

# THE TRAINING OF ARCHITECTS AND CRAFTSMEN IN THE PROTECTION and REPAIR of ANCIENT MONUMENTS

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IT is a very great pleasure and privilege for me to be addressing the 30th Annual General Meeting of the Ancient Monuments Society this afternoon on a subject which is very close to my heart. Not only have I the honour to serve on the Council of the Ancient Monuments Society, but I look upon York as my second home where I spend several weeks each year in various aspects of architectural study. Not least amongst these activities are the York Courses on Protection and Repair of Historic Buildings, about which I hope to tell you more later.

It is stimulating to find amongst all sections of society a renewed realization that this country contains a priceless heritage of historic architecture which is not surpassed anywhere in the world. For example, nowhere else is there such a fine array of exquisite mediaeval parish churches or such a rich collection of lesser traditional domestic architecture. Nor is this heritage confined to the buildings themselves. Everywhere there abound beautiful fittings and furnishings of real historic significance, the craftsmanship of which could never be equalled. It is a constant source of delight and pride to Northcountrymen that they have a goodly share of these treasures.

The impact of the last world conflict, with its trail of destruction, has brought home to us very forcibly the value of this heritage. With this has come the realisation that many of these ancient and historic buildings are in an extremely bad state of repair and in several cases require urgent and drastic attention. Additionally, amongst all those interested in the protection and repair of ancient monuments, there is grave apprehension about the future.

This realization and subsequent fear has been responsible for the setting up of two important Commissions, whose reports have been published within the last few years. The first of these, generally referred to as the Gowers Report, was published in 1950 and deals exclusively

with the vast and very complex problem of the "Great Houses" of this country. Although pressure is continually being applied in Parliament, it is only very recently that any implementation of this Report has emerged. Although the scale of Government aid is extremely small and inadequate, it does at least show that the value of our priceless heritage of "Great Houses" is being universally recognised. However, further delay in providing adequate funds may result in the rapidly worsening situation getting completely out of hand.

The other report, "The Preservation of our Churches" (June, 1952) is the outcome of the very earnest deliberations of a Church Assembly Commission concerned with the future of the country's 14,000 parish churches, of which almost 9,000 are largely mediaeval.

From these reports two main issues emerge, both of which are so fundamental that the whole future of our great historic buildings is dependent upon them. Finance is the primary consideration which exercises everyone's mind. How is the money required for even immediately necessary repairs to be found? This often repeated question is the real crux of the problem, but its solution is one of difficulty and complexity. It must be treated urgently, vigorously and on a national-wide scale. The Reports make very definite recommendations in this regard and already the Historic Church Preservation Trust has been formed with Her Majesty the Queen as Patron and the Duke of Edinburgh as President. Thus the work of raising the four million pounds required for our churches over the next ten years has started. The first County Trusts have also been formed.

A large part of these Reports and, indeed, much of what has been said and written generally, has emphasised the need for vast sums of money to meet the problem, but another and equally important consideration has not been sufficiently stressed. This second problem is to find architects, surveyors, builders and craftsmen, with suitable experience and specialised knowledge in the field of protection and repair, to carry out the necessary work in the best possible manner. It is not generally recognised that the repair of old buildings must be entrusted to architects and craftsmen skilled in the technique necessary for such work. To quote from the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings Annual Report (1951) :

"The lack of such knowledge leads to irreparable harm being done and time and again the Society finds evidence of expensive, overdrastic and frequently unnecessary reparations carried out by the ignorant and the inexperienced. The difficulties at present affecting the building trades, intensified by the lack of skilled craftsmen, contributes further to the problem and calls for constant and knowledgeable supervision by the architect."

Comparatively few experienced men exist, largely because, during the past few decades very little conservation work has been undertaken and therefore the opportunity to gain practical experience has been severely restricted. Making up this deficiency can only be undertaken as a long-term project, and all the various societies and public bodies concerned with this type of work are setting about tackling the problem with vigour and a real sense of urgency.

However, before I discuss the problems and difficulties related to the training of architects and craftsmen in protection and repair work, I should like to say a little about what I consider to be the right approach to the study and preservation of ancient monuments.

It is of the utmost importance that the right mental attitude to ancient and historic buildings should be developed. Every individual building in all its aspects must be studied and appreciated. Every building of any antiquity bears evidence of its structural evolution and development. The way of life, beliefs and mental outlook of all its various builders and craftsmen are revealed to all those who take the time and trouble to look and study. Overlaid on this will be found the influence, probably the greatest single influence, of passing styles and fashions. Strange as it may seem, this factor is as much in evidence in old work as it is to-day.

Every building possesses certain fundamental physical characteristics such as length, width and height, but it also possesses a personality very much its own. Some people refer to this quality as a fourth dimension, but, however it is viewed, it is a quality which that building alone possesses. Once it is destroyed or damaged it can never be re-created. It is impossible to restore this personality, and therefore any attempt to do so must be condemned. The result, at best, can be only "period-fakes."

It is this quality which blends together in an old building the often otherwise incongruous work of different historical periods. For example, many of our early parish churches comprise perhaps a Saxon tower, Norman nave, thirteenth century chancel and fourteenth century aisles, with many later additions and alterations. Thus the vigour of the Saxon, the detail of the Norman and the structural ingenuity of later periods are fused together in a harmonious composition. It is, however, difficult to define the sources of a building's "personality" and its attendant atmosphere, because its components include proportion, texture, colour and decoration, each of which is a study in itself, with the passage of the centuries to fuse them together. From these few remarks it is evident that the problems of protecting and repairing ancient and historic buildings are many and complex. There is, however, only space here to consider a few of the main principles to be adopted.

The first essential is to have a real personal and first-hand contact with

the structure and materials of the building and get within its "personality." This is vitally necessary in order to avoid its destruction and at the same time to repair it sympathetically. The second guiding principle is that of conservation and preservation. As it is impossible to re-create the atmosphere of individual buildings, it is therefore essential to preserve and protect as much of the original work as possible. Where repairs and replacements are necessary, these should be so contrived that they in no way result in conjectural imitations of the old work. New work should always be in harmony with the old, but subordinate to it.

Thirdly, the very common archaeological habit of exposing historical features, for no other reason than that they are historical, should be avoided. For example, many mediaeval timber-framed houses, particularly in cities like York, have had their eighteenth-century plaster façades removed, thus depriving them of much of their "personality." Apart from the fact that many of these façades were very beautiful in themselves, often with fine decorated pargetting, the whole chronological sequence and therefore their authenticity has been lost. In fact in several cases false Tudor windows have had to be inserted in an effort to restore some sort of appearance.

It was principles such as these that led, over seventy years ago, to the founding of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings by William Morris, Ruskin, Burne-Jones, and similar kindred spirits. They aimed at restraining the Victorian method of wholesale conjectural restoration, which was so rampant at the time.

Now to turn to the training of architects and craftsmen in protection and repair methods.

The Ministry of Works (Ancient Monuments Branch), the National Trust, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, the Ancient Monuments Society, the Central Council for the Care of Churches and the Georgian Group are all working from their own particular angles towards the solution of this great problem.

Probably the most important step in the right direction has been taken by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, who have re-instituted their Lethaby Scholarship. This was originally instituted in 1930 by the Society, in memory of the late Professor W. R. Lethaby, to enable architectural students to study for a period of six months the repair of ancient buildings under the guidance of architect-members of the Society. This endeavour has proved most satisfactory and is an ideal solution to the problem.

The Bartlett School of Architecture at London University, on the other hand, has set up a post-graduate Diploma Course on the repair of ancient buildings on a part-time evening basis. Although this is admirable

and extends for one session it is obviously suitable only for those working and living in or near London.

Probably the most valuable and interesting contribution in this field is now being made by the Academic Development Committee of the York Civic Trust, and it is particularly fitting that this Meeting should be held in this magnificent hall in this beautiful and historic city. It is fitting because this hall now forms the Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, which was opened a month ago by Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal, and represents a major achievement for the Academic Development Committee of the York Civic Trust.

As well as these historical studies, the Committee have been engaged for the past few years in the architectural field as well, and I have the honour to be their Director of Architectural Studies. A comprehensive series of short but fully residential Courses have been set up called the "York Courses on Protection and Repair of Historic Buildings." These are a development of the already well-established annual Summer Schools of Architectural Study, which they now supplement. The first course was held at York last September and was an unqualified success, drawing architects, surveyors and builders from all over Britain. At Easter two more highly successful courses were held and an ambitious programme is planned for the next eighteen months.

These courses have been organised in such a manner that architects and others, who wish to know more of repair methods, but who find it difficult to leave their appointments or practices for any length of time, can attend. Their duration is for a week or a fortnight, and the whole series can be taken over a period of one or more years to suit personal requirements. An attempt has been made to provide a series of "balanced" courses of both general and specialised kinds. This was done by including lectures, films, exhibitions and demonstrations, visits and practical work.

From the foregoing remarks, it will be evident that the training of architects is well in hand and architects and surveyors can now obtain first-class training in a variety of ways for this most important work.

The training of craftsmen, however, is a rather more difficult problem, particularly in the case of masons. First and foremost, recruits to this kind of work must be real craftsmen. That is to say they must have their work and craft at heart and must have a sympathetic approach to materials, technique and the buildings themselves. Everyone has not always the right temperament for such work. Specialised training and apprenticeship will be long and arduous, but to interested and sympathetic craftsmen the reward and satisfaction will be great.

Several schemes have been put forward lately for the training of suitable craftsmen, but the method most likely to give the best results is

that of making use of the existing Cathedral Workshops. Many difficulties and obstacles would, of course, have to be overcome, but I feel sure that a suitable scheme could be worked out in each Diocese. Much reorganisation and extension of existing facilities would be required, but with the co-operation of all concerned this should be possible.

I hope that the various Societies and public bodies interested in Protection and Repair work will find it possible in the very near future to get together and make some plans for the training of craftsmen in this most important but specialised subject.

In this short review I have attempted to give you a better understanding of the value of our ancient and historic buildings and monuments and to convey something of the principles of preservation. The accent has been rather on the negative side; but if old buildings are saved from the wrong kind of restoration, much of the excellent craftsmanship still remaining will be preserved. It is always better to preserve than to restore.



The President, Lord Rosse, addressing the Annual General Meeting.

*Photograph, Evening Press, York*