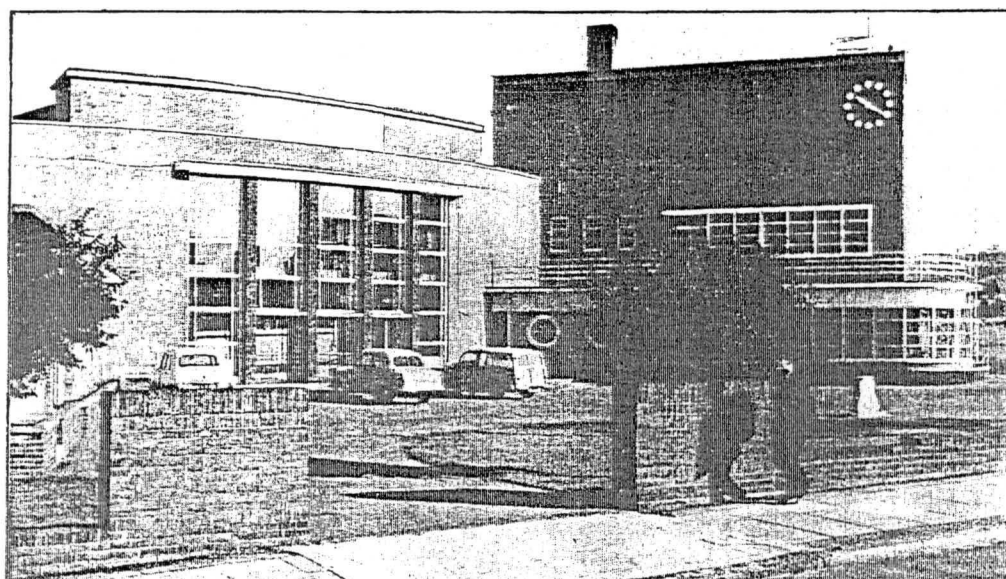


ISSN 0960-7870

BRITISH BRICK SOCIETY

# INFORMATION 81

OCTOBER 2000



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### **Cover illustration:**

The former Luton Grammar School, opened in 1938 as Luton Modern School. The name was changed following the 1944 Education Act. Much altered and added to, it now houses Luton Sixth Form College. See ‘The 1930s in One Town: Brickwork in Luton’ in this issue.

## EDITORIAL: DROPPING BRICKS?

As one century, and millennium, gives way to another - the change, of course, will occur at midnight of Sunday 31 December 2000 - the temptation to look back seems irresistible. A substantial contribution to this issue of *Information* reviews brickwork of the 1930s in one English town. When our regular editor, David Kennett, invited me to write the piece I accepted readily, even at the risk of a degree of self-indulgence. For the topic is of particular personal interest: I was born and bred in Luton and educated, in the '50s and early '60s, in three of the buildings mentioned.

Memories of school are, naturally enough, mixed: those of the disliked compulsory games mingle with those of the essentially liberal (and unashamedly academic) atmosphere of Luton Grammar School and its encouragement of an early interest in archaeology - shared, incidentally, with a fellow pupil, David Kennett. Other 1930s brick buildings too bring back

pleasant memories: the railway station, where one eagerly awaited the powerful, hissing steam trains for outings to London or for seaside holidays; the cinemas, where one thrilled to the adventures of Captain Marvel, Hopalong Cassidy, and other boyhood heroes; and St Andrew's Church, in the shadow of which, with another twelve-year-old, I once smirched bare knees, grubbing in mud for dog-buried bones, which, we were convinced, were those of Anglo-Saxon warriors. Memories of a very different sort are evoked by the School Clinic, with its rubber-covering, gas-giving dentist's surgery!

More is involved, however, than personal nostalgia. Architectural assessment, *fin de siècle*, has changed radically, with greater appreciation of the large number of brick buildings of the 1930s. Some architectural writings of the period tended to disparage brick whilst fêting more recent materials - steel, concrete, and plate-glass in particular. The newer materials (though with concrete often simulated by stuccoed brickwork) matched the contemporary cult of fresh air and health, nicely captured in W. H. Auden's *Letter to Lord Byron* of 1937:

A world of Aertex underwear for boys,  
Huge plate-glass windows, walls absorbing noise,  
Where the smoke nuisance is utterly abated  
And all the furniture is chromium-plated.

It was even urged, sometimes, that brick should be *dropped*, although attitudes were not always consistent: in *The International Style* (USA, 1932), for example, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson declare that 'from an aesthetic point of view, brick is undoubtedly less satisfactory than other materials, including stucco.... The use of brick tends to give a picturesqueness which is at variance with the fundamental character of the modern style'; yet a little later they state that '[s]ince brick is permanent in color and not subject to cracking and streaking, it is in the long run actually superior aesthetically for large-scale constructions'.

In fact, brick was *not* dropped. Quite the contrary: some of the buildings in *Fifty Modern Churches*, published by the Incorporated Church Building Society in 1947 and covering the period 1930-1945, have reinforced concrete or steel framing, but for their facing materials forty-three have *exposed brick* (in one case slurried over), six have *stone* (often backed with brick), and only one has *rendered (stuccoed) brickwork*. Church buildings, of course, may not be fully representative. Yet the wide range of building types illustrated in the Architecture Club's selection, *Recent English Architecture 1920-1940*, again published in 1947, and covering the two decades of its title, also shows a marked preponderance of brick, though including both other traditional and more modern materials.

Luton is an ideal town in which to examine the contribution of brick to 1930s architecture. It was, between the two World Wars, a developing town, fortunate enough to be spared the worst effects of the Depression. There was thus an urgent need for new buildings: for civic requirements, commerce, education, health care, industry, leisure, religion, and transport, as well as for housing. The majority are in exposed brickwork and, together, they demonstrate the wide variety of ways in which the material might be used. If nothing else, they provide a demonstration that bricks were not, and should not be, dropped. (See also David Kennett's Editorial to *BBS Information* 80, June 2000, 2-4.)

It is a privilege to be back, temporarily, in the Editor's Chair once again. I am grateful to David Kennett for the invitation, and for allowing that invitation to stand even when the reason for it no longer applied. I hope I may be forgiven for using the opportunity to reduce my own *Nachlaß*. Aware that there is really too much of *me* in the issue, I am especially grateful to those other contributors who have provided at least *some* balance.

TERENCE PAUL SMITH  
*Guest Editor*

## THE 1930s IN ONE TOWN: BRICKWORK IN LUTON

Terence Paul Smith

### Introduction

People fly into or out of Luton Airport, drive past the town on the M1, allow themselves to be whisked through it on the railway. But for those with an interest in modern brick building, there is more to be seen, and enjoyed, than might at first be expected. Much dates from the 1930s, for rapid growth of the town required new buildings of different types; inevitably they were of varying quality.<sup>1</sup> They are here considered thematically.<sup>2</sup>

It is housing that accounts for the bulk of the brick building in Luton, as elsewhere, in the period. Houses - most by speculative builders, some by the local council - follow the types found throughout the country. There are a few privately built detached houses and many more semi-detached, with the usual features of hipped roofs, bay-windows, typically under cross-gables, and applied finishes of pebbledash, tile-hanging, clapboarding (usually wany-edged), or imitation timber-framing. A *very* few show a *Moderne* approach, with flat roofs or porthole windows - a striking example being in Stockingstone Road. There are a few low-rise blocks of flats in similar style, for example at The Mount in New Bedford Road. Cheaper versions of the typical suburban houses were built in terraces of four, six, or eight, and usually show the same features. Versions put up by the council are usually (though not always) distinguished by the absence of porches, and by the inclusion of a passage leading to the back, since council houses were not normally provided with independent rear access. There are also, in some parts, the familiar bungalows, squatting under their heavy hipped roofs. For reasons of space, housing is not considered further in this essay.

### Churches<sup>3</sup>

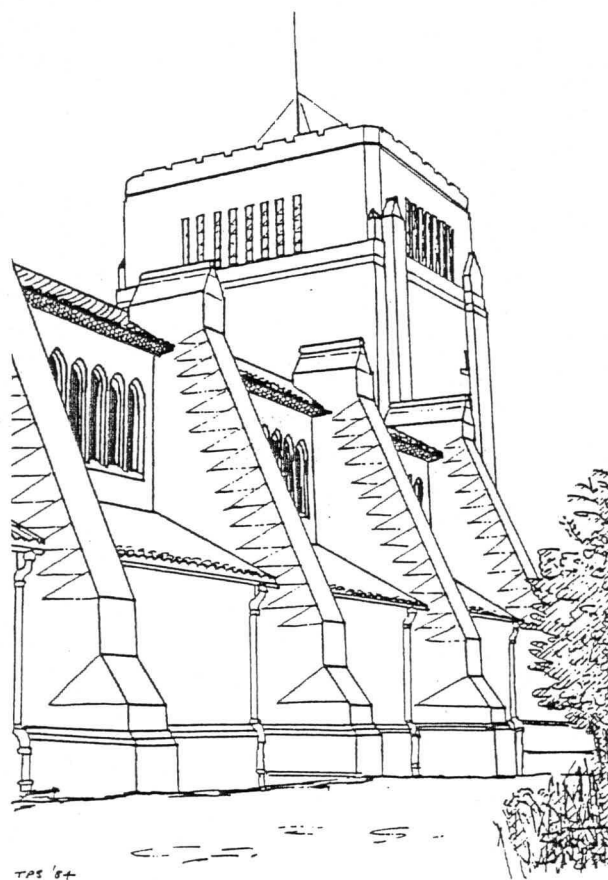
With growth of the town, church provision became inadequate and new churches were built. The earliest - and finest - is St Andrew's, Blenheim Crescent (1931-2) by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott (fig. 1), which Charles McKean aptly describes as 'a Valhalla for brick-layers'.<sup>4</sup> Scott had won the competition for the new Anglican cathedral at Liverpool in 1904, though the building was finished only many decades later. As early as 1914 his Catholic church at Northfleet, Kent used a modern version of brick Gothic, which the architect was to adopt again at St Andrew's. The buttresses have two sharply raked offsets above a plinth, the upper offset making a long sweep from eaves level and cutting across the aisles; tumbling-in emphasises the triangularity of effect. The building is essentially a three-dimensional composition of planes, made more effective by the absence of fenestration from the aisle walls. The interior is lighted entirely by the clerestory of connected lancets.

The tower is a dramatic termination. With its pilaster buttresses, minimal fenestration, and rectangular belfry openings, it too forms a composition of brickwork planes, brought to an effective finish by a slight recession of the octagonal parapet. The tower doorway is the only extensive use of stone in the building. The tall arch which encloses both the doorway and the triple-lancet above it is stunningly bold, its simple five-order moulding constructed from brick squints. Similar bricks are used for the surrounds of the clerestory windows and, on edge, for the plinth. Special corner bricks are employed at the angles.

The extensive brickwork is of specially produced thin pinkish bricks in English Garden Wall Bond, though there is more than surface patterning involved in the choice of bond. The walls are constructed of two skins of brickwork, the outer of facing bricks, the inner of commons. Concrete, with the addition of 'Pudlo' waterproofing powder, was poured between

the skins. The header courses, projecting into the concrete, serve to anchor the brickwork to the fill. The construction is an instance of Scott's willingness to use innovative techniques.

Fig. 1 St Andrew's Church, Luton



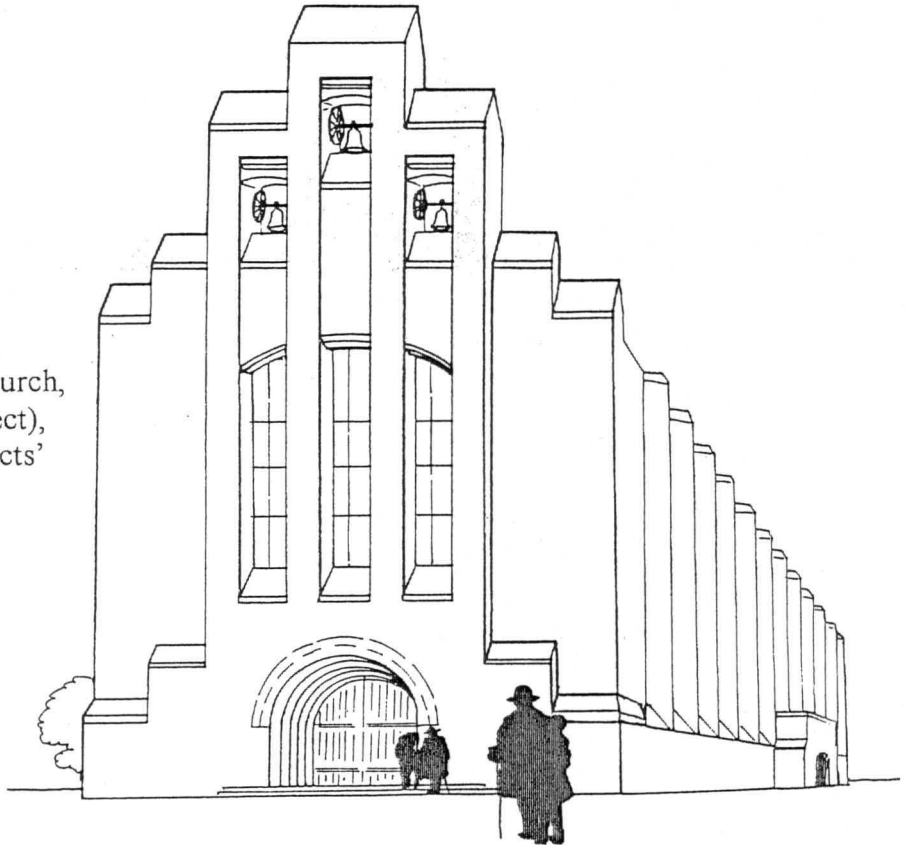
The plastered interior is simple. A series of slightly pointed concrete arches crosses the rectangular space. They are unmoulded and are brought down to floor level as shallow pilasters. The chancel arch is slightly narrower than the others. Simple unmoulded arches also cross the aisles transversely. The arcades are of plain round arches punched through the walls, and the ranks of clerestory windows above them are similarly unadorned.

Gavin Stamp writes of the building: 'There, in that midlands motor-car manufacturing town, Scott made the body of the church long and low, almost like a limousine, until it met the solid, rather expressionist tower at the [liturgical] west end.'<sup>5</sup> Perhaps this is not too fanciful, for Scott himself was very fond of fast cars. He also had a taste for the dramatic and this is well exploited at St Andrew's, on its hilltop site.

The church is mentioned in a study of architectural history by (Sir) Albert Richardson and Hector Corfiato; on the same page they speak warmly of P. V. Jensen Klint's Grundtvig Church at Copenhagen (1913-40).<sup>6</sup> Something of the same inspiration - the medieval churches of the 'Brick Gothic' region of northern Europe - lay behind the first (1931) design, by Richardson and his partner G. Lovatt Gill, for St Christopher's Church in Stockingstone Road (fig. 2). The design is dominated by a large stepped gable at the 'west', its steps echoed by those of the heavy plinth. A deep doorway of several orders is topped by a round arch, turned in brick. Four pilasters rising from the plinth cut across a segmental-headed window and, towards the top, flank three bell openings at two levels. The church is lengthy with tall windows flanked by diagonally-set buttresses rising from a continuous plinth. There was to

be a low porch on one side and the church was to finish at the 'east' in an apse. One has the feeling that Richardson enjoyed himself with this design, which, though on a much smaller scale than the Grundtvig Church, would have been a building of European standing - albeit one rather less at home in Luton than in Copenhagen! But he must have known that there were unlikely to be sufficient funds for its realisation: money was raised mainly by the children of the St Albans diocese.<sup>7</sup>

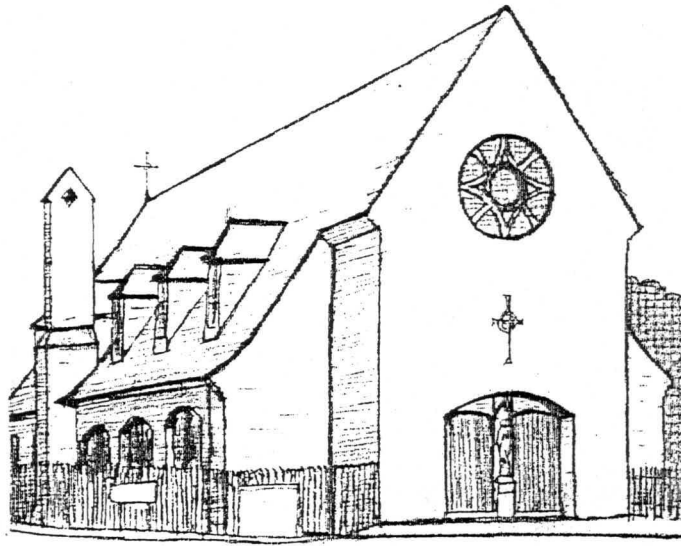
Fig. 2 St Christopher's Church, Luton (unbuilt project), based on the architects' own drawing



Richardson prepared a simpler design, based in part on a medieval barn. It was cruciform, with quite deep transepts and a slim *flèche* over the crossing. There was money only for the nave to be built in 1936-7; the rest of the building, it was proposed, would follow later. Only in 1959 was the church completed, not according to the second design, but by a continuation of the nave to form a chancel, all under a single roof. Even so, the result is a fine building (fig. 3). It is of thin brown Stamford bricks in Stretcher Bond with occasional headers in every sixth course. The side walls are low, the roof sweeping down and containing dormers for additional lighting. The fairly small windows have brick mullions of moulded brick specials and are paired either side of square pilasters; they are set within a series of segmental-headed recesses with sloping offsets at their feet. Entry is from the 'west' end, where the tall gable - a faint echo of the first design - is the dominant feature. Between the double doors is a stone statue in an image niche with a nodding-ogee arch of moulded brick specials. Above this is a simple rose window, also constructed from moulded brick specials. The roof is supported, independently of the walls, by large timber crucks. Sir Nikolaus Pevsner wrote of the church: 'Pleasant, though very reactionary',<sup>8</sup> as if he liked it but felt that he ought not to! It is an undeniable treasure in an otherwise unremarkable area of the town.

Of particular note is the careful craftsmanship, always of great concern to Richardson.

Fig. 3 St Christopher's Church, Luton



Less distinguished, particularly in the articulation of its elements, is St Anne's Church (1937-8) on the corner of Hart Lane and Crawley Green Road, by a local practice, W. W. Franklin & Briars. A flat-roofed vestibule, with a large square-headed doorway of several orders, opens into the main body of the church, which consists of nave and chancel under large pitched roofs. The 'east' window is a modern version of Tudor Perpendicular, but other windows are rectangular with mullions and transoms. Those of the nave rise into the roof as dormers. Nave and chancel are separated by a quite narrow pointed arch in a kind of screen wall, which is expressed externally by a gable topped by a square bellcote. Brickwork is in Luton Greys in Flemish Bond with minimal stone trim.

St Luke's, Oakley Road (1936, demolished), by Leslie T. Moore, was built as a mission church and hall, with a stage at the 'west' end. The 'east' end had a triple-lancet whilst the side windows were square-headed dormers. The chancel was marked externally by a slight projection with the red bricks laid in English Garden Wall Bond, the headers paler than the stretchers to give a banded effect; other brickwork was in Stretcher Bond. Most intriguing was the sinuous roof of latticed lamella construction. Intended to become a church hall when a permanent church was provided, it was in fact demolished when the latter was erected, to a design by Seeley & Paget, in 1956.

The Nonconformists had less need for new buildings at the time, but the Methodists built two. Beech Hill Methodist Church (1934) is of Luton Greys in Stretcher Bond and is gabled with a twin-gabled vestibule. There are narrow windows to the vestibule and a round-headed window to the principal façade. The side elevations have Palladian windows of brick and the 'east' window is similar. Inside, the walls and square piers are of exposed brickwork, although the arcade arches and the semi-circular vault are plastered. Adjoining is a smaller church hall in a similar style, though with triple square-headed windows in the side walls. Very similar, though on a somewhat larger scale incorporating transepts and a 'south' porch, is St Margaret's Methodist Church, Montrose Avenue (1937), once more with an adjoining hall in matching style. Brown brick is used in Flemish Bond, slightly vitrified headers giving a muted chequer pattern. The church is again gabled with a vestibule, containing a round-headed entrance of three orders of bull-nose red bricks; a Latin cross is recessed into the brickwork of the front façade. The windows are square-headed versions of Palladian windows. Below the vestibule parapet and running up the gables are single soldier courses. The interior, which is plastered, incorporates pointed vaults. In these two churches, though the



architects were not entirely *au fait* with vault construction, W. W. Franklin & Briars have provided buildings of some dignity.

The Baptists built a much simpler church in Blenheim Crescent in 1938, a box-like building under a hipped roof with a porch under a half-hipped roof. Windows are square-headed. It is of brown bricks in Stretcher Bond, with a course of black headers on edge just below the parapet. It has served as a church hall since the opening of the new church in 1961.

The former Salvation Army Citadel was opened in 1935. It is of red brick in English Bond. Two tower-like projections flank a central gabled portion, which has a square-headed doorway and, above, twin triangular-headed windows. Other windows are square-headed and narrow. Those in the 'towers' are continued downwards as recesses with patterned brickwork of diagonal courses of headers on edge alternating with triple diagonal courses of stretchers. The tops of the 'towers' are finished with sawtooth features of bricks on edge. Hardly first-rate architecture, it has a certain *gauche* charm.

Bury Park Congregational (now United Reformed) Church was built in Waldeck Road in 1895-1903. In 1930 the former Memorial Hall - a church hall - was built on a nearby site in Dunstable Road. It is of hard red bricks in Flemish Bond and has a low front gable in the form of a split-bed pediment. Rising into it is a round-headed window with rusticated jambs and 'keystone' of brick. The side walls have brick pilasters. At the front is a lower flat-roofed portico with straight-headed windows and with its entrances in the sides.

### Civic Buildings

Luton's first town hall, built in 1847, was burned down in 1919 during mishandled Peace celebrations. A replacement was built in 1934-8 to a design by Bradshaw, Gass & Hope in a classical style with a tall tower. Much brick was used in its construction and stretches of brickwork may be seen at the back of the building. But its 'show faces' are of Portland Stone, and the building need not detain us longer.



Fig. 4 Police Station and Law Courts, Luton (demolished)

In 1938 a new Police Station and Law Courts (demolished) were built in Stuart Street to a design by the Borough Engineer, J. W. Tomlinson (fig. 4). A neo-Georgian classical style was chosen, with central portico and slightly projecting wings. Basement, portico, and other trim were of reconstituted Weldon Stone with the principal walls of handmade red bricks.

The portico had four Ionic columns topped by an entablature (continued along other façades) and a pediment. There was a cupola at the centre. Windows were square or rectangular. On a suitable scale and in the hands of a master, this approach could result in buildings of decided dignity, as in C. Cowles Voysey's Worthing Town Hall of 1930. But at Luton the scale was smaller and the sloping site not handled especially well. There was an unfortunate air of Toy Town about the building and its loss is not greatly to be regretted.

### Schools

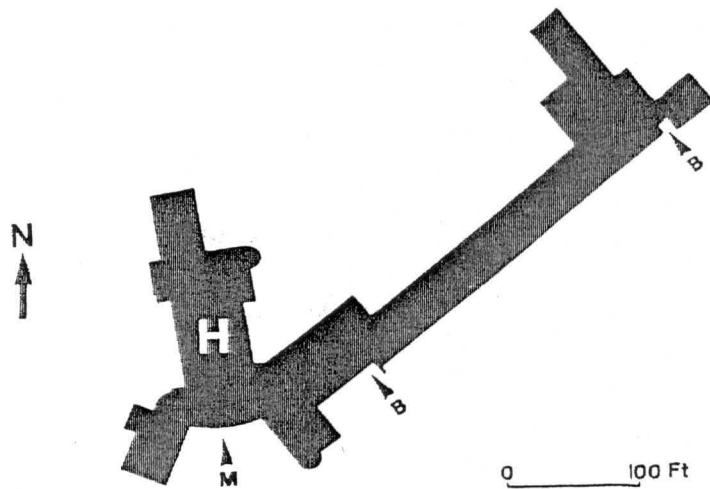
'The First World War brought a halt to school building but with no corresponding check in the number of children of school age' in the town.<sup>9</sup> The situation continued in the interwar years and the problem was exacerbated by reorganisation of the education system in 1932, along the lines of the Hadow Report of 1926. Combined infant and junior schools were built at Denbigh Road (1921, and thus pre-Hadow, but with permanent buildings only from 1931), Maidenhall Road (1932), Harthill (Brooms Road, 1937), and Beechwood Road (1938). All show variations of the quadrangular plan, a common arrangement for such schools at the time.<sup>10</sup> It allowed for a single-storey scheme, thus sensibly avoiding stairs for small children, some as young as five, although the sloping site at Harthill necessitated short flights at intervals in the two long corridors. Denbigh and Maidenhall have flat roofs except over the hall, which is gabled and is distinguished by its tall round-headed windows and its use of English Bond with a chequer pattern of black headers and red stretchers. The two slightly later schools are in the typical heavy hipped-roof style of the time, with the roofs over the halls being especially dominant. Doubtless they, and brick for the walls, were chosen to give a feeling of domesticity. Harthill is a rare example of a public building using LBC Rustics, laid in Flemish Bond.<sup>11</sup> In a similar style is Stopsley Junior School (the infants continued in an older building), completed in 1940, but using the corridor plan with a range of classrooms each side of a central hall and of a headmaster's study and staffroom. Harthill Nursery School (Whitcroft Road, 1940) is different. Three large general purpose rooms have semi-circular ends, well glazed for light; glazed doors open onto verandahs. The rest is of brick rendered to simulate concrete and the roofs are flat. Any resemblance to the Modern Movement is, however, superficial: the glazed portions have heavy wooden frames and the panes are straight, not curved; other fenestration is traditional. Minor additions in red brick were made to the earlier (1910) Beech Hill School in Dunstable Road.

A more individual - and, it has to be said, more expensive - approach than that of the primary schools was adopted for grammar schools.<sup>12</sup> Luton Modern School was founded as a mixed grammar school in 1904 and moved into a purpose-built school at Park Square in the town centre in 1908. In 1919 the girls moved out to the former High School for Girls (now part of Denbigh High School) in Alexandra Avenue, although a permanent building was not completed until 1930. It is an impressive neo-Baroque building (and really belonging to the 1920s) in red brick in Flemish Bond. The stone entrance has four attached Tuscan pilasters supporting a triangular pediment with the doorway itself covered by a segmental pediment bearing the school badge and motto. There is a slight projection at each end with a central window with segmental pediment flanked by square-headed windows. There are round-headed windows in the bays adjoining the projections. All other windows have flat arches with stone keys. A wide lawn and drive add to the attractiveness of the building.

The boys remained at Park Square until 1938, when a new building was opened in Bradgers Hill Road, then on the very edge of the town (fig. 5). The former Grammar School - its name was changed following the 1944 Education Act; since 1965 it has housed the Sixth Form College - was to a competition-winning design by C. Beresford Marshall & W. Tweedy, the project architect being the Hungarian *émigré* J. Turok, a somewhat mysterious

figure about whom little is known. He came to England from Vienna, where he had worked in the State Architect's Department; he left Marshall & Tweedy to set up his own practice shortly after the competition was won, and the building was seen to completion by J. E. Moore.<sup>13</sup> Marshall & Tweedy had recently completed a block of flats at Viceroy Court, Prince Albert Road, London NW1 (1936); of this, David Dean writes that 'it is a kind of muted résumé of modern motifs',<sup>14</sup> and much the same comment applies to the Grammar School, with its homage to Dudok and Mendelsohn, although the 'ceremonial' entrance also owes something to the Classical tradition.

Fig. 5 Luton Grammar School: block plan:  
M = main entrance;  
B = boys' entrance;  
H = hall



The steel frame is expressed in the red brick cladding to the vertical members. The central block, inspired by the Dutch architect W. M. Dudok, comprises a yellow brick tower (with clocks; fig. 6) containing headmaster's study, deputy headmaster's room, staffroom,

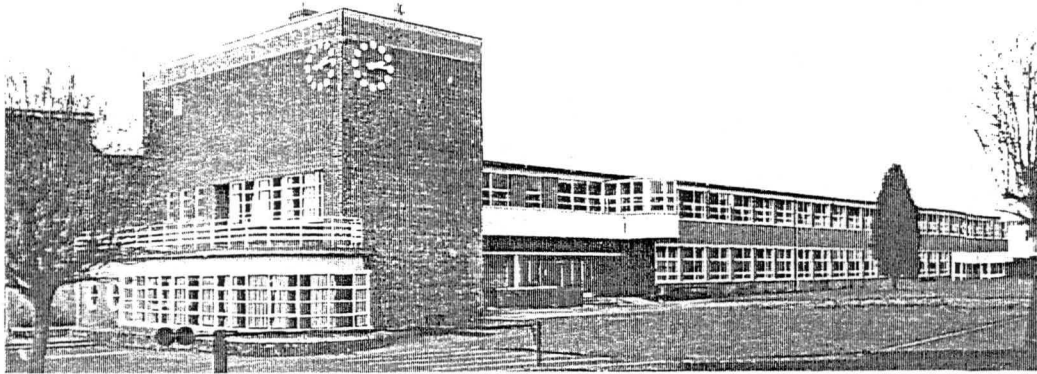


Fig. 6 Luton Grammar School (now Luton Sixth Form College)

and services. A smaller, glass-fronted tower at the rear of the building contains a stair and the music room, placed at the top for sound isolation. Such thoughtfulness is displayed also in the railed sun terrace for staff on the flat roof of the apsidal extension to the headmaster's study and in the provision of built-in flower boxes along several of the walls. West of the tower is the curtain-walled main - 'ceremonial' - entrance, a gentle curve giving access to the foyer in front of the assembly hall (see cover illustration). Greeting the visitor was once a wooden honours board, but this seems not to have been to the taste of the later occupants and has been scrubbed clean. The wood panelling and the glass entrance combined to give a welcoming aspect to this part of the building when, muffled against the cold in navy gaberdine raincoat,

red and yellow scarf, and school cap, one approached to attend, say, a Christmas carol service. One could also feel important, escorting one's parents to this entrance with an assumed air of familiarity - though in fact it was normally out of bounds to boys! The western end of the foyer, where the dining hall adjoins, is marked by the swirl of an open circular staircase - sheer *jeu d'esprit* - recalling that by Erich Mendelsohn in the De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill-on-Sea (1935).

The assembly hall is separated from the gymnasium by the changing room, which thus doubles as a 'green room' for school plays. The adjoining PE office picks up the theme of the apsidal headmaster's study, with curved glazing again reminiscent of Mendelsohn. A similar motif is employed at first-floor level in the projecting greenhouse attached to a biology laboratory in the long classroom block which runs east from the tower and office block, where also is the main 'everyday' entrance for boys (fig. 6). The vertical frame members here are muted, so that the long *travées* of windows, the brick panels beneath them, and the overhang of the flat roof combine to give a strongly horizontal emphasis, the wing seeming to sweep from one end to the other. Cloakrooms, washrooms, and toilets are provided at both ends, and at the far end are a large geography room, library, art room, and workshops, where the massing of brickwork volumes again reflects the work of Dudok; in accordance with a Board of Education recommendation, the geography room has a master's demonstration bench and French windows to give easy access to meteorological instruments.<sup>15</sup>

The building is mainly clad with handmade buff yellow bricks, backed by Flettons, in English Bond, with red bricks as facings to the vertical members of the frame; blue tiles on the PE office; and some strips of white render, most effectively marking the main boys' entrance. The emphasis is on the juxtaposition of curved and straight forms and of horizontals and verticals, coming together at the tower, which is the principal architectural focus. The slope of the site from east to west is also exploited, whilst the wide lawn was an important and humane aspect of the design. Half a century on from the Luton school, Livio Vacchini, himself the designer of a fine school building at Montagnola, near Lugano, Switzerland, wrote of the 'three things that a building may be...: a limit created in the ... landscape; a door which leads to a different world; and a place to be at ease in;'<sup>16</sup> Luton Grammar School admirably fulfilled these aims and this alone justifies the extended treatment given it here. When it was opened in September 1938, Alderman Harry Arnold said of the building: 'It is beautiful this morning. Keep it beautiful, and don't do anything to tarnish it.' Somewhat ironically, it has been its later occupants who have done the tarnishing, not least with the livid red brick box cynically plonked down on what used to be the front lawn.<sup>17</sup>

### Buildings for Health Care

As the town grew, hospital accommodation in Luton, and in neighbouring Dunstable, became inadequate, and a new hospital (The Luton and Dunstable Hospital or 'L & D') was planned at the junction of Dunstable Road and Lewsey Road, roughly midway between the two towns. It was designed by two architects in collaboration, Stanley Parrott and Peter Dunham, and was opened in 1939. It was designed for maximum sunlight and minimum noise. Two ward blocks lie along opposite sides of a grassed courtyard, open to the south, with three floors of wards in each block. Each block has a flat roof and corner windows at one angle. Brick bands separate the strips of windows and there is minimal brick decoration in places. The northern block houses offices, casualty department, kitchen, and other units. A private ward block was also built. Twin operating theatres were provided so that 'never again would there be waiting for surgery'(!).<sup>18</sup> The building is now largely hidden by later additions.

On an adjoining site, the Maternity Hospital had been built in 1936 to a design by the Borough Engineer, J. W. Tomlinson. Wards and labour unit, around three sides of a court-

yard, are flat-roofed and more or less astylar. Two front pavilions, containing antenatal and isolation blocks, are similar. But the central administrative block has pitched roofs with pan-tiles. Most prominent is the entrance, which is built like a large detached house of two storeys. Single-storey half-hexagonal bay windows flank an entrance of three arches, two containing windows, the central one containing the doorway. The parapets of the bays are of soldier courses which are carried across the main elevation as a platband. If the building as a whole seems indecisive, the domestic treatment of the central block, though a little heavy handed, is at least thoughtful - a homely welcome to expectant mothers.

Tomlinson was also responsible, in the 1930s, for the former Beechwood Road Maternity and Child Welfare Clinic on a triangular site between Beechwood Road and Dunstable Road. It is a single-storey building with hipped roof at the apex of the triangle but with gables at the ends of the two wings. A curved section lies between these wings at the rear. The building is of brown rough-textured bricks in Stretcher Bond, though the plinth and the plain eaves-cornice are rendered, as is the slightly projecting square-headed entrance.

The former Children's Hospital was erected in London Road in red brick Tudor style in 1893-4. An extension was begun in 1928 and completed in 1931. 'Much thought was given to provision of maximum air, sunshine and light and the furniture, equipment and flooring were all chosen for ease of cleaning.'<sup>19</sup> Of brick in Flemish Bond, it has long vertical windows and pitched roofs. Two wards were built on opposite sides of a grassed courtyard, Christopher Garden, with other buildings, including a new operating theatre, on a third side.

Also for children and of the 1930s was the former School Clinic in Dallow Road, once again by J. W. Tomlinson. It is a simple two-storey block built of Luton Greys in Flemish Bond with a copper-clad attic. The symmetrical frontage has two stone doorways in slight projections and there is a fluted stone band immediately below the cornice. As well as administration areas, the building contained a doctor's consultation room and an area for the treatment of minor injuries on the ground floor and dental and optical departments on the first floor. At the far end is an open circular stair, though less striking than that at the Grammar School. In accordance with ideas of the time, the emphasis was on cleanliness and efficiency: worthy aims indeed, but inevitably imparting a lack of warmth - what, indeed, we might criticise today as too *clinical*.

In the middle of the decade Peter Dunham designed a doctor's surgery in Dunstable Road. It is in a modernised version of domestic architecture, with pitched roof and some strip windows. The entrance is of stone, the rest of brown bricks in Flemish Bond. For the most part, however, doctors' surgeries were built as, or took over existing, houses.

### **Transport: the Railway Station**

A growing town depends on adequate transport. A new bus garage had already been built, of brick, in London Road in 1928.

By the 1930s the main railway line to St Pancras required replacement of Luton Midland Road (now simply Luton) Station of 1867. The design, erected between 1938 and 1940, was by W. H. Hamlyn, Chief Architect to the LMS. The building, a juxtaposition of brick blocks which fully exploits a drop in the land, derives from the Netherlands, though mediated, no doubt, through Charles Holden's work for the London Underground. It is of brown bricks in English Bond, with some decorative panels of vertical sawtooth brickwork and some soldier courses. Bull-nose specials are used for the slopes of the window sills; the windows themselves are metal-framed. On the platforms there was some curved glazing (now dismantled), and there is much use of flat concrete roofs. The booking hall bridges the tracks and rises as a four-square clock tower. This arrangement conveniently obviates the need for a separate passenger footbridge, since both platforms are approachable from the booking hall -

and entirely in the dry on rainy days. Further platforms have now been added, the booking hall re-arranged, and other alterations made. Only from a few positions is it now possible to appreciate the careful massing of the original composition (fig. 7).



Fig. 7 Luton (formerly Luton Midland Road) Railway Station

Luton Airport was opened in 1938, but as little more than an airfield, with no brick structures (though see 'Industrial Buildings', below).

### Cinemas

The 1930s was the Age of the Cinema, ushered in by the advent of the 'talkies' (1928 in Britain). Demand was 'met by the large cinema chains which adopted the principle of spending their way out of the recession with a programme of cinema building.'<sup>20</sup> A notable feature of many was the plush interior - contrasting with the frequent drabness beyond its walls - though this is an aspect which we must ignore in a study of brickwork.

In Luton, three new cinemas were built, all towards the end of the decade. First was the former Union (later Ritz) in Gordon Street (1937). It makes good use of the sloping, slightly curved street and is of thin brown bricks in English Bond with some buff faience tiles. A canopy (demolished) marked the entrance, which is in a tower-like portion. Above it is a stone window with fluted columns separating the lights, topped by a cast stone semi-nude figure by John Alexander. A problem in any cinema which runs parallel to the street, as this one does, is the treatment of a large blank wall necessarily without windows: here it is solved by dividing the façade into a series of bays by means of thin stone fins running up the walls. At the far end from the entrance is a ventilation grill of vertical slots with stepped brickwork at the head and foot of each.

The former Odeon, Dunstable Road (fig. 8) was opened in 1938. It is to a design by Andrew Mather, who did much work for the Odeon chain despite *not* being a qualified architect.<sup>21</sup> Prominent is the slim tower - a hallmark of the Odeon chain - above the entrance. The long façade is of brown brick in Flemish Bond above a plinth of black tiles and render. The long face is relieved by pilasters of brick. This most impressive of Luton's cinemas is, at time of writing, in a sorry state.

The Savoy, George Street (later the ABC, now the Cinema, with three screens)

opened five days after the Odeon in 1938. Its entrance is narrow and is stone-faced and curved. The main part of the building is ranged along a side street - George Street West - and little is therefore made of it. LBC Rustics - a rare use outside domestic building (but see Hart-hill School, above) - are laid in English Bond with minimal fenestration. A low tower is marked by shallow pilasters and the brickwork includes soldier courses beneath the parapet. Sadly, this least satisfactory of the town's 1930s cinemas is the only one still in use as such.

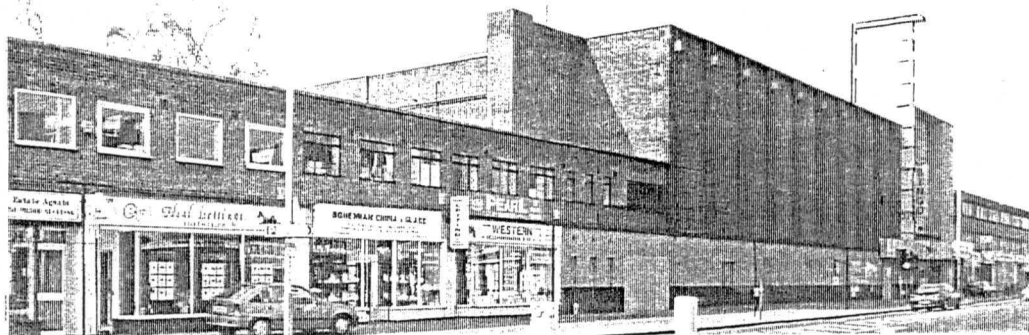


Fig. 8 Former Odeon Cinema and adjoining ranges of shops, Luton

### Buildings for Leisure

Cinemas, of course, are themselves buildings for leisure, though their particular characteristics warrant the separate attention that they have received. To a degree, leisure facilities were also provided by the churches, especially by the Salvation Army, whose 'meetings' have always been as much entertainment as religious worship. Here we are concerned with various other leisure activities.

In accordance with the concern for healthy exercise at the time, is the public open-air swimming pool in Bath Road (J. W. Tomlinson, 1935). The large single pool reflected social change: 'Public swimming-baths,' it was noted in 1938, 'now contain one bathing-pool for both sexes.'<sup>22</sup> There is also a children's paddling pool. The buildings - administration, changing rooms, and terraces for spectators - are low and flat-roofed in an appropriately sleek *Moderne* style. They are of brick in a version of Monk Bond. They have now been joined by a large indoor swimming pool.

This is the most convenient place to mention the former Masonic Hall on the corner of Church Street and Waller Street (1935). It makes use of its corner site with a curved entrance façade. It is a neo-Baroque building in narrow red bricks laid in English Bond; each side of the entrance is a window with a projecting frame of brick, but all other detailing is in stone. Windows are in a heavy Baroque style, as is the entrance, which has attached rusticated piers and two Tuscan columns *in antis*; there is a heavy feature above. A moulded stone band runs round the building between the two storeys and there is a moulded cornice. Windows are metal-framed. The building has a '20s rather than a '30s aspect. It is now The Lodge public house.

Other public houses of the period were built as such.<sup>23</sup> A traditional domestic 'road-house' style - neo-Georgian or vernacular - in brick and with heavy pitched roofs was preferred. This was largely a matter of *image*: the buildings, it was being said, were not 'spit-and-sawdust' beershops but respectable venues where wives or girlfriends might decently accompany the men. This was occasionally reflected in the use of the word 'tavern' in the name. Where possible, at least in the outer parts of the town, parking space was generous by the standards of the time: motoring itself was, of course, one of the newer leisure activities.

Some in the central area are facings or rebuildings of earlier structures. All are of red

or brown brick in Flemish Bond and in variants of a neo-Georgian style with pitched roofs. The Richard the Third (now O'Shea's) in Castle Street began as a row of cottages, converted to a public house in 1846. The 1930s frontage has courses of headers on edge at the levels of the windows and a soldier course beneath the stone coping. There is a slightly projecting porch in the centre and the windows have flat arches. The Plume of Feathers on the corner of Guildford Street and Bridge Street was built in the middle of the nineteenth century. Its 1930s brick frontage has stone platbands and coping. The main entrance, which has a stone surround, is in a slight projection. The Stag's Head (now Mac's Bar) on the corner of Russell Street and Winsdon Road was built in 1938 as a replacement for The Stag, only a hundred yards away. The canted corner has a large panel with a brick surround whilst above each of the two doorways is a portion of headers laid as vertical sawtooth elements. There is a soldier course beneath the stone coping and the window-heads have flat arches. The Green Man on the corner of Duke Street and Taylor Street was built c.1865. It was entirely rebuilt in 1938-9. The windows are of wood, as is the eaves-cornice. There is a stone platband above the ground-floor windows. The entrance, in a canted angle, is of stone. The Royal Hotel (now Taboo) was built on the corner of Old Bedford Road and Mill Street in the mid-nineteenth century and rebuilt in 1939. It curves neatly along the road junction, where the main entrance is placed; there are further entrances on the two streets. The ground-floor windows have round arches of brick and the first-floor windows have flat arches. The steeply pitched roof has dormer windows and the brick chimney stacks are prominent.

New public houses in the outer parts of the town are essentially similar, although some use Stretcher Bond and some are more in a neo-vernacular than in a neo-Georgian style; domesticity is sometimes further suggested by the use of pantiles on the roofs. Of large scale, their bulk provides valuable punctuation in the rows of, usually semi-detached, houses in newer parts of the town. The Leicester Arms in Dunstable Road (1933) is in basically similar style to The Plume of Feathers, though not exploiting its corner site in the same manner. Its porches are more prominent with their four stepped projections; one is centrally placed and the other at one end, giving an asymmetrical aspect to the building. There are stone platbands and cornice, the porch cornices hinting at crenellation: perhaps there is an intended iconographic progression here: an Englishman's home is his castle - his 'local' is his other home. The Kingsway Tavern (now the Kingsway Arms) in Kingsway (1936) is perhaps the most interesting of all. It is neo-vernacular in a version of seventeenth-century Artisan Mannerism, with a central portion under a hipped roof with overhanging eaves and with flat-roofed wings. The hipped roof has pantiles. The ends of the wings have rusticated quoins in brickwork and the parapets of their porches contain decorative brickwork laid in herringbone fashion. The central porch projects forwards and is supported on two square brick piers; its parapet is of bricks laid vertically. Such brickwork is also used for the parapets of the wings, which continue as a band across the central portion. The windows have flat arches. At time of writing, unfortunately, the brickwork is painted white, giving a tawdry appearance to this potentially attractive building. The Three Horseshoes, Marsh Road, Leagrave (1938, demolished) replaced an earlier building. It was in a neo-Georgian style with a hipped roof and flat-roofed porches at each end. There was a central doorcase with hood and the flat-arched windows were traditional wooden sashes. Despite protests and attempts to re-open it, it was demolished in 1995. The Somerset Tavern, on the corner of Crawley Green Road and Somerset Avenue (c.1938), is similar to The Plume of Feathers and the Leicester Arms. It makes use of its corner site and of the slope in the ground, the latter allowing for a low beer terrace. The double-stepped porch is in a canted angle and there is a subsidiary porch at one end. The last pre-War public house is The Wardown Tavern (1939; later The Warden Tavern, now The Warden) in Barton Road. It is domestic in style, its central portion, with its hipped roofs, like a large detached house with a round-headed entry flanked by half-hexagonal bay-windows.



Flat-roofed wings have round-headed windows. There have been some drastic alterations and, like the Kingsway Tavern, it is, at time of writing and detrimentally, painted white.

### Commercial Buildings

Not surprisingly, most commercial buildings of the 1930s are (or were) in the town centre. Several are stone-faced. The earliest of the brick buildings is probably the best - the former Gas Company Showrooms (1936), by Whinney, Son & Austen Hall, in George Street, the town's principal street (fig. 9). It contained showrooms in the basement and on the ground floor; there was a lecture room on the first floor; upper floors, with a separate entrance from the street, were let as offices. The building is quite tall, but horizontality is stressed by the canopy over the street (now altered), by the strip-windows, by the white concrete-faced bands, and by the flat roofs. At the top, the building is set back and there is a short tower to one side, containing lifts, changing the composition at this level from planar to volumetric. The side wall of the tower once displayed the company's name, and the front face has a bas-relief, by Dennis Dunlop, of a figure holding a flambeau. The brickwork is prominent and is in Flemish Bond using Luton Greys with red brick for the panels at the ends of the window strips and for the diagonally-set piers of the windows. Obtuse angles at the ends of the windows have standard bricks overlapped, giving a jagged effect, and immediately below the tower parapet projecting bricks provide muted decoration. It is a most accomplished addition to the street and it is fortunate that it remains, though given over to different uses.



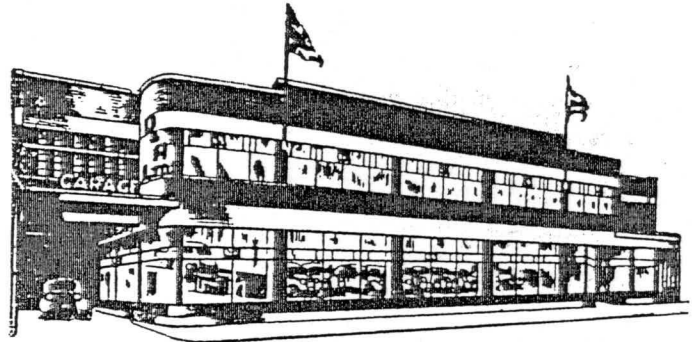
Fig. 9 Former Gas Company showrooms, Luton

On the opposite side of George Street is the former National Provincial Bank (W. F. C. Holden, 1936), actually just a frontage to an earlier building. It is in a decidedly *Moderne* style, sniffily deprecated by purists of the Modern Movement, with a central portion in a version of stripped Classical curving forwards between flanking shops which have curved bay windows. It is of Luton Greys in Flemish Bond with Portland Stone dressings above a plinth of polished black granite. There were flagpoles originally, and their stone supports are still present. Not so the fine bronze doors, which were made by the Birmingham Guild of Craftsmen and incorporated motifs based on English and Ancient Greek coins. They were intriguing to at least one archaeologically-minded schoolboy, and their loss is to be regretted. The building itself at least survives, a welcome cheerful note in the town's main street.

A parade of shops adjoining the Savoy cinema is mostly stone-faced, above the shop-fronts, but the parapet is of Luton Greys in Flemish Bond. There is curved glazing at the ends and minimal decoration in the form of fluting to the piers between the windows.

Around the corner in Bridge Street was Dickinson & Adams' two-storey car showroom (demolished), again in a *Moderne* style in brick and with curved glazing at each end (fig. 10). There were flagpoles from which the company could fly its own flags. Not least exciting - at least to a wide-eyed boy who sometimes watched - was the helical concrete ramp at one end, by which cars were moved from one floor to the other. The site was on a reversion lease to the Luton Industrial Co-operative Society and in the late 1950s it was converted as an extension of the Co-op store; it was demolished in 1992.

Fig. 10 Dickinson & Adams' car showroom, Luton (demolished), from a 1950s advertisement



Shopping parades in a similar *Moderne* style, of brick, sometimes with curved glazing, and usually with accommodation above the shops, were built in various outer parts of the town and some still remain, for example in Dunstable Road (fig. 8) and Leagrave Road and on the corner of Stockingstone Road and Heywood Drive.

### Industrial Buildings

Luton's traditional industry of hat making was in decline between the wars and most firms continued in older buildings. The former Vyse's factory in Bute Street, however, represents a rebuilding following a serious fire in February 1930. The new building is traditional at the rear, but on the street frontage brick piers rise between the windows to a stone parapet with simple Art Deco ornament. The windows are separated by deep horizontal metal bands, those in the centre bearing the firm's initial: *V*. Curiously, the windows themselves are old-fashioned wooden sashes. The brickwork is of thin brown bricks in Flemish Bond. The former James Eggleton's factory, also in Bute Street, dates from about the same time. It too has brick piers, but in English Bond, and windows separated by metal bands; the windows themselves are metal-framed. There is minimal Art Deco ornament in stone. Paul Walser's former factory on the corner of Midland Road and Dudley Street was built c.1930 and again has the metal bands, between the first- and second-floor windows. The building is mostly stone-faced but the top storey is of exposed brick, using Luton Greys for the piers and red bricks for the flat arches of the long windows; the side and rear walls are entirely of brick.

During World War II, the factory was used by Percival Aircraft for making parts for Mosquito aircraft. There is something symbolic about this, for by the 1930s engineering had taken over as the town's principal industry. Percival began production in 1936, on a site adjoining what, two years later, would become Luton Airport. The buildings (demolished) were steel-framed, though some had panel infills of Fletton common bricks.

The largest employer was Vauxhall Motors in Kimpton Road, which came to the town in 1905, with cars being at first only a sideline to the principal product: hydraulic pumps. There was considerable expansion in the 1920s and '30s, particularly after the take-over by the American General Motors in 1925. Various workshops erected in 1933 (demolished) were in different materials, one being of steel-framing with brick infill. The new Laboratory

Block (demolished) was a rather mean-looking one-storey neo-Georgian (or sub-Georgian) building with parapet, all in Flemish Bond, with lighter headers giving a chequer pattern. At the quoins some courses were slightly projected to give a rudimentary rustication. The windows were narrow with flat arches and the main doorcase was of stone. More striking was the Restaurant and Social Club (1936, demolished). The frontage was of red brick in Flemish Bond in a ponderous neo-Baroque style. The centre rose above low side wings and had a segmental-headed window with stone mullions. Its cornice was continuous with that of sections of entablature to each side, above brick pilasters. These elements hinted at an entrance which was not actually present, imparting a somewhat blank-faced look to the building. Each side was a small window, high-set, with segmental head and foot. It was not an especially well proportioned or articulated building and its loss is of no great consequence.

Much more dignified was the 1930s extension to George Kent's works in Biscot Road (demolished). It was in a stripped Classical style (fig. 11), mostly stone-faced but with some portions of brick laid in Monk Bond. The main entrance block was of stone surrounded by such brickwork, with quite large metal-framed windows and porthole windows at the very top. A hint of *Moderne* was provided in the small, one-storey gatekeeper's cabin, with its brick plinth and its raking glazing. Amongst Luton's industrial buildings, it is rather a sad loss.

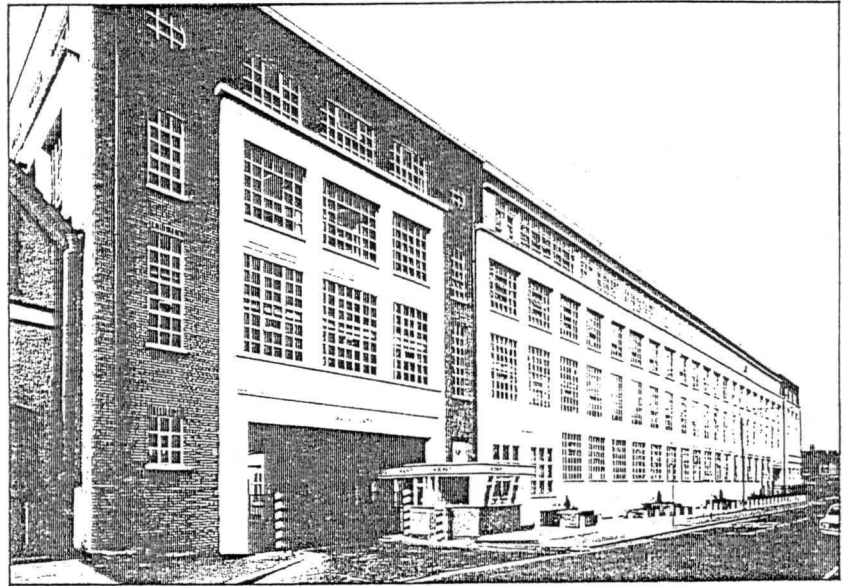


Fig. 11 Extension to George Kent's works, Luton (demolished)

The former Skefco (later SKF) ball bearing factory in Leagrave Road was extended in the 1930s with a wing each side of the earlier heavily Classical building. They are in red brick in Flemish Bond. Brick piers rise between tall vertical windows, with metal bands between the ground- and first-floor windows. There is also an attic storey of brick above a stone cornice with simple mouldings.

The Electrolux factory in Oakley Road is long and of two storeys. It is of Luton Greys in Flemish Bond with metal-framed windows, with stone frames on the lower storey and stone lintels on the upper storey. Above the entrance is a rather engaging clock set in a radial arrangement of cut bricks flanked by three vertical strips of sawtooth brickwork.

## Conclusion

Brick architecture of the 1930s was pluralistic, the Luton buildings showing, at least, the following approaches: Art Deco, Baroque, Dutch *à la* Dudok, Expressionist (including Mendelsohn), Georgian, Gothic, *Moderne*, and Vernacular. In this, the town is more representative of

the general architectural scene than some would at one time have been willing to concede. A handful of the buildings - St Andrew's Church, St Christopher's Church, the Grammar School, and perhaps the railway station - are of more than local significance. St Andrew's demonstrates that commitment to a more traditional approach did not have to result in mere pastiche, for the church is indisputably a *modern* building. The Grammar School shows that a fully contemporary approach could result in a building which was not only functionally efficient but also attractive, even beautiful - as Councillor Harry Arnold recognised at the time of its opening. These buildings, and some others in the town, are certainly worth a visit for the pleasure that may be obtained from the brickwork of the 1930s.

## Notes

1. Some details in this essay are taken from the contemporary architectural press, in which a number of the buildings were featured; I am grateful to David Kennett for copies of the relevant articles. In four cases I have adapted paragraphs from T. P. Smith, *Four Brick Buildings of the 1930s in Luton*, a pamphlet prepared for the British Brick Society's Spring Meeting, April 1993; in one case, this had already borrowed words from T. P. Smith, 'Three Brick Churches by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott', *BBS Information*, 38, February 1986, 9-13.
2. In this essay the words 'the former' are used to indicate that, at time of writing, a building still exists, sometimes much altered, but is no longer used for its primary purpose. Where a building has been demolished, this is noted in the text.
3. In church descriptions cardinal points are used in their liturgical sense - that is, with the altar regarded as being at the east, even if this is not the actual orientation; I have signalled this by the use of inverted commas - e.g. 'west'.
4. C. McKean, *Architectural Guide to Cambridge and East Anglia since 1920*, London, 1982, p. 144.
5. G. Stamp, 'Giles Gilbert Scott: the Problem of "Modernism",' *Architectural Design Profiles*, 24, *Britain in the Thirties*, ed. G. Stamp, London, [1979], p.73; the tower is actually at the south-east.
6. A. E. Richardson and H. O. Corfiato, *The Art of Architecture*, London, 1938, p.244.
7. J. Dyer and J. G. Dony, *The Story of Luton*, 3rd edn, Luton, 1975, p.181.
8. N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Bedfordshire and the County of Huntingdon and Peterborough*, Harmondsworth, 1968, p.116.
9. J. G. Dony, *A History of Education in Luton*, Luton, 1970, p.50.
10. Rustics are standard Fletton bricks with two faces scored with a zigzag pattern so that they can serve as facing bricks; not the loveliest of such bricks, they were introduced by the London Brick Company in 1923: R. Hillier, *Clay that Burns: a History of the Fletton Brick Industry*, London, 1981, p.68.
11. M. Seaborne, *Primary School Design*, London, 1971, pp.40-47.
12. M. Seaborne and R. Lowe, *The English School: its Architecture and Organization*, vol. 2, 1870-1970, London, 1977, pp.137-44.
13. D. Farr, *English Art 1870-1940*, Oxford History of English Art, vol. 11, Oxford, 1978, p.313, n.2, and further information on Turok from D. H. Kennett. Surprisingly, the building is not included in Pevsner, 1968. Incidentally, the lowest tender for construction of the building (which was accepted) was from the local firm of H. C. Janes. Unfortunately, the price of the bricks was inadvertently omitted from the estimate! Rather than face the usual penalty - no work for the local council for three years - the firm met the cost of the bricks from its own profits: *ex inf.* D. H. Kennett.
14. D. Dean, *The Thirties: Recalling the English Architectural Scene*, RIBA Drawings Series, London, 1983, p.59.
15. Board of Education, Educational Pamphlet 86, London, 1931, p.28.
16. L. Vacchini, quoted in Ch. Norberg-Schulz and J. C. Vigato, *Livio Vacchini*, Barcelona, 1987, p.44.
17. Alderman Arnold's remarks are reported in *Beds. and Herts. Evening Telegraph*, Thursday 15 September 1938, 5. Insensitive additions are remarked upon in Farr, 1978, p.314, in D. H. Kennett, *Portrait of Bedford-*

shire, London, 1978, p.191, in Smith, 1993, p.8, and in J. Dyer, *The Stopsley Book*, Dunstable, 1998, p.183; it ought perhaps to be mentioned that all four writers happen to be former pupils.

18. M. R. Currie, *Hospitals in Luton and Dunstable: an Illustrated History*, Luton, 1982, p.76.
19. Currie, 1982, p.123.
20. J. Stephenson, *British Society 1914-45*, Harmondsworth, 1984, p.396; throughout this section I have relied for dates on G. C. Peck, *Bedfordshire Cinemas*, Bedford, 1981.
21. D. Atwell, *Cathedrals of the Movies: a History of British Cinemas and their Audiences*, London, 1980, p.53.
22. Richardson and Corfiato, 1938, p. 240.
23. In this section I have obtained much help from S. Smith, *Pubs and Pints: the Story of Luton's Public Houses and Breweries*, Dunstable, 1995.

## **BRITISH BRICK SOCIETY BIBLIOGRAPHY**

At its inception in 1972-3, the British Brick Society began a bibliography relating to brick and its uses. By 1975 this had progressed sufficiently for the then Academic Secretary of the Society, Terence Paul Smith, to issue a document of eighteen pages giving about 360 references. At various times this has been up-dated, principally by Ann Los, the Society's Bibliographer since 1983, and the mixed typed and handwritten copy of this maintained by the Society now contains approximately 1000 references. At present it does not contain any references to articles published in *BBS Information*. Adding these will increase the bulk to around 1300 items and with material known not to be included in the system the total would certainly be well in excess of 2000 items. It is hoped that in the near future David H. Kennett will have sufficient time to enter the existing material into a word processor, with what additions are known to him, and including items in *BBS Information*.

There has been a long-standing proposal to create a printed academic bibliography of all references of interest to those whose hobby or subject of study, from whatever background, is 'brick'. To examine the viability of this, David H. Kennett produced a paper for discussion at the Society's Annual General Meeting held at Kew on 10 June 2000. Following extensive discussion at the meeting, a motion was proposed by Richard Morris and seconded by James Campbell that the Society abandon, at least for the time being, any attempt to produce a definitive printed brick bibliography. This motion was carried unanimously.

Members present at the Annual General Meeting felt, however, that the matter of some form of bibliography and/or booklist should not be left unresolved. A number of suggestions were put forward:

1. When new members join the Society they are presented with a short booklist of valuable and accessible books on brick which are either in print or not too difficult to obtain from secondhand bookshops or libraries. This is to be revised and distributed to all members of the Society in a future mailing.

2. It was also suggested that members be encouraged to write two- or three-paragraph reviews of new books and submit them to the editor of *BBS Information*.

3. There was also the feeling that *BBS Information* might usefully carry bibliographical essays on particular aspects of brick. This suggestion had been made earlier by Ronald Firman when a draft of the discussion paper was circulated to the Society's officers. This was accompanied by an offer to write on 'Geological sources of information for the study of brick'. Both the Chairman and the Editor of the British Brick Society would like to encourage others to share their expertise on specific aspects of brick by writing such bibliographical essays for consideration for inclusion in future issues of *BBS Information*.

DHK

# DRAGONS AND FRIENDS IN LONDON AND THE THAMES VALLEY

Tony Lewis

## Introduction

The note on 'Dragons and Friends' in *BBS Information* 62, June 1994, 11 has finally stirred me into action: I have been spotting dragons occasionally on my travels and it is about time that I collected together the data on them. Most have been observed from buses or trains and I have therefore not been able to examine them closely. The list works westwards by county from London (the former GLC area): it thus covers parts of London as well as Middlesex, Surrey, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, and Oxfordshire. The eastern boundary of the area is the River Lea (or Lee), the traditional divide between Middlesex and Essex. David Kennett has integrated brief notes with references to other dragons in these counties except for those in Surrey, for which an initial county listing has been published in *BBS Information* 73, February 1998, 4-8. A map of locations of the dragons and other creatures is provided in fig. 1.

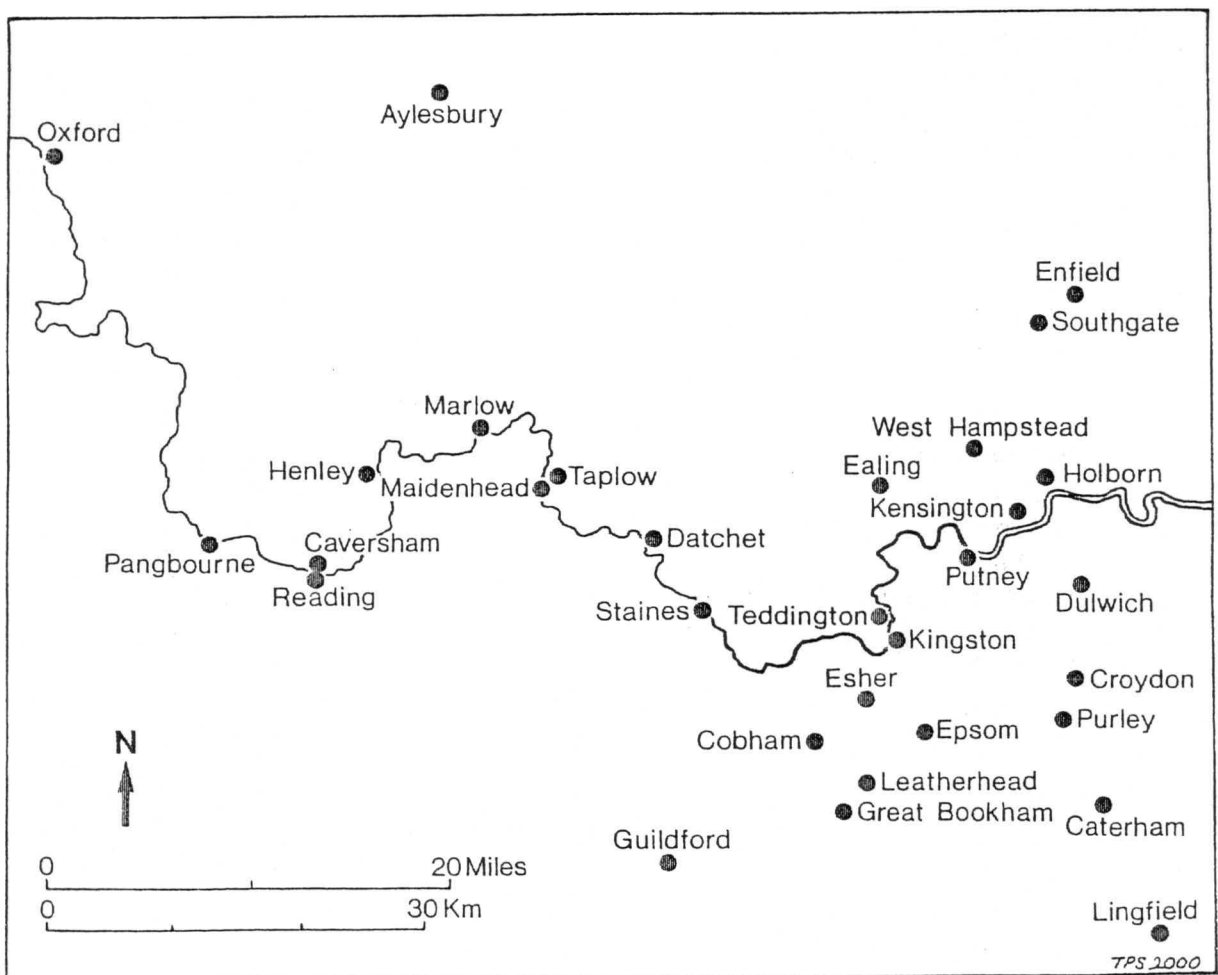


Fig. 1 Dragons and other creatures so far recorded within the area of the present paper

## Listing

**EALING, LONDON W3:** The Six bells, Uxbridge Road, Acton  
Standing dragon with spread wings on gable fronting street (reported by D. H. Kennett).

**EALING, LONDON W5:** 54 Eaton Rise, formerly 'Berridale', now St Benedict's School: TQ/176817; built pre-1894: four dragons, one on each of north, east, south, and west gables; east gable dragon has left wing missing, south gable dragon has right wing missing, possibly the result of landmine damage in World War II.

**EALING, LONDON W13:** 110 The Avenue: TQ/167817; built post-1894: one dragon, west gable; small wings.

**WEST HAMPSTEAD, LONDON NW16:** 324, 328, and 330 Finchlet Road: TQ/253857: three dragons on west gables.

### *Other London Examples:*

**DULWICH PARK:** dragon on house: *BBS Information* 48, July 1989, 2, citing I. Haasenberg, *London in Detail*, 1986;

**HOLBORN:** beavers on building in Oxford Street: *BBS Information* 56, July 1992, 9;

**KENSINGTON:** dragons on gables of houses in Lower Sloane Street and Pont Street: *BBS Information* 56, July 1992, 12;

**PUTNEY:** row of dragons on houses, visible from Tube (District Line) between Putney Bridge and East Putney stations: *BBS Information* 54, December 1991, 18; sphinxes sejant, one on each dwarf wall on roof between gables on corner of Florian Road and Debar Road: *BBS Information*, 73, February 1998, 8.

**STAINES, MIDDLESEX:** works in railway junction triangle west of station: TQ/038715: two dragons.

**TEDDINGTON, MIDDLESEX:** 108 High Street: TQ/164712: one wyvern(?).

### *Other Middlesex Examples:*

**ENFIELD:** dragons on houses at 57 Wellington Road and on public houses The Jolly Butchers and The Enfield Stores (formerly The Hop Poles): *BBS Information* 50, October 1990, 6;

**SOUTHGATE:** dragon on public house The Three Compasses, Queen Street: *BBS Information* 50, October 1990, 6;

**TWICKENHAM:** Dragon reported: *BBS Information* 48, 2.

### *Surrey Examples:*

See county list: *BBS Information* 73, February 1998, 4-8 and map, fig. 1, to the present paper.

**DATCHET, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE:** Upton Road, c.150 yards north of railway station: SU/985775: one dragon.

### *Other Buckinghamshire Examples:*

**AYLESBURY:** dragon on The Railway Hotel, Great Western Street: *BBS Information* 49, 1990, 20 and *BBS Information* 56, July 1992, 10-11;

**MARLOW:** dragon on shop on West Street: *BBS Information* 62, June 1994, 24;

**TAPLOW:** dragons on roofs in River Road: *BBS Information* 49, 1990, 19.

**PANGBOURNE, BERKSHIRE:** Threale Road, south of village: SU/635760: three dragons.

*Other Berkshire Examples:*

**CAVERSHAM:** dragon on The Griffin Inn: *BBS Information* 50, October 1990, 5;  
**MAIDENHEAD:** dragons and one goblin on houses in River Road: *BBS Information* 48, July 1989, 2; dragons on houses in Belmont and Furze Platt areas and bear on The Bear Hotel, with general notes on manufacturer: *BBS Information* 49, 1990, 19; swan on house by River Thames: *BBS Information* 50, October 1990, 6;  
**READING:** dragon from houses in Christchurch Road now in Reading Museum: *BBS Information* 50, October 1990, 5.

**HENLEY-ON-THAMES, OXFORDSHIRE:** Imperial Hotel: SU/763824: at least three dragons, one with head erect.

**HENLEY-ON-THAMES, OXFORDSHIRE:** Little White Hart Hotel: SU/763828: three dragons on front gables.

**OXFORD, OXFORDSHIRE:** 153, 155 Woodstock Road: dragon on front gable of each of two detached houses; houses 157 and 159 are almost identical but have been reroofed: possibly they too once had dragons (reported by D. H. Kennett).

**BOOK REVIEW**

Tim Tatton-Brown, *Lambeth Palace: a History of the Archbishops of Canterbury and their Houses*, with a Foreword by George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury: London: SPCK, 2000; xii + 116 pp; numerous illustrations in colour and b&w; ISBN 0-281-05347-2; price £17-50

The subtitle of this attractively produced book by BBS member Tim Tatton-Brown gives a clue to its subject matter, which is wider than the bare title *Lambeth Palace* would suggest. Tim Tatton-Brown begins his story almost exactly one thousand years ago, when Aelfric was Archbishop of Canterbury and the Danes were ravaging Kent. There is a flashback to the earliest days of the archbishopric, following St Augustine's arrival in Kent in 597. The narrative then moves forward at a lively pace, Tim Tatton-Brown's light touch enlivening the deep scholarship behind his telling of the story.

It is a story full of people, incidents, places, and, above all, buildings, with Lambeth Palace itself forming the centrepiece. Of course, for earlier periods, there is nothing about brick (though Roman bricks were re-used by Augustine for his church of SS Peter and Paul at Canterbury), but later the importance of the material comes to the fore. The question of late medieval and early Tudor patronage of brick buildings is an important one, requiring further research. Here, Tim Tatton-Brown underlines the significant contribution of a succession of Canterbury prelates. Although materials called 'brick tiles' were used for blocking a window at Lambeth in 1434, it was not until the erection of Archbishop John Morton's gatehouse tower c.1490 that brick was used there as a building material in its own right; Morton may also have been responsible, as Tim Tatton-Brown plausibly suggests, for the brick-built upper portion of Lollards' Tower at the palace. He also built in the material at Croydon in Surrey and at Ford in Kent. His successors too used brick at their palaces: Warham, for example, at Otford and Cranmer at Bekesbourne, both in Kent. In this book, Tim Tatton-Brown suggests, against earlier but unsupported claims, that Cranmer was responsible for extensive new work in brick at Lambeth. After the Reformation Archbishop Parker built, amongst other works at Lambeth, a series of brick sewers 'to cleanse and keep his house sweet'.

Later works at Lambeth include William Juxon's rebuilding of the great hall in red brick with white Portland Stone dressings (1660-63), nicely described by Samuel Pepys as 'a



new old-fashioned Hall'! The use of 'Gothic' at this period is interesting - one of those examples of what should be regarded as Gothic *Survival* rather than Gothic *Revival*. Work by Edward Blore for Archbishop Howley in 1829-33 eschewed brick in favour of Bath Stone, at least for facing. A pleasant aspect of later building history is that of the care taken by W. D. Caröe in choosing matching bricks for his repairs to Lambeth.

The book is attractively illustrated in both colour and black-and-white. Many of the line drawings were prepared specially for the book by John Atherton Bowen, and if some of these seem a little mannered - those in exaggerated three-point perspective especially - they nevertheless form a valuable supplement to the written text. There are two appendices (one transcribing a parliamentary survey of 1647, the other a reconstruction of the pre-1830 Lambeth Palace), a Foreword by Archbishop George Carey, a Select Bibliography, and a useful index. Frequent references to 'recent work' reflect the fact that the book is fully up-to-date. Much of that recent work - and not just at Lambeth - has been by Tim Tatton-Brown himself. This book, which Tim Tatton-Brown modestly offers as 'only an interim study' (p.ix), is highly recommended. It whets the appetite too for what one hopes is to come in due course!

TERENCE PAUL SMITH

### **COMMENT: TATE MODERN**

Rowan Moore and Raymund Ryan with contributions by Adrian Hardwicke and Gavin Stamp, *Building Tate Modern: Herzog & de Meuron Transforming Giles Gilbert Scott*: London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2000; 200 pp; numerous illustrations, most in colour; ISBN 1-85437-292-0; price £25

The new Tate Modern - it contains *inter alia* Carl Andre's *Equivalent VIII* (1966), a flat oblong composition of firebricks - was officially opened by Queen Elizabeth II on 11 May 2000. For the brick enthusiast interest will naturally begin with the building itself. The present contribution is both book notice and comment on the building.<sup>1</sup>

The book tells the story of the conversion of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's brick-built Bankside power station (1948-60) into the new gallery.<sup>2</sup> The competition for this work was won by Herzog & de Meuron (project architect Harry Gugger), an accomplished architectural practice based in Basel, Switzerland.<sup>3</sup> Jacques Herzog describes the task (p.125) as 'a kind of Aikido strategy where you use your enemy's strategy for your own purpose'. One takes the point, although it is clear that the architects did not really conceive of Scott's building as an *enemy*. Indeed, of the six shortlisted designs (pp.18-19), Herzog & de Meuron's envisaged the least alteration, and therefore the greatest compliment, to the original: David Chipperfield Architects wanted to demolish the tower and replace it with a central glazed box, imparting a peculiarly emasculated appearance; and other proposals (by Tadao Ando Architects & Associates, Rafael Moneo, Rem Koolhaas/OMA, and Renzo Piano Building Workshop) all involved more modification than that of Herzog & de Meuron.

Too many recent museums and galleries - in Paris, Stuttgart, Bilbao, or Columbus, Ohio, for example - do too much to promote *themselves*.<sup>4</sup> It should, rather, be the *exhibits* that hold centre stage, as Gerrit Rietveld realised in his (posthumous) Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam (with J. van Dillen and J. van Tricht, completed 1972), too often criticised for its blandness; and as Louis Kahn realised in his Yale Center for British Art at New Haven, Connecticut (1969-77). Herzog & de Meuron's task was, of course, significantly different: *Altbau* rather than *Neubau*. To it they have brought an admirable reticence - as, previously, in their smaller gallery projects - providing space for the works of art on display, their minimalist approach creating a series of very beautiful, sometimes even breathtaking, spaces with an economy of means. The 'light beam' at the top - a horizontal box of Miesian finesse counter-

poising the verticality of Scott's brick tower; the 'bay windows' - box-like glazed projections jettied out over one side of the former turbine hall; the 'grand staircase', beautifully finished in black and rising through the full height of the building; and the long western entry ramp: these are the architects' own most magical contributions. They have also added some fine new brickwork, melding with Scott's, whilst the removal of later accretions from around the outside ensures that the building engages dramatically with the ground.

The entry ramp begins outside and slopes into the basement, eliding inner and outer space in a manner much favoured by these architects. There are other telling ambiguities too: the former turbine hall - a vast space strangely reminiscent of an untitled Anselm Kiefer painting of 1978<sup>5</sup> - both is and *not* industrial archaeology (much as the original building was both utility *and* art, its central feature both functioning chimney *and* decorative tower), whilst the vitrine-like 'bay windows' are both spaces for viewing *and* spaces in which to *be* viewed, transforming visitors into temporary exhibits. The 'light beam' houses services, cafés, and viewing gallery, as well as providing light for the building. At night, it takes on a further rôle, shining through the darkness - a *beam* in both senses of the term. Some of Herzog & de Meuron's elements pick up themes from their earlier projects, notably the Railway Engine Depot Auf dem Wolf in Basel (1995) and the Studio Rémy Zaugg in Mulhouse-Pfastatt, France (1996).

In this book, both Scott's and Herzog & de Meuron's work is celebrated. Gavin Stamp (pp.177-90), whilst admitting that a power station should never have been built in post-war central London, praises the building itself for its fine architectural qualities, including its highly articulated brickwork. Rowan Moore (pp.7-12) introduces the new work and Raymund Ryan (pp.13-36) tells the story of the transformation from 'temple of power' to 'temple of art'. At pp.37-57 is a transcript of a conversation between Jacques Herzog, Sir Nicholas Serota (Director of the Tate), and Rowan Moore, held in August 1999.

Throughout, the book is lavishly illustrated, most drawings and photographs being in colour and several taking up a full page of the landscape format. It includes a chronology (from the opening of the Tate in 1897), compiled by Adrian Hardwicke, a list of basic facts, a list of donors, a full index, and a list of those works of art which appear in some of the photographs. If the text occasionally requires some of us to reach for the dictionary ('haptic', 'heteroclitic'!), it nevertheless enhances understanding and appreciation of this beautiful, now composite, building. For the brick enthusiast, the fine colour photographs of Scott's brickwork at pp.117-124 will be an especial delight. In May 1998 *Private Eye* magazine combined a sneer at modern art, the new gallery, and Southwark with a Third Form joke about the newly appointed director, Lars Nittve, being a Swede. *This* book is for the grown-ups!

Beyond the book, of course, is the building itself, a building condemned by Sir Nikolaus Pevsner before it was even built: 'BANKSIDE ... is now [1952] largely modern, commercial, and industrial, and will be even more so when the new Power Station designed by Sir Giles G. Scott will have raised its ugly head.'<sup>6</sup> In fact, even as a utilitarian structure it was a fine work, for Scott was a master of using just the right amount of decoration to soften the bulk of large-scale buildings: he had, after all, designed a huge cathedral - Liverpool Anglican - at the age of only 22. He showed this same skill at Battersea Power station (1931 onwards), at the Guinness Brewery in Park Royal (1936), and, on a smaller but still significant scale, at various of his churches.<sup>7</sup> Now, respectfully transformed by Herzog & de Meuron, the Bankside building emerges as one of London's finest of the twentieth century - as well as one of the best galleries of modern art in the world.<sup>8</sup>

TERENCE PAUL SMITH

## Notes

1. Tate Modern is open Sunday-Thursday 10.00-18.00 and Friday and Saturday 10.00-22.00 (galleries open at 10.15); admission is free, except for ticketed exhibitions. It is easily accessible, although at time of writing the new (£18m) Millennium Bridge across the Thames is unable to cope with the pedestrians for whom it is intended. Its designer, Lord Foster (*The Independent*, 29 June 2000), states that he 'would rather be over-ambitious than retire into a lily-livered past which never really existed' - whatever *that* may mean!
2. For the trials and tribulations, as well as the triumphs, of the project: K. Sabbagh, *Power into Art: Creating Tate Modern, Bankside*, London, 2000.
3. The best, and most attractive, introduction to the architects' work is the whole number of the Spanish journal *El Croquis*, 84, 1997: over 200 pages with parallel Spanish and English text; more concise is W. Wang, *Herzog & de Meuron*, Basel, Boston, and Berlin, 1998, with parallel German and English text, but unfortunately marred by the poor quality of the English translation; see also the whole number of the Swiss magazine *du*, 706, May 2000, issued (for this number only) in an English as well as a German edition, and, more briefly, *Tate*, 21, *Tate Modern Special*, 2000, 20-35. The architects' complete *œuvre* down to 1991 is available in G. Mack, *Herzog & de Meuron 1978-1988*, The Complete Works vol. 1, Basel, Boston, and Berlin, 1997, and G. Mack, *Herzog & de Meuron 1989-1991*, The Complete Works vol. 2, Basel, Boston, and Berlin, 1996; vol. 3 is due in autumn 2000; also available are: T. Ruff, *Architectures of Herzog & de Meuron: Portraits by Thomas Ruff*, New York, 1995; R. Zaugg, *Herzog & de Meuron: an Exhibition*, Ostfilden-Ruit, 1996; and T. Vischer, *Herzog & de Meuron: Zeichnungen/Drawings*, New York, 1997.
4. For a careful consideration of some contemporary museum and gallery buildings: D. Ghirardo, *Architecture after Modernism*, London, 1996, pp.69-96; for a quite wide selection from the last decade or so: F. A. Cerver, *The World of [Contemporary] Architecture*, Cologne, 2000, pp.244-99.
5. Reproduced in E. Lucie-Smith, *Movements in Art since 1945: Issues and Concepts*, 3rd edn, London, 1995, p.213, fig.190.
6. N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 2: except the Cities of London and Westminster*, Harmondsworth, 1952, p.403. After it was built, Ian Nairn, in characteristically Delphic manner, referred to it as 'another slice of unreality': I. Nairn, *Nairn's London*, Harmondsworth, 1966, p.31. For an illustration of how much architectural assessment changed in a quarter of a century see E. Harwood and A. Saint, *Exploring England's Heritage: London*, London, 1991, pp.230-31; also Bridget Cherry in B. Cherry and N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 2: South*, Harmondsworth, 1983, p.582.
7. For these and other buildings: G. Stamp, 'Giles Gilbert Scott: the Problem of "Modernism"', *Architectural Design Profiles*, 24, *Britain in the Thirties*, ed. G. Stamp, London, [1979], 72-83; for some of the churches: T. P. Smith, 'Three Brick Churches by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott', *BBS Information*, 38, February 1986, 9-13; and cf. pp.3-4 of this issue.
8. This contribution is concerned with the building, but its contents are, of course, its *raison d'être*: I. Blazwick and S. Wilson, eds, *Tate Modern: the Handbook*, London, 2000, is a well illustrated guide, though on over-reflective paper - but be prepared for some pretentiousness as well as for enlightenment! For a very different assessment of the gallery and its contents: J. Perl, 'Why Tate Modern Doesn't Work', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 August 2000. (I am grateful to David Kennett for this last reference.)

**BBS ON LINE!**

Perhaps not all members are aware that, following discussion at the 1999 AGM of the British Brick Society, a website for the Society has been set up on the Internet. The Society is grateful to Sandra Garside-Neville for doing this work. She writes that after one member had experienced difficulty getting into the site, 'I made efforts to specifically register the web pages with the major search engines (Alta Vista, Lycos, etc) where possible, and have ensured that key words are included in the meta data fields of the HTML on the home page...'. You don't need to understand all this in order to make use of the facilities that it offers. The primary material is aimed at non-members who may be interested in joining the Society. For current members there are useful links with other groups and facilities. The website address appears on the inside front cover of this issue.

## JUBILEE PLAQUES

Following the publication of a note on terracotta plaques commemorating the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897 in *BBS Information* 78, October 1999, some members have written to report further plaques commemorating Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and plaques recording other matters (fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Terracotta plaque commemorating the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, 1897 (photo: Kathleen Clarke)

Alan Cox reports a terracotta plaque set at first-floor level into the front of the eponymous Jubilee Confectioners building in the Town Street at Beamish Museum in Beamish, Co. Durham. From the guidebook to the museum it is not clear whether this is a re-erected building and if so from where in North-East England it comes. The existence of the Beamish example may, perhaps, lend some credence to the suggestion that the works at Comondale were a source for such plaques.

Lyle Perrins reports that he has noted five examples from various locations in Hertfordshire. Three are of a single design and are to be found at 2 High Street, Baldock, 152 George Street, Berkhamsted, and 4-6 James Road, Watford. A plaque of a different design has been seen at 'Les Villas du Jubilee', 4-6 Essex Road, Watford, and there is a further example on the pavilion in Dyrham Park near South Mimms.

Following publication of the Hertfordshire examples in *Hertfordshire Review*, Lyle Perrins was contacted by a Mr A. W. Sadler of Oadby, Leicestershire, who had compiled a list of forty-five such plaques for 1897 at various locations in Britain and had noted a further five plaques dating from 1907 in an article in *Out of Town*, June 1987.

David Kennett has noted a plaque in the centre of the four-bay building which now serves as the Post Office in High Street, Midhurst, Sussex. The plaque is in a light-coloured,

almost pink, terracotta, much lighter than the brown shade of the plaque seen in 1998 in Fakenham, Norfolk.

Alan Cox also reports plaques on two adjacent house at 76-78 Church Street, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire: each has a somewhat similar terracotta plaque set between the ground and first floors and showing a relief bust of King Edward VII in three-quarters profile and without a crown. The plaques bear the date 1902, the year of his coronation on 9 August; the houses themselves appear to date from this time.

David Kennett has seen a different form of commemorative plaque. On the centre of the front of the offices of a firm of solicitors on Friars Walk, Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire, there is a square plaque with the arms of the County Borough of Burton-on-Trent with the words 'United Club' on a raised bend; above the arms are the dates 1877 and 1889, the second being the probable date of construction of the two-storey building. The terracotta of this plaque is much darker than that of the Midhurst Jubilee plaque and looks darker than that of the Fakenham plaque.

The Fakenham plaque was noted in *BBS Information* 78, October 1999, together with one now on display in Darlington and thought to have been made by the Comondale Brick and Pipe Clay Company. The initial comment in *BBS Information* 51, December 1990, by Kathleen Clarke, noted three in Southampton, one in Romsey, and one in Birmingham, to which T. P. Smith added another in Nottingham.

ALAN COX  
 LYLE PERRINS  
 DAVID H. KENNETT

### **BOOK NOTICE**

Andrew Saint (introduction), *London Suburbs*, London: Merrell Holberton in association with English Heritage, 1999; 240 pp; 174 (mostly colour) plates, 32 maps, 72 b&w photographs (unnumbered) in gazetteer; ISBN 1-85894-077-X; price £25

This is a valuable historical review of the London suburb, something which changes in character and place through time, as is revealed in Andrew Saint's Introduction, entitled 'The Quality of the London Suburb'. Chapter One, by Chris Miele, reviews 'From Aristocratic Ideal to Middle-Class Idyll: 1690-1840'. In Chapter Two, Susie Barson examines 'Infinite Variety in Brick and Stucco: 1840-1914', whilst Roger Bowdler's subject in Chapter Three is 'Between the Wars: 1914-1940'. Chapter Four, by Elaine Harwood, examines the rather different conditions and ideals present in the later twentieth century under the title 'The Road to Subtopia: 1940 to the Present'. A final chapter, by Eddie Booth, looks at 'The Place of Conservation'.

The volume is completed by a gazetteer arranged by local authority, the appropriate London Borough, and – within these – by period. This is particularly useful for study of the involvement of specific architects in individual housing projects, both privately financed and built under municipal aegis. There is a short but succinct bibliography.

DAVID H. KENNETT

**RECEIVED FOR REVIEW:** Stephen Halliday, *The Great Stink of London: Sir Joseph Bazalgette and the Cleansing of the Victorian Capital*, Stroud, Glos.: Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1999. This book will be reviewed in *BBS Information* 82, February 2001, which will also contain an account of the Society's visit to the Brighton sewers.

## QUERY: UNUSUAL BRICKS NEAR CHIRK, CLWYD

BBS member Dr Elizabeth Laycock has forwarded a query from her friend, Alison Walton, together with computer-scans of four colour photographs, on which the accompanying sketches (fig. 1) are based.

Alison Walton writes: 'We have just bought a small woodland near Chirk [Clwyd]. There is a disused mineral railway line running through part of it, and along one edge it has been lined with some unusual bricks. They are ... of different shapes and sizes fitting together like a jigsaw. Some have holes in and some have writing on them.'

The bricks, which are presumably of nineteenth-century date, are orange/red in colour and appear to have a hard, smooth finish, perhaps suggesting that they are more or less local products from the important brick and terracotta manufacturing area in and around Ruabon. (For this industry see M. J. Dillon, *Bricks, Tiles, and Terracotta*, Wrexham, 1985.) Several of the bricks have shallow frog-like depressions, and it is within these that the circular holes occur, when they are present. From their disposition, irregular shapes, and varying sizes, the holes appear to have been cut by hand. A few bricks are rhomboid with joggled joints, and were presumably intended for the construction of flat arches or similar features. The writing on some of the bricks is not clear in the photographs, although one appears to have a word beginning 'MO...'. No sizes are given, but the brick with two holes in it (shown top left in fig. 1) appears to be of standard size - that is, approximately 9 × 4 inches. In places, the wall is topped by blue bull-nose engineering bricks.

Information on these bricks would be appreciated and may be sent direct to Dr Elizabeth Laycock (Sheffield Hallam University, Room 231, Owen Building, City Campus, Pond Street, Sheffield S1 1WB) and Alison Walton (e-mail: [ali@henblasconsultants.ltd.uk](mailto:ali@henblasconsultants.ltd.uk)), although an explanation for publication in these pages would also be welcome.

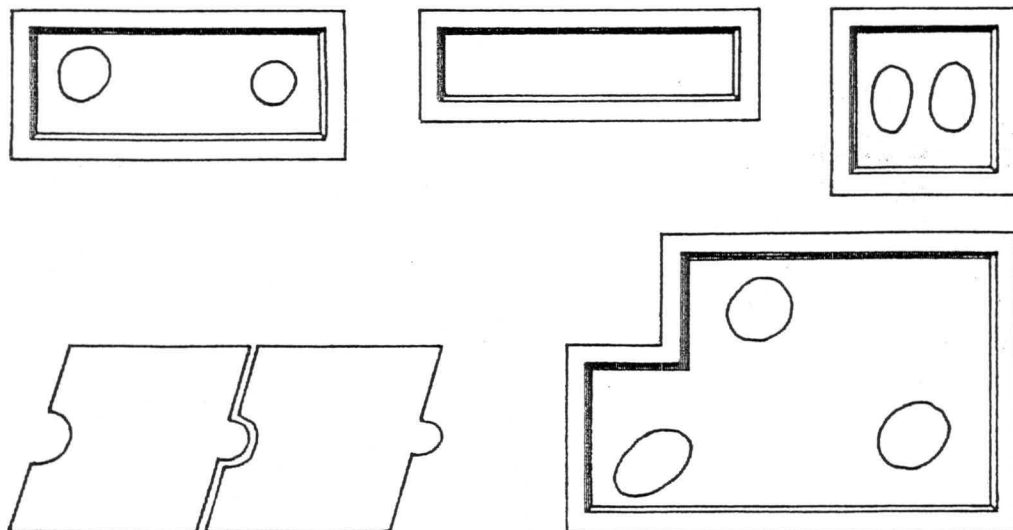


Fig. 1 Sketches (not to scale) of some of the unusual bricks near Chirk

# BRICKS "Я" US!

Terence Paul Smith

When the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) wanted to illustrate the concept of a 'primitive language' he chose the example of a group of builders calling for different items: *blocks, pillars, slabs, beams*.<sup>1</sup> These sound rather more like the components of a child's building brick set than anything likely to be found on a real building site. Perhaps, indeed, Wittgenstein had such things in mind, for it was to games that he turned when looking for an example of 'family resemblances' and it was he too who introduced into modern philosophy the concept of *language games*. The pioneer of 'stone' toy building bricks, A. D. Richter (see below) was, like Wittgenstein, an Austrian, and it is tempting to imagine the young Ludwig playing with some of Richter's *Anker* bricks. Whatever the truth of that matter, many of us first became acquainted with bricks by playing with toy examples as children. As a less serious than usual contribution to these pages perhaps it is worth reflecting on some of these products.

At their simplest the bricks are wooden cubes painted in different colours. They were a familiar item in the Regency nursery<sup>2</sup> and continued through Victorian times and well into the twentieth century, although Chief Superintendent Wycliffe, in the 1980s, found himself wondering: 'Did [children] still play with bricks? Or with computer graphics?'<sup>3</sup> A box of toy building bricks even forms a vital clue in 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', a Sherlock Holmes story of 1891/2.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes they were decorated with pictures (of animals or clowns, it might be) or with numerals or letters, either painted or transferred direct onto the bricks or printed on paper and pasted onto them. The numerals or letters helped children who were learning to count or spell, and were much valued by those puritan souls - they are again somewhat prominent in our own day - who consider that play can only really be justified if it is somehow *educational* or *improving*. Indeed, this aspect was quite explicit with Froebel blocks, invented by the German educationist Friedrich August Wilhelm Froebel, founder of the first kindergarten. Interestingly, Frank Lloyd Wright's mother bought a set for her young son at the Philadelphia Exhibition of 1879. Young Frank (1867-1959) enjoyed playing with his Froebel blocks, and it has been plausibly suggested, by William Curtis amongst others, that Wright's 'later formal strategies in design, and his belief in the universality of fundamental geometrical forms[,] may be traced in part to these early experiences.'<sup>5</sup>

The *real* fun, however, is more basic: it consists, first, in piling brick upon brick to form 'buildings', simple or fantastic; and, secondly, in toppling them to the ground with a satisfying clatter, as in Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Block City' of 1885:

What are you able to build with your blocks?  
Castles and palaces, temples and docks....

Now I have done with it, down let it go!  
All in a moment the town is laid low.  
Block upon block lying scattered and free,  
What is there left of my town by the sea?<sup>6</sup>

Both aspects are nicely captured too in a 1960 choir school story by William Mayne, in which the boys and their choir master build a high tower, and then:

'Come on,' said Dr Sunderland. 'Do a Jericho on it, Hunter.'  
'You do it, sir,' said Hunter. 'Just press this brick down hard.'

'Right,' said Dr Sunderland. 'Stand back, everybody.'...

Dr Sunderland ... pushed on the brick with his foot. The building heaved at the bottom, and the lower stories fell down. The superimposition hung in air for a moment, then leaned towards Dr Sunderland and collapsed round him, and left him standing in a rubble of bricks....

'Well done ye,' said Arle. 'Good, sir.'

A little later, Dr Sunderland and one of the boys take great pleasure in the words of the psalm for Evensong on day 28 of the month: '... how they said, Down with it, down with it, even unto the ground' (Psalm 137, verse 7).<sup>7</sup> It is, perhaps, 'politically incorrect' these days to celebrate with such relish an act of destruction, although, alternatively, one might argue that such acts are healthily cathartic - or just good harmless fun! At any rate, the elemental instinct for such demolition probably lies behind the pleasure obtained from the Best Store 'Indeterminate Façade' in the Alameda-Genoa Shopping Center at Houston, Texas, by SITE INC and James Wines (1974-5), with its broken top and its cascade of falling bricks.<sup>8</sup> 'Perhaps,' as I have observed elsewhere, 'we are all returning subliminally to our childhood ... when we enjoy these architectural jokes.'<sup>9</sup> 'An' de walls came tumblin' down!' can be appreciated even by those of us who do not share the religious beliefs behind the biblical story.

Simple cubical bricks, however, have their limitations for erecting anything like realistic buildings, and manufacturers of children's toys sought to provide additional components. These often took the form of wooden blocks, slabs, pillars, and other shapes, reminiscent of Wittgenstein's elements, though also including arches and triangles which could serve as pediments or gables. In the post-War Austerity Era, as I recall, there were cheap boxes of such bricks available, small in size, machine-sawn, decorated with brick patterns (Stretcher Bond) on one face, and unvarnished. Similar sets, though more finely finished, were pioneered in Germany around 1800 by such toy merchants as Georg Hieronymus Bestelmeier of Nuremberg.<sup>10</sup> Rather simpler were the British *Vacher's Model Bricks* of 1885, which included brick shapes, half bats, and others.<sup>11</sup>

It was in Austria that A. D. Richter, of Rudolstadt, patented his 'stone bricks' in 1880. They were known as *Anker* blocks, and were actually manufactured not from stone but from a mixture of sand, ground chalk, linseed oil, varnish, and colour, pressed in moulds and dried (but not fired) in ovens. As well as blocks and slabs, they included arches, column drums, and pinnacles, and came in various colours. They were manufactured in Britain, under the translated brand name *Anchor Blocks*, from 1882. A British version was made by Lott's Bricks Ltd of Watford, founded in 1917 and continuing down to 1965. Described on the box as 'solid stone building bricks', they were, like *Anchor Blocks*, formed from artificial stone, in this case bound with resin; doubtless it was the resin that gave them - as I recall - their very distinctive scent. They were produced in various colours. The brick shapes even had slight sunken margins! Other shapes were also available, and the set included large sections of orange card printed in black to resemble tiles from which roofs could be constructed. A book of plans and illustrations came with the set. The scale of the buildings was conveniently equivalent to that of 'O' gauge model railways. Lott's later purchased Richter's *Anchor Blocks* machinery.

If the deliberate destruction of a building could bring pleasure, as to Dr Sunderland and his pupils, the *accidental* knocking down of a nearly completed structure could be irritating and frustrating. Manufacturers therefore began to produce interlocking bricks. A system of wooden bricks with a single button and matching hole was patented in 1889. Later came *Pickabricks*, which comprised perforated wooden bricks of various rectilinear forms; small wooden pegs enabled the blocks to be joined together.

In the 1930s the Premo Rubber Company of Petersfield, Hampshire introduced interlocking rubber bricks, marketed as *Minibrix*, each with two moulded studs which pushed into holes in the lower faces and held the bricks firmly together. They were produced in brick-



shaped pieces. They were available in 'Tudor' and in 'Modern' sets, and the instruction booklets included models of actual buildings, such as the Moot Hall at Aldeburgh, Suffolk.

By the end of the 1930s, the designer Hilary Page of *Kiddicraft* introduced a series of interlocking plastic bricks in blue, green, red, white, and yellow, with plastic doors and windows and printed card roofs showing white joints on a red background. But it was the Danish firm of *Lego* who were to take this development to its peak. The founder of the firm, Ole Kirk Christiansen, began by making wooden toys, to which, in 1934, he gave the name *Lego*, derived from the Danish *leg* ('play') and *godt* ('well'). The firm moved into plastic toys in 1946 and first marketed the now familiar interlocking bricks in 1955. Developed by Christiansen's son, Godtfred Kirk Christiansen, they fix together, just as with *Kiddicraft* bricks, by means of small round projections and corresponding holes. The company was soon marketing throughout the world. In 1969 they introduced *Duplo* bricks, eight times larger than the normal *Lego* bricks and specifically aimed at very young children. Much of the appeal of the bricks probably comes from their bright colours - blue, green, red, and yellow, as well as white and black. The versatility and range of buildings possible with these extremely carefully manufactured bricks is fully exhibited at the company's *Legoland* in Denmark and now, near Windsor, in Britain.

Since *Lego* was not the first company to introduce such plastic interlocking bricks, it was on the specific method of interlocking that a patent was taken out; this has now expired in most countries. Imitations are therefore available. One which I came across fairly recently is in pallid colours with bricks which are more poorly manufactured than *Lego* and do not fit together so snugly. Other building bricks which have sought to rival *Lego*, but which have usually been only short-lived, include *Bettabilda* and *Pennybrix*, the latter brand name reflecting the fact that the bricks could be purchased individually from toy shops at one (old) penny each. More recently, *Mega Bloks* - large interlocking plastic bricks rather like *Duplo* - have been introduced as a rival to *Lego*. Like the latter, they are well made.

*Plasticine* is, of course, a very different sort of toy, but in the 1920s its manufacturers marketed, 'for the young architect and modeller', the *Harbutt's Plasticine Builder*. The kit included a set of moulds into which the *Plasticine* could be pushed and removed with a plunger, also provided, to 'make little bricks'. These could then be used for buildings.<sup>12</sup>

Fig. 1

An advertisement for *Contemporary Brickplayer* in the *Eagle* comic for 4 November 1961

**CONTEMPORARY BRICKPLAYER KIT B.**

Build the real way with Bricks & Mortar - ARCHITECT DESIGNED MODELS

**SO REAL  
—SO MODERN!**

The famous brick and mortar building kit brought bang up-to-date with Architect-designed contemporary style models. Kits include bricks, mortar, roofing, windows, doors, plans, instruction booklet. Models can be permanent or dismantled and bricks used again.

Kit A - 20/6      Kit B - 27/11  
Kit C - 53/6

**CONTEMPORARY  
BRICKPLAYER**

J. W. SPEAR & SONS LTD., Dept. (E), Enfield, Middx

At good toyshops, hobby shops and departmental stores. If your dealer cannot supply, write for address of nearest stockist to:

The system, however, which most closely resembled work on a real building site was *Brickplayer*, introduced by J. W. Spear & Sons of Enfield in 1951 and continuing down to 1964. 'Real' bricks - actually moulded from some form of plaster composition - were red in

which was used to 'mortar' the bricks together using cold water paste. This enabled a completed building to be 'demolished' by soaking in water. There were plastic doorways and windows and impressed cardboard roofs. Plans were printed in white on blue (and called 'blueprints') and there was a book of models to be made, all at 'O' gauge scale. I was bought a set as a Christmas present in 1954, and my mother insists that she was therefore responsible for my subsequent interest in bricks! In the early 1960s, *Contemporary Brickplayer*, with 'Architect-designed contemporary style models', was introduced (fig. 1).

*Lego* have now cornered much of the market, although *Mega Bloks* are also apparently doing well. It is perhaps rather a pity that other systems, giving a variety of choice, are no longer available. At least, however, *Lego* bricks, *Duplo* bricks, and *Mega Bloks* give children something creative, often *very* creative, to do with their hands other than tapping computer keys or manipulating a mouse. And - who knows? - perhaps their use may even encourage future members of the British Brick Society!

## Notes

1. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford, 1968, p.3<sup>e</sup>, §2. Wittgenstein, who initially trained as an engineer, turned briefly to architecture in 1929, when he collaborated with Paul Engelman on a very severe geometrical house for his sister, Margarethe Stonborough-Wittgenstein, in Vienna: J. Glancy, *C20th Architecture: the Structures that Shaped the Century*, London, 1998, p.158.
2. D. Hall, ed., *Memories of Childhood*, London, 1990, pp.30-31.
3. W. J. Burley, *Wycliffe and the Quiet Virgin*, London 1986, pbk edn London, 1989, p.169.
4. Originally published in *Strand Magazine* in 1891/2 and in book form in A. Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, London, 1895; there are many subsequent editions to date; I have used 9*The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, Harmondsworth, 1981, p.234 *bis*.
5. W. J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, 3rd edn, London, 1996, p.114; the Froebel blocks are also mentioned in other works, including most of the standard works on Wright and, e.g., C. Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture*, 2nd edn, London, 1985, pp.125, 126; at p.114 Jencks draws attention to, and illustrates, the mass-production housing designed at the Bauhaus by Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer in 1922-23(?) and using 'large-scale building bricks' - that is, block-shaped components. Glancy, 1998, p.354 draws attention to the Nakagin Capsule Tower in Tokyo, by Kisho Kurokawa (1972), an assembly of prefabricated 'capsules': it is 'the sort of architecture that can be made in basic Lego sets and, like Lego, its construction is simple but very clever.'
6. R. L. Stevenson, *A Child's Garden of Verses*, London, 1885, and many subsequent editions to date; I have used the Wordsworth Classics edn, Ware, 1994, pp.91-2.
7. W. Mayne, *Cathedral Wednesday*, new edn, Sevenoaks, 1984, pp.95, 97.
8. P. Restany, B. Zevi, and SITE, *SITE: Architecture as Art*, London, 1980, pp.25, 33, 42-9; this book, it may be added, follows the architects themselves in treating their works as much more than architectural *jokes*: SITE is an acronym for *Sculpture In The Environment*, their buildings are termed 'De-architecture', and they are underpinned by a rather pompous form of architectural 'philosophy': the potential of the approach is, in fact, somewhat limited and later works rather give the impression of children wondering what game to play next; *cf.* the comments in Glancy, 1998, p.289.
9. T. P. Smith, 'Brick and the World of Play', *Brick Bulletin*, Spring 1995, 6.
10. B. Harley, *Constructional Toys*, Shire Album 248, Princes Risborough, 1990, p.5; I have used this source for some other dates and details in this essay.
11. Details taken from the display in the National Museum of Childhood, Bethnal Green, London; I have used this display for some other dates and details in this essay.
12. Other building systems were very different, for example *Bayko*, patented in 1933 by Plimpton Engineering of Liverpool (and later taken over by Meccano): thin metal rods were set vertically in perforated Bakelite bases and individual Bakelite units, many impressed with a brickwork pattern, were slid between or over the rods. Other systems are considered in Harley, 1990, pp.5-12.

## REPORTS REQUESTED!

David Kennett writes: 'Saturday 9 September 2000 was the churches sponsored cycle ride day, when almost all churches, of whatever Christian denomination, and some non-Christian places of worship were open as buildings to view rather than for worship. The weekend of Saturday 16 and Sunday 17 September 2000 formed the Open Heritage Days 2000, when many interesting properties not often accessible were open to the public. Members visiting brick churches or brick buildings (or those including significant brickwork) on any of these open days are invited to send a short paragraph for inclusion in *BBS Information*, 82, February 2001.'

## BRITISH BRICK SOCIETY IN 2001

Several visits are already planned for 2001. In some cases precise dates have yet to be confirmed.

### *Spring Meeting*

#### **March 2001 (date to be confirmed)**

Warwickshire: Fenny Compton Brickworks

This meeting has to be early in the year so that the kiln may be seen: it is a fairly complete structure but disused for many years; by May it is overgrown.

### *Annual General Meeting*

#### **Saturday 10 June 2001**

King's Lynn, with visit to some of the many brick buildings in the town

### *July Meeting*

#### **Saturday 15 July 2001 (to be confirmed)**

Basingstoke area, including Basing House and offices built for a brickworks by Sir Edwin Lutyens

It is hoped that the Society will be able to organise a Northern Spring Meeting in May 2001 and a Northern Autumn Meeting in late September 2001.

### *Ideas for meetings in 2002 include:*

1. a Western Spring Meeting at Gloucester Docks, to include the canals map, on which brickworks are marked, and also to view the canal warehouses;
2. a Spring Meeting in Stratford-upon-Avon, to include Elizabeth Scott's Theatre for the Royal Shakespeare Company before its possible demolition;
3. a July Meeting in south Suffolk, to include Kentwell Hall, with an Owner's Tour, which will include the fifteenth-century portion;
4. a visit to the Mausoleum at Castle Howard, which is open for groups only, in September 2002; the building has a brick vault.

*The British Brick Society is always looking for new ideas for future meetings. Suggestions should be sent, please, to Michael Hammett, David Kennett, or Terence Smith.*