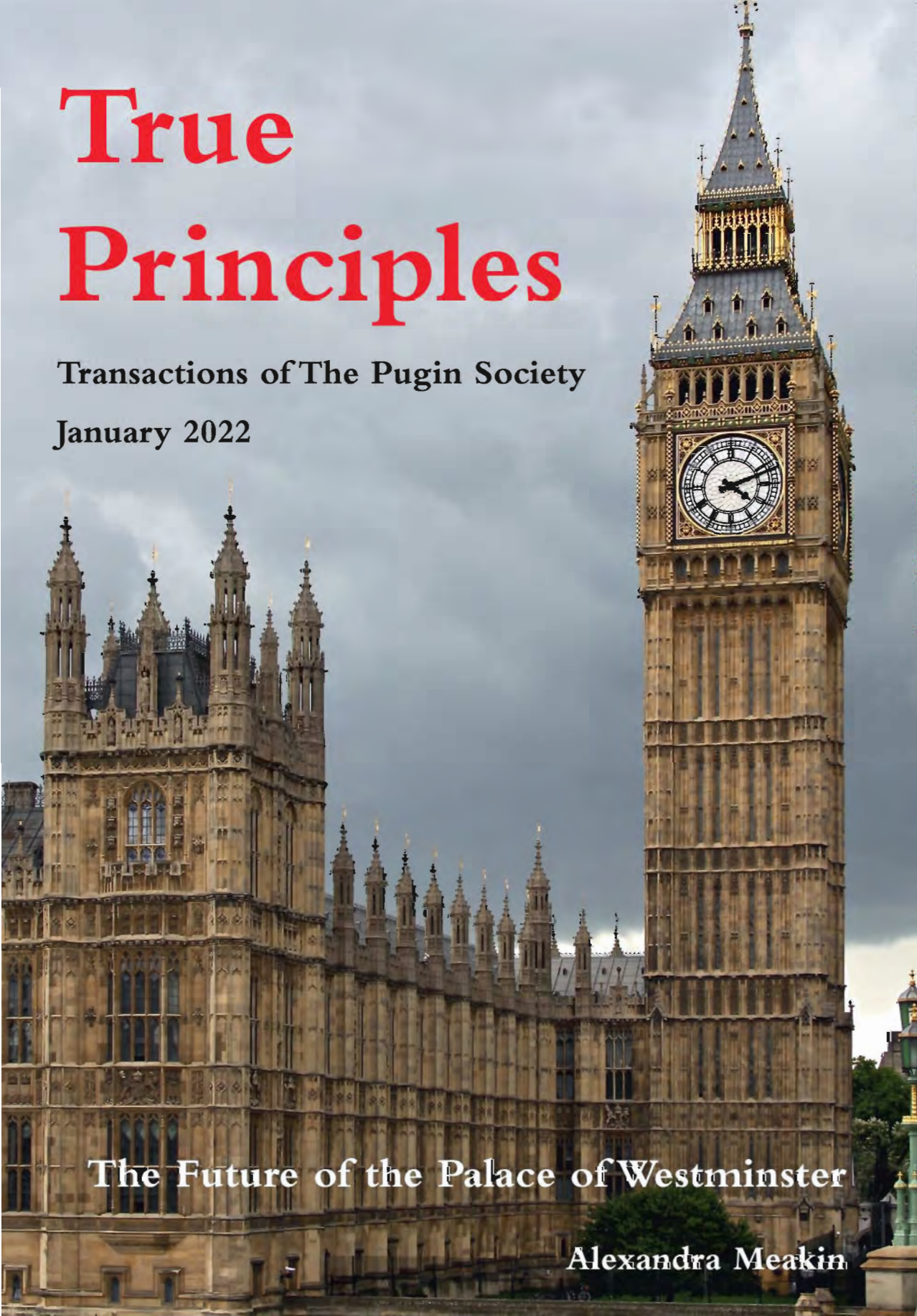
True Principles

Transactions of The Pugin Society

January 2022



The Future of the Palace of Westminster

Alexandra Meakin

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No 1: January 2022

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EDITORIAL

John Elliott, November 2021

In some respects this is a new venture for the Pugin Society; a short single author volume on a specific subject, whereas in the past *True Principles* was an annual, multi authored publication, the articles not necessarily all being on the same subject.

The publication takes its name from Pugin's famous work *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*, which was published in 1841 and which laid down his ideas on how buildings should be designed, whereas his *Contrasts* which was published in 1836, compared the buildings erected in the medieval period with those currently being erected, of which he was highly critical.

However, in recent years *True Principles* has tended to contain articles by a single author and to be on just one subject. For instance, the last edition, which was published in Spring 2020, was authored by Dr Gerard Hyland and dealt with the architectural career of E W Pugin.

The Pugin Society has always been aware that conditions change and that currently a shorter and more frequent single author volume may be a more appropriate form for publicising work in the area of Pugin studies.

It is planned that other *Transactions* will appear over the next twelve months and these are intended to complement the other Society publications - the annual *Present State* and the bi-monthly e-newsletter.

True Principles is peer reviewed, in a kindly and constructive way. We would encourage any graduate or post graduate student of history, in any of its forms, who can add to the knowledge available on Pugin,and his activities, and also those who were part of his family or strongly influenced by him, and by what has, or is, happening to his buildings., to make contact with the editor so that their work might be considered for a future *Transaction*.

The Palace of Westminster is one of the greatest buildings in Britain. It is the building by which Pugin is best well known and the centrepoint of our political process. This particular publication examines the various poitical moves surrounding the need to restore the Palace of Westminster and explains the many ups and downs that have taken place so far.

The Future of the Palace of Westminster

Alexandra Meakin

The Palace of Westminster is a magnificent building, which must be saved for future generations. Charles Barry and Augustus Pugin's creation is a triumph of neo-Gothic architecture, recognised the world over. Within these walls, our history, architecture and politics are entwined together. It is a place that inspires us as politicians, just as it inspires the many schoolchildren who visit Westminster. (House of Commons Debate, 20 July 2020, c1736)

So proclaimed Jacob Rees-Mogg, Leader of the House of Commons in July 2020, as MPs discussed plans to refurbish the Palace of Westminster. The need for the work is clear to anyone who works within or visits the Palace: Barry and Pugin's creation may be a 'triumph of neo-Gothic architecture', as Rees-Mogg described, but it is a creation in peril. Decades of neglect and under-investment have left the infrastructure serving the building operating long past its lifespan and at high risk of fire or flood. On the outside, the building is crumbling, with occurrences of falling masonry so frequent that Rees-Mogg's predecessor, Andrea Leadsom, warned last year that it was only "luck" that no-one had been killed or seriously injured. The building, as a select committee has warned, 'faces an impending crisis which we cannot responsibly ignore' (Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster, 2016a, p5). In 2018 the Commons and Lords sought to end years of indecision and muddling through by agreeing a major refurbishment—the Restoration and Renewal Programme—which would involve MPs and Peers moving out of the Palace for up to a decade to allow the building work to take place. This decision is now in doubt, however, as the Government is said to fear the reaction of the public to the multi-billion pricetag the work is likely to incur. This article will set out the current state of the Palace of Westminster, and how it has been able to deteriorate; analyse the "politics" of decisions about the parliamentary building; and look at what the future may hold for Barry and Pugin's masterpiece.

This year marks 150 years since Barry and Pugin's New Palace of Westminster was completed. It took thirty-six years to rebuild the Palace after the fire of 1834 and neither of its creators lived to see the building complete: the story of its construction is one of delays, overspending and political interference, so expertly detailed by Caroline Shenton in *Mr Barry's War* (2016). The initial response to the new Palace belies its current position in the nation's affections: Shenton (2016, p 221) noted how, even before completion,

Opposite: Under wraps: Big Ben and the Elizabeth Tower (Photo by the author)

'Pugin's Romantic Gothic ornamentation was already starting to look dated, so quickly were tastes changing in terms of High Victorian taste'. Port (1976, p 1) described how 'by the end of its lengthy period of gestation the New Palace was condemned as a stylistic travesty, and a grossly expensive one at that'. The concerns were not just about the décor. Externally, signs of decay in the stonework started to appear in the 1850s (Shenton, 2016). MPs and Peers were also critical of the practicalities of their new working environment, with the Commons chamber, in particular, criticised for its acoustics and lighting (White, 1897, Cocks, 1977). Both were said to be so poor that one MP, Colonel Sibthorp, warned that:

> Members were in danger of breaking their necks even before dinner, and what might be the case afterwards he could not say […] The New Palace at Westminster was not a house built for business (HC Deb, 2 Aug 1850, c727).

To improve the acoustics, MPs required Barry to replace the original ceiling with a much lower one, cutting the height of the windows in the chamber. Barry was said to have opposed this alteration vociferously and to have never entered the Commons chamber again after completing this change (Port, 1976).

The capacity of the chamber was a further cause of frustration, highlighted here by John Humphery, the MP for Southwark:

> the present House was so small, that it held out an encouragement to vice; because Members who could not find room in the House went into the smoking-room, where they would not go if they could find room in the House, and some went into the library [...] Now, could anything be so preposterous as that they should have spent three millions of money on the new building, and that the House of Commons should not be able to contain more than half the Members after all? (HC Deb, 2 Aug 1850, c733-734)

The uncomfortable truth for MPs was that the capacity of the chamber had largely been determined by the detailed specifications for the building produced by select committees setting the terms of the architectural competition in which Barry's design had been chosen. Many of the other concerns expressed by MPs, about the cost and length of the construction period, could similarly be attributed to select committee demands: during the construction period there were nearly 100 committee inquiries examining Barry and Pugin's work, often making contradictory recommendations (Shenton, 2016). The delays and overspending can also be traced to Barry's battle with "official mosquitos" in Whitehall, which included a long-running dispute with Benjamin Hall, the Minister for the Office of Works (Cocks, 1977, p 42). Port refers to Barry's 'contemptuous, almost insolent' responses to Hall's letters, and his 'flagrant disobedience of the minister's orders' (Port, 1976, pp 164, 165). The poor working relationship with

the Office of Works would outlast Barry's own lifespan: Hall's successor, William Ayrton was said to have a "vendetta" against Edward Barry (Cocks, 1977). The son of Charles, Edward had taken on responsibility for the final changes to the building after his father's death in 1860, attending the building almost daily and proposing extensive alterations to the Palace to address Member concerns about capacity (Port, 1976). Hall's dismissal of Edward Barry in 1870 marked the end of the construction of the New Palace, and placed a full stop on the chance of major changes to the building. While some MPs would continue to express concerns, particularly about capacity in the chamber (e.g. HC Deb, 6 April 1869, c259-66; HC Deb, 24 March 1908, c1309) Barry and Pugin's creation would remain substantially unaltered for some seventy years.

On the nights of 10 and 11 May 1941 the Palace of Westminster was hit by incendiary bombs, the Luftwaffe destroying the chamber of the House of Commons. While the rebuilding of the Palace would be delayed until the war was concluded, in 1943 the Commons was asked to approve a motion, tabled by the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, establishing a select committee to consider rebuilding the chamber and 'such alterations as may be considered desirable while preserving all its essential features' (HC Deb, 28 October 1943, cc406-9). In his opening speech Churchill spoke passionately in support of replicating the previous chamber:

> Our House of Commons was destroyed by the violence of the enemy, and we have now to consider whether we should build it up again, and how, and when. We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us. Having dwelt and served for more than 40 years in the late Chamber, and having derived very great pleasure and advantage therefrom, I, naturally, would like to see it restored in all essentials to its old form, convenience and dignity. (HC Deb, 28 Oct 1943, c403)

He received a broadly supportive response (e.g. HC Deb, 28 Oct 1943, c410), but not all MPs were convinced by his arguments. Viscountess Astor (one of just nine female MPs at the time) cautioned that Churchill was looking 'backwards instead of forwards' (HC Deb, 28 Oct 1943, c417). Colonel De Chair told the House that:

> The Prime Minister, in a pregnant phrase, said, "We shape our buildings and our buildings shape us." That is very true, but do they shape us so very well? They shaped the Parliaments which twice failed to prevent world wars […] We may not, therefore, conclude that the type of building we had before will necessarily produce the most sparkling Legislatures in the future. (HC Deb, 28 October 1943, c463)

When the Commons divided, however, only three MPs voted against the decision to preserve the essential features of the old chamber (HC Deb, 28 Oct 1943, c473). Calls for

a more modern and convenient chamber persisted, but were overwhelmingly defeated (HC 25 Jan 1945, cc1009,1018-20,1067).

The rebuilt Commons opened in October 1950, directly replicating the layout of Barry's design as requested by Churchill. For the next fifty years, the Palace of Westminster continued to serve as the home of an evolving legislature. The changing role of MPs led to more and more secretarial staff and researchers working within the Palace, and additional office space was added into the building, wherever possible (most notably above Upper Committee Corridor). As Port (1976) noted, 'Charles Barry's masterpiece has proved enormously adaptable'. The need for space was so considerable, however, that the focus turned to several buildings adjoining the Palace (including the Norman Shaw North and South buildings and the Bridge Street site, which would become Portcullis House) which were acquired or developed into office accommodation. The result was that Barry and Pugin's Palace of Westminster 'has ceased to be a self-contained Parliament House as originally conceived and has become instead the centrepiece of a much larger Parliamentary Estate' (Pre-Feasibility Study Group, 2012, p13).

By the turn of the millennium, however, it became apparent that the focus on growing the parliamentary estate had masked an emerging problem within the original Palace. A backlog of maintenance had been allowed to develop over several decades, due to neglect and 'persistent underinvestment' (Pre-Feasibility Study Group, 2012, p 5). The problem was primarily located in the depths of the building, described by former Clerk of the Commons, Lord Lisvane, as 'the cathedral of horror' (Lisvane, 2015, p 10). In 2000, a survey of the basement revealed that the mechanical and electrical systems serving the building—providing essential services such as water, gas, electricity and ventilation—were coming to the end of their lifespans and would require replacement within the next decade. In 2007 a further review warned of 'the growing backlog in maintenance of the Estate, including the roof of the Palace and the Basement Mechanical and Electrical project' (House of Commons Commission, 2007, p 44). Discussions around the state of the building first became public in June 2007, when the governing body for the Commons, the House of Commons Commission (2007, p 72,84) reported that planning would start on major infrastructure projects in the Palace. Numerous additional reviews would take place, but by the time of the 2010 general election—the point at which the 2000 survey had noted that much of the infrastructure would need to have been replaced—there was still no plan, or even consensus on how such a major refurbishment would take place. The former Speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow, summarised the situation as below:

> The place frankly is in a terrible mess, and I think it's been put off for a long time, I think we've tended to adopt a policy of make do and mend, and inevitably it comes to bite you (Interview, September 2018)

Early in the 2010 Parliament, the most senior official in both the House of Commons

and House of Lords would retire. Their replacements, Sir Robert Rogers (now Lord Lisvane) and Sir David Beamish, sought to make progress on the long overdue issue of the Palace's basement. They established a Study Group, comprising three parliamentary officials and an industry representative, advised by two members of each House, to consider the long-term future of the building. The group was given the freedom to consider 'the full range of possibilities […] from either a new build Parliament or a completely modernised Palace at one end of the spectrum, to a programme of managed replacement and condition-based maintenance at the other' (Pre-Feasibility Study Group, 2012, p 1). The group's report was completed in October 2012 with the title: *Restoration and Renewal of the Palace of Westminster: Pre-Feasibility Study and Preliminary Strategic Business Case* (Pre-Feasibility Study). The findings were stark, emphasising both the known risks of the antiquated nature of the infrastructure and the unknown risks posed by the inaccessible parts of the building:

> … there has been no general renovation of the building and its services since the partial rebuilding of 1945-50 and some of the services are older still. The original basements and vertical shafts are now crammed with pipes and cables making further work difficult and expensive. […] Much of the work undertaken over the past half-century is undocumented and since many areas are inaccessible, the state of dilapidation and therefore of risk is largely uncharted. (Pre-Feasibility Study Group, 2012, p 5)

This message was emphasised in a single, powerful sentence: 'If the Palace were not a listed building of the highest heritage value, its owners would probably be advised to demolish and rebuild' (Pre-Feasibility Study Group, 2012, p 5). A clear conclusion was identified: patch-and-mend solutions are no longer sufficient, the risks to the building are growing and 'fundamental renovation can no longer be avoided' (Pre-Feasibility Study Group, 2012, p 27).

When the governing authority of the House of Commons, the House of Commons Commission, met to consider the PFS, they made a significant—and yet little-scrutinised—decision about the future of the Palace of Westminster. Barry and Pugin's creation would, it was agreed, remain the permanent home of the UK Parliament. It is notable that this decision was taken by just the six MPs on the Commission, not by the membership of the Commons as a whole—let alone put to the public. It was endorsed by the equivalent body in the House of Lords, the House Committee, the following day, and with the development of a new parliamentary building ruled out, further research was commissioned on how a refurbishment of the Palace could be carried out.

The subsequent report, the Independent Options Appraisal, developed by a consortium led by Deloitte was published after the 2015 general election. At 250 pages long, the IOA report appeared to achieve the stated objective of a thorough and independent examination of the costs and practicalities of the potential outcomes for the Palace, and the different delivery options (Deloitte, 2015). Crucially, the report concluded that the

main factor affecting the costs and risks of any refurbishment was not the outcome level—the extent of improvements to the building—but how the work would be delivered and specifically the extent to which the Palace would be emptied for the work to take place. The report found that the cheapest and quickest way to deliver the work was the full decant option—where MPs and Peers would move out of the Palace entirely for the duration of the refurbishment. In contrast, a rolling programme of repairs, for which MPs and Peers remained working within the building, would offer 'the slowest rate of operational risk reduction given the piecemeal nature of the delivery of the Programme, with the greatest potential residual risk of a catastrophic event such as fire or flood as a result of life expired services, fabric and structure' (Deloitte, 2015, p 25).

The benefits of the full decant option were endorsed by a Joint Select Committee specially established to consider the future of the Palace. The Joint Committee's report in September 2016, concluded that 'in principle, a full decant of the Palace of Westminster is the best delivery option', arguing that it offered the least disruption, the quickest timescale, the lowest overall capital cost, the lowest risk, and the greatest scope for improvements (Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster, 2016a, p5). The Joint Committee stressed the urgency of the work required, warning that: 'unless an intensive programme of major remedial work is undertaken soon, it is likely that the building will become uninhabitable' (Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster, 2016a, p5). The report's overall tone was stark:

> The Palace of Westminster, a masterpiece of Victorian and medieval architecture and engineering, faces an impending crisis which we cannot responsibly ignore. It is impossible to say when this will happen, but there is a substantial and growing risk of either a single, catastrophic event, such as a major fire, or a succession of incremental failures in essential systems which would lead to Parliament no longer being able to occupy the Palace. (Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster, 2016a, p5)

The Committee warned of 'a potentially costly delay' unless Parliament 'now takes some key decisions'. To enable this, the Committee published a draft motion, which they recommended 'both Houses should agree […] as soon as possible' (Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster, 2016a, p100). This required the Government to commit the necessary parliamentary time for a substantive debate to take place and despite repeated protestations from the Joint Committee's members, their warnings would go unheeded for well over a year. Why were the Government reluctant to act? One reason was the wider political climate. The Government that had been asked to act on the Joint Committee report in September 2016 was very different to the one that had brought forward the establishment of the Joint Committee 14 months earlier. Immediately after the EU referendum David Cameron resigned as Leader of the Conservative Party, and

Opposite: Regeration work in New Palace Yard (Photo by the author)

was succeeded by Theresa May after a short, but brutal, leadership campaign. The early days of May's premiership were, focused on the tasks of implementing the UK's exit from the EU, while governing both a party and country that had split, fundamentally and perhaps irrevocably, during the referendum campaign. MPs, Peers, and officials, were all unanimous on how the prospect of Brexit monopolised the political agenda. One senior House of Lords official described how Brexit 'eats up politicians' brains' bandwidth, they haven't got much time to focus on anything else, because it's really massive' (interview, June 2018). With numerous domestic issues close to the heart of the Prime Minister (for example, the concerns regarding racial equality raised in her Downing Street speech upon taking power (May, 2016) struggling to receive any attention alongside Brexit, an issue that did not even fall within the Government's remit, such as the state of the Palace of Westminster, fell to a low position on the executive's agenda. The potential cost of the refurbishment of the Palace, and the concern about a public backlash about the cost further weakened any resolve to act on the issue.

The decision of Theresa May to call an early general election in spring 2017—which she described as being necessary due to the EU referendum result—further reduced the likelihood of action being taken on the Joint Committee's warning. The very act of calling an election prevented the debate from being held for a minimum of 12 weeks (the wash-up period, the election campaign, and, once the Commons returned, the swearing-in of members and debate on the Queen's Speech, during which there is no substantive business). In practice, however, the delaying effect of the election was even greater, primarily due to the post-election reshuffle and appointment of a new Leader of the House. Indeed, it was not until 31 January 2018—510 days since the Joint Committee reported, over six years since the Pre-Feasibility Study Group started work and nearly twenty years since the basement condition survey—that the House of Commons would finally discuss the future of the Palace of Westminster.

In an unusual move, the Government tabled two motions for the debate. The first stated that 'there is a clear and pressing need to repair the services in the Palace of Westminster in a comprehensive and strategic manner to prevent catastrophic failure', but committed only to reviewing the need for the work at the end of the 2017 – 2022 parliament, in effect further delaying policy change for several years (HC Deb, 31 Jan 2018, c878-879). The second motion proposed establishing governance bodies for a future refurbishment programme, without endorsing a delivery option (HC Deb, 31 Jan 2018, c879). The governance bodies would consider the different delivery options, again delaying a decision on a single policy option, and thus the necessary work to the Palace. For MPs supporting full decant, there was frustration that neither of the Government's motions reflected the Joint Committee's recommendation of supporting the R&R programme and committing to a full decant, which was seen as the only feasible way to protect the building. Ian Paisley, a member of the Joint Committee, described them as 'kick can down road' motions (interview, June 2018). Mark Tami, another member of the Joint Committee concurred, and noted how 'it has been the best part of 17 or 18 months,

in which time the Government have ducked, dived and dodged, and done everything but bring this issue to the House' (HC Deb, 31 Jan 2018, c910).

Frustration with the Government's motions led Tami's Labour colleague Chris Bryant, who had served on the Joint Committee and also chaired the Commons Finance Committee, to join with the Labour Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, Meg Hillier and the Conservative Chair of the Administration Committee, Sir Paul Beresford, to draft an amendment to the Government's motion. If passed, the amendment would commit MPs to supporting the Restoration and Renewal programme, including the full decant. It also demonstrated the commitment of parliamentarians to the Palace of Westminster: not only committing to returning to the Palace and their 'historic chambers' after the decant, but also proposing 'the removal of unnecessary and unsightly accretions to the Palace'—a reference to the additional offices and portacabins tacked onto the building in the twentieth century, as noted above (HC Deb, 31 Jan, c932). The amendment was tabled in Hillier's name but with Beresford and two other senior Conservatives, Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, the Deputy Chair of the PAC and a former Chair of the Committee of Selection; and Sir Roger Gale, a member of the Panel of Chairs as supporters. Once tabled, there was a concerted—and successful—effort to get senior MPs to declare their support for full decant. By the day of the debate 44 MPs had added their name to the amendment, including 16 select committee chairs. Five of these chairs were Conservatives at the time, including the Treasury Committee Chair, Nicky Morgan (viewed as particularly significant given the significant cost of Restoration and Renewal) and Dr Sarah Wollaston, Chair of the Liaison Committee, the *super-committee* of all committee chairs. The focus was on gaining critical actors in support, which would in turn persuade the wider population of MPs.

While the full decant motion was gaining support, there was a counter-effort from MPs who were also frustrated with the Government's delays and inaction on the state of the Palace, but were opposed, in principle, to the idea of leaving the Palace even temporarily. Sir Edward Leigh, a predecessor of Hillier as Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, tabled an amendment which committed to a major programme of repairs taking place, but proposed that the Commons debating chamber should stay within the Palace of Westminster or Portcullis House during the building works. This would entail either a rolling programme of works or a partial decant, rather than moving out entirely, options which had been rejected by the Joint Committee in 2016 as both more expensive and presenting greater risk to the building and the continued operation of Parliament. While it might seem like only a minor difference from the Hillier amendment, supporters of R&R and some officials, felt that by opposing full decant, the Leigh amendment would, in effect, block the whole project, due to the substantial difficulties of continuing to meet in the Palace during building work.

By the day of the debate the Leigh amendment had the same number of MPs listed as supporters as the Hillier amendment had, suggesting an evenly balanced Commons. But there was there was a key difference in the composition of supporting members.

The presence of the committee chairs made the Hillier amendment appear to be the preferred option of senior parliamentary (as opposed to ministerial) figures, and thus of the Commons itself. In contrast, 39 of the 44 supporters of the anti-decant amendment came from the governing party, and only two committee chairs were listed (Sir Edward Leigh and Sir Bill Cash). Notably, there was also a gender contrast: 45% of MPs supporting the Hillier amendment were female (despite women making up 32% of MPs at the time) compared to only 11% of the MPs listed as supporting the Leigh amendment (House of Commons, 2018).

Despite the significant level of support garnered for the Hillier amendment, ahead of the debate no-one on any side felt able to predict with confidence what the Commons would decide. Both the Conservatives and Labour had committed to a free vote on any divisions, (without the usual party whipping system). While free votes are not unusual, the status of R&R as a parliamentary matter, rather than a conscience issue, on which free votes are most typically used, meant there was little precedent on which to draw. In short, as *The Times* political journalist Sam Coates suggested ahead of the debate: 'if you're not confused about what's going on with the Restoration and Renewal debate then you haven't been listening closely enough, because it is hellishly confusing' (Westminster Hour, 2018).

When the debate finally took place, the Leader of the Commons, Andrea Leadsom, opened by warning of the dire state of the building:

> Over the past 10 years, 60 incidents have had the potential to cause a serious fire. Secondly, there is a huge amount of asbestos packed into the walls that needs to be carefully and expensively removed to enable repairs. Thirdly, many pipes and cables are decades past their lifespan, with some now being impossible to access. The likelihood of a major failure grows the longer the systems are left unaddressed. (HC Deb, 31 Jan 2018, cc880-1)

The position of the Palace of Westminster in the nation's affections was cited by MPs as a reason why they needed to act. Conservative MP and chartered surveyor, Peter Aldous, told the House:

> The Palace of Westminster is the most iconic building in the UK. It is not ours; it belongs to the nation. We are the custodians, with the responsibility of passing it on to the next generation in a better condition than we inherited it. For my part, the evidence is compelling. We need to get on with this work as soon as possible. (HC Deb, 31 Jan 2018)

The DUP MP, Ian Paisley, who had served on the Joint Committee also stressed this responsibility

> To everything there is a season, to every time a purpose: a time to break down and a time to build up. Words written 3,000 years ago surely are apt today for this building, which is 1,000 years old. I served on the Joint Committee. I attended that Committee as a sceptic, believing that we were only being pushed out of this place for some false reason, but the evidence led to one undoubtable and unalterable conclusion: in order for us to preserve a building that we love, a heritage that we cherish and a history that we are in charge of, we have to decant from this building, refurbish it, restore it, renew it and revive it, and on that basis allow ourselves to have a new building for future generations (HC Deb, 31 Jan 2018, c926-927).

Several of Paisley's colleagues on the Joint Committee spoke passionately in support of their report. They were supported by a number of senior parliamentarians, most notably Sir Patrick McLoughlin, a former Chief Whip and Transport Secretary, and Damian Green, the former First Secretary of State. Green, in particular, stressed the risks of the current building:

> It might be an exaggeration to say that Parliament is a death trap, but it would not be a wild exaggeration. Anyone who has taken the tour of the basement will have seen the full horror of the current arrangements. We have already heard about the regular fires that break out […] Chunks of masonry have fallen off high parts of the building. We are lucky that no one has been killed so far because of this. It is not remotely conceivable that people would be allowed to work here if this were a normal building, let alone that thousands of tourists would be allowed to visit it. (HC Deb, 31 Jan 2018, c901).

In a close vote at the end of the debate, the Hillier amendment passed by just 16 votes: a result which multiple sources have claimed to have surprised the Government. With the amendment passed, the Commons moved to vote on the main motion, as amended to endorse full decant. With the main argument over how the work should be done resolved, the vote on the amended motion was viewed as more of a formality. It was passed with a far more comfortable majority of 49—and in doing so meant there would be no vote on the Leigh amendment. Instead, the amended motion, now endorsing R&R and full decant, moved to the House of Lords, which promptly agreed to it without a vote: the debate indicated a far higher level of support for the work in the Lords, compared to the Commons.

The January 2018 decision to support Restoration and Renewal and the full decant was a watershed moment in the history of the Palace of Westminster. For the first time, parliamentarians took the decision to proactively repair and protect the building that serves as their home. It marked a significant policy change for the institution, moving away from decades of piecemeal alterations and patch-and-mend, towards a strategic

plan to develop a parliamentary building 'fit for the 21st Century and beyond' (Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster, 2016a, p 54). The debate had also demonstrated the strong emotional attachment MPs had towards the building Barry and Pugin created and the site on which Parliament first met in the thirteenth century. Ian Paisley again:

> As Members of this House, when we enter each day we walk over stones that were laid by William the Conqueror's descendants. We walk where Cromwell marched his army. We hear echoes around this building, the place where Wilberforce chanted the call for freedom. We pass through corridors where the smoke of Winston Churchill would have passed by. Indeed, on this great Bench, our heroes of Craig and Carson—and, indeed, my da—actually sat. If we really love this building, as many say they do, we should be brave and urge, as amendment (b) [the full decant amendment] does, that we get on with this process expeditiously (HC Deb, 31 Jan 2018, c927).

Paisley's words, invoking a physical connection to his predecessors, transmitted through the very fabric of the Palace, were in fact an echo of those that served before him. John Wilson Croker MP said of St Stephen's Chapel in 1831:

> He could not forget that it was the place in which the Cecils and the Bacons, the Wentworths and Hampdens, the Somers's and the St. Johns, the Walpoles and the Pulteneys, the Pitts, the Foxes, the Murrays, and the Burkes, had 'lived, and breathed, and had their being.' […] as long as the human mind was susceptible of local associations, he could not disregard the beneficial effect that might be felt from their continuing to assemble on the scene where so many illustrious actors had performed such splendid parts. If patriotism could grow warmer on the plain of Marathon, and piety amid the ruins of Iona, the zeal and talents of British senators might also be exalted by the religious and legislative sanctity with which time and circumstances had invested the ancient chapel of St. Stephen(HC Deb, 11 Oct 1831, c558-9).

By working within the same building, MPs aligned themselves with great names from the country's past, placing their own achievements on the same level. During the Second World War, when decisions were again to be made about the future of the Commons, the same predecessors were again invoked: Dr Russell Thomas MP argued for Parliament to stay within the same building where 'Burke, Sheridan, Charles James Fox, Pitt and others there laid down the foundations' of parliamentary democracy (HC Deb, 28 Oct 1943, c452). The building and the institution were intrinsically linked. Crucially, by the mid-20th century it was not just about the same location, but about the very design of Barry and Pugin's chamber, which was seen as symbolic of a golden age of parliamentary democracy (for example, HL Deb, 14 May 1941, c171). The 2018 commitment to restoring the Palace—rather than moving to a new parliamentary building or allowing the Palace to further decay—demonstrates that this emotional attachment remains strong.

After the watershed moment of agreeing to Restoration and Renewal in 2018, progress in enacting the will of each House was slow but steady. Crucially, primary legislation, in the form of the Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Act 2019 was passed, establishing independent governance bodies with the aim of avoiding the political interference that plagued Barry and Pugin. These governance bodies—the Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority—became substantive in April 2020 and have already had to assert their independence. The Prime Minister—who voted against Restoration and Renewal with full decant in 2018—proposed that consideration should be given, as part of a wider strategic review—to decanting Parliament to York during the R&R programme. Such a move would cause a seismic shift in UK politics, separating Parliament from Government, and was immediately met with scepticism. The Chief Executives of the Sponsor Body and Delivery Authority rejected the Prime Minister's proposal, emphasising that the location of Parliament was one for Parliament itself—not the Government—to decide. The strategic review reported in March 2021, and found that full decant was 'still the "best and most cost effective" option' Opposition to the proposed demolition of much of Richmond House, the former home of the Department of Health, to accommodate the replica Commons chamber may yet force a rethink of the full decant plans, however. While the issue remains one for Parliament, rather than the Government, the cooperation of the Treasury, in particular, will be required, given the cost of the work. The political landscape remains difficult: the current Leader of the Commons, Jacob Rees Mogg has openly questioned the strategic review's conclusions (HC Deb, 11 Mar 2021, c1017). An unnamed Cabinet Minister has previously been quoted as predicting that the R&R programme was heading for a quiet grave due to fears over public spending and the coronavirus pandemic (Morris, 2020).

The cost of R&R is indeed likely to be prohibitive: the 2015 Independent Options Appraisal (IOA) report suggested that the price-tag could be in the region of £4 billion, but this figure may rise significantly. The state of the basement means full extent of the necessary repairs is impossible to know until the work begins; the security climate has also deteriorated since the IOA report. There is no cheap solution to the problem of the Palace, however. The building forms part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site at Westminster, and the Government is required to protect it, even if it were no longer the home of the legislature. Failing to act is also expensive: each week of delays has been found to cost £200 million (House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, 2020). Inaction also increases the risk of the "impending crisis" of which the Joint Committee warned—the fire, flood or falling masonry that poses a significant risk to both the building and its occupants. Even if the Restoration and Renewal Programme proceeds without further delay, the risk to the Palace remains significant. In 2019 Lord Lisvane noted that decant was not due until the mid to late 2020s, and warned:

> Seven years [until decant] is a very long time to be lucky & I'm not sure that our

> luck, given the state of the services and the state of the fire compartmentation & fire prevention in the Palace, I'm not sure our luck is going to hold (Today, 2019)

The future of Barry and Pugin's New Palace of Westminster, cherished by parliamentarians and the nation, will depend on this luck holding out for a few more years yet.

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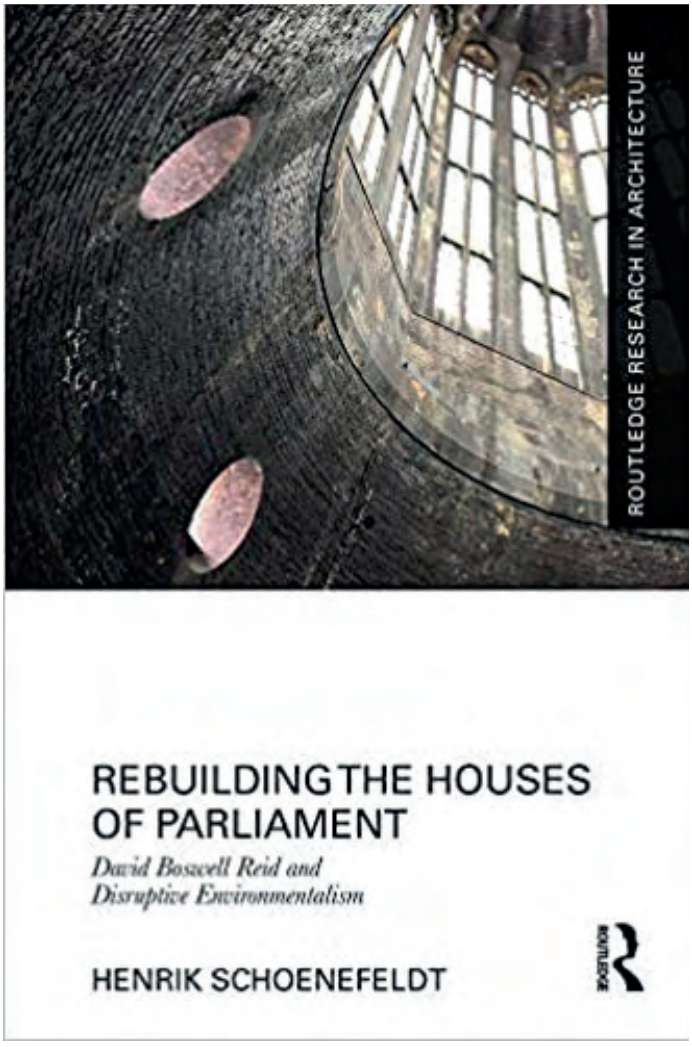
Book Review

Rebuilding the Houses of Parliament. David Boswell Reid and Disruptive Environmentalism

By Henrik Schoenefeldt.
288 pages, 40 illust. 2021 £96 hardback: £29.59 e-book

Any major publication on the Palace of Westminster is bound to interest Pugin enthusiasts. This new book doesn't have Pugin in its title, nor indeed as its main theme, but it is a substantial contribution to the history of the building. Hendrik Schoenefeldt has undertaken over four years research into the building services of the palace as part of the Palace of Westminster Restoration and Renewal Programme. As well as analysing a vast number of documents he has examined every part of the building, often poking into spaces which no-one knew were there, so he writes with an authority far greater than most desk-bound historians.



Previous accounts of the ventilation, heating and lighting of the palace have been irresistibly drawn to the conflicts between Charles Barry and David Boswell Reid, the Scottish scientist who received a separate appointment in 1839 to oversee the design of those aspects of the building. These conflicts were a gift to the contemporary press, which was quick to pillory Reid as an experimental boffin whose ignorance of building construction was holding up the whole project. There was a large kernel of truth in these accusations but they blinded people to the significance of what Reid was trying to do. Four years ago Edward J. Gillin, in his book *The Victorian Palace of Science*, set

Reid's work in the context of the progressive scientific approach adopted throughout the building project including by Barry. Now Schoenefeldt has identified Reid as a pioneer of sustainable energy whose work, however ridiculed at the time, is of lasting importance in the history of the palace.

Beneath the personality clash between Barry and Reid lay two fundamental problems. The first was that building services were not an integral part of the brief for rebuilding the Palace of Westminster and indeed were omitted from the first costings of the Barry-Pugin design in 1837 (they eventually formed 25% of the overall cost). This was a terrible mistake, especially since as a scientifically innovative project it was decided that the palace should be designed as a hermetically sealed, centrally serviced environment. Like Brunel's 'Great Eastern' the building was wholly unprecedented in scale and ambition. Secondly, because there was no authoritative model to work from, the building itself became a huge on-going experiment using the MPs and Lords as trial users. Before his main appointment Reid was entrusted with adapting the temporary Commons and Lords chambers which, as Schoenefeldt puts it, "became a site for environmental field studies". That spirit of experiment, relying on constant feedback evaluation and adjustment, carried on once the permanent chambers had been completed, even once Reid had been sacked in 1852.

How does Pugin come into this story? He was working fervently on the building interiors, which had to incorporate the services. In the Lords (where Barry had total control from 1846) fresh air was introduced through the carvings of the ornamental ceiling, the quatrefoils of the galleries and the coving beneath them. In the Commons (where Reid still had a role until 1852) the original Barry-Pugin ceiling seems to have been altered no less three times, though how that affected Pugin's work Schoenefeldt doesn't say. But it was on the exterior that the most radical changes were made. Reid's first idea was for a 150ft. high ventilation tower above the Central Lobby, to be used for air discharge from the whole building, a proposal which Barry willingly adopted (indeed he wanted it to be even higher). But ultimately through the interminable process of experiment and feedback, the role of that tower was much reduced and it was joined by no less than five other ventilation towers and shafts, which together constitute the picturesque skyline which we know today. Whatever his part in this ultimate outcome Pugin would surely have welcomed the way the original competition design was medievalised to suit the building services.

Following Reid's dismissal in the same year as Pugin's death the services were rethought yet again, this time by another scientist, Galsworthy Gurney. By then it was too late to introduce a wholly new set of ducts but air flows were redirected and the system for heating and cooling improved. In both the Commons and Lords chambers some of the windows were made openable, a triumph for members who had found the sealed environment insufferable. Thus radically amended, Reid's services infrastructure survived, in the Commons until the bombing of 1941 and in the Lords until as late as 1966.

Schoenefeldt gives as detailed an account of this whole story as anyone could want, supported by a superb set of plans and axonometric drawings. However, he has been singularly ill-served by his publishers. Quite apart from the book's absurd price, and a bizarrely unhelpful attitude to supplying review copies, they seem to have contributed no editorial input. Even a few days of an editor's time would have ironed out typos

and missing words and would have highlighted the necessity to reproduce more of the historic pictures referred to. And Schoenefeldt's drawings are reproduced in a way that detracts from their importance, or is someone afraid that they might be used by a twenty first. century Guy Fawkes?

All this is a shame because this book is packed with knowledge which deserves to be widely shared as the debate about the restoration of the Palace of Westminster gathers pace. The heart-searching about the historic authenticity of this work will focus on the original layout and decorative features. Yet just as important is how far Reid's vision of a low energy building can be fulfilled using the service routes and spaces, in large part his legacy, which are integral to its fabric.

Robert Thorne

The Pugin Society, Registered Charity No 1074766, was founded in 1995. It exists , to quote its Constitution, to further 'the advancement of the education of the public in the life and work of A.W.N. Pugin and other architects and designers in his family' and to watch over, and if possible save, threatened buildings designed by members of the Pugin family or near colleagues. The Society also aims to give advice on the conservation and restoration of relevant buildings or decorative schemes, and, in addition, organizes events and outings to raise awareness of this great architect, designer and writer.

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