INTERWAR

Hoover Factory, Perivale, Greater London (Wallis, Gilbert & Partners, 1932, extended 1935)

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BRITISH ARCHITECTURE 1919–39

GAVIN STAMP

With a foreword by Rosemary Hill

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Royal Artillery War Memorial, Hyde Park Corner, London (Lionel Pearson; sculptor Charles Sargeant Jagger, 1925)

FOREWORD

When my husband Gavin Stamp died in 2017 at the age of sixty-nine, he left the manuscript that became this book, a study of British architecture between the world wars, unfinished. It was a subject that had interested and preoccupied him since his schooldays. He returned to it on and off for decades; in a sense, the book would never have been finished because Gavin never stopped looking, learning and reconsidering.

Gavin was the most important and influential architectural historian and critic of his generation. Journalist, campaigner, scholar and activist, he continued to develop his ideas and change his mind when the evidence required it, into the last days of his life. He was immensely versatile. As *Private Eye*'s 'Piloti' he was the fearless scourge of vandals, individual or municipal, who tried to spoil good buildings – or even merely average buildings if they added to the quality of life for those who used them. He was among the first architectural conservationists to make the ecological argument, pointing out that buildings are embodied energy and demanding an

Battersea Power Station, London, before reconstruction (Giles Gilbert Scott, 1933)

environmental audit of the case for any demolition. As a scholar, his biography of George Gilbert Scott, junior, *An Architect of Promise*, rescued the most complicated figure of the great Scott dynasty, fated to be known as 'Middle Scott', from the heavy shadows of his famous father Sir Gilbert (designer of the Albert Memorial) and his yet more famous son Sir Giles (Battersea Power Station). Gavin wrote academic articles and organised exhibitions, most notably, with Colin Amery and others, the Lutyens exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in 1980–81, a landmark reassessment of Lutyens's reputation; for some years he taught at the Glasgow School of Architecture, where his lectures were memorably unorthodox; but for most of his life he was a working freelance journalist producing copy on time, to length (more or less), and often illustrated with his own photographs. This allowed him to explore ideas and places, to fill gaps in his knowledge and to revisit buildings over time. As Ian Hislop, his editor at *Private Eye*, once observed, Gavin's success as Piloti lay in his ability to assess readers' comments about a proposed development because he almost invariably knew the town, the street and, often, the building itself.

The architectural writer must conjure up the subject for the reader in words – and here, too, Gavin's range served him well. He could read the subtleties of a building as a musician reads a score. Of Lutyens's Midland Bank in the City of London he says:

> The ground floor is comparatively conventional, although tricks are played with the Doric order of pilasters disappearing into the rustication. Above, the wall dissolves, with banks of windows contained within giant buttresses, or pilasters, of unprecedented form. Not only do these recede, to give the vertical surfaces a pronounced batter, but each course of rustication diminishes in width by one-eighth of an inch as the building rises. Optical subtlety could surely be carried no further.

But technical details are not always relevant. He is equally likely to describe a building as 'wobbly', 'vulgar', 'friendly' or, quite brilliantly, as 'dominatingly unassertive'.

Gavin loved the architecture of Britain. In his later teens, irritated by his contemporaries' enthusiasm for Continental holidays, he made his own Grand Tour of the great industrial cities of the north. Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool and Glasgow remained for him among the most romantic and interesting of places, and he was impatient of his fellow southerners' tendency to know Tuscany better than Lancashire. Yet he also travelled widely himself. His was the generation that could trek with reasonable safety across Afghanistan – and he did, though not in hippy style. He wore a linen jacket and carried a canvas suitcase marked with his initials, being careful always to see that it was strapped on top of the bus before he boarded himself. He travelled too in India, a country for which he developed an enduring fascination, later making pioneering studies of the architecture of the Raj, and in Central and Eastern Europe before the fall of the Berlin Wall. As chairman of the Twentieth Century Society he led foreign trips to cities including Havana and Ljubljana which were always exciting and sometimes hair-raising due to their

speed and intensity, as well as Gavin's disregard for physical comfort and local bylaws. He had 20/20 eyesight until middle age and a phenomenal visual memory that allowed him to reach easily for connections and comparisons between, for example, the Nebraska State Capitol and Swansea Town Hall.

The period between the wars interested him for many reasons. He was an historian before he was an architectural historian, and he knew that at any given moment the most inaccessible period is that which is just within living memory. Too much material is still in private hands, too many axes are still being ground; the recent past is always on the move. At the same time it offers unique opportunities. Biography and oral history are two of the implements in the historian's toolkit, and Gavin made ample use of them. He knew many of the architects and critics he writes about here, including John Betjeman, through whom he inherited the *Private Eye* 'Nooks and Corners' column; Ernö Goldfinger, who became a friend; and John Summerson, with whom he enjoyed a long correspondence and who once publicly described Battersea Power Station, which Gavin was campaigning to save, as 'Gavin Stamp's billiard table'. He recorded extensive interviews for the British Sound Archive with Osbert Lancaster and Berthold Lubetkin, and although he just missed one of his heroes, Arthur Shoosmith, he developed a friendship with his widow, Marjorie, which informed his essay on Shoosmith for the *Dictionary of National Biography* and enabled them, together, to ensure that an unjustly forgotten figure was reassessed. Shoosmith's genius and its neglect are explicable in historical terms, and Gavin wanted to explain that (and much more) in order to see the period as a whole. This was something that he believed those historians who confined themselves to architecture had failed to do.

In architectural terms, the decades between 1919 and 1939 have generally been seen to mark a break between the traditional architecture of the Victorians and Edwardians and the start of the rise of Modernism. Too often the period has merely been scanned for evidence of what was to come, when as Nikolaus Pevsner put it: 'our

functionalists of the twenties and thirties', carried on the current of the zeitgeist, were led inexorably into 'the ocean of the International style of the 1930s'. This ignored the many continuities between pre- and post-war architecture and it undervalued or ignored the work of those such as Lutyens who were not part of this teleological rise to an inevitable Modernist Truth. It is one thing to argue that the work of the interwar Modernists was the best, aesthetically or even morally, the most interesting or the most cosmopolitan; it is another and simply untrue to suggest that it loomed large in Britain in the period between the world wars. Gavin's counter argument is implicit in the arrangement of his book, which reflects the historical reality. It begins with war memorials, the first and most widespread architectural expressions of the period, and ends with Modernism, a late, rarefied and largely unpopular phenomenon.

The past is always complicated. To understand it means seeing it as nearly as possible in the round – and this is especially true of the history of architecture. A poem can be the work of one person. To build requires collaboration, social momentum, money. Architecture happens to everyone, in their homes, streets, schools and their places of work and leisure. As A. W. N. Pugin demonstrated in his 1841 illustrations of 'Contrasted Towns', comparing the spires and turrets of the Middle Ages with the factory chimneys of the nineteenth century, a skyline will tell you a lot about a society. Since Gavin started work on this book, more light and shade have been added to the picture. Both his own writings and those of others have helped to establish a broader and more nuanced understanding of what Modernism was – and was not – in the Britain of the 1920s and 1930s. Yet nobody has written about the period as he does here, following the overlapping themes and cross-currents of an age of remarkable contrasts in architecture, as in society, but one also of continuities with the Late Victorian and Edwardian years. This was a period when 'British' architecture was built in many places outside Britain, by an Empire that had yet fully to comprehend the signs of its imminent collapse, and when much that was built in Britain was the work

of Americans, Russians, Australians and, after 1933, of European fugitives from Nazism. Of course, nobody thought of it at the time as an historic period and certainly not, until it was almost over, one of 'interwar' architecture. For a history to show how events unfolded with the advantage of hindsight while avoiding the condescension of posterity requires imagination as well as scholarship, and Gavin uses both to try and enter into the mood of Britain in 1919. Out of a population of 43 million, 880,000 men had been killed. The number physically wrecked or suffering from 'shell shock' is unknowable. There was no family, town or village that had not known losses, and so his first chapter deals with war memorials, the first works of a nation coming to terms with an unprecedented catastrophe, and its attempts to give expression to the inexpressible, from simple parish crosses to the vast cemeteries of Flanders, culminating in Lutyens's tragic masterpiece, the Memorial to the Missing of the Somme. Here, in monumental forms closer to pure sculpture than most architecture comes, is where the story of the interwar years begins.

If life was cheap in the Great War, death was expensive. Wages and employment fell through the 1920s. There could be few major building programmes, and the post-war years saw a concomitant flowering of architectural journalism. Projects that could not be built could be drawn and described. Visions for the brave new world were argued out in print – not only by specialist critics but by writers of many kinds, including Sacheverell Sitwell, Evelyn Waugh, Aldous Huxley and Robert Byron. A journalist himself, Gavin gives full weight to the arguments that ran through the pages of *Country Life* and especially the *Architectural Review*, the 'Archie Rev' as it was known to its friends. Here Pevsner and Betjeman represented two sides of the Modernism argument. Betjeman characterised his rival as the 'Herr Doktor Professor', complaining that Pevsner saw him as a lightweight enthusiast for Victoriana, a 'waxed-fruit' merchant. Pevsner, to Betjeman's irritation, seems not to have noticed this very British kind of teasing and failed to rise to a quarrel. There was also something of a satire boom. Evelyn Waugh was scathing

Woodland Way, Petts Wood, Greater London (Basil Scruby and Leonard Culliford, c. 1930)

about Modernism in both his journalism and his novels. The extreme Corbusian view represented by Professor Silenus in *Decline and Fall* is so madly doctrinaire that he resents his client's insistence on having a staircase. ('Up and down, in and out, round and round! Why can't they sit still and work?') Meanwhile, at the Archie Rev, the most brilliant architectural satirist who ever lived was in his prime. Osbert Lancaster's gift for language was as great as his ability to find and gently exaggerate the characteristics of any building. The styles he named – 'Stockbroker's Tudor', 'Bypass Variegated', 'Pseudish' and the rest – skewered sections of contemporary society and attached them to the bricks and mortar, concrete, glass, or mock-oak beams that best expressed their tastes and prejudices.

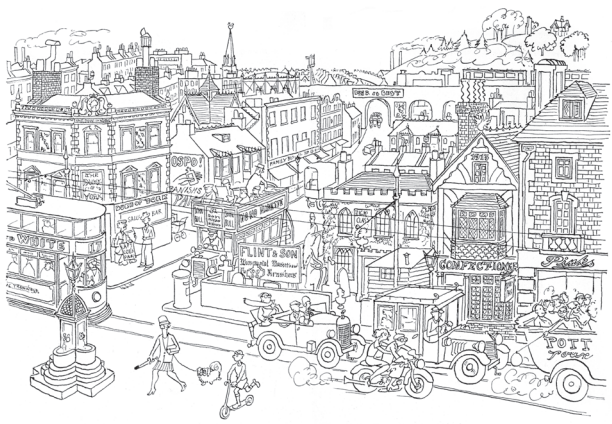
Gavin, especially in his guise as Piloti, shared Lancaster's fondness for satire. He occasionally resorted to it in his sallies against the vision of interwar Britain as a seedbed for Modernism, pointing out for example that Modernist buildings (he was thinking of Lubetkin's London Zoo Penguin Pool and Oliver Hill's hotel at Morecambe) are found mostly in 'fringe conditions, by the seaside or

in zoos', or in such 'peculiar locations' as Hampstead and Highgate in London. Apart from its historical inaccuracy, Gavin disliked the characterisation of the interwar period as an early chapter in the rise of Modernism for its snobbery. As he argued elsewhere in an article defending suburbia, 'Neo-Tudor', the semi-detached houses, thatched pubs and 'Elizabethan' shopping parades that represented the greater part of the output of the period were also what most people wanted. The Modernists' desire to distance themselves from popular taste was fully reciprocated; Lubetkin's 1930s block of flats, Highpoint One, intended as a manifesto for high-rise living, prompted local residents to form the Highgate Preservation Society to ensure that nothing like it happened again. Ironically it is the less socially advantaged who have ended up living in the social housing that was the post-war legacy of Corbusian doctrine, and the consequences have often been unhappy.

The question of patronage is always central to the history of architecture. After 1919 the traditional patrons – the landed aristocracy and the Church – no longer dominated. Public bodies, notably London Underground, the War Graves Commission and individual local authorities, largely determined the post-war built environment. The great housing shortage allowed speculative builders to flourish, and Gavin, whose own early childhood was spent in a bungalow on the Orpington bypass, was interested in them too. On either side of this broad middle were the extremes. On the one hand the die-hard Modernists with their 'flat roof Bolshevism', and on the other fringe there was the remarkable lone figure of Blunden Shadbolt, an architect who specialised in 'New "Old" Houses', laying roof tiles on wobbly chicken wire to create an effect of weathered age. His masterpiece, 'Smugglers' Way' in the New Forest, was a 'wildly irregular gabled composition of timber and brick, roofed with both tile and thatch'. Gavin found Shadbolt funny, but he didn't sneer at him, seeing in him one of the many ways in which architecture reflected the contrasts of the times. The Jazz Age, with its fancy factories, was also the age of the Cenotaph, just as the flappers and the Charleston coincided with the Jarrow March and the General Strike.

The architectural profession had its own internal contradictions in this period. The architects practising in 1919 spanned three generations. Some were Victorians carrying on, others were just beginning their careers. How many architects of genius were lost in the trenches we will never know. It was, predominantly, still a man's world, one in which men were known by surnames and initials, wore tweed and horn-rimmed glasses, and there was a distinct whiff of pipe smoke in the office air. Women in 1919 had not yet won the vote and they would not be admitted to degrees at Cambridge until 1948 (the year of Gavin's birth). In this context architecture appears among the more open-minded of the professions. Ethel Charles became the first female member of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in 1898 and her sister followed two years later. Practising female architects, however, remained rare. Elisabeth Scott, whose Shakespeare Memorial Theatre of 1927 Gavin campaigned to preserve from destructive alterations, was an exception but, as he wrote in a letter to the *London Review of Books* five months before he died, she was accused in her lifetime of plagiarism: 'In the very masculine profession of architecture, few could then accept that a mere young woman could have possibly been responsible for a sophisticated modern design chosen by independent British and American assessors out of 72 entries.'

Thus, the built environment is shaped by social norms, by politics and by our sense of the past. From the standpoint of the 1920s and 1930s, Georgian architecture still did not appear 'properly old'. Although it was admired by architects, including the Modernists, it was being swept away on a vast scale. 'The great contribution of England is Georgian,' Ernö Goldfinger remarked. 'But hardly had I time to look at it [than] they were pulling it down.' The Georgian Group was founded in 1937 to try and turn the tide. Even Christopher Wren was not safe. In 1919, 'as if to celebrate the peace', as Gavin writes, the Bishop of London proposed the closure of nineteen City of London churches by Wren, Hawksmoor and others, to free up valuable sites for redevelopment and fund new churches in the suburbs. This, at



'Drayneflete 1925' (Osbert Lancaster, 1949)

least, was stopped, but many battles lay ahead, and from the late 1960s onwards Gavin was usually somewhere in the advance guard. Some things he never forgot or forgave. The fact that Giles Scott's Memorial Court at Clare College, Cambridge, 'unique in British architecture', had been 'gratuitously spoiled' was among them. Overall, however, his tone in this last book is irenic. Surprisingly so, perhaps, for someone whose career involved so many campaigns and controversies. But this was a subject he had had time to come to terms with, to consider, and to arrive if not at a final then at a deeply considered judgement.

Between the manuscript that Gavin left on his computer and the book you now hold in your hands or read on screen, a great deal of work has been needed. I have done as much as I could, but *Interwar* would have been much diminished without the support of the Twentieth Century Society. A decision was made at an early stage by its Director, Catherine Croft, to support the book's illustration. This, and the generosity of the photographer John East, have made it what it is. John not only put his own archive at the disposal of the project, he also undertook original photography, travelling around the country from Petts Wood to the East Neuk of Fife, braving all weathers and obstructions, human and otherwise, in a spirit that Gavin would have appreciated. My debt to him and to the Twentieth Century Society is immense.

Rosemary Hill
December 2023

INTRODUCTION

Seventy years after it was completed, the tallest building in the city of Cambridge is still that strange, stocky, brooding tower which stands over the river to the west of the old colleges. Built of pinky-grey brick, its vertical lines are terminated by a colonnade below a truncated pyramidal roof. Uncollegiate and not particularly Gothic in character, with its walls curving subtly inwards towards the summit, it is reminiscent of monuments of the Ancient World while also looking rather like an early twentieth-century American skyscraper. But it is not a commercial structure. It is rather a tower of learning, for it rises above the Cambridge University Library (Plate 2). This building was designed by a major architect who flourished in the two decades framed by two world wars, became President of the Royal Institute of British Architects and is best known for the last great Gothic Revival cathedral in Britain, two prominent electricity generating stations in London, a bridge across the Thames, and for the design of the once-ubiquitous red telephone kiosk. He was Sir Giles Gilbert Scott (1880–1960), the third generation of a great British architectural dynasty.

In its modernity, its stylistic eclecticism and in its monumentality, the 'UL', as it is familiarly known, may serve as emblematic of British architecture between the wars, for it is very difficult to characterise in architectural terms. In his *Buildings of England* volume on Cambridgeshire (1954), Nikolaus Pevsner could write that 'one is never sure whether the building was meant to be functional or for display, modern or traditional'.[1] The 1920s and 1930s were responsible for a large number of important public buildings which continue to serve their functions as intended and which define the physical and social landscape of Britain, yet it was a time with no one identifiable style, or general agreement about what modern architecture might be. In fact, it was a period as complex, diverse and contradictory as the mid-Victorian decades. In his Inaugural Address at the RIBA in 1933, Scott talked of the urgent need for reconciliation in another Battle of the Styles:

> I hold no brief either for the extreme diehard Traditionalist or the extreme Modernist and it seems to me idle to compare styles and say that one is better than another; the old fight of my grandfather's time between Gothic and Classic and the present fight between Traditionalism and Modernism seem to me issues not worth spilling ink over, but what we do need is a common agreement to use only one style and one style only.[2]

This exasperating pluralism can be seen in interwar Cambridge. The axial approach to the library is framed by elegant neo-Georgian buildings designed by the same architect; in the marketplace a new Guildhall in a stripped, modernised Classical manner in grey-brown brick faces a curved residential block in stone with a strong horizontal modernistic emphasis. Not far away, the laboratory built for Sir Ernest Rutherford is a severe flat-roofed structure of simple volumes lit by large metal-framed windows and only ornamented by a crocodile carved into its yellow brickwork by Eric Gill; elsewhere in Cambridge there were experimental houses with flat roofs, white walls and metal

windows, built by young architects for progressive dons. Like other, more typical suburban houses in Cambridge, however, the new block added to Queens' College in the 1930s is in a modern adaptation of the Tudor, looking, as Nikolaus Pevsner put it with mild amusement, 'exactly like a friendly block of flats at, say, Pinner'.[3] In a similar style but rather better was the suave, traditional residential block by Sir Edwin Lutyens added to Magdalene College. Peterhouse, in contrast, built a modernistic residential block in concrete and brick while the nearby Fitzwilliam Museum was extended in a grand American Beaux-Arts Classical manner. Indeed, the impression given by the architectural production of a mere two decades is as chaotic as that given by the architectural ambitions of the first few decades of Victoria's reign in the same city, with the Roman grandeur of the Fitzwilliam Museum and the subtle neo-Classicism of Cockerell's old University Library co-existing with the earnest efforts of the Gothic Revival, while certain colleges chose Alfred Waterhouse's interpretation of Early French Renaissance before the pretty eclecticism of the 'Queen Anne' style of Newnham tried to suggest a resolution to this conflict.

This stylistic diversity worried contemporaries, in both the nineteenth century and the twentieth. 'When the history of the present phase of architectural development is written,' the architect Howard Robertson and the architectural photographer F. R. Yerbury predicted in 1931,

> it may be that the achievement of the years in which we are living will be summed up as mediocre. Emphasis will perhaps be laid on the lack of uniform tendencies, on the amount of individual experiment which has had no sequence, on the divergence between schools of thought which permits a twentieth-century house of the pseudo-thatched and elm-boarded pattern to rise cheek by jowl with a square flat-roofed box which is a pale essay in geometry. Sometimes, even, there may be astonishment on the part of historians to find that these two extremes in the expression of domestic ideals are the work of the same architect.[4]

Faced with this diversity, historians of architecture have tended to concentrate on the particular, while historians of the bigger picture have given way to conventional prejudice.

A comparison between the two eras is again here instructive. In his survey of *English Social History*, published in 1942, the historian G. M. Trevelyan could write how 'the decay of taste between the period of the Regency and the period of the Prince Consort was astonishing. The most refined and educated classes were as bad as any: the monstrosities of architecture erected by order of the Dons of Oxford and Cambridge Colleges in the days of William Butterfield and Alfred Waterhouse gives daily pain to posterity.'[5] Such a blinkered dismissal of some of the most serious buildings of their time was curiously echoed two decades later when A. J. P. Taylor generalised about the more recent architectural achievement in England:

> Architecture continued to follow a decaying Imperial style. Nash's Regent Street was destroyed. A nondescript blatancy took its place. Giles Gilbert Scott outdid the worst achievements of the Victorians in the New Bodleian building at Oxford. All that redeemed the period are some Underground stations by Charles Holden and the *Daily Express* building in Fleet Street.[6]

If architectural historians can be notoriously narrow in outlook, political and social historians can be out of their depth when dealing with aesthetic matters. Trevelyan's remarks were already dated in their time and were soon supplanted by a number of serious studies of Victorian architecture. Taylor's were almost as old-fashioned, but while the foundation of the Thirties Society in 1979 reflected a growing desire to understand and defend British interwar architecture, no major studies have attempted to put the buildings he dismissed into a broad cultural context. There are monographs on individual architects of the period, some traditional, like Edwin Lutyens; more on adherents of the Modern Movement, including Berthold Lubetkin, Ernö Goldfinger and Wells Coates, while exhibition catalogues and

other monographs have assessed more problematic and varied figures such as Oliver Hill, Robert Atkinson and H. S. Goodhart-Rendel. There have also been surveys of particular building types, factories, Underground railway stations and cinemas, but the only studies of a more general nature are devoted to what was a significant but nonetheless minority aspect of the period: the Modern Movement. Taylor's opinion would seem to echo the conclusion asserted by the architect and critic J. M. Richards in his influential Pelican paperback on modern architecture published at the very end of the period, in 1940, that:

> Presumably all thinking people now agree that it is absurd to put up houses that look like miniature castles, petrol stations that look like medieval barns, and department stores that look like the palaces of Renaissance bishops – quite apart from being extremely inefficient. No arguments are needed against dressing up our buildings in fancy costumes borrowed from the past. A more profitable occupation is to give our undivided attention to the new architecture of the mid twentieth century which is at last evolving.[7]

Except that many people still thought it absurd to put up houses that looked like factories.

Modernism was always invested with such particular moral virtue and presented itself with such polemic that the problem remains of putting it into that wider picture. As the architectural historian John Summerson put it in 1959:

> It seems natural writing about the past thirty years of English architecture, to write as if the only things worth bothering about were the local initiation, progress and achievements of the 'modern movement'. Historically, this is evidently lop-sided; but also, historically, it would be extremely difficult to write about the architecture of the period as if it could all be evaluated in

> much the same way. It cannot be. In architecture, as in poetry and sculpture, there has been a wide and deep gulf between the moderns and those who are vaguely and rather misleadingly described as traditionalists.[8]

In consequence, it was the moderns who were taken seriously first – at least officially. On the advice of Nikolaus Pevsner, the first buildings of the period 1914–39 to be listed in 1970 by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government were almost all by famous English pioneers of Modernism: Lubetkin's Penguin Pool; the Lawn Road flats in Hampstead by Wells Coates; Maxwell Fry's Sun House, also in Hampstead; the Peter Jones store in Sloane Square; and so on, together with the celebrated works of the refugees from Nazi Germany who did so much to encourage the New Architecture in Britain: Eric Mendelsohn, Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer. Only in 1981, following the sudden, scandalous demolition of the Art Deco Firestone Factory on the Great West Road in Brentford in anticipation of listing, was a more representative selection given statutory protection. Even so, more than half a century on from Summerson's remarks, the attempt to present the whole picture still needs to be made – hence this book. And from the present vantage point, perhaps it can be seen that the gulf was not quite so wide, and that there were continuities and shared characteristics between architects who designed in so many different, contemporary styles.

Despite its international scope, the perception has emerged that the best British architecture of the interwar years was 'Deco',* but this is as misleading a picture as that given by concentrating on the advent and development of the Modern Movement. The name 'Deco' came from the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs held in Paris in 1925, but the style was more influenced by modern American design. When

* [This was in the aftermath of an exhibition in 2003 at the Victoria and Albert Museum, which described Deco as 'the most glamorous and popular style of the twentieth century'. RH.]

Peter Jones Department Store, Sloane Square, London (William Crabtree, 1936)

applied to buildings in Britain, the result was best characterised as *moderne*, but the ingredients which give that sense of period style were much more diverse in origin and included the pre-war Jugendstil or Art Nouveau, German and Dutch Expressionist brick architecture and a taste for the exotic as well as the Sublime. The publicity given to the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922 only encouraged an existing interest in the monumental character of ancient buildings in Egypt and elsewhere, as well as in new decorative styles.

Quite how confusing the period was may be gathered from the retrospective published by the Architecture Club in 1947. According to its 'Preface' by Lionel Brett (later fourth Viscount Esher), *Recent English Architecture 1920–40* offered 'a representative selection of English architecture produced between the wars in preparation for the time when fine building can again be undertaken and its progressive evolution be resumed'.[9] The selection certainly indicated the redundancy of any analysis of style by building types; the civic buildings illustrated were Renaissance Classical (Trowbridge) or monumental stripped Classical (Dagenham), Swedish modern (Norwich) and Dutch modern (Hornsey), while even churches

were modernistic or Early Christian in addition to the predictable Gothic. Modernism was well represented by an airport (Ramsgate) and a village college (Impington), as well as by several already much celebrated houses.

The building chosen for the book's dustjacket, however, was the monumental brick ziggurat with Art Deco detailing which Herbert Rowse designed to conceal a ventilation shaft above the Mersey Tunnel in Birkenhead, which was clearly inspired by modern American structures, although it also has hints of German Expressionist architecture. Private houses were in almost every style, including that sort of Spanish Colonial which the great architectural critic, satirist and cartoonist Osbert Lancaster dubbed 'Pseudish'. Not represented was the most popular style, that of the new speculative housing developments, which were, in scale alone, a significant aspect of the output of the construction industry in Britain. But, then as now, there was a snobbish prejudice against such a popular taste. Nevertheless, the text of *Recent English Architecture* insisted that the illustrations had been chosen 'for the contribution the originals make to our heritage of building, whether they are modern or traditional in style. It is misleading to discriminate between buildings by mere labels, which are largely a matter of fashion.'

Another useful guide to the architectural aspirations and prejudices of the period was published by *The Architects' Journal* just a few months before another war brought things to a close. *Scoreboard* was the survey of votes for 'six recent British buildings . . . considered of the greatest merit' cast by 'well-known people' chosen by the journal's readers. The results are not so much a guide to popular taste as to educated fashionable opinion in London in 1939. The most popular architects were the avant-garde firm Tecton, led by the glamorous Russian *émigré* Berthold Lubetkin, followed by Messrs Adams, Holden & Pearson: that is, Charles Holden, the architect of, amongst other things, Arnos Grove Station on the Piccadilly Line, as well as the headquarters of London University. More revealing, however, are the individual buildings cited.

Top of the poll came the Peter Jones department store in Sloane Square in London. This was another choice that indicated the increasing acceptance of the Modern Movement in Britain; its curving glass and vitrolite curtained-walled exterior was derived from the Schocken Stores in Germany by Eric Mendelsohn, which its architect, the young William Crabtree, had studied. Second, however, came a building designed, on the outside at least, by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott. His Cambridge library may not have been cited, but his Battersea Power Station was much admired as a conspicuous and successful modern industrial building. It was chosen by, amongst others, the scientist J. D. Bernal, Kenneth Clark, director of the National Gallery, the actor Charles Laughton and the writer Rebecca West. Third came another conspicuous modern structure in London: the headquarters of the London Passenger Transport Board above St James's Park Station, designed by Charles Holden. Its supporters included the scientist Julian Huxley, the art critic of *The Times*, Charles Marriott, the Byzantinist David Talbot Rice and, perhaps not surprisingly, Frank Pick, the board's chief executive.

If any conclusion can be drawn from these choices, it is that modernity in the 1930s took several forms. It could be the New Architecture of steel and glass derived from Continental Europe, but it could also be that American-influenced treatment of monumental brickwork which John Betjeman dismissed as 'jazz modern' and today is loosely described as 'Deco'. Or it could be the monumental Classicism abstracted to planes of white Portland stone which was enriched in the case of Holden's building by avant-garde sculpture by Henry Moore, Jacob Epstein and Eric Gill. The survey reflects the tastes of the 1930s, a polarised and anxious decade which saw the increasing acceptance of the arguments in favour of the Modern Movement while Modernism itself was becoming more romantic, more English.

A similar survey undertaken in 1929 would have selected rather more traditional modern buildings; the 1920s was initially a more conservative decade, dominated, in England, by the cult of Sir

Christopher Wren, though it was still characterised by a diversity of approach. There was also the potent influence of Geoffrey Scott's book, *The Architecture of Humanism*, first published in 1914 but revised in 1924, which vaunted style at the expense of nineteenth-century notions of structural integrity. The consequence was a widespread belief that modern British architecture should be a development of the simplified national Classical tradition: that is, the Georgian. Anglophile foreign architects admired the repetitive, elegant severity of Georgian terraces in London and saw them as truly modern. This did not prevent several knighted traditionalists from assisting unbridled private interests in destroying much of the best of Georgian London between the wars, eventually provoking the foundation of the Georgian Group of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1937. This aspect of the period is powerfully conveyed by the uncritical optimism of the egregious Harold P. Clunn, who described those who would preserve John Rennie's Waterloo Bridge as 'short-sighted fanatics'.[10] That modern Georgian aspired to be the national style is suggested by the curiosity of 'The King's House' presented to King George V as a Silver Jubilee gift in 1935 by the Royal Warrant Holders;[11] the winning design by Beresford Marshall was in modernistic neo-Georgian, in brick, with a soberly streamlined Deco interior.*

Well might the critic or historian be bemused by British interwar architecture, especially as the same architect could produce buildings almost simultaneously in different styles. In the 1860s, George Gilbert Scott had been committed to Gothic. His grandson Giles Scott, however, might seem to have been unconstrained in choice. He naturally used the Gothic manner in which he had been trained for his great cathedral in Liverpool, but other churches by him were designed in an abstracted round-arched Early Christian or Romanesque manner, while a refined neo-Georgian was employed

* The King chose the design from three which emerged from a limited competition among architects nominated by Sir Giles Scott.

for domestic commissions and 'jazz modern' for his industrial jobs. Although he was happy to employ reinforced-concrete construction to achieve flat roofs, and sometimes used metal windows with a pronounced horizontal emphasis, Scott never designed a building which might be categorised as 'Modern', albeit his new Waterloo Bridge was a model of austere functional elegance. Younger architects could produce flat-roofed, reinforced-concrete houses which were published in several polemical books (including Raymond McGrath's *Twentieth Century Houses* and F. R. S. Yorke's *The Modern House in England*) while also being prepared to design in traditional styles when asked. Marshall Sisson or Hugh Hughes might be cited, but the best example is that supremely versatile architect, Oliver Hill.

Born in 1887, Hill was an exact contemporary of Le Corbusier (1887–1965). He designed a number of much-illustrated Modern houses, like Holthanger at Wentworth in Surrey, and a number of simple, geometrical houses with flat roofs and standard metal windows on the Frinton Estate in Essex. He was responsible for the stylish, streamlined Midland Hotel at Morecambe, the first modern-style hotel in Britain, and the Prospect Inn on the Isle of Thanet, the first modern pub or roadhouse, and was chosen as the architect for the British Pavilion at the 1937 Paris Exposition. On the other hand, Hill also designed London town houses in a neo-Georgian or neo-Regency manner in which the influence of his principal architectural hero, Edwin Lutyens, is clearly evident. He was also responsible for one of the finest houses of the interwar years, designed in a rugged, Arts and Crafts manner, at Cour, on the Kintyre peninsular (Plate 23), while his own home was a restored tile-hung farmhouse in Surrey, reflecting the widespread English taste for the Tudor. Hill was also a talented interior designer, making clever use of mirror and repetitive vertical fluting in a manner best described as Art Deco. After the Second World War, Hill's practice declined; he moved to the Cotswolds and wrote much for the magazine *Country Life* – in whose pages he had first seen the entrancing work of Lutyens.

Hill ought to have been included in *Representative British Architects of Today*, a compilation of articles published by Charles Reilly (1874–1948) in 1931. Reilly, the former Head of the Liverpool School of Architecture, later switched his enthusiasm for American Beaux-Arts Classicism for whatever was modern and fashionable. In 1931, however, he had yet to be converted to the Modern Movement, and the dozen architects selected mostly worked in more traditional styles. In a curious way Reilly's book is representative of the period by being so very unrepresentative. None of the younger architects already producing notably modern buildings were included, while the conspicuous absence of two of Reilly's productive contemporaries, E. Vincent Harris (who triumphed in so many competitions for civic buildings) and Charles Holden (then producing his admired work for London Underground), can only be explained by professional jealousy. The youngest architects included were both older than Hill, being both born in 1883. One was Robert Atkinson, a pioneer in cinema architecture responsible for The Regent at Brighton, with its American-influenced, atmospheric interiors. The other was Clough Williams-Ellis, a glamorous and fashionable figure who would become best known for his recycling of rescued architectural fragments to create a picturesque Mediterranean village on the Welsh coast at Portmeirion (Plate 9).

Both Atkinson and Williams-Ellis, like Reilly himself, had begun their architectural careers before the Great War, as had the other architects he eulogised. Indeed, what is most revealing about Reilly's book is how old and how established they were. Half of them were (or would soon be) knighted. Several were over seventy, and the oldest had been born at the end of the Crimean War. This was the combative Sir Reginald Blomfield (1856–1942), who still had it in him to infuriate younger generations and would soon do so by attempting to commence the rebuilding of Nash's Carlton House Terrace, and by publishing, in 1934, an intemperate attack on Modernism with the consciously xenophobic title *Modernismus*. 'For myself I am prejudiced enough to detest cosmopolitanism,' he announced, despite the fact that his own Classical work had been

conspicuously French in inspiration.[12] Others in the book had also made their names by producing Classical or 'Edwardian Baroque' buildings before the war: H. V. Lanchester, whose partnership was then working on the Parkinson Building at Leeds University and a whopping palace in India for the Maharajah of Jodhpur; Arthur J. Davis, who was still building giant Renaissance *palazzi* for banks in the City of London; and Curtis Green, whose unhappy collaboration with the engineer Owen Williams had resulted in the uncharacteristic and controversial Dorchester Hotel. There was also Stanley Adshead, who, in partnership with Stanley Ramsey, had once produced exquisite housing in a clever neo-Regency style.

Some were church architects, best known for Gothic work: Sir Giles Scott, of course, and Sir Walter Tapper. There was also the old Arts and Crafts architect, E. Guy Dawber. And there was Sir Herbert Baker, another knighted architect who managed to combine an Arts and Crafts sensitivity with an Imperial Classicism which he had practised in South Africa and India, as well as in London. That year, 1931, was indeed the year the new capital of British India, New Delhi, was officially inaugurated, and in which Baker's contribution to it was excoriated by Robert Byron in the pages of both the *Architectural Review* and *Country Life* while that of his uncomfortable collaborator, Sir Edwin Lutyens, was lauded. Along with Scott, Lutyens was the only representative of these distinguished Late Victorian and Edwardian architects who fully deserved inclusion in Reilly's book. Unlike several of them, he was still building, having just started on his huge, sublime Roman Catholic cathedral in Liverpool, and, unlike most of them, he was producing work which was still admired by a younger generation.

The differences among, and the conflicts between, these different generations may be one useful way of charting the complexities of interwar architecture. As Reilly's book suggests, the older generation still dominated: almost completely in the 1920s and still, to a considerable extent, in the 1930s. Too old to have fought in the First World War, they carried on regardless and, for a time, unchallenged.

'No age, not even the Victorian, is so remote from today as the Edwardian,' began an editorial in the *Architectural Review* in 1934,[13] going on to concede that 'the most prominent architects today' belonged to that era, and that, 'even when they themselves are dead, the offices which they started are still busy turning out the same sort of thing as they turned out in 1905'.* No wonder their grandchildren's generation often felt exasperated. 'We were born in the war,' yelled the young editors of *Focus*, the new student magazine emanating from the Architectural Association: 'We were born into a civilization whose leaders, whose ideals, whose culture had failed. They are still in power today. But we, the generation who follow, cannot accept their domination. They lead us always deeper into reaction that we are convinced can only end in disaster.'[14]

Polarised by the increasingly extreme politics of the 1930s, this was the voice of a generation ideologically committed to the Modern Movement which would attempt to fulfil its ideals after the Second World War. 'Today we have got our Modern Architecture and very soon it will be absolutely inescapable,' John Summerson could announce in 1941. 'It has the loyalty of the young; it is established, with different degrees of firmness, in every school of architecture in the country. Soon it will not be Modern Architecture any longer. It will just be Architecture.'[15]

It would, however, be a mistake to see the confused interwar years merely as a period of transition. There was, for a start, a generation in between the older Traditionalists and younger Modernists; this generation, which had fought in the war, included a number of thoughtful, broad-minded architects who reacted intelligently to the possibilities offered by Modernism and were open to new ideas from Europe, but who were not prepared to forget the past and to discard the many strengths of the continuing traditions of British architecture. They included such figures as Harry Goodhart-Rendel,

* Architectural development seems to go in spurts, followed by lulls, so much the same could have been written in, say, 1980 – or indeed today.

Howard Robertson, Thomas S. Tait, Frederick Etchells (who first translated the polemics of Le Corbusier into English), Herbert Rowse and Arthur Shoosmith – as well as Oliver Hill. These architects were responsible for a rich and allusive modernism, one that could be monumental, decorative and colourful, in contrast to the doctrinaire aesthetic of planar reinforced concrete derived from Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus.

However, for all the differences in outlook between the different generations of architects, they had much in common. Not least was an acceptance of the revolutionary impact new technologies were making on architecture and daily life – modernity in its widest sense. The more conservative architects may have believed in pitched roofs and traditional building materials, but they were happy to enjoy the benefits of electric light, the telephone and the motor car. What is also evident is how a machine aesthetic influenced architecture, for so many 'streamlined' buildings imitated the shape of aeroplanes, biplanes and monoplanes, and the superstructures of ocean liners. Then there were the new forms of construction, whose benefits were not to be denied (reinforced concrete and the steel frame), and new materials: plywoods and plastics, ruboleum for floors, aluminium and welded steel tubing for furniture, and vitrolite and new forms of glass for the walls. The sheer size and weight of the lavish book on *Glass in Architecture and Decoration* by Raymond McGrath and A. C. Frost, published by the Architectural Press in 1937 says much about the enthusiasms of the time.

It is, perhaps, difficult to appreciate the revolutionary impact of technical innovations experienced by architects born in the 1880s. Such men grew up in a world in which, beyond the network of steam railways, the fastest speed was that of a horse. By the beginning of the new century, the first vehicles powered by the internal combustion engine were appearing on the roads, the telephone was becoming widespread, and the first cinematograph films were being shown. Within another twenty years, horse-drawn transport was almost extinct in Britain and the wireless had annihilated time and distance. The development of

Royal Institute of British Architects, Portland Place, London (G. Grey Wornum, 1934)

these inventions was encouraged by a war which saw industrialised slaughter on an unprecedented scale. The Wright brothers had first staggered into the air in North Carolina in 1903; six years later Louis Blériot flew across the English Channel in an aeroplane, and by 1918 the Germans were able to attack London with four-engined Gotha bombers operating from Belgium. Meanwhile, on the ground, strange rhomboidal 'tanks' with continuous caterpillar tracks had proved able to defeat barbed wire and trenches. And there was poison gas. By the 1920s, the turn-of-the-century science fiction fantasies of H. G. Wells had been realised, and there was much more to come.

All this was exhilarating, and architects were not immune from the excitements generated by this momentous technical and social change. Many in Britain after the war wished to turn the clock back as if nothing had happened. But with the Kaiser defeated and the League of Nations founded, perhaps these technical and scientific advances would now be used to make the world a better place. Soon there would be the 'Good New Days' – the title of a book of 1935 by Marjorie and C. H. B. Quennell, when problems that had defeated earlier generations could be solved by science, by reason, by order, by cleanliness, by democracy. Unfortunately, modern technology might also be used to create the *Brave New World* that Aldous Huxley imagined in 1932. What the interwar years were not, either in architecture or other areas of life, was calm or serene. Rather, there seems to have been a general acceptance of continuous upheaval and, for many, a sense of impending doom.

The first published history of the 1930s, which appeared in 1940, began ominously: 'Each moment seems more urgent than all preceding ones; each generation of men are convinced that their difficulties and achievements are unparalleled. One of the few constants in life, for the individual and for the community, is a sense of crisis.'[16] The crises had been many: the General Strike of 1926, the Wall Street Crash of 1929, the economic depression and hunger marches that followed, political instability, the Abdication of Edward VIII in 1937, the rise of Mosley's Blackshirts and of street violence,

the Spanish Civil War, Appeasement, the Munich Agreement of 1938, and then the widespread, increasing fear of another war, to be accompanied by devastating aerial bombardment. The old political establishment had been discredited by the Great War, even though the interwar decades continued to be dominated by old men. Ideal solutions were increasingly sought in political extremes whose models were to be found abroad: in Soviet Russia and in Fascist Italy by the mid-1920s and in Nazi Germany after 1933. In that year, the young John Betjeman wrote of the necessity of 'a return to Christendom':

> Whether that Christendom will be a Union of Soviet Republics, a League of Socialistic Nations or an Ecclesiastical Union, it is not for me to say. I only know, like everyone else, that we are changing in a rapid and terrifying manner to some new form of civilization which will demand new architectural expression. Perhaps we are rushing towards annihilation.[17]

Despite, or because of, all these crises, there was a prevailing sense that the Modern Age was profoundly and qualitatively different from all former times, and particularly from the recent but distant Victorian Age. Countless books contrasted spacious, hygienic, modern housing in garden cities with back-to-back slum terraces in smoky industrial towns; tastefully furnished austere rooms, flooded with light, with rich dark interiors stuffed with threatening 'clutter'; sensible, modern body-revealing bathing costumes with crinoline dresses, frock-coats and stove-pipe hats; bright, clean milk bars with rowdy, degenerate Victorian gin palaces; flat-roofed modern houses with extreme examples of suburban Gothic Revival villas; and so on. New inventions – radio, the cinema, air travel – were going to make the world a better, happier place; scientific and social progress was inevitable. If the gas-lit Victorians moved in constant pea-soup fog, smoke and rain, there was now going to be perpetual sunshine.

Not that the picture was simple, for the legacy of the Victorians and Edwardians was everywhere and inescapable. Skirt lengths

may have risen dramatically by the mid-1920s, but when the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, returned from Munich and alighted at Heston Aerodrome in 1938 clutching that scrap of paper, he was wearing a stiff wing-collar. In the numerous memoirs written by that cohesive, artistic Bright Young Thing generation born soon after the turn of the century – John Betjeman, Osbert Lancaster, Cecil Beaton, Evelyn Waugh and the rest – parents are presented as remote and incomprehensible, almost a different species. Even the more elderly saw the Victorians as absurd. Giles Scott had a low opinion of the work of his famous grandfather, the architect of the Albert Memorial, but he had been born in 1880 and the roots of his own architecture lay firmly in the nineteenth century. Yet very few took the earnest efforts of the mid-Victorians seriously, especially in the 1920s. In 1949, describing how he came to write his pioneering study of the Gothic Revival, Kenneth Clark found 'the state of feeling towards nineteenth-century architecture which prevailed in 1927' hard to believe:

> In Oxford it was universally believed that Ruskin had built Keble, and that it was the ugliest building in the world. Undergraduates and young dons used to break off on their afternoon walks in order to have a good laugh at the quadrangle . . . One eminent historian . . . went so far as to call me a liar at a public meeting because I denied Ruskin's part in these buildings.[18]

Curiously, in vehemently rejecting what was perceived as the nineteenth-century practice of dressing up buildings in historical styles, architects of the 1920s and 1930s were sharing the Victorian obsession with style. Like them, they followed a quest for the elusive new style for the age, even if the advocates of the Modern Movement insisted that it was not a style but 'the honest product of science and art . . . relating methods of building as closely as possible to real needs'.[19] Not all architects agreed that a house was just a machine for living in, but a respect for simplicity and a desire to avoid excessive ornament,

an affection for well-lit interiors and muted colours, for order and rational planning, in contrast to so-called Victorian 'ostentation' and 'clutter', was shared by conservative Traditionalists and by Modernists. 'Revivalism' was the ultimate horror; instead, a new style was surely about to evolve. Some believed that modern architecture would come from developing the English Georgian tradition in its well-proportioned simplicity; others looked to America for a lead, while others saw the way in Holland, or Sweden, or Finland. Many had discovered the possibilities of the future at the Paris Exposition of 1925, others at Gothenburg in 1923 or Stockholm in 1930, and a few were convinced that the New Architecture had already been born in Cologne, Stuttgart and Dessau.

This also indicates a new and remarkable openness to foreign influences by British architects. Edwardian Britain had indeed looked to France and to America, but this was in connection with a growing interest in academic Classicism and the methods of the École des Beaux-Arts. Domestic architecture had remained national and insular in character, while being admired abroad. After the war, however, despite the initial attempts to reassert English values and traditions, there was a distinct loss of confidence among many architects that encouraged them to look abroad and, in particular, to two countries with vigorous national architectural traditions: Holland and Sweden. British architects had always looked to the Continent, of course, but they had always focused on old buildings – no Victorian was much interested in contemporary developments in Italy, France or Germany. What was new was that architects were learning from modern buildings abroad, whether from personal visits and organised student tours or from the articles and publications usually illustrated with photographs by F. R. Yerbury. The number of foreign architects working in Britain was also new. First came the colonials (Uren, Connell, Ward, McGrath, Coates), who were soon followed by the seductive and exotic Europeans (Goldfinger and Lubetkin) in promoting radical new ideas. The great Peter Behrens of Berlin had already been invited to design the

first real modern house in Britain, at Northampton in 1924. Then came the distinguished refugees from Nazism after 1933, although here the RIBA bowed to public anxiety and prejudice by insisting that each form a partnership with an established British architect: hence Gropius & Fry, Yorke & Breuer, Mendelsohn & Chermayeff.

The established architectural profession was in general agreement that it was absurd for Modern Man to live in a neo-Tudor house. Well-designed traditional houses in the Arts and Crafts tradition were acceptable, but not suburban houses with fake beams, leaded-light windows and tile-hung gables. This reflected a snobbish and self-interested disapproval of the work of the speculative builder, but also a widespread concern that the vast new housing developments encouraged after the Great War by electrified railways, bus services and the growing ownership of motor cars were wastefully planned and gobbling up large tracts of countryside. By the end of the 1930s, one in four houses was new and three-quarters of these had been built by private enterprise. These new suburbs succeeded in defining what was increasingly regarded as typical and desirable: developments of curving streets of neo-Tudor houses, with the occasional Pseudish example and, even rarer, a Modernistic one, detached or semi-detached, set behind parallel rows of front gardens, occasionally interspersed with a shopping parade, often half-timbered as well, with a large, Modernistic cinema, church and, perhaps, smart new Underground or Southern Electric station.

Unfortunately, in the absence of much effective planning legislation, suburban and industrial development tended to line arterial roads, giving rise to the ugly phenomenon of 'ribbon development' through rural countryside. Such consequences of uncontrolled development increasingly concerned architects and planners, and especially those impressed by the anti-urban bias of the Arts and Crafts and the ordered neatness encouraged by the Garden City movement. Numerous urban and rural plans were produced. Campaigning publications like Clough Williams-Ellis's *England and*

the Octopus (1928), with its photographs of outrageous advertisement hoardings and sprawls of bungalows, and the collection of essays entitled *Britain and the Beast* (1938) were informed responses to these problems, while Thomas Sharp's *Town and Countryside* (1932) deplored the blurring of the distinction between urban and rural districts.

The result was an almost universally shared belief in the desirability of planning, which mirrored the contemporary political tendencies towards collectivism and state control. Individualism was blamed for the chaotic and grimy legacy of the Industrial Revolution and unbridled private enterprise for ribbon development. Professorial chairs in town planning had been established before the war, and almost all architects agreed on the virtues of orderly, controlled urban development. These concerns were reflected in the consistently high standards of design encouraged by Frank Pick within the London Passenger Transport Board, whether in buildings, buses, lettering or advertisements, and by the appropriate, urbane buildings, usually sober neo-Georgian, erected by the Ministry of Works for the General Post Office. The former were much admired by the advocates of the New Architecture; the latter rather less so. And planning began to have legal backing: the Town and Country Planning Act of 1932 allowed a local authority to prohibit any building 'likely seriously to injure the amenity of a locality', the irony being that these powers were used chiefly against progressive modern designs.[20]

A British architect did not necessarily have to sympathise with the urban renewal policies, with new public buildings encouraged in Mussolini's Italy, with the economic planning attempted in Soviet Russia, or the public works programmes promoted in Hitler's Germany, to believe in the necessity of planning. The important thing was that the architect should be in charge. In the catalogue of the ambitious exhibition held by the RIBA to mark its centenary, 'International Architecture: 1924–34', Giles Scott, as President, contributed a foreword which stressed that it should:

> demonstrate the architect as a PLANNER, and as one of the most important servants of the community, with an invaluable contribution to make towards an improvement in the art of living . . . 'Planning' is the key-word to a form of development peculiar to our own time. We cannot continue to tolerate the poverty, ill-health, waste and ugliness of disorder. The whole world is out of joint through lack of planning.[21]

Planning could not have prevented the outbreak of war in 1914, but there was a determination that such a catastrophe must never happen again. The Great War created the vast gulf between generations; it was responsible for that loss of confidence which lies behind the eclectic confusion in British architecture in the 1920s and 1930s, and in the consequent determination to make a better, safer world; and it lies behind the technological and social optimism that generated the Modern Movement. As with so much else, the movement's origins can be traced before 1914, but it was the post-war climate that allowed such often misguided optimism to flourish. The mood was well caught by the young Australian designer Raymond McGrath, in his enthusiastic 1934 survey of *Twentieth Century Houses*:

> The work of Gropius at Cologne was a certain sign of the great changes coming, but the outburst of war in the same year made these changes seem farther off than ever and in comparison with the military scale of events quite unimportant. It is not possible to say what probable great architects there were among those millions of dead, but on those who did come through undamaged the effect of that time of destruction seems to have been a burning desire for sunlight and clean air and clean thought. The machines did their work at last and Metal took control.[22]

Great Britain may have emerged victorious in 1918, but at a terrible cost. The total British Empire loss was over a million men dead. The proportion of the population killed and wounded in England may

not have been as high as in France and Germany, but the social and psychological damage was immense. The older generation, those too old to fight, may have fully supported the war effort and revelled in the final victory, but many members of younger generations became disillusioned by the incompetence and callousness displayed by those in command. Although the effect of the war on society was nothing like as traumatic as it was in Germany, traditional ways of doing things were discredited – and in architecture the consequences of this took some time to emerge.

During the decade after the Armistice, British architecture was often conservative and uninspired, reflecting a society which was damaged and exhausted by four years of war. The dominant impulse at first was to go back to the way things were before 1914, a tendency exacerbated by the cult of Christopher Wren, which reached its height between 1923, the bicentenary of his death, and the tercentenary of his birth in 1932. The prevalent mood was caught by the *Country Life* writer Lawrence Weaver, when he insisted that 'A new method of design is incredible, simply because it is not feasible. We had our misfortunes a few years ago in that pursuit, but even before the war the "New Art" which pleased Germany and Austria so vastly was "dead and damned" in Great Britain.'[23] But this prejudiced and insular view ignored the interest of the more experimental architecture of the Edwardian years, and the fact that even Weaver's hero, Lutyens, had once been influenced by the 'New Art'.

Change was inevitable, and in 1927 the publication of Frederick Etchells's translation of Le Corbusier's *Vers une Architecture* as *Towards a New Architecture* opened up exciting possibilities to a younger generation of architects. The permanent buildings erected for the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924 were solid, monumental essays in abstracted neo-Classicism, albeit all of reinforced concrete, but by 1927 the international competition for rebuilding the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon resulted in a design neither Classical nor Gothic but strongly influenced by the modern Expressionist brick architecture

Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire (Elisabeth Scott, 1932)

of Holland (Plate 13). Even more remarkably, the architect was a woman, Elisabeth Scott, a cousin of Sir Giles, whose victory signalled, if not the end, then at least the opening up, of a profession exclusively dominated by men.

A special issue of the *Architectural Review* was devoted to the Stratford theatre in 1932. That same year, another one was entirely concerned with the new headquarters of the British Broadcasting Corporation, but not so much with its confused stone-clad exterior as with the unprecedented interior studios designed in a streamlined, modern manner using plywoods and bakelites. British architecture was changing. Another landmark was the competition for the De La Warr Pavilion at Bexhill-on-Sea being won with a modern design by Mendelsohn & Chermayeff, despite local opposition to employing 'alien' architects and that of the British Union of Fascists. It is important, however, to remember that whole issues of the *Architectural Review* were also devoted to more traditional modern buildings, like Norwich City Hall, while the January 1931 issue was a eulogy of Lutyens's achievement at New Delhi – designed before the war.

Nor should it be forgotten that some of the most impressive works of British architects between the wars were to be found in those far-flung parts of the world still coloured red in British atlases. A few miles west of New Delhi stand the massive, pinky-red walls of what by turns resembles both a stepped ziggurat and a buttressed Gothic cathedral (Plate 1). Anciently monumental, but with details reminiscent of German Expressionism or Dutch Modernism, this extraordinary brick construction is in fact a church. Designed in 1928, St Martin's Garrison Church was liked by the military as they thought it could be defended in times of trouble, and came to be known as 'the Cubist church', as Penelope Chetwode, daughter of the Indian Army's Commander-in-Chief, recalled.* At once

* [Penelope Chetwode (1910–1986) was the wife of John Betjeman. She and Gavin Stamp became friends in the later years of her life. RH.]

modern and traditional, practical and symbolic, it was also typical of its time in combining the severe industrial character of the factory with echoes of the monumentality of antiquity, both of which were much admired at the time; as Robert Byron argued, the two aesthetics were not necessarily so different.[24] 'Had this church been the work of a French or German architect,' wrote another contemporary admirer, 'Europe would be flabbergasted by the magnificently simple and direct design. But since it is the work of an Englishman, it will probably never be heard of abroad.'[25] That English architect was A. G. Shoosmith, and following his return home, he never built again.[26]

This Introduction ends with his church because it exemplifies many of the contradictory tendencies in architecture in the first three decades of the twentieth century. It also manifests the creative influence of Edwin Lutyens, who, despite his age, was indisputably the greatest living architect in Britain, enjoying the respect of his peers and of the younger generation, in the years between the two world wars. Designed in 1928, Shoosmith's Cubist church is not a building normally mentioned in discussions of British Architecture between the wars – not because it was built far away in India but because it has not been regarded as typical. For a majority of recent historians and critics, what has seemed most important has been the British expression of the Modern Movement in architecture, comparatively limited in both quantity and range though it may have been. The following chapters will attempt to suggest otherwise.

CHAPTER ONE

ARMISTICE

Eight months after the signing of the Armistice that ended the fighting on the Western Front, peace celebrations were held in London. On 19 July 1919, British and French troops marched past an unusual temporary structure erected in the middle of Whitehall: a tall pylon of timber and plaster, bearing wreaths, flanked by flags and carrying a symbolic draped coffin. At the end of the day, the watching crowds gathered round it and piled up flowers and wreaths around its base. The designer of this structure, the fashionable country house architect Edwin Lutyens (1869–1944), had not been invited to the unveiling ceremony. Nevertheless, he had created an object that so perfectly expressed the inarticulate grief of a nation in mourning that the government was unable to resist the popular demand that it be re-created in stone. The permanent Cenotaph, the national memorial to the British Empire dead of the Great War of 1914–1918, was unveiled on Armistice Day in 1920.[1] 'Not a catafalque but a Cenotaph,' was Lutyens's response to the Prime Minister Lloyd George's request in 1919 that he emulate the catafalque being erected for the peace celebrations in Paris; he recalled being told that a cenotaph, an

The Cenotaph, Whitehall, London (Edwin Lutyens, 1920)