

REVIEWS

Alec Clifton-Taylor, *English Parish Churches as Works of Art*, 256 pp, 124 illustrations. Published by B T Batsford, 2nd edition, London 1986, price £12.95

With the unexpected death of Alec Clifton-Taylor in 1985, many of us who had never met Alec, but had explored so many towns with him on television, felt he had become a real personal friend. It was most fortunate that when he died, Mervyn Blatch was at hand to complete Alec's work in preparing a revised edition of *English Parish Churches*, originally published in 1974, for the press.

This is a very personal book – the author's Testament of Taste: parish churches as works of art. The author does not tell us how he would define a work of art. For the purposes of this book we may take it as meaning something that is pleasing to look at and to enjoy with a purely aesthetic emotion. An intellectual understanding of what we are looking at is, in the case of a church, an ecclesiological obstruction in the way of our aesthetic pleasure. Our author is thus not looking for historical or liturgical explanations for what he enjoys.

The book opens with a definition of a parish church, and a review of those churches which have for a time been parochial and at other times not. The difficulties in the way of preservation are explained, as are some of the solutions to the difficulties that have been tried. We have a brief look at churches in the 18th century, and then a more extensive view of what the Victorians did to save or spoil their churches. It is perhaps worth remembering that when William Morris founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings his aim was to protect them from priests and architects.

After these preliminaries we are introduced to churches in their setting. This is the most sensitive and perceptive part of the book. We are led to see churches standing as the centre of the scene as the focal point in a town, or as carefully designed features in a gentleman's park, lonely and isolated, or as Surrey's Farleigh against a background of trees. There are a number of sketches of specially loved examples. After those especially loved for their siting we are told of those which contain the best collections of funeral monuments. The best of churchyard monuments are then identified; this leads to a general discussion of churchyards and churchyard memorials. In many places our author finds what he sees to be an outrage or a disgrace. The memorials themselves are often seen as a 'rash of nasty little pimples'. This leads naturally to a consideration of what we should be doing today to improve the settings of our churches, with a review of the best churchyards and of measures that have been taken to improve or preserve them.

Clifton-Taylor then turns to the appearance of the church itself, starting with the outside and taking note of the contribution made by different building materials. It has been said that the English architect has always been more interested in lineal design and surface texture than in the manipulation of architectural masses. Clifton-Taylor's materialist approach to visual appearance immediately makes him concentrate on surface texture rather than on overall shape. But architectural massing comes in for some consideration, with the placing of the tower relative to the rest of the building. From this point of view Patrington comes out the clear favourite. Discussing materials, our author gives Surrey's Burstow a special mention for its timber belfry, but timber work at Crowhurst and Thursley are unnoticed.

Following a general discussion of towers and spires, Surrey and its neighbours receive some especially appreciative remarks about their timber and shingled spires, but the area has little to contribute to the study of tower design.

R W McDOWALL

Editor's note. Robin McDowall was writing the above review at the time of the onset of the illness which led to his own unexpected death in June 1987, and it remained unfinished; it is here printed without addition or change of substance, as he left it.

Dennis Turner, *Surrey (Ordnance Survey Historical Guides)*, 135 pp with a series of maps and illustrations, some in colour, and a gazetteer. Published by George Phillip and the Ordnance Survey, 1988, price £9.95.

The book begins with a summary of the background of Surrey by Dennis Turner explaining the historical events and geological characteristics which have influenced the development of the county. This is followed by a series of early Ordnance Survey one inch maps, together with some of the latest Landranger series for comparison, with descriptive text. There are a number of illustrations which demonstrate changes since the industrial revolution.

The first series of Ordnance Survey one inch maps began publication in 1801 but as the maps used in the book include railways I assume they are post-1850. It would have been useful to give individual dates. Map no 8 of the Kingston upon Thames to Epsom area is printed on the reverse of the Landranger map of the same area making comparison difficult for the reader.

Regarding the illustrations, the captions in many cases are on a different page for reasons of length but it would have been an advantage to add shortened captions to all illustrations as has been done in the case of Guildford High Street on p 80. It is unfortunate that the attractive illustration of Bell Street, Reigate, on the jacket has been reversed for the frontispiece.

A minor error occurs on p 30 in the notes to map 3. Henry Tudor is referred to as the former Duke of Richmond. He was in fact the Earl of Richmond (this is correctly stated on p 17). A further error occurs on p 65 where the distance from Carshalton to Hyde Park Corner of 21km has been converted to 23 miles instead of 13.

Now that our heritage is becoming increasingly important this book will help to relate the past to the present. The use of maps and illustrations to achieve this is very successful. A useful book at a moderate price and the publishers are to be congratulated.

F A HASTINGS

Richard Roberts, *Twelfth Century Church Architecture in Sussex*, 221 pp, 22 pls. Published by the Book Guild Ltd, 1988, price £10.50

This provides a readable account of the subject stated in the title prefaced by a considerable foray into the previous century. The book concerns itself only with architecture and architectural embellishment: there is no mention of monuments, or even of the important series of 12th-century wall paintings.

The writer traces the background of Sussex Romanesque through Normandy to Burgundy but chooses to ignore the possibility of a direct contribution from the Rhineland. In emphasising Burgundy at the expense of other influences on the Anglo-Norman Romanesque, he ventures into deep waters with hardly a hint of the uncertainties that surround this subject. The absence of references or even a bibliography is to be regretted but the shadow of the late K J Conant seems to be clear (Conant 1973). Closer to home, great emphasis is placed on the influence of St-Etienne de Caen but strangely little mention of Lanfranc's Canterbury. There is at least a case to be made that the influence of Canterbury overtook that of St-Etienne.

In respect of the individual Sussex churches themselves, Mr Roberts provides straightforward, informative descriptions of the churches and their connections. His style is somewhat expansive, occasionally even discursive, the very antithesis of that employed by Pevsner, for example. Inevitably, it is easy to cross swords over individual points but there is after all plenty of room for differences of opinion. For example, the traditional view is given of Sompting church tower as an important pre-Conquest construction and it would be interesting to know whether the author has overlooked, has decided to ignore or has reason to disagree with Dr Gem's scholarly reassessment of this tower (Gem 1983). As Mr Roberts also seems unaware of Dr Gem's view of the dating of the church of the Knights Templars at Shipley (Gem 1984), retaining a conventional view of the date that allows construction before that usually accepted for the introduction of the Templars to

England, this suggests that Mr Roberts has overlooked the important series of *Anglo-Norman Studies* in which these reappraisals have appeared.

The publisher, apart from an irritating adherence to the common error with apostrophes, has served the author well. The typeface is clear and the binding firm. Most of the photographs seems to have been carefully chosen with the limitation of the printing method used borne in mind.

REFERENCES

- Conant, K J, 1973 *Carolingian and Romanesque architecture 800-1200*, 3 edn
 Gem, R H D, 1983 The Early Romanesque tower of Sompting church, *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 5, 121-9
 Gem, R H D, 1984 An early church of the Knights Templars at Shipley, *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 6 (1983), 238-46

D J TURNER

Gillian Darley, *A Future for Farm Buildings*, 84 pp, 171 illustrations. Published by SAVE Britain's Heritage, 1988, price £8.00

Charles Watkins & Michael Winter, *Superb Conversions? Farm Diversifications – the Farm Building Experience*, 48 pp, 21 illustrations, numerous tables. Published by CPRE, 1988, price not stated

Britain's traditional farm buildings are being demolished or converted at an alarming rate. There are more applications to demolish or convert listed 'barns' than any other building type. People are willing to pay large sums of money to lay their heads where grain or hay was once stored, or cattle wintered.

While this may be more profitable to the farmer and estate owner than demolition, the result from a landscape or archaeological point of view is not always a happy one. The conversion often destroys architectural character and integrity and archaeological evidence. As Gillian Darley notes '[the insertion of] off-the-peg windows and a rash of roof lights are two of the principal ways to wreck a fine barn'. In an article in *Country Life* (15 August 1988), Clive Aslet called for a moratorium on the conversion of listed barns into houses and a conference organized by the SPAB in the following month was threaded through with similar sentiments.

In fact, only a relatively small proportion of farm buildings are listed and there are many, both listed and unlisted, that are redundant or will soon become so. Most people would prefer to see farm buildings remain in agricultural use but it should not be forgotten that modern agri-business is nearly as tough on the historic structure of England's barns as is residential conversion. If half-a-million hectares of farmland are going to come out of cereal production and even more out of grassland, as the Minister of Agriculture has forecast, many more farm buildings are going to become redundant.

Attention needs to be paid by government towards changing the agricultural grants structure: grants need to be geared not to production but to landscape protection and building preservation. The CPRE report indicates that to date attempts to diversify the agricultural scene have not resulted in any material improvement in the sympathy with which redundant farm buildings are being handled.

In 'green-belt' counties like Surrey, planning permission for the conversion of unlisted farm buildings will not be easily obtained. Proposals to convert listed buildings may receive consent even in the green belt in order to preserve the buildings – despite, and here is the Catch 22, the fact that conversion often destroys the qualities that justify listing. Some planning authorities are aware of this and are reluctant to grant consent but they cannot always be sure of being backed by the Secretary of State.

There are uses other than residential to which redundant farm buildings can be put – such as light industry, commerce, local arts centres or design studios – but conversion to housing is sometimes the only solution, however inappropriate. What is important is that the quality of

conversion should be high. Local planning authorities do have the power to control the details of internal and external alterations: they sometimes lack the will, expertise or man-power to achieve the best results.

At the beginning of the century architects such as Sidney Barnsley, Guy Dawber and Detmar Blow earned praise for sensitive conversion of old buildings (although not, apparently, in Surrey). What is needed today are architects who can convert farm buildings either in a way that leaves their integrity intact or in ways that give them new integrity valid in the late 20th-century countryside. All too frequently, of course, an architect is employed only up to the point when planning permission is obtained. The architect is then ditched and the developer or contractor erodes the architect's concept (obtaining a succession of 'minor' alterations to the planning permission) until neither the architect nor the planning committee would recognize the result as what had been originally granted permission.

If a reasonable sample of farm buildings is to be preserved in anything approaching their original condition for the information and delight of future generations, public bodies and organizations such as the National Trust will have to become more involved. More local authorities will have to follow the example of Essex County Council who have purchased the farm at Cressing Temple on which the famous, and well-preserved, Wheat and Barley Barns stand (Darley, pp 60–1). The Oxfordshire County Council are preserving a set of barns at Cogges, Witney, as part of a farm museum (albeit too closely hemmed around by modern housing) – there is plenty of scope for more projects like this. The National Trust has for many decades cared for cathedral-like barns such as Great Coxwell and Bredon but it needs to pursue a policy towards preserving a comprehensive range of farm buildings.

Ms Darley illustrates the many different styles of farm buildings to be found in Britain and clearly sets out many of the problems, showing some examples of successful preservation and even a few of acceptable conversions. Both reports under review, however, provide a preponderance of examples of the threatened and badly converted with which to increase our concern.

D J TURNER

David J Tomalin, *Roman Wight. A guide catalogue*, 128 pp, numerous illustrations. Published by Isle of Wight County Council, 1987, price not given

This useful guide to the Roman remains on the Isle of Wight is planned primarily as a catalogue of selected categories of Roman finds, classified by material as 'Topics', the majority of which have come from the island's eight known villas. The catalogue is preceded by a short history of archaeological work on the island's Roman sites and a summary of what is currently known of the pattern of Roman settlement. In addition there are brief accounts of the villas at Newport and Brading, which are open to visitors, and a gazetteer of sites to see.

The preface states that the book is intended for the general reader and as a fully-referenced introduction for the more serious student, but this aim does not always combine easily with the often very specialised information in the catalogue entries. There is also some imbalance in the organisation of the text: it would have been helpful, especially to the general reader, if the introductory section had been fuller, summarising aspects which are otherwise scattered among the 'Topic' sections. Thus, while the note on settlement pattern includes the villas, and by implication agriculture, and discusses interesting recent pollen evidence to indicate the management of deciduous woodland on the northern clay soils during the Roman period, it is clear from elsewhere in the text that economic activity also included pottery and tile making, salt production, bone working, and the quarrying and manufacture of stone querns and roof slates, as well as a considerable volume of trade both before (Dressel 1 wine amphorae, and – a recent find not noted here – Arretine ware from the Combley villa) and after the Roman conquest.

The most important of the catalogue topics is that covering the locally made Vectis ware, for

which the typology is here published for the first time. This brown burnished coarseware was apparently produced from the late Iron Age to at least the early 4th century AD, and copies a wide range of types, from Gallo-Belgic platters and beakers to late Dorset black burnished jars; its distribution is shown to be restricted to the island and southern Hampshire. It would have been helpful here to have had a brief summary of the other Roman pottery found on the island, to set the Vectis ware in its ceramic context.

The other topics form an interesting contribution to the 'small finds' literature, covering glass, shale and jet, bone and antler, bronze and silver, iron, stonework, and building materials. The shale items are not numerous, but include some handsome dishes; perhaps the unidentified 'tori' served as rather upmarket loomweights. Brooches are classified with the bronze and silver, and among the bronze items are several for which a military context is suggested: no E33 could be added to these, as a probable helmet handle. The ironwork includes a group of door furniture, and a sad indication of what was lost in Victorian exploration: a previously unpublished 1864 record of a complete charred door from the Gurnard villa with all its fittings intact, which disintegrated on attempts to move it.

This catalogue is undoubtedly a useful addition to the literature of southern England in the Roman period, and draws attention to the considerable richness of some of the island's sites. The Isle of Wight County Council and Archaeological Unit are to be congratulated on producing it so quickly – the Council only took over responsibility for the collections in 1979 – and it is to be hoped that the promised prehistoric volumes will be to a similar standard.

JOANNA BIRD