

# Around a journal in 80 seconds ...

## #3 True Principles

By the time of his death at the age of 40 in 1852 Augustus Welby Pugin had designed six cathedrals, more than 50 churches, houses, convents, monasteries, schools and almshouses, as well as the interiors of the Palace of Westminster and the medieval court at the Great Exhibition of 1851. His output also included stained glass, furniture, metalwork, vestments and wallpaper. He was married three times, widowed twice, and fathered eight children, including the architects Edward, Peter Paul and Cuthbert Pugin.

The only child of Auguste Pugin, a French architectural draughtsman who ran a drawing school, and Catherine Welby, Pugin was born in Bloomsbury and as a boy was taken on sketching trips to France before he worked in the theatre, and then, at the age of 21 decided to devote himself exclusively to Gothic architecture.

In 1834, at the age of 22 he converted to Catholicism and two years later published *Contrasts* a thundering attack on contemporary architecture – ‘the erection of churches has dwindled down to a mere trade’ – which called for a return to the faith and ecclesiastical buildings of the middle ages. It also stressed the importance of function over form.

‘The great test of architectural beauty is the fitness of the design to the purpose for which it is intended and the style of the building should so correspond with its use that the spectator may at once perceive the purpose for which it was erected,’ he wrote.

In *True Principles* his later architectural manifesto, published in 1841 when he was 29, Pugin argued that the two great rules for design were ‘no features about a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction or propriety (and) all ornament should consist of enrichment of the essential construction of the building.’

The Pugin Society was founded in 1995, following *Pugin: A Gothic Passion*, the highly successful exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum the previous year. Four enthusiasts – Catriona Blaker, Judith Crocker, Oonagh Robertson and the late Pat McVicker – met in a Ramsgate cafe to agree some aims. In addition to making the work of Pugin and his family better known and encouraging research, the Society proposed the establishment of a scholarly newsletter, a programme of events and setting up a visitor centre in Ramsgate, where Pugin built his family home, The Grange, and the adjoining St Augustine’s church, where he is buried.

At the time, despite having been granted Grade I listing in 1968, the Grange was in severe disrepair (a Society committee member fell through part of a floor on an early visit) and facing an uncertain future. Access to the church was spasmodic. In 1997 the Landmark Trust bought The Grange, saving it from possible redevelopment as flats, and undertook a superb seven-year restoration. It is now available for holiday lets and weekly tours are provided for visitors.

With a grant of £810,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, St Augustine’s, threatened with closure in 2010, has also been restored and is a working church open every day. A £1 million archive and education centre opened in June, financed by the HLF with support from Lord Lloyd Webber and others.

The Society, which has a membership of 400, publishes *True Principles*, a yearly peer-reviewed journal, and an annual newsletter, *Present State*. Events have included study tours to Belgium, Germany and Ireland as well as visits to the Palace of Westminster, where the Society celebrated Pugin’s bicentenary in 2012, and Pugin buildings across the UK. Pugin’s great-great-granddaughter, Sarah Houle is president, scholar Alexandra Wedgwood is patron, and his biographer Rosemary Hill is a committee member.

■ Joanna Lyall, secretary  
[www.thepuginsociety.co.uk](http://www.thepuginsociety.co.uk)

right St Augustine’s church, Ramsgate, which Pugin worked on from 1846 until his death in 1852

