

# Books

**The Buildings of England: London 4: North**, by Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner, *Penguin Books*, 1998. xxii + 808 pp, 130 b&w plates, many figs. £30.

THE NEW LONDON volumes of the *Buildings of England* series, of which this is the fourth, are establishing themselves not just as useful guide-books but also as valuable works of reference. That the revised format makes them more suitable for the bookshelf than for the pocket simply reflects the vast amount of material now included. An observation in Bridget Cherry's *Foreword* (p. xvi) -- that parts of two very early volumes form the skeleton of the present work -- modestly understates her own considerable contribution. Those volumes, *Middlesex* (1951) and *London except the Cities of London and Westminster* (1952), both by the series' founder, the late Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, were published before the nature and scope of the series was fully settled and when, too, it was by no means certain that the late Sir Allen Lane's courageous venture in publishing would be viable.

Apart from the now more inclusive approach, much has happened in north London since the early 1950s: buildings have been lost and many more constructed. There has also been scholarly investigation, enabling, for example, a very full account of the 16th-century Sutton House, Hackney (contributed by Victor Belcher, pp. 491-5) to replace the previous much shorter version (*London except...*, pp. 171-2). The area covered is densely built-up, and buildings from the 12th century to what Bridget Cherry aptly calls the current *Age of Pluralism* (p. 84) are included, many of them by great names in English architectural history from Henry Yeveley (or Yevele) onwards. The one hundred and thirty plates are intended to 'provide a chronological overview of the whole area' (p. xv), and this they admirably succeed in doing.

Architectural assessment, *fin de siècle*, has changed radically. Pevsner himself found it difficult to appreciate anything post-1920 which was not more or less Modern Movement in conception. The consequence was some notable omissions: St John the Baptist, Tottenham, by John Seely and Paul Paget (1939), for instance, despite its concrete parabolic arches, was too traditional for Pevsner's taste -- there are pantiles on the roof! -- and did not appear (but see p. 572 of the present volume). At other times he could bring himself to offer no

more than faint praise, as with Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's St Alban and St Michael, Golders Green (1932-3): 'A pleasant brick church ... with a crossing tower and quite an impressive brick interior' (*Middlesex*, p. 57; contrast the present volume, pp. 133-4). What is tactfully called a 'broadening of architectural appreciation' (p. xvi) informs the present volume, to which Bridget Cherry brings all her capacity for painstaking investigation and meticulous scholarship combined with an ability for felicitous assessment where aesthetic judgement is called for. The result is not only a much fuller but also a much more balanced text than those of the original volumes.

There are three supporting essays. Eric Robinson's *Geology and Building Materials* (pp. 87-9, basically a revamping of his essay in *London 3: North West*, 1991) is disappointing: north London's most prominent material -- brick -- is dismissed in one brief sentence; roof tiles, including the once common pantiles, are not mentioned; timber, formerly abundant and much used for building, is not discussed; the terracotta revival, of which north London possesses some outstanding examples (notably Frank Matcham's Hackney Empire, 1901), goes unnoticed; stones brought in from elsewhere -- principally Caen, Kentish Rag, and Reigate -- are considered, but there is no mention of Portland Stone despite its appearance in such important buildings as Nicholas Hawksmoor's St George, Bloomsbury (1716-31) and St Luke, Old Street (1727-33, now a sad shell) or, much later, Charles Holden's University of London Senate House (1932-7); the virtually ubiquitous Welsh slate, brought in by rail in the 19th and 20th centuries, warrants not a word! (One thinks wistfully of the late Alec Clifton-Taylor's essays in, say, the two Kent volumes or the revised Hertfordshire and Surrey volumes). Joanna Bird outlines *Prehistoric and Roman Archaeology* in the whole of Greater London (pp. 89-95) and Malcolm Tucker offers a useful survey of *Industrial Archaeology* (pp. 95-103).

A well illustrated glossary (as in all volumes) and extensive indexes are a great aid to effective use of the work. The prefatory list of those who have helped is long and generous. It would be churlish not to remember Sir Nikolaus Pevsner's contribution in starting the whole project. Yet it is to Bridget Cherry herself that the real credit belongs for this considered, informative, and attractive volume.

Terence Paul Smith