

# Book Reviews

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## Historic Architecture of the Royal Navy, An Introduction Jonathan G. Coad

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Victor Gollancz, 1983, 160pp, £15  
ISBN 0 5750 3277 4

The Royal Navy was England's primary defence from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Not only was it concerned with the defence of this country but also of its extended colonial acquisitions. With such great responsibilities and extensive jurisdiction, the Royal Navy was of necessity a highly organized and extensive organism. The architecture associated with the Royal Navy – buildings in which the fleet was built and maintained; in which goods were manufactured and produced; in which its officers were housed; in which its men received educational and religious instruction; and in which its sick and wounded were nursed – was in many ways unique, serving many special functions. The architecture of the Royal Navy developed with time to meet the specific needs of the Navy and as these needs changed so too did the function and appearance of its dockyard buildings.

This book is a welcome introduction. The author has concentrated primarily on the years 1700 to 1850 as the 'classic age of the sailing navy'. However he frequently refers to developments in Tudor times as well as changes after 1850, in order to present the reader with a short but broad historical account. The book not only discusses the architecture and buildings of the Royal Navy but also its administration and complex organisation, so as to illuminate more clearly the exact nature of the various types of buildings as well as the functions which they served. The subject is formidable in its breadth, and the author has handled the task admirably within the format and nature of the book. Intended as an introduction for the general reader, this book is the condensation

of fifteen years' research and represents a portion of a much larger manuscript. The majority of the information in the book is derived from original sources. These are not cited within the text for reference, but are grouped at the back of the book under a general heading of 'sources'. The serious scholar must refer instead to more detailed accounts of the dockyards of Portsmouth, Chatham, and Devonport, published by the author in *The Mariner's Mirror*. A subject of such immense interest and importance deserves greater exposure, and it is hoped that the results of the author's extensive research will some day appear in a more detailed and enlarged version.

The text is divided into chapters. The first discusses naval bases in general, roughly plotting their development from the 17th to the 19th century. It is supplemented with maps which are extremely informative and warrant continual reference as one reads through the entire text of the book. Each of the chapters which follow looks at a particular aspect of naval architecture, assessing the nature and historical development of particular building types as well as their related functions. Whenever possible the author discusses examples found in the various naval bases, providing the reader with a rounded historical account of the main developments.

The actual structures concerned with the building and repair of warships such as dry docks, wet docks, ship-building slips and roofs over slips are discussed in the second chapter. From a structural engineering point of view, this is one of the most interesting aspects of the subject. It is unfortunate that the size and nature of the book restricts a fuller discussion and assessment of these most interesting buildings and structures.

The author states that before the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the mid-18th century, the Royal Dockyards could be described as the industrial centres of England. This

phenomenon is accounted for by the various trades found within a naval dockyard which were associated with ship construction and maintenance as well as the manufacturing of fittings, equipment and supplies. The discussion of these trades and the buildings which were erected to serve them is of great interest. The naval roperies are of particular importance for the purpose-built structures and machinery which produced cordage from the smallest yarn to a diameter of 24 inches. The length of these roperies, 1000 feet or more, was necessarily great to produce unbroken strands of cordage.

A separate chapter deals with naval warehouses, and another with houses, churches and naval schools. The buildings erected by the Victualling Board and the Board of Ordnance are treated in separate chapters, while the final chapter discusses the origins and developments of naval hospitals.

The buildings dealt with in this book have not been accessible to the public for reasons of security. The book is all the more welcome for the enlightening introduction which it provides. It is well illustrated with reproductions of architectural drawings, engravings, and historical records.

*Edward Diestelkamp*

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**Survey of London, vol.XLI:  
South Kensington: Brompton**  
F.H.W. Sheppard, (General Editor)

The Athlone Press for the Greater  
London Council, 1983, xviii + 318pp  
108 plates, £45  
ISBN 0 485 48241 X

Brompton caters for body and spirit: the food hall at Harrods and the Oratory are the best-known buildings in the area and form two of

the most interesting case-studies in this massive volume. Frederick Faber, the founder of the Oratory, somewhat dismissively referred to the area as the 'Madeira of London', a district apart from the mainstream, devoted to the preservation of gentility. John Hughes, father of Thomas the author of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and a new resident of The Boltons, brought out the former characteristic in 1853, when he referred to 'this wild back-settlement, two miles beyond Hyde Park Corner .... I consider myself for all social purposes, as living in the country, out of the pale of the Red Book.' The latter feature was portrayed by the plea to the Postmaster General in 1937 to reconsider his plan to build a telephone exchange in The Boltons. Why, it was urged, could he not put it 'where the staff of a telephone exchange would mingle unobtrusively with the normal type of foot-passenger'?

The building of the Oratory suggests that the architectural competition could have even more pitfalls than the trustees of the National Gallery could dream of. The Fathers had developed a passion for architecture and each had his favoured plan; a competition was announced in 1878 and Alfred Waterhouse was engaged to report on the designs. His decision was not to bind the Fathers, and they indeed selected the design of Herbert Gribble which Waterhouse found lacking in dignity, 'embellished with so much extraneous ornamentation as to be almost vulgar and commonplace'.

The Fathers knew what they wanted: a church in the style of the Italian Renaissance, perhaps inspired by the idiosyncratic ideas cultivated next door at the Science and Art Department. This is an excellent account of the circumstances of the building of a major church. The analysis of the construction of Harrods department store is equally fascinating, providing information which cannot readily be found elsewhere. One point which emerges very clearly is the influence of building regulations. The greater part of the store was built in stages between 1894 to 1912 in a piecemeal process to allow business to continue. The result was that it lacked in-

ternal unity, and was divided into several structurally separate entities. This form was the product of building codes as well as pragmatic business needs, for under the London Building Acts all buildings over 250,000 cubic feet had to be subdivided with party walls and fire doors. This prevented the development of steel-framed construction and open interiors common in continental and American stores. Retailing was also confined to the ground and first floors, for the extension of shopping upwards would run into difficulties with these regulations on 'cubic extent'. The upper floors at Harrods were accordingly used as luxury flats with completely separate entrances. The result was a complex use of space: the occupants had their entrance from the street; the service stairs rose from a basement through the store; and the flats were arranged around large light-wells which also illuminated sky-lights in the showrooms on the first floor. In the interwar period, the whole of the building was brought into commercial use, and this curious mix of functions disappeared. This account of the construction of Harrods provides a reminder to the historian of the shifting definition of such apparently static forms as a department store: it can only be regretted that more attention has not been paid to the lay-out of shop floors and the social history of counters and displays. The changing architectural form of the interior of the store says as much about the social relationships of customer and staff as it does about building regulations.

Brompton was a place of residence as well as prayer and consumption, and the account of the building of The Boltons gives a most useful insight into the construction of houses for the upper middle-class. The particular interest here lies in the fact that the freeholders, the Gunters, entrusted most of the building after 1863 to one firm, Corbett and McClymont, which went bankrupt in 1878 with liabilities of almost £1.5 million. The complex financial arrangements of the firm which led to its demise; its concern for social tone and the provision of an expensive church at the centre of the estate; and its continued ownership of the houses erected are all described

in detail.

Such accounts of the construction of ordinary streets are one of the most praiseworthy features of the general editorship of F.H.W. Sheppard, who has held this post since 1954. At their best, the volumes of the Survey have produced urban history in the tradition of H.J. Dyos, explaining how fields come to be covered with bricks and mortar. Dr Sheppard retired at the end of 1982, while the present volume was in the press. His achievement over the past 30 years has been immense; he has brought to the attention of Londoners both the architectural details of their environment, and the social and economic processes which created the physical shape of the metropolis. His successor, Hermione Hobhouse, author of an excellent biography of Thomas Cubitt, is in the same mould. It can only be hoped that the successor to the Greater London Council will follow the tradition which has been so well established.

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**Victorian Architectural  
Competitions**  
Roger H. Harper

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Mansell, 1983, 416pp, £20  
ISBN 0 7201 1685 6

The popularity of the architectural competition with promoters of Victorian public works was matched only by its unpopularity amongst architects: issues from almost any year of *The Builder*, until the RIBA began to regulate competitions in the 1870s and 1880s, resound with the invective of 'One in the Field' or 'Not One of the Committee' against the motto system, or local favouritism, or the inadequate recompense for competitors'

labour. Dr Harper's index of competitions, which in fact is four indexes – arranged geographically, by competitors' and assessors' names, by building type and by date – reveals how far beyond the major, well chronicled competitions the practice extended. It suggests many interesting trends; for instance the preponderance of public, or public-spirited, works as suitable subjects (there are more competitions listed for coffee taverns than for pubs), and the slump in the number of competitions (matched by a decline in tenders advertised in *The Builder*) at the turn of the century.

We can trace the history of practices – Lockwood & Mawson of Bradford become Lockwood, Mawson & Mawson of Leeds in 1861 – and their growth: Spalding & Cross enter designs for artisans' dwellings in 1891, are invited to design public baths in 1898, and are competing for the Shoreditch Town Hall a year later. Dr Harper includes target costs and premiums awards, where available, so economic changes can also be monitored, as can the growth of new building types (or at least the growth in competitions for new building types). All good reference books encourage speculations: why did W D Caroe, between 1895 and 1897, enter three competitions, win two of them and act as assessor for the four others, and then never compete, or assess, again? How much did those veteran assessors, Ewan Christian and Alfred Waterhouse, make from their many appointments, and what influence did their appointment have on the designs submitted?

However, as Dr Harper points out, we must be cautious in the application of statistics derived from *Builder* references: exigencies of space and changing editorial policy may well explain what seem to be trends. We should also be wary of the assumption that these references present an accurate cross-section of the profession: from 1884, the *Builder* included with its tenders references to current competitions (along with their advertisements on pages which, alas, are now missing from many runs of the *Builder*) the index doesn't pick up. They sometimes contain information (on premiums, for example)

which later editorial references fail to include; more importantly, the nature of many of the projects which aren't mentioned at all in the 'text' of the *Builder* suggests that the competition system extended even further down the scale of architectural prestige than the index implies.

Most of the index's failings are the *Builder*'s: inconsistent spellings, surnames without initials or christian names, unlocated buildings (a particular problem, for example, with workhouses or lunatic asylums, overseen by county unions or boards of guardians, and often described solely by these county names). Dr Harper wrestles manfully with printers' devils and journalists' vagaries but detailed checking, even to establish whether buildings were actually erected, would obviously have been impractical. We too have work to do, to determine whether Murray (Warwick Corn Exchange, 1855), Murray of Coventry (Coventry Exchange, 1853) and Ed. Murray of Coventry (Rugby Town Hall, 1856) are one and the same. But will anyone ever discover the subject of the 1860 competition ('place and type of building not known') won by Bellamy & Hardy of Lincoln?

Two indexer's quibbles. The second names in architectural partnerships are inconsistently cross-referenced; there are references from 'Paine' and 'Woodhouse' to Smith & Paine, and Smith & Woodhouse, but no entries at 'Grundy' and 'Tweedale' for Smith & Grundy, and Smith & Tweedale; this could be quite a problem since its often unclear whether the *Builder* is referring to two separately practising (and competing) architects or to one partnership. Some place names in the index, for example Watford, Pinner and Northwood, appear under the heading London, for no apparent reason; others (Ealing, Bromley) are under their own names; many (Feltham, Egham, Edmonton) are present in both these forms, with different references at each. I feel that at least we should have been warned of this.

A valuable index, however, that should stimulate research into the quotidian history of the profession: one longs for an index to tenders in the *Builder* that would do the same

for the trade.

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### Building Control: National Legislation and the Introduction of Local Bye-Laws in Victorian England

S. Martin Gaskell

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Bedford Square Press (British Association for Local History, National Statutes and the Local Community series), 1983, 64pp, £3.95  
ISBN 0 7199 1100 1

The history of building legislation has been the subject of many published works varying from the general to the particular. Some have studied the role of building regulations and their effect on the environment within the wider contexts of building history or urban history. Others have made a study of building control in a particular locality such as London. Now S. Martin Gaskell has produced *Building Control*, a booklet which examines the evolution and establishment of building by-laws as the means of controlling building and urban development.

The introduction to the booklet states that it concentrates on the period 1840 to 1880 because 'it was in this relatively short period that rudimentary regulations were shown to be inadequate'. Gaskell adds that it was not his concern to examine in detail the content of national or local codes or to make comparisons between standards applied in different localities. The aim of the booklet is rather to 'analyse the emergence of the legal and administrative system under which effec-

tive and extensive controls were made enforceable'.

In an attempt to make this analysis of the emergence of effective controls, the booklet is divided into three major sections: (1) Building and Sanitary Problems in Early Victorian England, (11) The Local Government Act 1858 and the First Model By-Laws, and (111) The Organisation of Building Controls. The first section examines the response of local and national government to the social and sanitary problems of early Victorian England prior to the passing of the Local Government Act of 1858. Section (11) examines the legislation of 1858 and the first set of model by-laws prepared by central government. The third section involves a closer examination of four towns; Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Sheffield. These towns are made the subject of local studies in order to look at the effect of legislative and administrative changes on specific authorities which reflected a range of local problems and traditions.

The booklet does not attempt to be all-embracing or go to the other extreme of becoming a catalogue of bureaucratic detail or a compendium of local by-laws. Gaskell sets out to show that the emergence of effective building controls was a slow and piecemeal process of growth, the result of a series of practical responses to a developing situation. At the same time, however, the appropriate balance had to be kept between what was local custom or practice and central government intervention. The booklet clearly spells out the importance of the Local Government Act of 1858, the Public Health Act of 1875 and the Model By-Laws of 1877. It also shows how the towns used for the local studies produced their own by-laws which amended the stringency of government models where they felt the use of the latter would lead to a 'considerable sacrifice of property'.

The major contribution of this booklet is the bringing together of so much information concerning the development of local by-laws for building control purposes. This information has been drawn from many sources and put

into an easy-to-read and clearly understandable form. Gaskell sticks to the main theme well and does not become sidetracked into long discussions on well worn themes such as jerry-building or the monotony of by-law housing. There is an excellent compilation of references which provide a wealth of information for any reader wishing to either read around the subject or refer to specific sources. The illustrations are clear, informative and well presented although photographs are not referred to in the text. The table of legislation at the beginning of the booklet is a useful 'signpost' to help the reader find his way through the legislative processes.

Perhaps the only omission is in the area of enforcement of the local by-laws, especially in the selected towns after 1870. There is a wealth of evidence in the minutes of the committee meetings held by plans committees or building committees which describe in detail how local regulations were enforced. The minutes show how builders and other developers were dealt with when they carried out work which was not in accordance with the regulations then in force.

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**Dictionary of Business  
Biography. A Biographical  
Dictionary of Business  
Leaders Active in Britain in  
the Period 1860-1980.**

**Volume I, A-C**  
David J. Jeremy (ed.)

Butterworths, 1984, xxxi + 878pp,  
illus., £65

ISBN 0 406 27341 3

This is the first of a series which will even-

tually consist of five large volumes. Dr Jeremy and his colleagues in the Business History Unit at the London School of Economics are to be congratulated in getting this volume into print so soon after the inception of the project in 1980. It is, however, strange that such an obviously useful work of reference has not been published before, for it is now exactly fifty years since the Business Archives Council was founded at the self-same L.S.E., and twelve years since the first volume of the *Dictionary of Labour Biography* appeared. One reason for this late start, however, may have been some doubts about the validity of the biographical approach – with its connotations of great men and great deeds – to business history. It may have been some lingering appreciation of those doubts which has led the Business History Unit to look upon the *Dictionary* as something more than a collection of biographies of business leaders, and to see it as playing an important part in the analysis of entrepreneurship and its impact on Britain's economic performance. With this aim in view a computerised data bank is being compiled from information provided by the numerous biographers and this is intended to be used to study the characteristics of British entrepreneurs as a group. One reason, we are told, why 1860 has been taken as a starting point is that historians claim to have noticed a failure of entrepreneurial skill shortly after that date. These considerations which surround the project do give rise to some doubts, however, without at all impugning the usefulness of the work as a whole, the high quality of most of the entries, or the splendid editing job that has been done.

If the date 1860 is one that has an overriding historical importance and has not been chosen simply to make the number of entries manageable, it does have some disadvantages. A good many entries are about individuals who inherited their businesses (that is, they were second or third generation entrepreneurs after the industrial revolution) and although there is invariably some information about their forebears it is frequently not enough to make comparisons about their

respective drive and abilities. Conversely one would like to have more information about succeeding generations. Sir Basil Bartlett's biography of his grandfather, Sir Herbert Bartlett, the builder, is first rate in itself, but he does rather leave the reader hanging when he says the 'The business passed to his second son, Robert Dudley Bartlett, whose abilities did not match his aspirations and under him the firm of Perry & Co in 1926 went bankrupt.' Inevitably most of the subjects of the biographies here were undoubted successes, and for a study of entrepreneurship in general one would also like to know more about those who failed. One also has some doubts about the proposed data bank, because it is patently obvious from many of the entries that the facts and figures about success and failure are often simply not available.

These misgivings only arise because of the very high standard which has been set for the work. As a collection of biographies the *Dictionary* makes fascinating reading and is an absolutely indispensable work of reference. The number of entries relating to the construction industry in this volume alone should make that clear. They include biographies of Sir John Aird; Sir Edwin Airey, the pioneer of prefabricated housing; Sir Benjamin Baker, the civil engineer; William Henry Barlow, civil engineer; Sir John Wolfe Barry; Sir Herbert Bartlett; Sir George Mowlem Burt; Sir James Carmichael; John Howard Colls; Sir Richard Costain; Sir Francis Nicholas Cowlin; Francis Henry Crittall; and of several persons on the periphery of construction history such as Jabez Balfour, the founder of the ill-starred Liberator Building Society, Jack Cotton, the property developer, and many others. An indication of a few of the other persons featured may perhaps give some idea of the volume's fascination. They include famous individuals such as Horatio Bottomley, Sir Ernest Cassel (rightly one of the longest entries) or Joseph Chamberlain (a restrained entry which confines itself principally to his business activities), and those whose names have become synonymous with products or companies such as Herbert Austin, Arthur William Barratt, Sir Alfred

Bird (of Bird's custard), Jesse Boot (the chemist), Wilberforce Bryant, Sir Montague Burton, Billy Butlin, George and Laurence Cadbury, and Jeremiah James Colman. Many of the entries are written by leading academics, others by descendants of the individuals themselves or historians, both official and unofficial, of their companies, and several by members of the Business History Unit itself. One of this reviewer's particular favourites is the splendidly acerbic biography of the speculator Jack Cotton by Richard Davenport-Hines.

The late arrival of this *Dictionary* on the reference scene has one particular advantage in that modern printing methods have enabled illustrations to be incorporated easily and cheaply. These include not only portraits of most of the subjects but also photographs of factories, products and processes. The volume is printed on fine-quality, thick paper, as befits a work which will be handled a great deal, in a format that is very lavish indeed with wide margins and type that is easy on the eye. Butterworths are to be congratulated both for undertaking the publication of this enterprise in the first place and for the care they have bestowed on the volume's production.

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