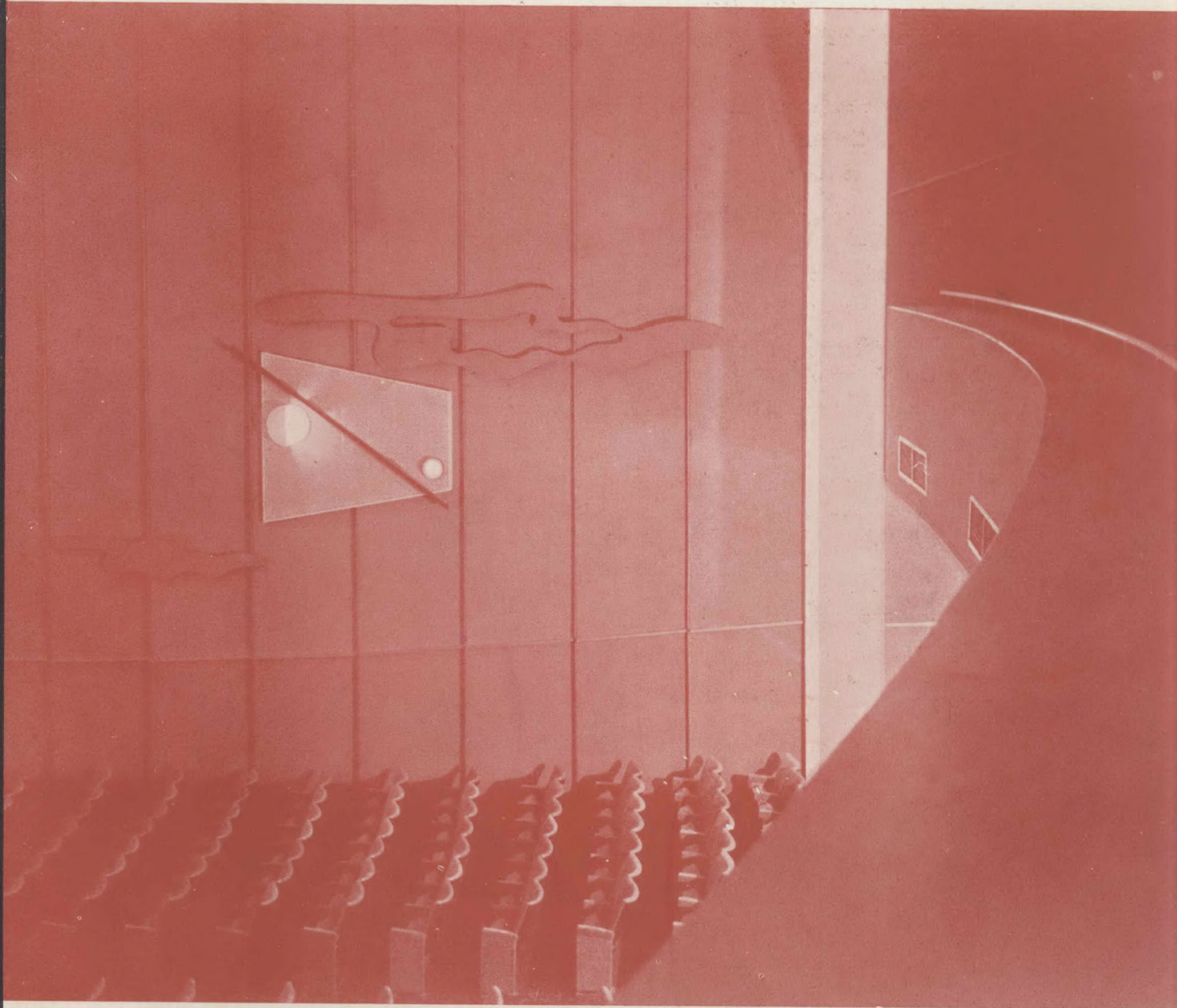


SOUTH AFRICAN ARCHITECTURAL RECORD



FORMAL PROBLEMS IN CINEMA DESIGN

NOVEMBER 1941

Then it was remembered that London was very largely an historic sequence, a place of sites and tablets. For what is left of Roman days you went to the British Museum or were lucky enough to come upon a complete mosaic when digging a deep basement, or found a small length of the old city wall cluttering up a building operation. Of Mediaeval London, what remains of the great Friaries but their localities and Walter Godfrey's researches. Of Tudor and Stuart London, how much beyond the topographical drawings such as Hollars. It is true that each period was represented very well, in a few scattered examples; but even these had usually suffered from lack of upkeep and consequent restoration. The town the Londoner lived in, had grown as an entity from the time of the Restoration. The historic associations and its strange qualities lay in its tortuous plan and the place names.

The inside of the town was not without recent change, however. In the reign of Edward VII, the London County Council did valuable work in clearing up insalubrious central neighbourhoods and replaced them with such schemes as Kingsway. This was the right way to foster the essential growth of a city. Other methods had obtruded during the last twenty years. These were piecemeal, scattered, and naturally, never bore any relation to the principle of improving the town, by the method of adequately attacking and opening up squalid areas. How much this *laissez faire* in rebuilding could be attributed to the handling of Regent Street by the Crown, it is impossible to say, but the architectural landslide seems to start there.

So away went Devonshire House, bequeathing its gateways to Green Park. So went the glistening portland stone of Lansdowne House, with insult added to injury by leaving a small dismembered bit of it to be overjostled by its new neighbour. So went Dorchester House with its Alfred Stevens decorations. So went the Adelphi under the gallumping mass of Shell House : the Geological Museum : Waterloo Bridge, in spite of the sustained and gallant rearguard action fought by the R.I.B.A. And an average cross section of replacement is represented in the inept, echeloned barrack blocks of Grosvenor House, tricked up by the Westminster Estate expert, who put a little plaster temple on top of each block.

To a great degree then, and at some aesthetic sacrifice, Londoners had agreed upon the necessity of general rebuilding, at any rate in the west end. Bearing that in mind, one can regard with more fortitude the havoc wrought by enemy action, however little one may approve of it.

Among all the photographs and pamphlets that reach us, it has been left to B. T. Batsford to publish

a book and present it in his inimitable way in spite of prevailing conditions. It is described as consisting of photographs by Cecil Beaton and commentary by James Hope-Hennessy. The photographs, as one would expect, are beautifully presented and adequate, but the commentary is so absorbing that, on balance, one is somewhat disappointed with the illustrations.

This essay, which is not so much concerned with the human holocaust as it is with historic losses, brings the story of destruction up to May of this year. The note of anxiety creeps in again and again when the author is regarding a little damaged building, sobered by the thought of premature jubilation.

The book is divided into three parts, Mediaeval and Renaissance; Wren's; and Hanoverian London. This framework holds together for the reader, the delicate pattern which is woven from great erudition and sensitiveness. It is a book which is a sheer delight to read and difficult to put down, even for looking up a reference. Architects will want to refer to text books and especially to the volumes of the "Wren Society" to see what is lost to posterity. As a matter of interest, they should refer to the isometric drawing of St. Pauls, prepared by the Surveyor, to see how prophetically it is drawn to admit the bomb at the east end.

One illustration, of Smith Square, will interest many who have there enjoyed the hospitality of Herbert Baker. The well known little house is roofless and blind, the result of blast of two, otherwise misspent, bombs.

High explosive will remove buildings but not history. St. James Piccadilly will doubtless continue for centuries in one guise or another—that is London.

C. D. ST. LEGER



See review on opposite page.

New Scotland Yard, London
(1888). View from Embankment
before additions.

A V I C T O R I A N G I A N T

Richard Norman Shaw, R.A. A Study by Sir Reginald Blomfield, R.A. B. T. Batsford, Ltd. 1940. 12/6.

This life of Shaw makes interesting reading not so much because we share its author's reverence for his subject, but for the reason that light is thrown on the Victorian scene by one whose age is sufficiently ripe to have enabled him to participate in those (for well-connected architects) carefree days of the seventies, eighties and nineties of the last century.

Not that Sir Reginald's mind is wholly occupied with the past—within the first four lines of his preface there is a bitter reference to le Corbusier, and again on page 31 he bemoans the fact that the national tradition has been supplanted by ". . . the theories of M. Corbusier and the practice of Russian and German architects . . ." Shaw "was fortunate in living before the advent of 'modernismus'." With this pious and heartfelt vote of thanks to fate before us let us see what Shaw achieved and what Sir Reginald Blomfield makes of the achievement. The "life" is copiously illustrated by means of plans, photographs, and perspective drawings—the latter with their harsh meticulous technique recall more immediately for us than any written word can do, the "artistic" atmosphere of those halcyon days which merges (though not quite justifiably in point of time) with the activities of Mr. Pecksniff, with stern fathers and Sunday dinners, and with the smug aura of correct deportment and corroding snobbishness that enveloped 'the wealthy clients.'

I may not be quite accurate in my attributions, but even Sir Reginald is at times a little confused when looking back to the rosy past when "Shaw had wealthy clients who believed in him and let him do what he liked." For on page 26 we are told of "those happy days of domestic architecture in the last quarter of the 19th century" and on page 48 that Shaw "lived in the prosperous days of the last quarter of the 19th century when there was money in abundance," but on page 27 the author recalls "the lean days of the last quarter of the 19th century."

Shaw's work is extolled with a note of passionate defence, but it is extremely difficult to see the mastery of design, the steady development and the profound significance which Sir Reginald reads into

the profusion of work that came from his board. With the rich heritage of country house design that preceded Shaw's era (at random one recalls Inigo Jones's Coleshill in Berkshire, the Manor House at Groombridge by Wren or by one of his school, and even centuries earlier an example such as Cothay in Somersetshire) one cannot be impressed by Shaw's turgid progress through tortured "half-timber" and restless roofs to the relatively classic placidity of Bryanston (1890) and Chesters (1891). To have almost arrived at the point reached by Jones and Wren, and to have apparently missed the lesson of the repose and discipline of the town house facades of the eighteenth century (consider the street fronts of houses in Beaconsfield and Buckingham) may in retrospect seem impressive to the author, and may even indirectly indicate the appalling chaos and arbitrariness that characterised Victorian architecture, but it does not in broad historical perspective raise Shaw to a position of eminence.

Sir Reginald Blomfield sees in modern architecture a dreary procession of boxes, without subtlety, without proportion or aesthetic significance. Apparently a sort of myopic fury envelops the architect who will not concede that "time marches on." One can sympathise with the rude bereavement that heralded new values before the last war (when Edwardian complacency had counted upon a period of slippered ease, with static and inviolate standards of aesthetic judgment for the fortunate few) but to read the same sneers, the same threadbare attacks and shibboleths seventeen years after the epoch-making House La Roche brought fame to, and hatred on, le Corbusier, is as exasperating as it is misplaced in a survey of the work of an architect who lived from 1831 to 1912.

We are told that if Shaw "did strange things, it was for a definite purpose." Figures 10, 11, 28, 38, 50 show just how strange these things could be, though the definite purpose persistently eludes one. Scotland Yard is in Sir Reginald's opinion, and leaving the Houses of Parliament out of account, "the finest public building erected in London since Somerset House" It is possible.

A chapter on Shaw's pupils has some amusing stories, and the concluding chapter on Lethaby will have its interest for those who worked in England when his influence was still a factor in architectural thought, but is it not possible to attribute a little too much to the "Arts and Crafts" movement of last century?

A facsimile of part of a letter from Shaw to Blomfield, and two complete letters (both full of admiration for the author of this book) complete the survey. Indeed the whole is an interesting reflection

of the times of Queen Victoria.

From a production point of view the book is impeccably handled (no mean achievement under war conditions), printed in small though beautiful type on fine paper with clear illustrations and an attractive binding. The frontispiece is a portrait-photo of Shaw taken in 1896.

R. MARTIENSSEN

PROFESSIONAL NOTES AND NEWS

Summary of the statistical statement prepared by the Witwatersrand Advisory Committee to The Controller of Industrial Man Power in respect to the control of Building activities on the Rand since the date of the Government Proclamation up to the 13th of November, 1941.

PERMITS GRANTED	832	£5,261,021
REFUSALS	303	£1,359,118
NOTED	114	£19,442
NATIVE PERMITS	32	£14,600
PENDING	36	£49,156

4 (Not stated)

These figures indicate that, subject to obtaining all the labour essential, from time to time, for the building operations so urgently required by the Defence Department, the Committee in giving effect to the policy of the Controller has been very greatly influenced by the desire to occasion the least possible interruption of the building industry on the Rand.

In granting permission, priority has been given for the erection of certain buildings in the order in which their functions are, directly or indirectly, associated with the war effort, and every endeavour has been made to avoid disabilities which a literal interpretation of the Regulations might occasion under certain circumstances and conditions.

C O R R E S P O N D E N C E

UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA—UNIE VAN SUID-AFRIKA.
OFFICE OF THE—KANTOOR VAN DIE
INSPECTOR OF FACTORIES.

New Magistrates' Courts,
Marshall Street,
JOHANNESBURG.
14/9/1941

The Secretary,
Transvaal Institute of S.A. Architects,
202, Kelvin House,
JOHANNESBURG.

Dear Sir,

FACTORIES, MACHINERY AND BUILDING WORK ACT, 1941: SECTION 12 AND CHAPTER I SECTION 2 (1) (2) and 5 OF THE REGULATIONS (GOVERNMENT NOTICE No. 2935 OF 28th AUGUST, 1941).

As you are doubtless aware, any plan submitted under Section 12 of the new Factories Act must be accompanied by a statutory form, duly completed by the owner or occupier of the building. I am forwarding herewith a few of these forms for use until more can be printed.

I shall be very glad if, when the form for the Municipal specifications for plans is supplied to the owner or occupier of the proposed building, this factory form may be supplied to that person for completion at the same time, so as to expedite return of plans submitted by your office in terms of Section 12.

Please note that the fee prescribed under Chapter I Section 2 (5) of the Factories Act Regulations (Government Notice No. 2935, of 28th August, 1941) must accompany each plan.

I shall be very glad if you would bring this to the notice of your members.

Yours faithfully,

L. DREYER,

Inspector of Factories.

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