

*Arts and Crafts Churches*. Alec Hamilton. Lund Humphries, 2020. 352 pp, 250 colour ill. Hardback £45.00. [ISBN 978-1-848223-321-9]

As with London buses you wait for ages until two come along at once: thus in 2020 two substantial and well-researched books on Arts and Crafts churches appeared. Some reviews compare them, but I will not dwell on the coincidence other than to remark on the happy fact that both Roger Button's *Arts and Crafts Churches of Great Britain: Architects, Craftsmen and Patrons* and Alec Hamilton's *Arts and Crafts Churches* present us with well-illustrated new material, accessible to all enthusiasts of architectural history. Yet only twenty-three churches appear in both, highlighting the difficulties of differentiation and selection from this rich field.

The ancient St Peter and St Paul's in Exton, Hampshire, first led me to Alec Hamilton's 2012 book on not-so-well-known Arts and Crafts architect Charles Spooner. Entering the tiny church, I was surprised by an 1891 east window that Pevsner (1967) called a 'very remarkable Arts and Crafts design, mostly of leaves, but also abstract'. Pevsner did not mention the lively *Tree of Life* stencilled by Spooner on the east wall between the lancets (imagine a reductionist Burne-Jones' *Briar Rose* crossed with Morris' *Trellis*) but in Hamilton's latest book, this and much more on the context of Spooner's interventions at Exton (p77) is enthusiastically described and illustrated.

A fine eye for such detail and an obvious passion for his subject are the outstanding qualities of *Arts and Crafts Churches*. The author's academic biography reveals his engagement in this field for almost twenty years, and as a result his book is bursting with knowledge, facts and figures, supported and enlivened by colourful photographs. The images also underline the diversity of his subject and the difficulty of defining it; two issues he fully acknowledges and that both mark his achievement, and recur through the text.

For example, we see (p135) the painted and gilded *Holy Rood* by J. F. Bentley from Watford's Catholic church, modelled on medieval prototypes, next to H.G. Ibbetson's circular west window from Chorleywood Free Church that would not be out of place in a *deco* interior: 'restrained to the point of Mondrian,' as Hamilton notes. Yet the two were built within one decade, albeit for faiths of diverse liturgies and aesthetic outlooks.

Leafing through (as all readers will do), images range from austere (Buxton) to sumptuous (Great Warley), both dedications to St Mary. This variation, sometimes corresponding to the 'High-' or 'Low-ness' of the commission, ultimately reflects the idiosyncratic tastes of patrons who funded many of the churches or chapels listed and whose Arts and Crafts sympathies, as Hamilton points out in his introduction, often represent socialist (or 'societally conscious') free-thinking radicalism rather than a conformist culture of Church and State. The author also defines 'Church' for us, so his Gazetteer includes buildings of worship encompassing the Anglican, Catholic, non-conformist denominations and other faiths ranging from Synagogues to Scientology.

Alec Hamilton has divided his book into several substantial introductory essays, followed by the main body of a nationwide Gazetteer. The first parts comprise a useful, well-referenced contextual background, particularly (3) *Religion*, that is recommended to anyone seeking an authoritative account of the complex of spiritual paths open in late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain. Here one

might also reference the Barchester novels, where Trollope vividly depicted the entanglements of High and Low church and society in the cultural microcosm of his fictional city.

Hamilton's title, contents and introduction appear well signposted and promise no surprises for the reader. However, in attempting to define 'Arts and Crafts' and set out parameters for his selected examples, the author immediately challenges himself and us by contradicting many of his own statements: he recognises from the outset that by confining an 'Arts and Crafts' church to one newly designed after 1884 by a member of the Art Workers Guild (AWG) or the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society (ACES) he is imposing an arbitrary rule that will be impossible to follow; as artificially self-limiting as defining an Arts and Crafts artefact as one made by the Guild of Handicraft, or sold by Morris & Co. Membership of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) might have been an alternative criterion, not offered here, but encompassing many architects of the period.

Within a page he has emended the chronological parameters from post-1884 to a more realistic c1875-1925. The 1920s' demand for First World War memorials as chapels, windows and church furnishings merits another paragraph: a surge, not a 'diminuendo' here. Retro-Arts & Crafts style was not just an expression of sentiment, but a personal seeking for semiotic memory through artefacts, bringing comfort for a generation lost. The pious or spiritual quality of the movement is played down in Hamilton's introductory chapters but in that decade of Remembrance (with a capital R) it surely found its place, depicting a utopian ruralism far from the mud of the trenches. A moving and pertinent example excluded (because not AWG; and in an 'earlier' building) is Henry Payne's (1925) east window in St James, Chipping Campden, featuring the military Saint Martin of Tours- the city around which the local regiment fought- whose saint's day is 11 November.

Hamilton gives scarce mentions to the Guild of Handicraft at Chipping Campden, who fell out with the vicar of St James, and their interventions at nearby St Nicholas, Saintbury are excluded, but well worth a visit. Yet Payne (not AWG) and the rest of the Birmingham Group *are* featured, indeed celebrated, for their Madresfield Court (earlier, private) chapel, while nearby Rodmarton's chapel (Henry Payne's son Edward's glass, for Barnsley) is excluded for being private, though local villagers attended its services. Both were completed in the 1920s. Similarly, Christopher Whall (AWG) brings Gloucester Cathedral's Lady Chapel into the Gazetteer (with daughter Veronica Whall, denied AWG membership by gender) yet a more ancient site (like Exton) can scarcely be imagined.

In any Gazetteer, one is drawn to familiar locations. Reviewing, this makes selection inevitable and some omissions harder. I should be sorry if anyone took at face value the claim that 'the Lake District has no Arts and Crafts churches' because they would miss some worthy schemes: Alec Miller at Urswick; Burne-Jones at several, including a gem of an east window at Troutbeck whose design was a collaboration between him, Morris and Madox Brown (nearby on a fishing trip; their trout duly represented in stained glass). They would miss Henry Holiday's St John, Keswick, one of about twenty local churches he (not AWG, but close friend of Ruskin and successor to Burne-Jones at Powell's) embellished, often with quality crafted joinery by Simpson's of Kendal. Webb's St Martin, Brampton (1877-8) for a local aristocrat, key Arts and Crafts patron George Howard, is of course included in spite of those pesky parameters. The townsfolk's reservations about the socialist southern architect were intensified by the demolition of a street of houses opposite to better show off his design.

Still in the Lakes, if admitting Losh's idiosyncratic St Mary, Wrea (1842) as a 'precursor', why not introduce ('Form and Function' precursor) Pugin's little St Wilfred and Our Lady (1841) at Warwick Bridge nearby? But Hamilton does include *Other Churches* at the end of each location, and *Exceptions and Exclusions* with 'Further Reading' that, with copious endnotes, is a chapter in itself and a testament to the amount of work that went into this handsome tome.

One jolt in the Gazetteer is Worcestershire's removal from the Three Counties (Herefordshire, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire), an ecclesiastical cultural entity. Thus Madresfield, Malvern, joins the (industrial) West Midlands. William Lygon of Madresfield owned much of Gloucestershire, including Kempley, where his 1902 commission St Edwards, like Lethaby's Brockhampton, was delivered by Randall Wells - not without incident. Kempley is a rustic vernacular counterpoint to Madresfield chapel's opulence (whose painted trellis has real gold nail-heads) but Lygon (seventh Earl Beauchamp from 1891) was the High Church Liberal intellectual and politician who sponsored both. He appropriated Madresfield's donor portraits of himself and his wife from engravings after the apse frescoes by C.G. Pfannschmidt (1819-87) in the Queen Luise mausoleum in Charlottenberg (engraved and published 1896), and his image appears in one of Payne's windows as the 'not worthy' Centurion (Matthew 8:8). Luckily this personalised *Gesamkunstwerk* also slipped through the parameters.

The Gazetteer is interspersed with numerous mini-essays that spotlight such diverse subjects as 'Coates Carter's Reredoses' and 'Colliers' Churches'. Here is a trove of often gleeful information on (to me) little-known local architects and esoteric treasures. They cut into the run of the text, and perhaps the intention was to surprise, but they are rewarding and hugely educational side tracks.

If Alec Hamilton's parameters were soon abandoned, his ambitions cannot be faulted. In attempting the impossible – he has achieved the remarkable. Providing such a bountiful, well-researched and inspiringly illustrated book *and* Gazetteer (with, oh joy, postcodes!) will find him many friends, including this reviewer, among church visitors, Arts and Crafts enthusiasts, and vicarious armchair historians.

JANET SINCLAIR

West Dean College of Arts and Conservation, Sussex