

Three centuries of ingenuity

Medieval Church Window Tracery in England

Stephen Hart, *The Boydell Press*, 2010, 154pp, 68 b&w, 20 colour plates, ISBN 978 1 843 835332, £45

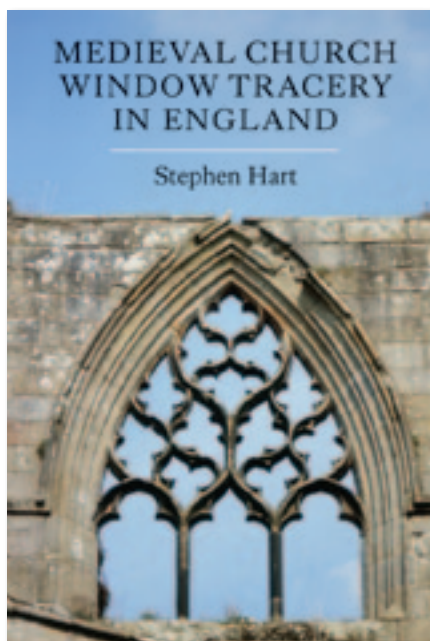
The last important books on the design of window tracery were written nearly 120 years ago. Edmund Sharpe's *Rise and Progress of Decorated Window Tracery* (1849) and EA Freeman's *Essay on the Origin and Development of Window Tracery in England* (1851) were scholarly expositions, published at a time when the understanding of medieval architecture was the subject of intense professional and public interest. Knowing your dagger from your mouchette had then an almost moral imperative.

Sharpe gave the architectural profession a magnificent series of deep-toned wood engravings from which to borrow ideas, and Freeman's essay, written initially without knowledge of Sharpe's work, extended the analysis into the perpendicular style. Today's readership is slightly different but there is a clear need for an up-to-date work to set us on the right path and explain the methodical design procedures through which the rule and the compass could produce work of such serpentine complexity.

Hart's book is essentially an essay, one that covers more than three centuries. It is profusely illustrated with good photographs of examples drawn mainly from the central part of the limestone belt and from East Anglia. For anyone interested in medieval architecture the plates, which show upwards of 260 examples, make it a useful addition to the library.

The author's approach is exclusively morphological. He uses windows, both ambitious and humble, to demonstrate the range of tracery design, to suggest some of the processes through which it evolved and to establish some typological groupings. He makes clear at the outset, however, his intention to set aside the windows of the great cathedrals in order to concentrate on the dissemination of design within smaller churches, where he sees a continuous thread of development 'seemingly independent from major sources'.

It is true that one can learn much



from the windows of a well-chosen group of provincial parish churches and that there are certain areas – notably 14th-century Lincolnshire – where the windows are not exceeded in invention and elegance by those of the cathedrals and abbeys. But it has to be said that in the most important and exciting phase of tracery design, from c1250 to c1330, the pace was set by the king's works, and developed in the cathedrals, palaces, private chapels and abbey churches of courtiers. Likewise the early evolution of the various foiled piercings that were later to reappear in the skeletons of bar tracery occurred in the greater buildings of the earlier 13th century.

The book uses dates derived from Pevsner and others, and asserts a general absence of documentary evidence for 'the architecturally fertile decade immediately before and after the beginning of the fourteenth century'. If that is true of many of the windows illustrated, there are comparable and more important windows in the greater buildings where the dates are well known or have been established in recent years.

Medieval studies are moving away from the analysis of form, and into the interpretation of meaning and context. At the same time, archaeological analysis of standing masonry has been brought to new heights of forensic observation. What is needed now is an equally searching and detailed exposition of the early history and development of tracery, one that connects it properly

to its architectural context and deals effectively with its relationships to the allied arts, notably stained glass.

In the meantime anyone interested in medieval windows will enjoy the great range of examples put forward and discussed by Hart, whose book is a timely reminder of the ingenuity and creativity of England's medieval masons. *John Maddison, artist and architectural historian*

Beyond the lists

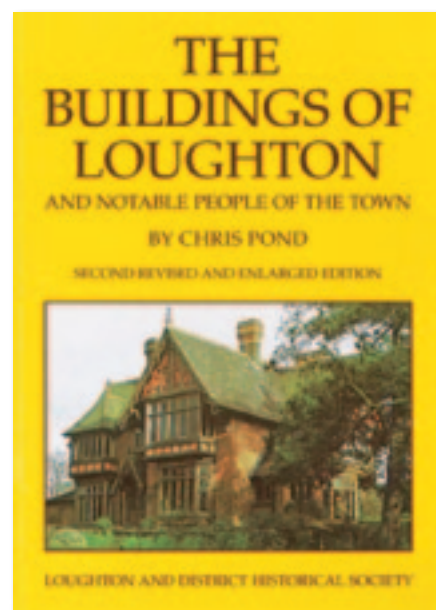
The Buildings of Loughton

Chris Pond, *Loughton and District Historical Society*, 2nd revised and enlarged edition, 2010, 112 pp, b&w ills, paperback ISBN 978 1 905269 11 2, £7.50

Living, Leisure and Law: eight building types in England, 1800-1914

Edited by Geoff Brandwood, *Spire Books, Reading and the Victorian Society with English Heritage*, 2010, pp 172, b&w ills, paperback ISBN 978 1 904965 27 5, £17.50

Loughton, Essex, is a town in the south-west corner of the county and a suburb of outer London, soon reached as you come out in this direction. Only lightly sprinkled with listed buildings, it was largely overlooked in all early guide books until the advent of the new Bettley and Pevsner *Buildings of Essex* in 2007. There are currently only three conservation areas but it is hoped to add five further ones at



some future date, as yet unknown.

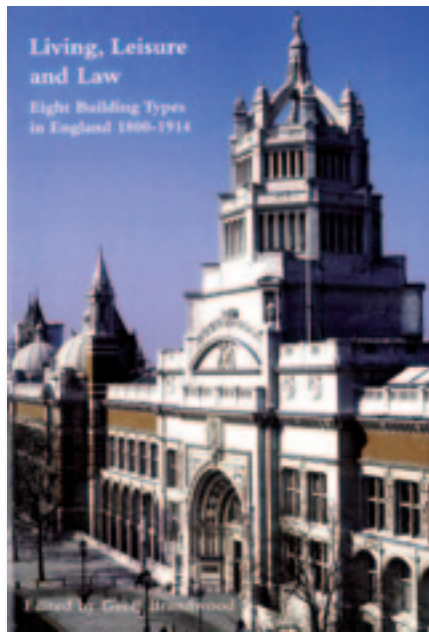
In the past it was too far from Soho and Chelsea for most bohemians (the exception being Epstein, the sculptor, who lived here from 1921 to 1950) but it was attractive to a wealthy and dignified middle class, especially to those who did not have to hurry too quickly to their desks in the City. Much of Loughton today is therefore a quite spacious area of 19th and early 20th century houses, banks, libraries, schools and so on, but with little protection derived from such planning measures as PPS5. It is an area whose history and character deserve research and recording as the prelude to meaningful conservation.

Chris Pond first brought out his booklet in 2003. Its success was such that a new edition has been produced which includes fresh material coming from the findings of research attracted to the original nucleus. There are updates on various sites to record developments either favourable or otherwise in environmental terms. About 352 buildings are covered (virtually all of them unreached by earlier authors except Bettley in 2007, who could make use of the 2003 material). The author believes this to be a higher proportion of the total stock of about 10,000 sites than comparable studies of Hampstead Garden Suburb or Bournville.

By no means dull, the booklet is full of good buildings, architects, builders and a catalogue of fascinating, often eccentric, inhabitants from the recent past.

It records a bygone age when, for instance, 'temperance catering' was laid on for the droves of Sunday merry-makers. They came out from inner London to enjoy a day's leisure in Epping Forest, and needed to be lured away and into the woods out of the numerous pubs which lined the roads linking the station with the nearby greenery.

Temperance provides the first essay of eight in the collection put together under Geoff Brandwood's editorship in *Living, Leisure and Law*. Other themes, most of which are relatively new to the pages of architectural history, include police stations, post offices, purpose-built lodgings in the city for working women, boathouses and motor houses. The whole of England is covered. Those with interests in



suburbia will pick out the research and footnoted references on such topics as motor houses. These are structures that usually stand at some distance from the outer boundaries of listing or Pevsner, but they can be immensely valuable in the creation of scenery and openness, and can contribute to the setting of a variety of sites.

With local lists currently under discussion nationally together with localism, and with the full implications of PPS5 still being tested, both Pond's booklet and Brandwood's volume are well worth consulting. Each, in its own way, points to new fields of knowledge, and to research techniques that can and should be applied far more widely.

*Graham Tite, conservation officer,
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council*

**Newcastle and Gateshead:
Pevsner architectural guide**

Grace McCombie, Yale University Press, 2010, 308pp, 183 colour ills, paperback, ISBN 978 0 300126 64 8, £9.99

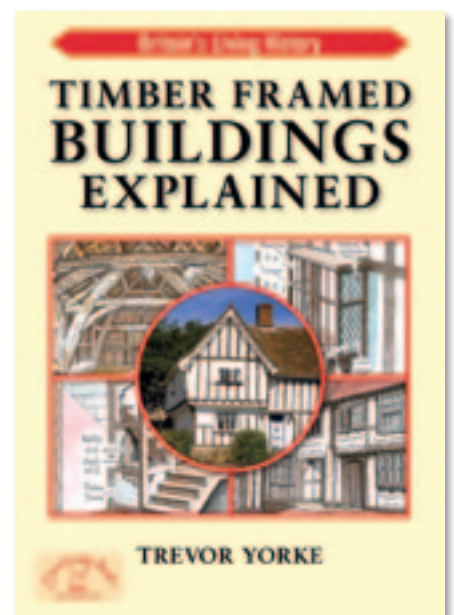
Hull: Pevsner architectural guide

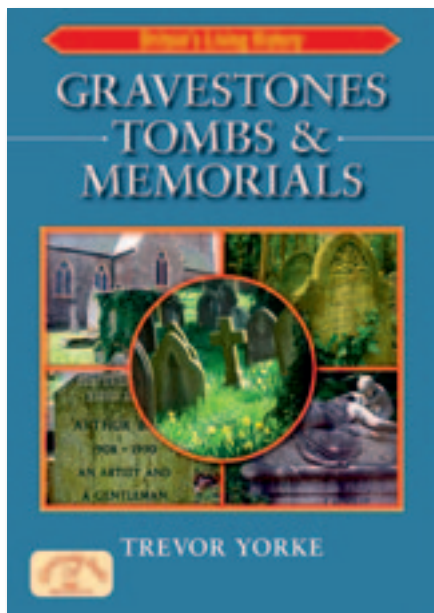
David and Susan Neave, Yale University Press, 2010, 254pp, 176 colour ills, paperback, ISBN 978 0 300141 72 6, £12.50

The two latest Pevsner city guides feature northern cities of very differing character, though both have important histories as ports. In the first, Newcastle and Gateshead are considered alongside one another, and appropriate prominence is given to the regeneration of Grainger Town as well as the spectacular new developments on the quaysides. Among the outer areas featured are the Byker Estate and Jesmond, and there are excursions to Jarrow and Tynemouth Priory. Hull is undeservedly less well known and the rich heritage of the city will come as a revelation to those who have not visited. Both volumes are written by local experts with critical understanding, are beautifully illustrated, and will enhance any visit to these great cities.

Timber Framed Buildings Explained

Trevor Yorke, Countryside Books, 2010, 80pp, many colour and b&w ills, paperback, ISBN 978 1 846742 20 0, £6.99





Gravestones, Tombs and Memorials

Trevor Yorke, *Countryside Books*, 2010, 64pp, many b&w ills, paperback, ISBN 978 1 846742 02 6, £5.99

The 1940s and 1950s House Explained: from blackout to sunlight

Trevor Yorke, *Countryside Books*, 2010, 80pp, colour ills, ISBN 978 1 846742 21 7, £6.99

The resourceful Trevor Yorke has produced three more concise volumes in the Living History series. While lacking the informed analysis of Richard Harris, whose little book on timber-framed buildings in the Shire series remains in print after more than 30 years, Yorke succeeds in covering a large range of timber-framing styles and techniques, illustrating many with his own sensitive drawings. The volume on gravestones is a similarly accessible

way into the subject, but will not add much to the knowledge of those who spend their leisure time in ancient churchyards. His treatment of the 1940s and 50s house is more original. The new post-war spirit was driven by optimism for the future, and by using full colour illustrations throughout, Yorke captures the popularity for bright and colourful interior decor that characterises this period.

The Toll-houses of North Devon

Tim Jenkinson and Patrick Taylor, *Polystar Press*, 2010, 120pp, b&w ills, ISBN 978 1 907154 03 4, £8.95

A further volume in the series that tells the story of the turnpike roads in the south of England, with a useful gazetteer of surviving toll houses.

Manningham: character and diversity in a Bradford suburb

Simon Taylor and Kathryn Gibson, *English Heritage*, 2010, 107pp and DVD, 100 colour ills, paperback, ISBN 978 1 848020 30 6, £9.99

Following the English Heritage Informed Conservation series volume on Anfield Breckfield in Liverpool (reviewed in *Context* 108), this survey of Manningham deals with the built heritage and lives of the inhabitants of a Victorian suburb. Civic pride comes across as a strong factor that inspired all sectors of society, but what makes this sensitively written account particularly evocative is the inclusion of a DVD that captures the views and memories of today's residents, and their hopes for the future.

The Lye and Woolescote Cemetery and Chapels

Jean Weston and Marlene Price, *West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust*, 2010, 82pp, colour ills, ISBN 978 0 956504 10 4, £9.99

The Lye and Woolescote Cemetery in the Black Country, which opened in 1879, is typical of many Victorian burial sites in its history of growth and decline. Favoured resting place of local industrialists, religious leaders and politicians, with its spacious layout, tree-lined pathways and proud cemetery chapel, the cemetery is an oasis on the outskirts of Stourbridge. But the chapel is closed and empty, while gravestones have become unstable and have been vandalised. Happily the West Midlands historic buildings trust has become involved, and is seeking a use as community and commercial offices. The book, which tells the story of the cemetery and the

lives of people of the area, will raise funds for the refurbishment project.

Tin Tabernacles Postcard Album

Ian Smith, *Camrose*, 2010, 154pp, b&w ills, ISBN 978 0 956613 20 2, £12.99

Corrugated iron churches and chapels hold an enduring fascination, and are becoming an increasingly endangered species. Ian Smith, who is more obsessed with them than anyone, has followed up his earlier book *Tin Tabernacles* (reviewed in *Context* September 2004), with this enjoyable volume of picture postcards. It includes tin tabernacles from outside and in, tin tabernacles from fire and collapsing, tin tabernacles as a background to religious, military and community gatherings, and tin tabernacles overseas. Intended as temporary structures and with few likely to have long life outside the confines of heritage museums, it is encouraging to see the ingenuity of their builders and the place they held within their local communities.

Live or Let Die: buildings at risk

SAVE Britain's Heritage, 2010, 176pp, colour ills, ISBN 978 0 905978 63 5, £15.00 (£13 for members) + postage from *SAVE Britain's Heritage*, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ

Under a typically snappy title, *SAVE* issues its latest catalogue of buildings in need of rescue. As usual there is a look back to recent successes as well as scandals. A feature on pubs demonstrates that this is a particularly threatened building type, while the main text and images featuring buildings of all types show why heritage at risk must remain top of the list for the conservation sector.

