while in the context of Harold Wilson’s contemporaneous speeches on the white heat of technology (pp. 304-308). Whereas the Reliance Controls Factory was an American *homage* by British architects, the Cummins Engine Company Plant was an object lesson in American design by an American architect, albeit one born in Ireland (pp.234-241). Its influence was considerable and, quite rightly, its image appears on the book’s dust jacket.

The significance of this book is certainly more noticeable now than it might have been, say, a decade ago. The war in Iraq has made us aware, once again, of American hegemony which, as the book demonstrates, was the driving force behind the development of post-war architecture in this country. For all its rhetoric and the

resulting adoration by British architects, it was not European Modernism, as best represented by Le Corbusier, which really changed the direction and internationalised British architecture but, like blues music, television soaps and fast food burger joints, it was American cultural imperialism. This point is amply brought home throughout this book and specifically in its concluding section, 'The hybrid topography of Britain' (pp.501-505). But the case is also made for the learning and influence going the other way. Banham, who moved to SUNY Buffalo and then UC Santa Cruz, has already been mentioned, but there was also Colin Rowe, a product of the Liverpool School of Architecture, who ended up, by way of UT Austin, at Cornell University. Others, notably Robert Maxwell, Alan Colquhoun and Kenneth Frampton, all architects with proven track record in practice, crossed the Atlantic to become historians and theorists/critics, thus providing the social and cultural dimension which the teaching of architecture in post-war America had lacked (pp.401-405). In 'The Brits are coming!' (pp.488-498) the authors show that now it is the high-tech firms – Foster, Rogers, Grimshaw, Hopkins, Wilkinson Eyre – who are making the most significant inroads into current American architecture, importing an architecture which, in many ways, began as an American export but one which the Americans, because it was unfeasible within their business mentality, could never make their own. This Fraser and Kerr put down to the presence of British engineers whose energy-conscious

design strategies strike a chord with even the Bush administration, when Americans are now (June 2008) paying \$4 a gallon for gas.

This is a large book, almost 600 pages, yet it is set out in a remarkably clear and accessible way. The first chapter, as noted, provides a historical foundation while the seven subsequent chapters (compared with Curtis's 35!) offer parallel and sometimes overlapping thematic studies which are largely arranged chronologically within themselves and subdivided into manageable sections with epigrammatic sub-titles, as quoted above; I particularly liked 'Earning from Las Vegas' (p. 477). The research is extensive and fastidiously recorded: over 800 titles in the bibliography and in excess of 1500 endnotes, mostly with multiple references. The writing, which avoids obfuscation, is clear and concise and is littered with amusing asides. The potentially more difficult theoretical explanations, such as the psychosexuality of corporate towers (p.404) are treated with a lightness of touch which makes them immediately understandable; other less arcane but probably more unattractive topics, such as the discussion of the shopping mall 'From Metro Centre to Bluewater', are rich in detail which allows us to comprehend, if not to love them (pp. 435-442).

It is hard not to admire this book. It has tied up the subject so completely that we will have to wait another fifty years for a re-evaluation of the Special Relationship. I, for one, won't be around to read it.

NEIL JACKSON