

## Reviving Tudor as the national style

*The Institute of Conservation: Icon Historic Interiors Group Conference:  
Pre-Raphaelites to Arts & Crafts  
Cambridge*

12 April 2019

*Timothy Brittain-Catlin*

This is a talk about how it's quite possible to interpret Edwardian architecture in an unfamiliar way, and in particular how to link it to the realist movements of the high Victorian era rather than solely to the arts and crafts movement.

The last person to present a comprehensive overview of Edwardian architecture was Alastair Service in the 1970s. Since then there has been, of course, a terrific series of books on the great architects of the period – some of them the best books on British architectural history ever written. But the 1970s are a long time ago now and we can see some of the fundamental things in a different light. One of the biggest changes has been in our attitude to the gothic revival that preceded it. For a long time it was seen as a kind of romantic response to industrialisation, and that attitude produced some remarkably inaccurate architectural history. It's become clearer that whilst there were, for sure, romantics amongst its practitioners, the engine behind Pugin and others was what we now call realism – that is, a strong drive towards buildings that were not only logical and coherent in their planning and construction, but which expressed that logic and emphasised, exaggerated it – steeply pointed roofs that clearly threw off the rain, for example, as a riposte to almost flat Georgian roofs. That came as response to a long series of architects' failings in the 1820s and 1830s which seriously challenged the prestige of the profession.

One of the most perceptive writers on this realism was the late Chris Brooks. In a 1984 book called *Signs of the Times*, he wrote about both pre-Raphaelite painting and Pugin's architecture. One key section in it is this:

Pugin's response parallels those of Carlyle and Dickens, Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites both quantitatively, insisting upon the sheer amount of individual detail, and qualitatively, insisting upon the separable identity of each detail. Every element of the Pugin building is true, true to structure, to function, to material, to a religious meaning; above all, true to itself, its own isolable reality.

What he is saying is that Pugin's architecture was about assembling individual elements and drawing attention to them. And this I think turns out to be one of the keys to Edwardian architecture.

If that's the case, a study of Edwardian architecture actually starts within Pugin's own lifetime, at the end of the 1840s. This is the development by George Devey at Penshurst in West Kent called Leicester Square. What Devey did here seems to be more or less unprecedented for an architect as opposed to a

rural builder. He refurbished, restored and rebuilt a set of cottages, and added new buildings to them. Of course architects have always done that, including Pugin, but the difference here is that you can't tell what is old, and what is new. Indeed, one might say that that is the whole point. What matters are the elements and how they are joined together.

Devey did this at other sites, including these two, the former saddler's shop at Peshurst, which is just around the corner from Leicester Square, and at South Park, a farm outside the village. But he designed entirely new versions of the same idea throughout his career, until his early death in 1886. Here is an example, I'm afraid from one of my own snapshots rather than from Robin Forster who is the photographer for my book. This is a corner of St Alban's Court, Nonington in East Kent, of 1875-9. What was traditionally said about this was that it was a kind of fakery, that it was meant to look as if a new house had been built on top of some old ruins. Possibly that idea might have amused Devey, but it couldn't have been further from the truth. Firstly, Devey was an austere honest person – it was he who said of a builder's bodge of some sort that he would be 'ashamed for the birds to see it'. But more important this building draws attention to the precise detail and nature of the stone and brick, by separating out the elements in this way. We know from one of Devey's biographers that he stayed up for long nights with his client working on the design of this house. I visited it with the architect Charles Holland last year and we were pretty certain that Devey had worked out the position of every brick. This is a building that illustrates Chris Brooks' 'own isolable reality' better than anything else.

Now, there's something else to say about Devey before moving on to the picture of Edwardian domestic architecture more generally, and that is that C.F.A. Voysey trained under him. Modernist architectural history likes to say that Voysey picked up his white buildings and sparse details from Saxon Snell, a hospital architect. But Voysey worked for Snell for a very short period, whereas he was with Devey for a number of years, up the point when Devey entrusted him with his own jobs. Not only in his early career but intermittently even during the prime of his white period, Voysey designed houses in a Devey manner, using different types of building material and joints in timber and brick diaper work. The conclusion I came to was that Voysey devised his white backgrounds as a way of emphasising the small number of perfect details on them. Thus eaves brackets, subtle window jamb and cill sections and so on stand out more when they are placed against a white background. This is an advanced form of Deveyism, I think. Both Devey and then Voysey were held in exceptionally high esteem by the architectural periodicals of their day, and I would say for similar reasons, even if contemporary architects, as usual, were unable to put into words what these were.

And what were these details? They were Tudor. It's possible to make an argument that Voysey's work across the long Edwardian period, from the 1890s up to the Great War, was essentially Tudor. Think of the grotesque faces he used as brackets, for example, such as these at Perrycroft of 1893-1894 outside Great Malvern. A way of designing that makes construction obvious is an essentially Tudor attribute. I'm not intended to belittle the sophistication of Tudor carpentry when I say that it looks like – *looks like* – anyone with a hammer and nails, and some degree of coordination could build those timber frames. No one would say that about either a gothic building of any quality or, of course, a polished eighteenth-century baroque or Palladian one. And just as in pre-Raphaelite painting, these real things often carried allegorical meanings. It's easy to see therefore why this type of building appealed to late Victorian and Edwardian Liberals who campaigned for land reform, what is sometimes called the 'four acres and a cow' movement. You can somehow see the smallholder building his house like this, and also as a political statement, because Tudor England meant for everyone Protestant England. The question of land reform is a very big one, but I'll summarise it here by saying firstly that it is not surprising that Tudor imagery appealed to the reformers, and secondly that a very large number

of Liberal Party politicians built Tudor houses in the Edwardian era. Both Devey and Voysey built repeatedly for Liberal MPs.

The Pugin – Devey – Voysey axis lays, I would say, the conceptual framework for Edwardian realist building. Nothing much would be known about it, however, but for the work of two quite exceptionally perceptive critics who wrote for *Country Life* which in its early years was pretty much a Liberal Party publication. You'll find almost nothing of any practical help if you stick to the *Architectural Review*, the *RIBA Journal*, the *Builders' Journal* and so on: in fact I think it's fair to say that the great designers of the arts and crafts period, Professor Prior, Professor Lethaby, Professor Ricardo, and so on, were quite exceptionally bad in grasping what they themselves were doing – Lethaby and Prior in particular could ramble on for hours about beauty and truth and nice plates and folk dancing and so on without actually saying anything, but often succeeding in saying things that were demonstrably untrue even of their own work. M.H. Baillie Scott provided an excellent example of this when he wrote in 1906 that 'the modern Jacobean room ... must necessarily be a failure', and yet he was designing beautiful ones himself all through the decade, and later. If you wanted to see how Devey ideas turned themselves into the mainstream of Edwardian domestic architecture, the people to go to are H. Avray Tipping and from about 1910 Lawrence Weaver, the architectural writers of *Country Life*.

*Country Life* wrote for landed estate owners who were confronted with everyday problems of housing agricultural workers. These were, in equal measures, a flight from the countryside into the towns at times of economic recession, and the costs of maintaining or upgrading existing housing. Perhaps on a broader level some landowners were worried too about the land reform movement challenging the ownership of their estates, wanting to break them up, to tax them punitively, to use the resentment of workers as a way of disrupting their management. At the same time, the building byelaws, which had been devised for urban conditions, made it very difficult to refurbish, upgrade or even retain old cottages in any economically feasible way. If you look at Ordnance Survey maps of the period you can see strangely alien rectangular blocks floating about in the countryside, because the easiest way of housing your workers was to build a bye-law compliant urban terrace.

*Country Life* addressed this in a directly rational, real way, with calculations for the costs of buildings and rebuilding, and by enthusiastic and realistic coverage of attempts, such as by the *Spectator* magazine, to sponsor the design and building of cheap cottages. It achieved the extraordinary feat of combining this hard-headed economic attitude with the projection of a sentimental image of old England – for example, the repeated references to the association of Tudor England with cheering hospitality whether grand or modest, or to picturesque scenes from the Protestant Netherlands. The magazine also published many, many details of Tudor houses large and small, which meant that architects had a ready supply of authentic sources – and this was as important as the accurate, 'scientific' publications of John Britton had been to the early gothic revivalists.

The public interest generated by this type of approach resulted in the sponsorship by three Liberals, led by the MP Herbert Raphael, to build on his own land at Gidea Park a kind of model village of Tudor cottages, which were on the one hand very cheap, £375 or £500, and on the other, extremely sophisticated and rational in their design, with plenty of storage, no front parlours and kitchens separated from living rooms. This was a competition and it attracted a great deal of public interest. Many architects who went on to be well known, for example Clough Williams Ellis, Philip Tilden and Thomas Millwood Wilson, who designed a large number of Lloyds Bank branches, first made their name there. Baillie Scott, already well known, produced a pair of cottages – a £375 one and a linked £500 one, which were the stars of the show. Lawrence Weaver wrote that it was 'almost impossible to

over-rate the value' of the scheme, traces of which emerged in England suburban housing across the whole country for decades afterwards, and which re-emerged in housing after a brief hiatus in the 1960s and 1970s.

These are some of the conceptual and political approaches to architecture, and the same ideas lay behind the much bigger and more photogenic houses about which Tipping and Weaver wrote weekly. Tipping was an enthusiastic member of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, so it is at first sight surprising that in practice he certainly didn't promote the central SPAB shibboleth of making a distinction between old and new work. One of the most telling examples of this came in the course of his description of a place called Tudor House in Broadway, which was being restored and remodelled by Charles Mallows. Mallows had taken a fragment of an old baluster and from this generated the design of a new staircase balustrade, rather as if he had done this from the DNA of the house. He had gone back into the Tudor history of the building and remade it, as if the hated eighteenth century had never happened. In fact Tipping was positively delighted when in the case of one house, a large wing by Smirke was demolished to be replaced by a vernacular Tudor one by, I think, Walter Brierley. Only the quality of the thing mattered, not the date, a realist, rationalist attitude.

Vann is the ultimate example of an Edwardian house that mixed old and new to the extent that you can't tell which is which, and that it doesn't matter. This is the house designed for himself and his family by W.D. Caröe in an isolated spot near Hambleton in Surrey in 1907. Some parts of the house that you can see here are Tudor, and just off to the left is a seventeenth-century brick extension. Caröe had to reorganise the internal structure in some places, but in others he introduced both matching and contrasting elements, or ones that he found complementary to his idea of the house and its original craftsmanship, such as a Jacobean ceiling added to the sitting room. Most famously, he turned the old barn into a large billiard room for entertaining. In this new space he repurposed or relocated parts of the original structure in ways that builders had always done, but which would have been anathema to SPAB. Vann was used as Howards End in the recent BBC adaption, and since the novel was written in the same year that it was designed, it could hardly have been more appropriate, because it is clearly an Edwardian idea of what a perfect Tudor house should look and feel like.

Weaver published a book just before the War with a whole series of medium-sized or large houses such as Vann which had been remodelled in similarly tactful ways. Another of his examples was the Wharf, a sixteenth or seventeenth-century riverside barn that had been made into what she called a 'studio' for Margot Asquith, the prime minister's wife, by the architect Walter Cave, possibly the first 'barn conversion' in the modern sense. It's quite symbolic of how Tudor architecture, or at any rate buildings that looked Tudor, was loaded politically in the ear in which a Liberal government was promoting the carving up of large estates to form smallholdings at favourable rates to tenant farmers, and the very first steps towards national town planning legislation. This one, also in Weaver's book is by Andrew Prentice, a Scot who also made a name for himself as the designer of interiors for passenger liners, is called Orchard Farm, Broadway, which had been built around 1720 in a manner 'oblivious of the neo-classic fashions which had entirely captured architecture in most parts of the country' as Weaver write approvingly. Prentice reorganised the interior and added a modern kitchen wing for Lady Maud Bowes Lyon, and turned its barn into a music room, actually a couple of years in advance of Vann. In fact Prentice is an example of an architect who could be better known, because he excelled at the Edwardian skill of going back into the history of a building and finding out the architectural facts about it, as it were, and then remaking its history. This is a house called The Retreat, at Lakenheath for a Liberal MP called Sir William Dunn.

There was a lot of remaking the past going on in Edwardian culture. We all know the story of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, of 1912, in which the flower girl Eliza Doolittle is remade into someone else. In fact I like to think that those remade Edwardian cottages are Elizas, scrubbed up and represented as what they should have been in the first place but never actually were. One sees it in children's literature, too, most strikingly in E. Nesbit's stories where boys and girls come and go between the ugly present and an idealised Tudor past which means, as with the architects' new or renovated Tudor houses, that some kind of backstory needs to be invented for the missing centuries. Some architects in this period designed houses that actually looked as if they had been constructed irregularly at different times. This is The Croft in Totteridge, designed for himself in the 1890s by Thomas Collcutt, best known as the architect of the Savoy hotel and the Palace Theatre, originally the Royal English Opera House. As with many other Edwardian houses, it was built as part of a cluster by a golf course. It is in terrific condition and it's more obvious when one is standing in front of it that some parts, for example a corridor to the kitchen, were intended to look as if they had been added over the centuries.

Interestingly enough, Hermann Muthesius' famous *Das Englische Haus*, which is a masterpiece of rational analysis, ends with this and one other house by Collcutt, so he evidently recognised its significance. Yet somehow this whole theme of Edwardian thinking about architecture seems to have got lost relative to the rest of Muthesius' message, which had so big an impact on European architecture. Yet Muthesius was rooted in exactly the same spot as the *Country Life* writers, naming Philip Webb and Norman Shaw as the most significant designers of the pre-Edwardian period and their remodelled houses such as Great Tangle and Chesters as the best examples of their work. Webb in particular took ideas from houses of all periods and combined them to make them new, something that Edwin Lutyens, when he first came upon it, found revelatory.

In fact one can look at this background information on Edwardian architecture and re-evaluate the role that Lutyens played in it. There isn't any denying that this was an architect of exceptional talent who put ideas together in an extraordinarily appealing way. But at the same time it is clearly the case that he was drawing hard on the ideas around him – in other words, the way to look at him is as an exceptional designer who worked within the context of ideas devised by others, rather than as an innovator.

In fact almost everything he did in this period was simply a better version of what someone else had done. The place to start to look at this is his work with old buildings. It doesn't take long to realise that a very large number of his well known projects are remodellings: Lindisfarne and Great Dixter, Temple Dinsley, Abbotswood and Canons Ashby and so on. At Great Maytham, Lutyens remodelled a house of 1720 – as Weaver perceptively put it, he 'picked up the thread' from where its original builder had let go of it, and gone somewhere else with it. At Tigbourne Court he borrowed a motif he would have seen, probably more than once in the articles on South Wraxhall manor house in *Country Life*, which is the insertion of a classical loggia into a Tudor block. Lutyens made a great deal of use of the Wealden type of house – for example, at Munstead Wood – but so did everyone else in this period, from Baillie Scott to provincial architects who never strayed beyond their own suburbs. In fact, many other architects were doing what Lutyens famously did at Fulbrook, one of his early Wealden-type Tudor houses, which was to insert a white classical interior into it. At Folly Farm in Berkshire he played around with the dates of the various wings. It's well known that his Tudor wing was built after his William and Mary one, but it's also the case that this itself was attached to an earlier cottage. So the house went backwards and forwards in time, and what that tells me is that it was the fabric, the constructional details, that mattered, and that's Devey's realism again. In fact at Marsh Court Lutyens

borrowed both Devey's disintegrating materials in the wall construction and elements of this, W.H. Romaine-Walker's stupendous chalk-faced Danesfield, near Marlow in Buckinghamshire.

David Cole has recently published a book on Lutyens in which he points how Lutyens also borrowed ideas from Prior, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Arthur Mackmurdo, and I'd add to that the architect Horace Field who was doing Wrennaissance with a W well before Lutyens was. So my conclusion is that *Country Life* liked Lutyens not because of his originality but almost the opposite, because he was the most representative of all the ideas going around at the time and just did all those things very well.

In the end a neo-Georgian vanguard led by the *Architectural Review*, and by Charles Reilly and Stanley Adshead in Liverpool, helped push the wheel of fashion around a further revolution. The *Review* started to publish details of and then whole articles on more and more eighteenth-century houses, even if it never quite became the beaux arts journal that Reginald Blomfield, its founder, had hoped it would be. Horace Field and Michael Bunney's *English Domestic Architecture of the XVII and XVIII Centuries* of 1905 provided the well of English Georgian details that aspiring designers required to get their own revival going, and as for Adshead, he evidently found Gidea Park disgusting, yearning for symmetrical, box-like plastered rooms instead of place he likened to caveman dwellings. Of course however much the Tudor may have lost ground in artistic circles before the War, it remained one of the most popular styles after it; where I live, in Broadstairs, there was an up-market Tudor architect called Edgar Ranger who was still designing them, albeit much cheaper and simpler, in the 1960s, and nowadays of course one sees Tudor-type timber frame houses going up everywhere – there is one around the corner from where I live.

I'm ending with Robin's photograph of what may be more of an unfamiliar building than some of the others: E. Guy Dawber's Tuesley Court, near Godalming. This is not exactly Tudor – it's an interpretation of Tudor that seems a bit Scottish, or French-influenced Scottish, judging by the curve of the roof and the crowstep gable. It's a partocualry lovely example of reentering Tudor architecture and remaking it, rather as if history had taken a different course as in a fantasy novel. It also has one of those strongly contrasting interiors, in this case a late seventeenth-century classical one, but Dawber's better known Nether Swell has, astonishingly, an almost rococo one. It's a way of showing the architect's control of history and mastery of building method, which transcends discussions about style, and which also shows the weakness of telling the story of architectural history in terms of style, or in teleological terms of 'development', one of the many bad habits that the modernists consciously adopted from the most strident of the gothic revivalists. Tudor architecture is against all of these and tries to be more about the building itself rather than about discussions and analyses of it – as the late Peter Blundell Jones might have put it. I hope very much that this look into the world of the Edwardian Tudor architects makes a fitting launch to your conference.