

# NEWSLETTER

*Issue 27 November 2006*

## I h b C

### WEST MIDLANDS BRANCH

### INSTITUTE OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS CONSERVATION

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#### DIARY DATES

##### NEXT BRANCH MEETING

❖ *Thursday 30th November 2006.* At English Heritage offices in Birmingham. Featuring the work of EH's Scientific Dating Team and a presentation upon the application of Building Regulations Part 'L' to historic buildings.

##### 1<sup>st</sup> BRANCH MEETING 2007

❖ *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.

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#### CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

Ian Kilby

**Brrrrrrrrrr!**

As a child my parents always used to tell me to put 'another' jumper on rather than increase the temperature in the house. In fact I am sure now that it became something of a challenge to my father to see how long we could hold out before the heating was put on at all. They must have been proto- conservationists of a sort, or just careful, or mean; because whenever we moved house the first thing my father would do was arrange for cavity wall insulation to be installed. This caused much amusement to my friends watching the white foam being piped under pressure into our house. They all had new bikes for Christmas whilst I had projects from the Readers Digest Home Improvement and DIY manual. However I did benefit from weekends helping my father insulate the roof of their present house in 1979. Using large and cumbersome 8' by 4' panels of fibreboard this made the loft a slightly more bearable space for my model railway. Nevertheless in winter months the loft was a three jumper space.

The effect of rising gas prices and energy costs generally is likely to encourage more property owners to improve the thermal efficiency of historic buildings. I sense that despite the relative health benefits a draughty environment offers (compared with hermetically sealed modern equivalent) this will not

dissuade property owners from seeking to upgrade the thermal efficiency of older buildings.

Of course in principle this is not a bad thing but when the solution threatens historic fabric my temperature starts to rise – ironic that. Perhaps it would be useful to have empirical data to show the effect of different methods of reducing heating bills. Such a list could include non-invasive or damaging things such as carpets, heavy curtains, more efficient boilers and draught proofing. Compare this with the cost and impact of - say - replacement windows, dry lining or underdrawing ceilings and then grade then according to acceptability and cost. If the information is produced in an accessible form, such as a leaflet, all the better.

The scope of work is now covered by the building regulations including replacement boilers, re-wiring and new windows (non FENSA) is increasing. The latest draft revisions to Part L of the Building Regulations now recommend that the thermal efficiency of buildings is upgraded whenever there is a change of use which could have significant implications for buildings in commercial use. Our meeting in Birmingham on 30<sup>th</sup> November will provide an opportunity to discuss the English Heritage response to the draft revisions to Part L. The English Heritage advice has been produced by Oxley Conservation. Their consultant, Phil Ogle, has agreed to come and discuss with members the implications of the changes. I encourage those of you who work in Local Government to invite one of their Building Control Surveyors to attend the afternoon session and just in case – bring an extra jumper.

See you in Birmingham.

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#### EDITORIAL

One major editorial preoccupation is FEEDBACK. A newsletter number is published – and then silence. Of course, "no news is good news", for lack of protest and criticism is negative evidence for consumer satisfaction.

Each number is based on a formula – 'cascading' the technical information taken in at the Branch meeting for the benefit of those of the membership who were not able to make it. And then adding-in debriefing on other events which the Editor or Deputy Editor have been able to attend. And then again

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this editor has tended to add in some quite substantial pieces resulting from his out-of-region (and out of country) architectural wanderings.

So, back to *feedback*. What do you value, and why? What do you miss? And what would you rather not see included? Even just one or two comments along these lines would be helpful.

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## BRANCH MEETING

### 20<sup>th</sup> September 2006

Took place at the Staffordshire Moorlands District Council offices, Leek, hosted by Chris Drage and Gillian Bayliss, who provided a presentation on the current Leek-Cheadle two-town THI, and led walkabouts in both Leek and Cheadle.

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## VIEW OUT OF THE WINDOW

### 20<sup>th</sup> September 2006

Except that there was no window to look out of! The Branch Meeting took place in the Churnet Room, part of the 1930s Neo-Georgian building fronting on to Stockwell Street, Leek. Entering was something of a surprise, as access was through the nondescript late C20 Moorlands House, the main offices of Staffordshire Moorlands DC. The Churnet Room was top-lit through obscured glazing. However, as a room it was rather fine, with wall pilasters and freestanding columns, clearly expressing a steel frame, but clad in thin marble slab and topped with handsome capitals carrying an Art Deco flavour. The ceiling was suitably coved and corniced too. In fact, whilst the detailing was effectively Neo-Georgian, the visual impact was Art Deco.



*Churnet Room - detail*

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## BACKGROUND TO LEEK & CHEADLE THI

### 6<sup>th</sup> June 2006

Chris Drage said that, historically, the Staffordshire Moorlands DC area had been sparsely-populated, wet high altitude moorland very largely involved in pastoral agriculture. There was just one great estate, that of the Shrewsbury family at Alton towers.

The economy of the area was focussed on three market towns – Biddulph, Cheadle and Leek. Some of the better-off owned town houses, where they stayed whilst essential business was transacted.

It took the arrival of the canals, and, later, the railways before there was any significant industry or development. Leek developed a silk-weaving industry, initially home-based, which expanded into a significant number of large mills. Cheadle was involved in brass

and copper founding and smithing, taking advantage of ores mined in the Peak District.

Leek was intimately involved with the Arts and Crafts Aesthetic Movement of the mid/late C19, as William Morris worked closely with local business interests. Norman Shaw undertook several commissions in the area. Local architects *William* and *William Larner Sugden* (father and son) practised from 1849 to 1901 and obtained the lion's share of architectural commissions in the town. They produced a series of very competently-designed buildings in the prevailing mode.

The late C20 was characterised by economic decline, decay and dereliction, with many empty buildings. Staffordshire Moorlands DC has adopted a policy of regeneration based on the architectural heritage of both Leek and Cheadle. The present THI is the successor to preceding CAP, HERS and SRB schemes.

The present THI was prepared by consultants at a time when the DC did not have an in-house Conservation Officer. However, the present team includes Chris Drage as Conservation Manager with three THI project officers, of which Gillian Bayliss is one. An important element in the THI is the relationship with the Monitor appointed by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Grant rates are 65% for repairs and 90% for non-conjectural reinstatement of missing features. The total budget is of the order of £1m, of which half comes from the HLF. The two town councils of Leek and Cheadle make a contribution. Paperwork is a demanding element in the THI administration, with quarterly returns being required.

There are 100 target properties in Leek and 80 in Cheadle. A problematical issue has been the 'concentration' of target properties (of which more anon).



*Anglo-Saxon Cross Shaft,  
St Edward's Churchyard, Leek*

# LEEK WALKABOUT

20<sup>th</sup> September 2006

Led by Chris Drage, we started from St Edward's Churchyard, being greeted by an Anglo-Saxon cross-shaft therein. Central Leek is laid out as a fairly complex grid founded on traditional east-west and north south routes, expanded and filled-in. St Edward's, the ancient Parish Church, is now at the NE corner of the present historic town. The earliest buildings, some of them built as town houses C16-C17, are of half-timbered construction. The vernacular then changed to the use of stone from the C17 to the early C19. C19 and early C20 Leek relied on very good quality dark red brickwork with some stone and terracotta dressings, and occasional polychromy. The works of Sugden *pere et fils* are of frequent occurrence, and make a very important contribution to townscape character.

A particular issue are the surviving mill buildings, which are significantly empty or under-used. A start has been made on residential conversion, and one or two operate as antique markets or warehouses. An early example of the re-use of a mill is on the corner of Derby and Market Streets, where the Sugdens achieved a late C19 conversion into a Liberal Club, which remains operational. However, parts of this complex are disused and under-used, and require more work.

Survival rate of traditional cobbled road surfacing is high in the side streets.



*Town house attributed to Norman Shaw*



*Disused Mill*



*Recently-completed THI scheme, with reinstated shopfront. The repointing was rather noticeable!*

## **Comment**

Two issues arise from the walkabout. (1) Conservation Area coverage and (2) THI target properties. There was a significant view that the present Conservation Area was too tightly-drawn, omitting the workers' housing immediately adjoining some of the mills, and also leaving out vernacular cottaging with characteristic weaving shops outwardly recognisable in second floor 'strip' casement windows. In one partly residential street, the THI included one side and excluded the other, even though the houses on the excluded side were every bit as good – and indeed rather better – than those on the included side. The culprit here seems to have been an over-emphasis on the need for

'concentration' in the approved Stage 2 scheme.

On the further issue of the development of Leek as a visitor destination, there is, potentially, a lot that can be done with the town's significant Arts and Crafts connections. A first step has already been taken through the publication of a *William Morris Trail*, advertised in the Leek Tourist leaflet. All Saints Church, outside the town centre, is a major Norman Shaw work with interior fittings designed by many of his assistants, who became major architects and designers in their own right. All Saints is not normally open outside worship times. This situation needs to change in the interests of building up Leek's "critical mass" as a cultural tourist destination.



*The Sugdens' own house?*

## CHEADLE WALKABOUT 20<sup>th</sup> September 2006

Before the start of heritage-led regeneration, Cheadle house prices were low and there were at least 18 empty shops. One important C18 terrace at the rear of the market square was threatened with demolition. Now, there are just two empty shops and there is a demand for small dwellings in the town. The streetscape has been refurbished and a considerable number of traditional shopfronts have been reinstated.

Nos 1-6 Market Place have been repaired and re-converted into upper floor dwellings with ground floor retail units. The cost of the "conservation deficit" was met through the addition of two new-build dwellings on backland. All the dwellings are occupied and marketing of the re-created shops has just started. The shopfronts are the original, carefully dismantled and repaired off-site, and then reinstated.

The adjoining Market Hall, with its Victorian cast-iron pillars and roof trusses, has been reinstated, and there are plans for re-paving the Market Square

itself. One outstanding issue is the introduction of demountable market stalls so as to improve the appearance of the Square on non-Market days. Market management are opposed to the idea.



*Cheadle Police Station*

A number of "buildings at risk" were in fact Listed tombs in the churchyard of St Giles (CofE) church. They were deleted from the "at risk" list through modest 100% THI expenditure on repair and consolidation.



*THI scheme (including shopfront) on site*

During our visit, there were two THI schemes on site – one involving a new traditional shopfront and the other upper floor repairs.

As a planning gain some years ago, the high-street pavements were repaved in traditional blue pavers (unfortunately, with textured concrete kerbing). This was accompanied by cast-iron "catalogue" type street furniture in rather glitzy gold and mid green. The access to the High Street from the main Tape Street public car park (on back land) was similarly treated. An issue now is adequate maintenance and repair of damage that has accrued since installation.

Immediately adjoining the present THI in Bank Street is a remarkable complex of early-mid C19 industrial buildings called "Hurst's Yard". They are almost empty and clearly merit sympathetic repair and conversion. They form an important part of the streetscape and townscape immediately adjoining St Giles (RC) Church (qv).



*Hurst's Yard, street frontage, with Pugin spirelet to left*

The THI is also pursuing the subsequent maintenance of Cheadle properties repaired earlier under the preceding CAP and HERS schemes, encouraging owners (sometimes new ones) to safeguard the previous investment through adequate maintenance.

**Comment**

Significant issues for Cheadle as for Leek are CA coverage and the extent of the THI. Large parts of Chapel and Charles Streets (east of St Giles (RC)) are not included in the CA. And the properties in Hurst's Yard, Bank Street, should definitely be included in the THI. The very important group of Pugin buildings, culminating in the spectacular interior of St Giles (RC) could be promoted as Cheadle's own very special visitor attraction – linking in with his nearby works at Alton Towers and Alton Castle. As it is, though, conservation-led regeneration is clearly working in Cheadle, a very much smaller town than Leek, and one in which individual schemes have a proportionately greater impact.

**CHEADLE AND THE ENGLISH GOTHIC REVIVAL**

*The Editor*

Cheadle is a mecca for Pugin devotees and students of the English Gothic Revival. The town is dominated by the 200-foot spire of St Giles (RC) Church – architect Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin 1841-46, with the wealthy 16<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shrewsbury as client patron. St Giles must be Pugin's finest single church design, largely unfettered by considerations of cost. Despite the immensity of the tower and spire, the church itself is quite small, with a 5-bay nave and a short chancel.

The interior is highly reminiscent of Pugin's work in the Palace of Westminster, particularly the House of Lords. Every surface is a riot of colour. Tiled dados, stencilled and painted wall surfaces, ornate brass screening to the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, painted timber rood screen, carved reredos and pulpit... colour, colour .... pattern, pattern. To do the interior justice would require an intimate examination, with binoculars, lasting at least two hours. Fortunately, the church authorities provide an hour's interior lighting for a £1 coin in the slot. Equally important, the building is open to visitors daily.



*That spire!*

Pugin portrayed himself as re-creating the Christian Gothic architecture of the Middle Ages. St Giles is his most significant attempt. But, on examination, the evocation of the Middle Ages is more a matter of concept than detail. The design isn't really archaeological at all. This is very clearly a Victorian building, with Gothic reinterpreted through Pugin's very personal aesthetic sense. Yes, the organisation is Gothic, but the ashlar finish is smooth in the Gothick tradition of the C18, and the mouldings are thin and wiry. And the wrought iron (?) cresting on the nave roof ridge is so Victorian, too.



*Richness underfoot*

A booklet about design and history is on sale at St Giles, written by Fr Michael Fisher, the Pugin scholar. Fr Fisher points out that Pugin deliberately sited the building so that the tower and spire could be seen along, and be framed by, Cross Street. This means that St Giles sits organically in the townscape in almost medieval way. And, in the same mode, the spire locates Cheadle in the landscape for miles and miles.

The church does not stand by itself. It is just one in a complex of other Pugin buildings, including a former Presbytery and Convent, as well as St Giles (RC) Primary School. The former Presbytery is linked to the churchyard by a Pugin-designed 'cloister' building too. The churchyard cross, gates and walling are Pugin designs too.



*St Giles Primary School*

In many ways, Pugin was as interesting a designer when working on a low budget. Several scholars have pointed to his low-cost buildings as pointing the way forward to the buildings created by the Aesthetic Movement (aka Arts and Crafts) in the late C19. The school is a case in point. Construction is brick, with a steep, gabled tiled roof. There are two tiers of stone windows with cusped flat heads and plain casements. One end is topped by a pyramid roof and a simple timber-framed belfry.



*The 'Cloister'*

Previous grant schemes have paid for the repair of the Cloister, and the former Presbytery and Convent.

**Further Reading**

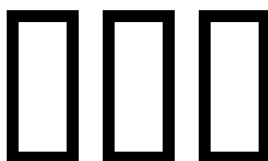
*Title:* Perfect Cheadle – St Giles Catholic Church, Cheadle – A History & Guide

*Author:* Michael Fisher

*Publisher:* M J Fisher

*Price:* £3.50

ISBN 0-9526855-4-X



## SPAB / CONSTRUCTION HISTORY SOCIETY “THE CONSERVATION OF HISTORIC PLAIN GLAZING”

AVONCROFT MUSEUM – 4<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER

2006

*Dave Burton-Pye*

I attended this course along with a very wide spectrum of interested parties. One of the beauties of these SPAB days is the range of disciplines/professions/trades who attend and Avoncroft was no exception. In terms of content I didn't think it quite hit the button in the same way that the lime-ash floors day had done in Derbyshire a while ago, but it was still a day well spent.

Jill Channer was her usual exuberant self – knowledgeable, coruscating, amusing, controversial – in fact displaying all of the admirable qualities that those who have heard her speak before come to expect. Her oft-used phrase “the saintly and wonderful Mr (or Mrs) X” was used a little too unctuously and oft to be wholly convincing! .... but there were some very good hints and tips throughout. In particular, Jill drove home the message that plain glazing is fundamental to the special architectural and historic interest of the buildings that we deal with but that it is easily overlooked. We exercise our minds about bricks and stones, timber and tiles, render and plaster, metal and mortar but overlook the significance of glass.

I was particularly impressed with one of the approaches that she advocated for assessing the importance of glazing – namely the production of elevational drawings where the windows are coloured to show the different ages of the glass. This sort of assessment is a specialist field and probably beyond the scope of most of us (however attentive we may have attempted to be) but as a device, it is a useful principle. Establishing the age and significance of the glass enables informed decisions to be taken about whether and what to replace. She emphasised how important it can be to specify that existing glass should be re-used where possible – a specification which states “reglaze” may lead to replacement of existing glass, and if the original can be kept and re-used this must be clearly and specifically stated.

There were very helpful references to differing techniques and characteristics of leaded lights, including their flexibility and ability to cope with differential temperatures between interiors and exteriors, with an interesting example shown of a delicate lead “spiders web” that had been inserted between panes to allow ventilation in a historic church.

Jill cautioned very strongly against the use of polycarbonate sheets as a protective measure for historic glazing. They are flammable, so whilst they may protect from some impact damage they are vulnerable to fire and given their rapid discolouration may need to be replaced every 5/10 years. Similar caution was expressed about U/V films. They are plastic and will degrade, and the adhesives used can make them very difficult to remove – potentially leading to loss of the very fabric that they are intended to preserve.

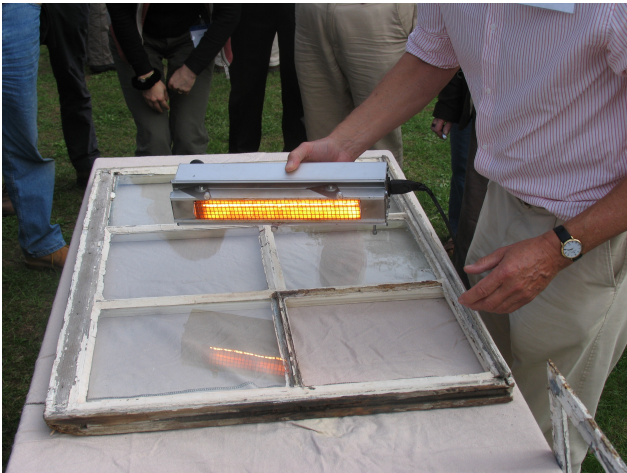
Robin Miller showed some fine examples of buildings that he knows via professional involvement or simply personal visits to places that he likes. He too emphasised the importance of identifying, recording and protecting historic plain glass – a material often underestimated in the presence of stained glass which is more likely to be appreciated. He outlined some of the arenas in which such exercises can be carried out including:-

- Conditions surveys;
- repair/refurbishment projects; conservation area appraisals;
- conservation plans;
- care and design guides;
- preparation of list descriptions; and
- conditions on listed building consents.

Whilst this talk contained some useful information I felt it was too heavily weighted towards buildings where the speaker was personally entranced by the sparkling, shimmering light transmitting or reflecting qualities of the material with too little practical advice.



Fortunately this balance was re-established by the next three speakers who brought the combined and considerable weight of their experience to the proceedings. Ben Sinclair of Norgrove Studios in Redditch spoke about the principal types of historic glass and its modern counterparts describing their characteristics as well as techniques for their repair and maintenance. In terms of practicalities/ organisation it was unfortunate that the chronological samples of glass handed round for inspection were not labelled. Ben acknowledged that this would prove to be something of a memory test for those unfortunates like myself who had arrived on time, only to find that the timetable had been re-adjusted, the lectures had started early, and we had to stand at the back of a very full hall! His warning proved to be all too true and if this particular day is to be repeated I do think it would be helpful to have the samples marked up to show what each represented. But this is a minor criticism of an in depth talk which contained much of interest.



Ben was followed by the highly amusing Mike Tuffey of English Antique Glass Ltd of Alvechurch, whose talk tapped into a rich vein of Brummie humour. I was sorely tempted to put on my best Black Country accent and congratulate him on producing a *bostin'* product – but in the context of what they make I decided that this would be a little misplaced! Mike and one of his

colleagues talked us through, and showed videos of, their glass making techniques in fascinating detail. After lunch, the final speaker was Stephen Clare of Holywell Glass Ltd in Somerset who again showed examples of case studies of buildings on which they had worked.

The afternoon session was devoted to casework and was highly instructive. It was interesting to see demonstrations of the Kittlampan Swedish Putty Lamp – but its current availability seems to be uncertain. It is probably most effective if the window can be removed and worked on a horizontal plane ie a workbench. Holy Well Glass demonstrated how leaded lights are made, and showed the differences in flexibility between windows made by joining together long strips and those made up by working diagonally from a corner. There was also a fascinating demonstration of repairs to leaded lights using copper foil and solder. Norgrove studios had numerous examples of cast and wrought iron frames and timber frames with leaded casements whilst English Antique Glass were showing extended videos of their glassmaking and showing how cylinders are cut ready for reheating and subsequent flattening.



In summary I found it a useful and instructive day and if, as a result of what I saw, I succeed in getting a set of Victorian gothic cast iron windows retained and refurbished in a current coach house conversion near to my offices, then it will have been money well spent.



A selection of photographs from the day – showing aspects of glazing and some of the buildings at Avoncroft - are posted on the West Midlands IHBC website.

## REVIEW

*Title:* Architecture 3s. Four volumes :  
 Arts & Crafts Houses I  
 City Icons  
 Twentieth Century Classics  
 Arts & Crafts Masterpieces

*Series Editor:* Beth Dunlop  
*Authors:* Several  
*Publishers:* Phaidon  
*Published:* circa 1990  
ISBN 0 7148 3675 6; 3673 X; 3868 3; 3876 4  
*Cost:* £4 per volume (remaindered)

I recently walked into my local remaindered bookshop and came out again £16 the poorer and carrying the arm-stretching weight of these four large format volumes.

Phaidon some years ago published a series of softbacks on individual 'icon' buildings (of which I have some in my library). More recently, they have amalgamated some of these singletons into 3-building hardbacks ("Architecture 3s"). The whole series has been published for a mid-Atlantic audience so buildings in UK and US are covered, with UK buildings slightly in the majority.

*Arts & Crafts Houses 1* features Philip Webb's Red House; W R Lethaby's Melsetter House, and Edwin Lutyens' Goddards. The choice of Goddards is slightly surprising, as it was built as a holiday home for gentlemen in reduced circumstances and only later converted into a family house. Why wasn't Deanery Garden chosen, I wonder? The photographic coverage of the Red House is very rewarding. I have never previously seen published the great majority of the interior and exterior shots. And I would love to re-activate the desolate stripped-out private chapel at Melsetter as a place of worship – it was a prototype run for Brockhampton, with a pointed concrete barrel vault.

*City Icons* covers Sagrada Familia Barcelona (Gaudi); Grand Central Station New York; and Utzon's Sydney Opera House. The text for all three comes from an interesting angle. Mark Burry, in writing up the Sagrada Familia, describes the archaeological process by which Gaudi's design is being recovered for embodiment in the continuing building programme. He also details the compromises that have been made in connection with the building of the recovered design. Kenneth Powell describes the preservation of Grand Central in the context of the destruction of Pennsylvania Terminus, and goes on to cover the reinstatement of the building in the context of the fierce commercial pressures of downtown New York. Philip Drew pays particular attention to the political processes that led to Utzon's dismissal, and then of the compromises adopted in completing the Sydney Opera House.

*Twentieth Century Classics* looks at the Bauhaus, Dessau (Gropius); L'Unite de Habitation, Marseilles (Corbusier); and Louis L Kahn's Salk Institute in California. This volume is on the unsatisfactory side, with the space available not giving full value to the buildings. The photographs of the Bauhaus are striking and almost art works in themselves. There is insufficient pictorial matter to illustrate clearly how the duplex apartments in the Unite actually work, though one or two of the photographs show where corrosion of the steel reinforcement at the top of the building has cracked and flaked off some of the shuttered concrete. And I am not convinced that the Salk Institute was sufficiently an iconic building to have included in the first place.

*Arts & Crafts Masterpieces* considers St Andrew, Roker (E S Prior); C R Macintosh's Glasgow School of Art; and the First Church of Christ Scientist, Berkeley, California (Bernard Maybeck). Interestingly, Randall Wells, who worked in the West Midlands area as site agent for Lethaby's Brockhampton Church and as architect of St Edward the Confessor, Kempsey, acted as Prior's site agent at Roker too. This very interesting design owes a lot to the creative use of a local rough limestone without proper bedding. The Glasgow School of Art is too famous to require any

comment, but Maybeck's Christian Science Church (of which I had never heard before) is an extraordinary building in all sorts of ways, combining industrial materials with Gothic and Romanesque detailing and yet ending up with a product that, exteriorly, is Hindu-Japanese in character, whilst, internally, being sharply free-style in its subsidiary rooms and a testament to virtuoso structural woodwork in its auditorium.

All four volumes give at least a 'taster' of all the buildings involved, providing measured drawings, a modern photographic survey, and the reproduction of some original drawings and images, accompanied by knowledgeable text.

At £4 a go, definitely bargain coverage of design classics.

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## EDITOR'S SHOPPING LIST

Your Editor welcomes, for the next Edition of the Newsletter (No 28), to go out in February 2007, 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 28 should, preferably, arrive not later than the end of January 2007. Please contact your *Newsletter Editor* : Peter Arnold, 16 Elmbank Road, Walsall WS5 4EL; 01922 644219; [pdarnold@care4free.net](mailto:pdarnold@care4free.net)

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## PICTURE POSTSCRIPT



*Works building in Leek. Sgraffitto (or is it pargeting?) decoration in complex patterns.*