

NEWSLETTER

Issue 26 September 2006

IHBC

WEST MIDLANDS BRANCH

INSTITUTE OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS CONSERVATION

DIARY DATES

NEXT BRANCH MEETING

❖ *Wednesday 20th September 2006.* In Leek, Staffordshire. To include a visit to Cheadle.

BRANCH MEETINGS 2006-07

❖ *Thursday 30th November 2006.* Perhaps central Birmingham. Date, venue and theme to be confirmed.

❖ *Tuesday 13th March 2007.* At Ludlow, to be hosted by Colin Richards. To feature Green Conservation and technical developments in practice as deployed at Ludlow Castle.

PEOPLE

Noel Knight, not content with having retired from Herefordshire, is now one of IHBC's "guinea pigs" helping with the development of arrangements for member accreditation.

Fiona Newton, formerly chair of the National IHBC Commercial Committee, is the new IHBC *Project Officer*. She will be undertaking a series of research projects and be available to earn income for IHBC by working as a consultant to others.

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

Ian Kilby

The Camel's Back

In this column I have tended to share with you conservation issues in Shrewsbury, more for convenience than any other reason and there seems to be no shortage of material either. The latest challenge has involved the proposed demolition of two former industrial buildings close to the Council's Offices and within a conservation area.

The first is a former Maltings, a three storey brick building under a double pile tiled roof. We believe the building dates from 1805 (or thereabouts according to local deeds) and although attempts to list it have failed the building is prominently situated close to the river and makes a positive contribution to the conservation area. Of particular interest is that the upper floors of one element of the building are supported by a single longitudinal spine beam some 19m long. Why the builder chose to build in this way

rather than a series of short 5m spans across the gable width is not clear other than to say it is extremely impressive. One possibility is that the timber was floated up river from Bristol and may even be Baltic pine, used in largely unconverted state. Shortly after construction a series of iron props were added beneath the beam (just to be sure!).

Roll on 200 years and the building is faced with an uncertain future along with an adjacent warehouse dating from the mid 19th century but incorporating the remains of an 18th century house. By the time you read this the fate of both buildings could have been decided.

In support of the applications to demolish the buildings both applicants have put together a range of technical reports from structural engineers, quantity surveyors, building surveyors and valuers in an attempt to address the tests set out in PPG15 (paras 3.16-3.19). As it appears that a refusal would almost certainly lead to an appeal and because there is a good level of interest in supporting the retention of the buildings the Council has employed its own consultant building surveyor, structural engineer and quantity surveyor. The Council's consultants found that neither building was likely to collapse and that both could be repaired in a manner far less expensive than that suggested by the applicants.

Needless to say the exchange of correspondence from consultants on both sides quickly revealed that there was a fundamental difference in opinion regarding the structural capacity of the buildings. It isn't surprising that engineers are perhaps more risk averse than other professionals and particularly in an increasingly regulated and litigious world there is greater reliance of proven standards. It is difficult however to apply British Standards for construction to historic buildings that have no regard to such factors. In these circumstances the value of the conservation engineer becomes clear. Those of you who have sought advice from English Heritages engineers will already know their worth and in this case, the Council's consultant was no exception. As the arguments were exchanged about various repair approaches the council's engineer kindly supplied the applicant with a report from Context (Issue 57 March 1998) on load testing of historic buildings. Note only did this remind me that we need to approach problems with pragmatism and common sense – it also reminded me of what a fantastic

resource the online archive is. Check it out and see you in Leek.

EDITORIAL

Thank you to our former Branch Secretary, Vicci Cox. At our 6th June Branch meeting she suggested that the Branch Event Email should include a direct access link to the Website copy of the *Newsletter*. Just click that link, and the Newsletter will download on your screen. However, for those of you without internet connections, a paper *Newsletter* copy will be sent you. Please register with Deb Boffin for a paper copy, if you have not already done so.

BRANCH MEETING 6th June 2006

Took place at the Oddfellows Hall, Clarence Terrace, Leamington Spa, hosted by *Roger Cullimore* and *Alan Mayes* of Warwick and Leamington Borough Council. Many thanks to both for their thoughtful and attentive care throughout the day.

Please see the minutes for the content of the business part of the Branch meeting, which included a technical forum. A future issue of the *Newsletter* is likely to include a case study describing the solution to the problem posed by a massive mullion and transom timber window with moulding integral to lintel and jambs, yet suffering severe decay and death watch beetle resulting in structural movement.

Lunch took place at the Regent Hotel, in what is now the Leamington Bar and Grill, the many participants filling a huge table in the former ground floor ballroom, which retained the original mirrors and chandeliers. Special thanks too to Branch Treasurer Mizzy Marshall for sorting out the complex business of payment for lunch!

The afternoon featured a visit to the Jephson Gardens public park to look at the new interpretation centre in the former lodge, and to view the new-build contemporary style Sub-Tropical House. Walks to and from the Regent Hotel and Jephson Gardens took in many of the buildings and sites featured in Alan Mayes morning talk about new build in central Leamington.

VIEW OUT OF THE WINDOW 6th June 2006

The Oddfellows Hall wasn't a „hall at all. Rather, it was a suite of rooms occupying part of the end pavilion of the Grade II* Clarence Terrace, 1830-ish. We met on the first floor in the front room, linked to the rear room by an early timber sliding partition. Original features included the timber window shutters, and (judging by the build-up of whitewash) the acanthus ceiling cornice.

The rear room terminated in a bow. However, a side window in this room had had its upper light re-glazed sometime in the 1890s with very attractive Aesthetic Movement stained glass. The full-length front casements opened out on to a balcony with a heavy cast-iron balustrade with acanthus balusters. The front windows looked out over Warwick Place to a similar but rather later grand stucco terrace opposite.

Externally, Clarence Terrace was very handsome, rising to four stories and having end pavilions. Porches were in a pretty pure Doric and the end pavilion pilasters Corinthian. Round-headed dormers (reminiscent of acroteria) could be seen peering over the solid parapet. The basement areas

retained their original heavy cast-iron railings, which were being repainted at the time of our visit. The terrace faced a carriage drive set back from Warwick Place itself.



Oddfellows Hall – exterior



Oddfellows Hall – Aesthetic Movement stained glass window

CABE “FESTIVE FIVE” AWARD 6th June 2006

Warwick and Leamington BC knew nothing about it until the Award certificate arrived in the post, being duly date-stamped by the post clerk. It commended the Council's 2005 efforts to secure a good standard of contemporary design.

Alan Mayes explained that Leamington had largely escaped the usual depredations of the 1950s and '60s, with the stucco terraces and frontages typical of the town surviving, albeit in a poor physical and decorative state. The modern town was largely the result of the development of the Spa in the early 1800s. Local building stone was of poor quality so the characteristic early C19 terraces were executed in stucco. However, there were some good examples

of 50s-60s housing that were of some quality and passed the test of time.

Modern development pressures were largely generated by retail, with the development of Leamington as a regional centre. Because of the predominance of the Classical stucco terrace, there was a strong tendency for new schemes to be designed in pastiche. Such proposals were not always well-detailed, and could have unfortunate results, both in scale and appearance, when Classical packaging was allied to steel framing and commercial quantities of floorspace. However, the DC were seeking a good standard of contemporary design and were making their town centre land holdings available for contemporary development by way of setting a positive example.

This had been done at a site in Holly Walk, adjoining both the modern Police Station and stucco terrace. A competition had been won with a contemporary design by architect [N]. This had just been built and was completing. It had no problems in finding an occupant.

A particularly interesting effort in the past 10 years was a corner building in Warwick Street, turning the corner by means of a cylindrical turret.

Leamington now had two modern shopping centres. The first dated from the 1980s and was set on backland on the east side. New porches in the original frontage terrace led shoppers through the main mall, lidded by a pseudo „Crystal Palace steel arched roof. The second, the *Royal Priors Shopping Centre*, was just completing. This is also on backland immediately to the east of the Regent Hotel. A new street had been created, running from the Hotel through to Regent Street. The new build used a mixture of rendered and brick facing to pick up from both the Hotel and the brick-and-terracotta Town Hall. This development includes upper floor housing on top of ground-level retail.

REGENT HOTEL Leamington Spa

1818-1898, architect C S Smith. A fairly plain stucco box externally, with front and end porches. Some effort had been expended on the interiors, which included a grand staircase and a ballroom suite. Alterations over the years meant that the present plasterwork of the ballroom was Edwardian rather than Regency.

In family ownership until recently, the death of the proprietor was followed by closure of the Hotel and sale to a developer. The developer wanted to convert the ground floor to retail use. Undesirable, in view of the good degree of survival, which would be seriously threatened by modern shopfitting. During the period of closure there was a fire, which led to damage of the ground floor plasterwork. However, some of the original features – mirrors, chandeliers – had been put into store and so escaped.

The ultimate negotiated solution was demolition of the architecturally plain rear service wing to enable the new backland retail development to work, and the splitting of the main hotel into two units. Part of the ground floor went to conversion as a bar/restaurant. The rest found a continuing hotel use in the (improbable) hands of *Travelodge*, who made an exceptional change in company policy to levy higher charges than their standard £26 a night! The *Travelodge* portion includes the original grand stair, but the ground floor of the stairhall is now (reversibly I think) physically partitioned off from the bar/restaurant. On 6th June we had the opportunity to view the stairhall as well as the bar/restaurant.



Regent Hotel – outside the Doric entrance porch

SUB TROPICAL HOUSE Jephson Gardens

The restoration and interpretation of Jephson Gardens had attracted a £4.5m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Jephson Gardens is a linear public park flanking and incorporating the River Leam. It has been progressively developed from the mid C19, with a fine collection of exotic trees and good quality buildings.

Access from the Parade opposite the Royal Pump Rooms is through formal iron gates flanked by single-storey stucco gate lodges. The south lodge, formerly a Parks Department office, has now been converted into an interpretation centre, with wall displays and a continuous 20-minute slide display.

Unusually, HLF funding had included the construction of a new Sub Tropical House on the site of the former (utilitarian) greenhouse. Designed by *Architects PLB* of Winchester, it opened in 2003. Part of the HLF package was training in traditional horticultural skills for the Parks workforce. The building included a dedicated classroom for this purpose. At the opposite end was a restaurant with wide views over the River and Gardens. One of the design requirements had been a raised plinth to cope with the consequences of flooding – a recently-experienced phenomenon!



Sub Tropical House – oblique view

Upon examination, the Sub Tropical House could be described as something of a “curate s egg”. The main plant house section is a lightweight glazed and steel box, with its west frontage relieved by a series of high-level glazed slats expressed as visual gables. These „gables” add character and life to the

buildings appearance. To the south is the restaurant, planted on a tall and visually very solid plinth, and topped by a thick and visually solid flat roof. On the north, the glasshouse is flanked by a much smaller flat-roofed classroom, with a kind of portico facing north.

Internally, a series of paths and bridges slope down to the south. Water is a major feature, being run over constructions of slate rubble to provide visual interest. The water features have been treated as „wishing wells by the public. With one unusual result. Some of the coins have turned bright blue. The plants, which are intended to evoke the scene of millions of years ago, were supplied commercially by a subsidiary of the *Rentokill* combine!

By contrast to the glasshouse, the classroom was cool internally, with an unusual low-down window with a lintel at waist height facing west.

Editor's Comment

In many ways an attractive creation, the Sub Tropical House does show signs of not having been thought through as a functional building. Some high-level glazing was growing algae, and (?) condensation had led to heavy streaking down adjacent texture-rendered walling. There was clearly no easy means of access round and through the plants (some of which had toxic properties) to deal with this soiling. And indeed wall decoration and glass cleaning inside the glasshouse generally.

Externally, the filigree „gables looked dusty and slightly grubby. Access for cleaning and maintenance does not seem to have been designed-in.

A cantilevered stub wall on the north side, finished in render, had one of its angles chipped and damaged. Unsurprisingly, as this corner was at body height and easy to collide-with.

Aesthetically, the restaurant section failed to complement the glasshouse. The plinth was far too crude and solid, and provided too much of a lumpen contrast. The visual integration of the classroom was better done, with some quite attractive timber panelling.

Conclusion. There needs to be a "Phase II" project taking a careful look at wear and tear over the three years since opening, and then devising a planned maintenance scheme for both the building and its plant contents. Maintenance access needs to be practically, intelligently and sensitively prescribed.

LEAMINGTON WALKABOUT

6th June 2006

The walkabout took in much that has already been described. Also ran:

- ❖ **Royal Pump Rooms.** The focus of the Spa. Originally a single-storey colonnaded building of 1813-14 by C S Smith (qv Regent Hotel). Enlarged and extended in the late C19 and again 1910-48. Bought by the Borough Council in 1920. Progressively closed down in the 1990s with vacation by the NHS and then closure of the Assembly Rooms and the swimming baths by the Borough Council. Received a new lease of life through re-opening as Borough Library, Museum and Art Gallery with Assembly Rooms. The swimming bath with its steel truss roof was converted into the Library through extension of the previous balcony. One problem was securing adequate public access to the new facilities. The design solution was to build on a cluster of steel-framed „pavilions on to the north side to

act as user-friendly entrance porches. The re-activated building now provides the town's Tourist Information Centre. *Comment.* However, the conversion has had a „domino effect in that the previous library, museum and art gallery building near the railway station is now empty and looking for a new role. This is an attractive and handsome „Free Style Edwardian edifice with stained glass and elegant dark-red terracotta dressings and details.

- ❖ **Royal Priors Shopping Centre.** The new development behind the Regent Hotel. An open-air street lined by shops. The architecture is a mixture of painted render in the modern idiom, with portions either brick-faced or clad in red terracotta tiling. As mentioned above, the facing materials seek to respond to context. Part of the context being the dramatic (and idiosyncratic Town Hall – qv). The elevations are generally tall, and marked with new infill at the junction with Regent Street. Aesthetically the most successful portion is the brick-faced frontage on the south side. This is divided into bays by pilaster strips. Each bay is elegantly and skilfully punctured by a variety of rectangular windows with deep reveals.



Royal Priors Shopping Centre

- ❖ **Town Hall.** 1884, architect John Cundall. A building of considerable character. Highly eclectic, being a mixture of the Aesthetic Movement manner after R W Edis (Marylebone Station Hotel etc) and a form of Neo-Byzantine, expressed in red brick with lavish dressings of cream terracotta. The centre gable features a mosaic. The single most effective feature is the tower, possessed of an elegant verticality with a richly intricate top.
- ❖ **Jephson Memorial.** In Jephson Gardens, designed by D G Squirhill and dating from 1849. This is an extremely elegant kiosk with a bell-shaped dome. A grilled doorway reveals a full-size marble statue of Dr Henry Jephson himself. It is a smaller version of the mausoleum of Titus Salt at Saltaire, and no less architecturally effective.
- ❖ **Holly Walk.** To the north of Jephson Gardens. A tree-lined promenade runs along the middle of this very wide street, with a carriageway on either side. However, the visual „stop to the west end of the promenade at the junction with the Parade is a low, blockish public lavatory of little visual merit, mercifully shrouded in scruffy shrubbery. This visual „inconvenience presents a prime opportunity for an attractive piece of architectural pastiche, perhaps re-cladding as a miniature temple along the lines of a Green Park lodge.



Jephson Memorial – Jephson Park



Holly Walk, Leamington Spa – featuring National IHBC Chairman John Yates

LEAMINGTON – Planning Context

Warwick and Leamington BC has declared a moratorium on new build residential development. The Borough is „full up“. However, residential

conversion, and new build residential on the upper floors of retail developments, is continuing. *Royal Priors Shopping Centre* is a case in point, with the substantial upper floor space being residential.

However, “living over the shop” remains a problem along the Parade as many shop conversions over the years have either cut off upper floors or restricted access other than through the shop. As a consequence there remain ill-maintained upper floor frontages. The dual problem of separate access and owner attitudes remains to be tackled.

Many of the earlier shop conversions of terraced houses (built for residential rental during the Spa „season“) involved building out the shops over the original basement areas. The Borough seeks to take advantage of the available Planning opportunities to push the shopfronts back to the original building line and bring the fascias down to below first floor sill level, with considerable success.

MUSCULAR GOTHIC

The Editor

Central Leamington contains a major Gothic Revival Church – St Peter’s Roman Catholic Church, 1865, architect Henry Clutton. The young William Burges was Clutton’s junior partner for a while. St Peter’s contains several characteristics that were later to materialize in Burges’ own independent work. Chunky massing with a strong North French „transition accent“. The building is tall, with a south-west tower, a polygonal apse and a plate tracery west rose window, executed in brick with stone dressings. The tower is slim for its height. The top belfry stage features tall lancet openings with intricate arch mouldings. The Leamington Society’s *Town Trail* says that a spire was removed in 1947. Fortunately, the architecture is strong enough to survive the loss.



St Peter’s - South view with tower

St Peter’s is flanked by a simple but subtly-detailed Presbytery that – unusually but commendably – benefits from Grade I Listing.

Clutton was not a prolific architect but most of his work was very individual. Like several of his contemporaries he had a strong sense of shape and mass, so that his designs possess a strong sculptural quality. St Peter's has this quality in full measure and is an excellent example of the so-called "Muscular Gothic" style, which is perhaps the greatest achievement of the English Gothic Revival, still under-recognised and under-celebrated.

SCULPTURE CORNER

Leamington's redundant Library, Museum and Art Gallery has a 1920s side wing for the main picture gallery. The blank gable on to the street contains an attractive, slightly Art Deco figure sculpture in deep relief.



Former Leamington Art Gallery – deep relief figure sculpture in niche

CITY ENTERPRISE

The Editor

Guest speaker at the 16th May Annual General Meeting of the West Midlands Historic Trust was Nigel Brown, Wolverhampton City Council's Project Manager for the acquisition, repair and conversion of the Grade II building-at-risk Molineux Hotel. Your Editor was there.*

The present building has its origins in 1725. In 1744 it was acquired by the Molineux family, who undertook extensive alterations around 1750. These included the two important interiors now known as the *Roccoco Room* and the *Oak Room*.

In 1859 there was a change of ownership, and the extensive grounds were converted into a public pleasure ground, the house becoming a hotel. Part of the former pleasure grounds became the stadium of Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club – "Wolves". In 1901 the hotel was acquired by the W Butler & Co brewery, the owners in due time

becoming Mitchell & Butler, a large brewery and pub chain operation. After World War II the public house operation took precedence of the hotel, Grade II Listing taking effect in 1949. Wolves acquired the building in the 1970s, hotel use lapsing and the structure being allowed to run down. Two separate attempts were made to secure demolition. Applications were refused and the Listing upgraded to II* in 1977.

Public house use ceased in 1979. The disused building suffered heavy vandalism. The property changed hands a number of times, but no owner succeeded in implementing a suitable repair and conversion scheme. One owner stripped out the panelling of the Oak Room and other fittings and put them into off-site store.

In 2002 Wolverhampton City Council resolved to serve a Repairs Notice on the final owner, following on from a series of Urgent Works Notices aimed at keeping the building structurally stable, weather-tight and intruder-proof. The City's Repairs Notice included a fully-specified programme of works aimed at authentic reinstatement. The works were costed at £1.25m (plus fees) and accompanied by Listed Building Consent for the works itemised in it. Preparation and service of the repairs notice cost £30,000. If an owner fails to comply with a Listed Building Repairs Notice within the timetable specified by it, then the local authority is left with no alternative but to secure control of the building, by Compulsory Purchase if necessary.

Wolverhampton City was able to use the specification and costings prepared for the Repairs Notice in grant applications to Advantage West Midlands and English Heritage. These applications were successful, resulting in offers totalling £1.74m (to cover the acquisition as well as the works) to which the Council added a further £200,000. The City was therefore in a position to go on site with a full repair scheme immediately upon acquisition. Acquisition negotiations with the commercial owner were protracted.

On 14th June 2003 the building was subject to a deliberate arson attack, started in the cellars. The greater part of the interior was burnt out, with debris – including the remains of the large clock turret – collapsing right through into the cellar. The Roccoco Room was fortuitously preserved because it was internally scaffolded, with its ceiling supported. The owner promptly submitted a structural engineer's report to the City. The report said that the building was acutely unsafe and that the only satisfactory remedy, in the interests of public safety, was demolition. The City's response was to serve a Court Injunction, restraining the owner from taking any such demolition action.

The City finally broke the acquisition deadlock by an offer based on the capitalization of the rentals of that part of the site used as a car park. The costs of the works had increased as a result of the fire, but some compensatory savings were made with the assistance of English Heritage regarding the authenticity of some of the structural repairs eg extensive use of steel rather than replacement oak.

The first phase of consolidation work went on site on 13th March 2004. The unstable outer shell was extensively scaffolded – as a support as well as a means of access – and the clearing of the unsafe interior commenced. This undertaken by the unusual method of lowering men into the building in a cage suspended from a crane. Another crane with a skip attached lifted out debris and re-usable components. Finds included long-lost coinage as well as ironwork from the clock turret capable of re-use.

By the summer of 2005 the shell of the building had been consolidated and re-roofed. Work then began on the reinstatement of the two main rooms – the *Oak Room* and the *Roccoco Room*. Work on the Roccoco Room involved the stripping of many layers of paint using a steam system, revealing the very high quality of the workmanship and enabling the original craftsman, the Italian *Francesco Vassali*, to be identified. Vassali undertook a number of significant country house commissions in the region, including Chillington Hall, Hagley Hall and Patshull Hall. The walls had about 80% survival and the ceiling 20%. During *Civic Trust Open Days* in September 2005 the public were able to enter and see these interior repairs in progress.

The City's end use is as the home of the City Archives Service, with the present building providing the public rooms and offices. The scheme involves building on, as an extension, a "windowless box" to act as the actual archive repository. Heritage Lottery Fund grant aid has been applied for. Public access is available – groups only – by prior appointment with Nigel Brown, who is able to act as guide.

Editor's Comment

An important foundation for the whole scheme was the earlier feasibility study commissioned by the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust. This study demonstrated that the building was capable of repair and was suited for a number of modern uses. The Trust had been unable to progress these findings as the owner had refused to sell. The consultants for that study were Donald Insall Associates of Shrewsbury, who went on to become the City's consultant architects for the City's project. The City's main contractors were William Sapcote & Sons, who also undertook the Trust's Award-winning repair and conversion of the Harris & Pearson Building, Brierley Hill.

Thank you to Nigel Brown, who checked and corrected the Editor's draft summary of his talk.

LETTER

Thank you!

May I through the columns of the Branch NEWSLETTER thank all members who attended the recent meeting in Shrewsbury very much for not only the gift and "clown" cake (most appropriate), but also

I won't bore you with "The memoirs of an Historic Building Surveyor" just yet!

Noel Knight

REVIEW

BUILDING FOR A FUTURE

Quarterly Periodical – Summer 2006 Edition

Published: Green Building Press

Cost: £20 a year

Whilst this is a rather uneven publication, it almost always contains items of interest. This particular number was a good one.

The main feature was a description of the reinstatement, by the National Trust, of a Grade II Listed textile mill, isolated from public roads and unconnected to any mains service – Gibson Mill, Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire. The client brief was for the repair and re-activation of the building as a visitor centre in as self-sufficient manner as possible, *excluding* connection to mains services.

The building had a number of positive factors going for it. A high-level spring providing drinkable water. Serviceable millpond, sluices and

water turbines enabled electricity to be generated on site, with a large woodland area providing both building timber and fuel. Problem-solving included a man-powered lift and separating toilets involving recycling of solids and soakaway of liquids.

Two West Midlands Region projects were given coverage – a family self-build in Pembridge Herefordshire using sustainable techniques; and a new eco-house project on a bungalow site in Worcestershire – "Prickley Top". The project had hit design and specification problems owing to a lack of technical information.

Then there was a case study of the redevelopment of an awkward infill site in Sussex to create four dwellings, using locally-sourced materials, with a number of attractive design features.

Finally, there was a discussion about floating homes. Classified as "boats", they are apparently exempt from Planning control and Building Regulations. Many, however, are not visually boats at all, but houses built on floating pontoons. This particular technique has significance for providing dwellings on high-risk flood plains. There were some pictures of rather attractive "pontoon" houses built in Holland.

THE VICTORIAN

Thrice-Yearly Periodical – July 2006 Edition

Published: Victorian Society

Cost: Covered by VicSoc membership

During our Branch visit to Leamington Alan Mayes showed us some „before and „after slides of the disused swimming bath forming part of the Royal Pump Rooms complex. The solution to redundancy as a swimming pool was conversion to a public library. Not without some cost, as the original narrow gallery was removed and replaced by a wider one to provide more functional space. The pool area itself was converted to provide an archive store.

The July edition of the *Victorian* is very apposite, as it focuses on the plight of threatened and redundant municipal swimming baths of the late C19 and early C20. These are often Listed buildings of architectural merit, but pool dimensions do not meet current standards and the municipal ability to provide adequate maintenance is severely lacking. As a consequence, public baths are a particularly threatened class of Listed building.

The public baths at Balsall Heath in Birmingham (II*) are still operational, however. But not so the wonderful Neo-Byzantine Baths at Ashton-under-Lyme. They have been disused for a long time and are in the ownership of a developer who has failed to bring any proposals forward.

The Victoria Baths in Manchester won the vote concluding the first series of TV *Restoration* programme. It is slowly being brought back into its original use.

The Leamington solution is just one of comparatively few that have given this threatened building type a new lease of life. Thank you to the VicSoc for focussing-in on the plight of the public bath.

H H RICHARDSON

The Editor

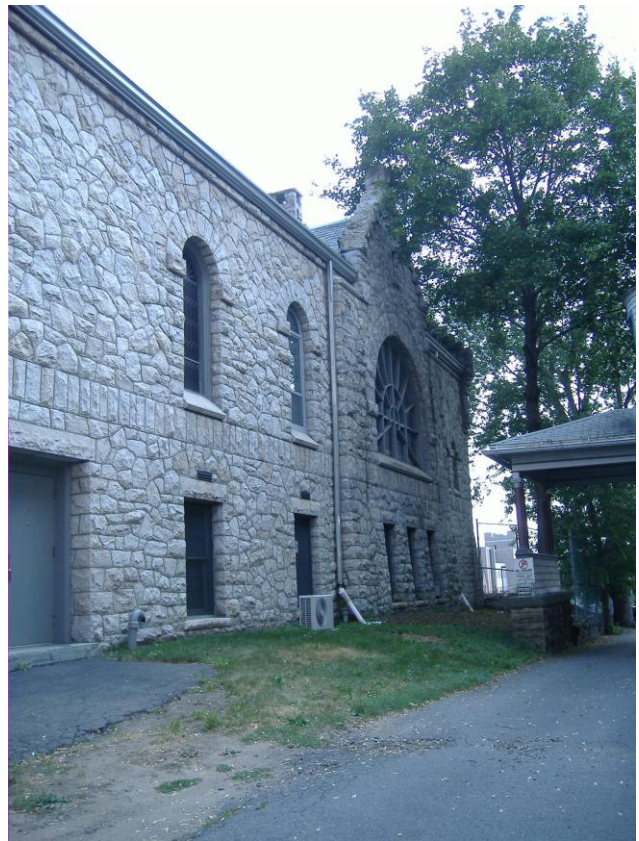
One of my recent acquisitions has been a facsimile reprint copy of the 1888 book by Mariana Griswold van Rensselaer, entitled *Henry Hobson Richardson and His Works*. Richardson (1838-1886) is clearly a very significant figure in the evolution of architectural design. His Marshall Field store in Chicago had its

knock-on effect through Louis Sullivan to Frank Lloyd Wright. Yet he himself, despite a Parisian architectural education, took the „Muscular Gothic style of mid-Victorian England and developed it, using European Romanesque as his starting point, to create a strikingly individual style having much in common with English „Free Style building.

Mariana van Renssalaer was a personal friend of Richardson and an enthusiast for architecture. Her book is far too close in time – and affection - to her friend to be an impartial evaluation of his achievement. But it does benefit from very sharp and beautiful photographs of his work, together with reproduction drawings and sketches. Some of the buildings illustrated no longer survive, so the reprint is particularly useful as a comprehensive visual survey. The photos bring out the superb „texture of much of Richardson’s work. He used rock-faced local stone with narrow, precise rectilinear joints, laid without regular coursing. In this way, the whole wall face becomes an architectural statement of its own accord, being a subtle arrangement of rectangles.

Louis Sullivan took and developed Richardson’s use of the massive Romanesque arch. These arches, often used singly in a frontage, are a strong characteristic. They often combine visually with other openings where flat lintels rest directly on pilasters. Building shapes are chunky, asymmetrical, with the elements very carefully balanced.

One English painter – Hubert Herkomer – was so entranced by Richardson’s artistry that he commissioned him to design his own house – Lululand – in Edgware, North London. Sadly, not much of it survives today.



Scranton University Arts Centre – a former early C20 church using both coursed and random rock-faced masonry

A TASTE OF THE USA

The Editor

I had the opportunity to learn more about the North American use of rock-faced stonework (as employed by Richardson) when visiting the USA for three weeks in August. I spent two weeks in the industrial city of Scranton in NE Pennsylvania, and saw parts of New Jersey *en route* to and from Pennsylvania.

Scranton has a good deal in common with Birmingham and the Black Country. Founded on the discovery of good quality anthracite coal in the mid-C19, Scranton became a railway centre surrounded by heavy industry (including locomotive manufacture). Economic decline set in once traditional industry became internationally uncompetitive. Scranton is only now starting to recover from depression through the economic benefits brought by a rapidly-expanding university.

Despite a fair amount of clearance and many gaps, Scranton still possesses a rich range of surviving Victorian, Edwardian and Art Deco buildings, some impressively large.

Local vernacular architecture was very largely based on the North American development of clapboard construction imported from south-east England by early settlers. Almost all dwellings, even new ones, are built on this timber-framed system. Footings and plinths are in rubble stonework using chunks of the plentiful local building stone. Stone, in a wide variety of combinations, is used for buildings – such as churches – meriting prestige. Brick was and is available but is not particularly common. Art Deco city centre buildings use a fair amount of glazed terracotta.



Brooks Building. Washington Avenue, Scranton. Chicago-style high-rise in the Richardson manner, clad in pinky-brown stone. Some carved decoration reminiscent of Louis Sullivan’s work.



Mine Baron's Villa, Green Ridge, Scranton. Arts and Crafts design combining partial rubble facing with timber framing and cladding.



*Green Ridge Public Library, Scranton
Elegant Arts and Crafts building after Richardson,
with stone-faced ground floor and brick-faced first
floor. Deep eaves.*



*401 Jefferson Avenue. Traditional "Georgian
Survival" timber mansion on a large scale.*



*Detail of Elm Park Baptist Church, Scranton. An
essay in Richardsonian Romanesque with rectilinear
rock-faced stonework.*



*Railroad Goods Station, Lackawanna Avenue,
Scranton. Arts and Crafts Gothic*



*Art Deco "Electric City" building, Linden Avenue,
Scranton. Terracotta clad.*

Judging by siting and density, US urban planning is much less restrictive than our own. Housing wraps around and closely abuts industrial premises. Houses stand on relatively small plots, and there are no qualms about side windows looking on to side windows. The majority of houses are detached. Semi-detached ("doubles") are quite rare, and terraces ("row houses") are even rarer. When row houses do occur they are often the only ones to be built in brick.

Buildings are "Registered" for their historic interest, but I did not have the opportunity to find out how extensive – and how restrictive – Registration actually was. I also learnt that grant aid had been made available for the repair of one Art Deco high-rise block. The effects of economic depression meant that there were several significant buildings facing an uncertain future – including two of those illustrated above – 401 Jefferson Avenue and the Railfreight Station. No 401 was empty and on the market and was in pressing need of the attentions of a skilled carpenter using lots of scaffolding. The Railfreight building was empty, boarded-up and suffering from some kind of structural movement.

In fact, structural movement seemed to be a local problem. One 4-storey 1930s brick building had racked and was leaning noticeably. Several other brick buildings were cracking, too. Which is where the vernacular timber-framed clapboard method of construction had its advantages. I saw several leaning at an angle without showing signs of any distress.

Like Britain, UPVC has made its mark. Only it is called "vinyl". Its principal use is as cladding. It comes in "planks" complete with wood grain effects and a great many of the local vernacular houses had been re-clad in it.

The Appalachian mountains are not high, rising to only about 1,500 feet either side of Scranton (Moosic Mountain and Bald Mountain respectively) but they did provide large and useful quantities of building stone, with some quarry scars visible on the slopes.

A major consideration is the climate, involving hot summers and long cold winters, which means that mortars and fixings are highly stressed, and that paint on timber cladding weathers quickly. No doubt also building vinyl will have a shorter life than in the more temperate UK. Windows have a more complicated existence, involving flyscreens in summer along with inserted air conditioning units, and double glazing to cope with the rigours of winter.

Scranton featured one in-town covered shopping centre, for which a whole city block had been taken out. There were other shopping centres along main roads on the city periphery. Obviously, the effects of out-of-town shopping have not yet become a planning consideration. Retail rentals (and hence quality of property maintenance) seemed to be very low, even in the town centre.

In the local centres, as many shops as possible have their own dedicated parking lots, which means pretty gappy building lines. In fact, out of the town centre, the general emphasis is on „drive in facilities – including bank cash machines!

One item of the street scene is radically different from the UK – the wirescape. All electrical supplies are run above-ground on poles. It can be picturesque, it can be ugly – depending on how you look at it. One potential snag is lighting strikes. As I experienced on one occasion, with power cutting out momentarily during a thunderstorm. In urban areas, too, there are traditional fire hydrants at every street corner.

Finally, mailboxes. Houses with any sort of driveway or footpath entry have a free-standing mailbox on the sidewalk. Where houses are on or almost on the street they have an external mailbox affixed to the fabric. Letterboxes are not a known phenomenon.



Wirescape, Stroudsburg, PA



Wirescape, Portland PA

EDITOR'S SHOPPING LIST

Your Editor welcomes, for the next Edition of the Newsletter (No 27), to go out in late Autumn 2006, the following:

- ❖ Personal news of moves, retirements, arrivals;
- ❖ Copies of announcements and press releases;
- ❖ Case Studies;
- ❖ Letters;
- ❖ Articles on Law and Techniques;
- ❖ Book Reviews.

Material for inclusion in No 27 should, preferably, arrive not later than the middle of October 2006. Please contact your *Newsletter Editor* : Peter Arnold, 16 Elmbank Road, Walsall WS5 4EL; 01922 644219; pdarnold@care4free.net