

Pugin Society

e-newsletter

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Another Pugin item for the Palace of Westminster?

David Ley, auctioneers in Penzance hold a leather chest which they claim is an 'important chest designed by Augustus Welby Pugin for the Palace of Westminster, covered in tooled, gilt red leather. The domed lid with portcullis and royal cypher of Queen Victoria, the lower half embellished with an all-over foliate quatrefoil motif, leather straps forming the hinges and fastening. Height: 64cm, width: 60cm, depth: 50cm.' It should have appeared in an auction in May which has now been postponed because of the coronavirus outbreak. The item has an auctioneer's estimate of £500-£1,000 with bids starting at £300.

A photograph of the chest has been shown to Lady Wedgwood who commented 'I think that they [the Palace of Westminster] should buy it, but not at the price and estimate that the auction house has put on it.'

The auctioneer calls it 'an important chest designed by A. W. Pugin for the P of W'. It has been suggested that it was probably a box, perhaps with leather handles, in use somewhere in the House of Lords, possibly to transfer books and or stationery, which has been quickly and rather clumsily adapted with a lid, perhaps to carry a piece of furniture and keep the rain off for a departing clerk, using various pieces of wallpaper the employee found in the basement of the P of W.

However, Lady Wedgwood feels that Pugin most probably did not design this object. 'I have come to the conclusion that it is 2 pieces, the base and the lid. The pattern on the base I do not recognise; it is certainly 'Puginesque' but the scale seems wrong as does the way the pattern repeats. It would be useful to look at the volume in the V&A which shows where various wallpapers are used at Westminster to see if it is there. The VR monogram and the Portcullis symbol on a red ground look genuine. It is impossible to date accurately but I would be happy with 'circa 1860-1870'.



More anon when the auction eventually takes place.

The Future

This e-newsletter was created to fill a communication gap during the coronavirus pandemic when all the Society events had to be cancelled. However, the volume of e-mails that we have received seem to suggest that it has provided a new and interesting form of communication, and something that members look forward to receiving.

What we include in the e-newsletter depends very much on what information members send to us. So please send your ideas and inputs to jpellott@btinternet.com

Convent Chapel of St Michael and All the Holy Angels, St Leonards-on-Sea

Ironically, adjacent to James Burton's classical extravagance that is St Leonards-on-Sea sits Edward Welby Pugin's Convent Chapel of St Michael and All the Holy Angels and its associated buildings, erected for the Holy Child Jesus Catholic teaching order in the 1860s.

Historic England claims that the lower parts of the convent walls were designed by AWN Pugin (it has now been proved that this is not the case) but completed, with alterations, by his son Edward who went on to design the now Grade 2* Gothic Revival style chapel consecrated in 1868. Work on the chapel continued with the east window completed in 1872, reredos and corbels in 1874 and choir stalls installed by 1876. The organ was added in 1881. The High Victorian Gothic interior is considered of outstanding quality and includes a rare example of a Roman Catholic chapel retaining the nuns' choir.

The teaching order of the Holy Child Jesus, founded by Cornelia Connelly, retained the site until 1976 when it moved to its sister school in Mayfield, East Sussex. The school, in recent memory called St Leonards-Mayfield School, is now known as Mayfield School.

Edward Pugin was also at work at the convent school in Mayfield, restoring the derelict medieval chapel that formed part of the site of one of the many summer palaces of the Archbishops of Canterbury.

As for the rest of the St Leonards buildings, they currently operate as a private language school and were designed by William Wilkinson Wardell





(1823-99) who also helped set up The Catholic Wykeham Brotherhood, a guild to promote Catholic and Gothic Revival teaching although the guild did not survive many years. He was a friend of both Augustus Pugin and John Henry Newman. Wardell emigrated to Australia in 1858 and became a distinguished architect there, designing amongst other buildings St Mary's Catholic cathedral in Sydney, and in Melbourne, St Patrick's Catholic cathedral and Government House.

The whole St Leonard's site, alongside most of Burton's "Regent's Park-on-Sea" as St Leonards was referred to by some in its early days, is captured in the St Leonards-on-Sea Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan prepared for Hastings Borough Council, a draft of which was published in October 2018. Its full adoption due in 2019 appears not to have taken place as yet. Meanwhile, readers may enjoy the above private unofficial images of Edward Pugin's convent chapel at St Leonards-on-Sea.

(All photographs are from a private collection)

David Bushell

Victoria Tower Gardens, Westminster

The Victoria Tower Gardens provide a lovely setting with delightful views of the Palace of Westminster. A small listed grade II park on the embankment, it offers a tranquil riverside oasis and a stopping off point before attending events in the Palace. Evolving from the original design of 1879, the park has been enjoyed by generations of locals and visitors alike. Due to plans for a new building on its land, this park has been under threat for over three years and, if constructed, would significantly impair the views to the Palace, deemed by Historic England as having 'excellent views looking north to Victoria Tower'. Westminster council rejected the plans in February but a parliamentary enquiry had already been set up. However, due to the current pandemic, the scheduled May meeting was postponed. Let's hope the ongoing campaign to save this lovely little Victorian park will succeed.

Ramsgate: The town and its seaside heritage

Geraint Franklin, with Nick Dermott and Alan Brodie

Historic England ISBN 978-1-78962 -189-1 £14.99

In 2017 Ramsgate was made a Heritage Action Zone by Historic England. Such a designation involves a follow-up package of projects all focusing on assisting regeneration in a chosen place by learning from its past - in the case of Ramsgate, in particular, a rich and rewarding area to explore. This publication,

which aims to raise awareness of Ramsgate's intriguing history and architecture, is one of a series produced by Historic England covering locations which have become Heritage Action Zones.

Whilst quite a few local historians have worked on various aspects of Ramsgate, often in considerable detail, it needed someone else, possibly a non-resident, to relate all the information gleaned and weld it together to put things in context and to show the bigger picture. This is what author Geraint Franklin has done, whilst at the same time adding a mass of additional material which makes for riveting reading. His research has been formidable. This is the sort of book which you need to have in your hand when you walk around the streets of Ramsgate; it makes you look twice as hard at what is in front of you and enables you to understand the evolution and planning of the town far better. Franklin, whilst writing with unquestionable authority, is also, I think, to be



commended for his ready engagement with residents during the course of his researches.

The book follows the history and architectural development of Ramsgate from very early on in the pre-resort era right through to the present day. For us Victorians it is gratifying that the author has given so much time to nineteenth century architectural developments here, not only to the more celebrated sites but also to many other buildings, including the delightful but less exalted substrata of suburban villas dotted about the town, particularly those on what was once the Ellington estate, whose merits have previously been somewhat ignored.

Geraint Franklin does the Pugins proud, as we would expect, giving due credit to the more familiar work of Augustus and Edward but also adding some interesting extra information. Who knew, for example, that in the 1880s Pugin & Pugin designed the striking building adjacent to Ramsgate's Royal Temple Yacht Club, up above the harbour, or of the startlingly contrasting oriel windows they added to a sedate terrace of 1778-90? Who was aware - and this is perhaps the firm's most surprising contribution to the town - of the roller-skating rink (albeit short lived) that they created in the High Street?

Ramsgate is very well ordered, with different sections for the various types of building in each era, and so is easy to follow. It is illustrated with high quality well selected images, and also includes a select Gazetteer which is very useful, suggested further reading and bibliography, notes, and good historic maps.

The final chapter, by past Pugin Society Chair Nick Dermott, here acting in his role as Heritage Development Advisor to Thanet District Council, and Allan Brodie of Historic England, contains upbeat suggestions as to how it might be possible to enhance the quality of life in Ramsgate and how best to learn from and harness its architectural and historical splendours to increase its future prosperity and significance.

This book, which is very good value at £14.99, by raising awareness and increasing a sense of pride in Ramsgate, its past, and what it has to offer, has fulfilled its remit in no uncertain terms and can only assist in ensuring a better future for this alluring seaside town.

Catriona Blaker