

Pugin Society

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The Life and Works of Edward Welby Pugin Architect, 1834-75 **by Gerard Hyland (The Pugin Society, £35)**

When Catriona Blaker asked me if I would write this review, I must say I blanched somewhat at the prospect. Gerard's book had been delivered by Catriona to the office at St Augustine's, Ramsgate which I occupy, and I had spent some enjoyable idle moments leafing through it, looking at the beautiful photographs and falling into what used to be called a 'brown study'. After all, the world of Edward Pugin, a world of revived Catholic faith, and the beautiful buildings he created to express that faith, is no longer our world. But I knew that I would have to rouse myself from this Romantic reverie if I were to write the review: gazing at the pictures and occasionally reading the captions would not do. I would have to get to grips with the text and, in particular, the organisational principles of this catalogue raisonné.

I use the French epithet deliberately because I think it captures better than the more familiar 'gazetteer', the systematic – the raisonné or logical - way Gerard has gone about sorting out the material of this study. Certainly, the book is packed with facts, but it is much more than a source of information about Edward's life and work. In his Foreword, Roderick O'Donnell makes this point and, recalling Gerard's academic career as a theoretical physicist, declares that he 'has brought a scientific rigour to his task, marshalling the biography, assessing the buildings, and defining the style.' I shall use these three categories as the headings for what I have to say about Gerard's book in this review.

Marshalling the Biography

The biographical sketch which forms chapter 1 is full of interest. It begins with Pugin pere looking forward to his son's birth in a letter to his Salisbury friend William Osmund: 'a few weeks will I expect bring a little Gothic boy or girl'. The mistake about his mother's name (Button not Burton) is corrected. I did not know that he was baptized twice, once in the parish church – he was born in 1834 the year before his father became a Catholic – and again thirteen years later by Fr Costigan, the Catholic parish priest from Margate. But then before the age of ecumenism the Catholic Church did not recognise Anglican baptisms. He was known as 'Teddy' in his family and educated at home where his father 'imbued him with some of that consummate love of art which completely filled his own mind', as the obituary in the Thanet Advertiser put it. Gerard tells the story of his early collaboration with his father so that he was able to take the baton from him at his death and complete the buildings he had begun. This precocity was recognised by his being made a Knight of the Order of St Sylvester at 24 specifically for his design for the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Dadizele near Bruges which is on my to-see list once we can travel freely again. Election to the RIBA followed four years later, and his partnership with George Ashlin (married to Edward's sister Mary) flourished, producing many churches in Ireland, an aspect of Edward's work which is perhaps not well-known.

In his character, as Gerard notes quoting contemporary descriptions, Edward was very like his father, but there were significant differences in their life-styles: Edward liked to dress fashionably and was fond of Turkish bathing. He enjoyed entertaining at The Grange and was involved in the affairs of Ramsgate through his many building projects there as well as his captaincy of the local army volunteer corps. He also seems to have made more money than his father, 'around £40,000 (about £2.5 million today)' by the mid-1860s. However, like his father he came into conflict with a Cardinal (Manning not Wiseman) who gave the commission for Westminster Cathedral to his own nephew (Henry Clutton). Other disappointments followed, especially not



Above and below: St Anne's, Rock Ferry, Wirral, Merseyside



being invited to compete for the design of the new Law Courts in the Strand, which, Gerard says, ‘seems to have triggered a dramatic transformation of his character, demeanour and behaviour.’ Thus began the period of his life in which he became better known as a litigant than an architect. Nevertheless, like his father, he never gave up working and continued to produce notable designs for churches and secular buildings. He lived just a year longer than his father. His death, again like his father’s, was, at the very least, connected to the use and probable abuse of Victorian medication. But the villain in Edward’s case was not mercury but chloral hydrate which caused the final fatal stroke.

Assessing the Buildings

This is the meat of Gerard’s book. Edward’s buildings are categorized under eight headings, the first and by far the largest being ‘A. Catholic Places of Worship’. Gerard tells us that ‘there are 118 authenticated executed designs for Catholic places of worship made up of 3 cathedrals (2 in England, 1 in Ireland) 3 abbey churches, 77 parish churches (including those served by Religious Orders and Congregations) and 35 chapels of various kinds.’ He notes the irony that the absence of photographs for many of these buildings has resulted in a much better outcome for the historian since there is a fuller written analysis of the architectural detail than would be the case if photographs had been taken.

However, photographs are certainly not absent from Gerard’s book. There are many fine photographs as well as reproductions of contemporary drawings of Edward’s buildings in it; the Pugin Society and particularly designer Rob Norridge, are to be congratulated on the superb quality of both. Gerard classifies the churches in the conventional way – the way that we owe to Thomas Rickman as Rosemary Hill has reminded us recently in *Time’s Witness* – writing of Edward’s churches that ‘the vast majority... are in the Early Decorated (Geometrical), with a number of instances of Early English... but never any Perpendicular.’ But he footnotes the latter denial as follows: ‘The closest EW Pugin’s tracery ever comes to Perpendicular is in the upper parts of the East and West windows Oulton Abbey Church.’ Here we see the true scholarly mind at work, not content with generalisations, but always seeking to test them against empirical observation. The same attention to detail is apparent throughout this central section of the book. And not just in the book. Gerard has issued a 290 page Supplement containing material which could not be included in the book for reasons of space, but which can be consulted on the website of the Pugin Society, under ‘society publications. The Appendices of this supplement are fascinating and include an inventory with photos of bell-cote, spire and tower designs, as well as brief accounts of all the court cases in which Edward was involved. With the Supplement, Gerard is clearly aiming for comprehensiveness of coverage and, although the label ‘definitive’ should not be bandied about in scholarly circles, I cannot myself see how the two together, book and Supplement, can be described in any other way.

Defining the Style

I have already alluded to this aspect of Gerard’s book, but there is much more to it than identifying the Gothic styles which Edward adopted. As he makes clear, his engagement with Gothic was far from that of a slavish copyist; it was rather the springboard for the exercise of own creative genius. Gerard characterizes it as follows: ‘the larger churches are instantly recognizable from their physical assertiveness, achieved through a persistent emphasis on the vertical element of their design which is accentuated by the acuteness of the roof pitch and often by a dominant W gable bell-cote or an off-axis tower supporting a spire.’ This is a pithy description of the visual impact of Edward’s work, but Gerard also analyses the historical context in which it emerged. And that means comparing and contrasting his genius with that of the father with whom he collaborated from such an early age. On this subject, Gerard follows the line of argument he developed in his important study *Beyond Puginism* about the desire of his father at the end of his life to produce Gothic churches which would be sympathetic to the celebration of the Tridentine Mass and its associated devotions such as Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. It became a reality in the churches built by his eldest son during what Gerard identifies as ‘EW Pugin’s Phase II (1859-69) when the structural distinction between nave and chancel (which characterized most of the churches of Phase I, (1852-58) was abandoned, and the chancel (which had assumed such paramount importance and significance in his father’s churches) replaced by a sanctuary that is essentially an extension of the nave under the same roof-line with no demarcation between them, either interiorly or exteriorly; in a sense, the whole church became a chancel, thereby achieving a total architectural



Basilica of The Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, in Dadizele, Belgium

integration of worshippers and officiating clergy.’ In this sentence, we can see the style – and the reason for it – defined.

I hope the reader of this review gets some sense of the truly ground-breaking nature of Gerard’s scholarship. I have only scratched the surface of the massive amount of the detail Gerard has unearthed about his subject. However, I have tried to highlight the logical, indeed *raisonné*, way it is organised and presented so that, with a little effort, one which I am pleased to have been compelled to have made in order to write this review, the reader is enabled to appreciate fully the greatness of EW Pugin as an architect, thus fulfilling the author’s intention in compiling this magnificent study. I think I can make that observation without fear of contradiction from the author, because, as well as the empirical and rational mind evidenced throughout this volume, Gerard’s love of Edward’s oeuvre is readily apparent in its pages. The affair began when, he tells us when, as a young altar server at his parish church of St Anne’s, Rock Ferry (Edward’s final church commission), he was ‘overawed by the beauty of St Anne’s chancel, the crowning glory of which is its spectacular High altar and reredos, features of which I remember trying to replicate at home (rather futilely) with wooden toy blocks’. It continued when, in 1966, the author was appointed organist at Holy Cross, another of Edward’s Liverpool churches, and seems to have flowered during his professional life which took him to Warwickshire where, he says, ‘I found myself in the vicinity of numerous other of his churches: it was as though he was following me around’.

The book reviewed here might be considered the fruit of that long, personal, and emotional, attachment to Edward’s buildings movingly symbolised by his discovery in the course of his researches ‘that even my infant school in Rock Ferry had been designed by him!’ How appropriate then that the final Appendix of the book is devoted to a gazetteer of St Anne’s, Rock Ferry comprising, *inter alia*, a gallery of beautiful photographs of the church, including its sumptuous interior. Having made the intellectual effort required to write this review, I shall now return to gazing at them – and all the other lovely images in this book - in the frame of mind with which I began it. Back to the poignant pleasures of the ‘brown study’!

Fr Simon Heans

To purchase this book go to www.thepuginsociety.co.uk

Pugin Week Ramsgate

This will be from 8th to 14th September. Events are yet to be finalised, but look at the Friends of St Augustine website (www.augustine-pugin.org.uk), or Pugin Society Twitter, a little nearer the time. Queries about the programme can be emailed to office@augustineshrine.co.uk. Telephone contact is 01843 606756.

**Don’t be shy.
Send your contributions for the e-newsletter to
jpelliott@btinternet.com**

**Pevsner Architectural Guides: funding editor Sir Nikolaus Pevsner.
Buildings of England: Wiltshire
A comparison of the Pugin references in the 1963 and 2021 editions**

Even though he lived in the county for a few years and built his own house there, Wiltshire does not provide an abundant source of Pugin designs. In the Introduction to the 1963 edition by Bridget Cherry there is little mention of Pugin except to say that he built St Marie's Grange, where he also designed some stained glass and that he used the stonemason William Osmond as one of his craftsmen. He fares somewhat better in the new edition, revised by Julian Orbach, which comments upon Pugin's wider influence and says that Allington church, which it claims was designed by Pugin's friend Frederick Fisher, was an example of Pugin's influence being felt in the 1840s; he also reports on how the design for the church was taken to Newfoundland by the curate the Rev William Grey.

The real finds in the new Pevsner are the Pugin attribution of a stained glass window at St Martin, Bremhill in 1864 whereas the old Pevsner simply attributes the window to Hardman, and the reproduction of a drawing of the bell-turrets of St Peter and St Nicholas, Biddestone by Pugin in 1840. The former bell-turret survives but the latter is now a garden ornament in Castle Combe.

The main Pugin designed ecclesiastical building in Salisbury is St Osmund's church which was built in 1847-8, though much altered later. The old Pevsner describes the church as 'of no architectural interest inside or out', while the new edition refers to it as 'plain rather than inspiring'.

Pugin lives near Salisbury for a time and built his own house there in 1835 – St Marie's Grange. The Bridget Cherry edition of Pevsner provides a lengthy description of Pugin's which it claims was a 'romantic dream come true'. The house was enlarged around 1841 and Cherry cites *Pugin* by Phoebe Stanton (1971) as suggesting that Pugin may have made the alterations. The latest edition also credits Pugin with a small coach-house and stable.

Just down the road from St Marie's Grange there is a small gate-lodge for the Clarendon estate, though today it is isolated from the estate by the new A36 dual carriageway. The 1963 Pevsner attributes it to Pugin despite its Tudorish style, adding 'He would not have done that later', whereas the new edition says that it 'is probably by Pugin ... his first private commission' before reiterating the statement that he would not have used that style later.

The Hall of John Halle survives on New Canal in the centre of Salisbury, but was refaced in the nineteenth century. Today it houses the entrance to the Odeon cinema.

The 1963 Pevsner says that the Hall was restored by Pugin in 1834. The new edition claims that the restoration was undertaken by Pugin's friend F R Fisher in 1833-4, claiming that it was 'Too early for *Pugin's* reputed involvement. Ferrey says that Pugin painted the heraldic angel on the s wall and the fireplace'.

A few miles to the west of Salisbury lies the village of Bishopstone. Pugin designed an elaborate monument to the Rev George Augustus Montgomery in 1844. The old Pevsner describes it as a 'super-Gothic tomb-chest' and the new edition confirms this and adds that Pugin received £52 for the work, whereas the 1963 work cites Phoebe Stanton with providing the date and also stating that Pugin received £52. Both editions also credit Pugin with the design of a window above the tomb which the new edition says was made by Wailes, though it is now no more. The 1963 work suggests that Pugin may have been responsible for a piscina canopy on the left of the monument.

Overall the new and old editions both fairly represent Pugin's work in Wiltshire. While his contribution to the architectural landscape may be limited, there are a few gems, especially the monument at Bishopstone. There is some mention of Pugin's wider influence and it would be interesting to see more on this.

John Elliott, Editor

**Hopefully photographs of some of the buildings
Pugin was involved with in Wiltshire will appear
in the next e-newsletter**