

## Epilogue

'*Real, simple, and religious*' – that was how the 'eminent church architect' writing in 1849 to the Architectural and Archæological Society for the County of Buckinghamshire had described his ideal parsonage. It is perhaps a significant statement, and one which draws the history of the design of the parsonage into the much wider field of social history, laying the clues for why the story of these houses may be of interest beyond the realm of architecture.

I questioned above whether the words chosen by that 'eminent church architect' would have been understood by all of his audience in the same way. 'Realism' in particular seems then to have been used as a term without a precise definition. Adrian Forty's *Words and buildings* provides however two meanings for the word as it might then have been deployed by architects: the revelation by the form of a building of the real nature of a community or activity housed; and, more traditionally, the blatant expression of the constructional characteristics of building in the way that Pugin was now doing.<sup>1</sup> In other words, it was at least partly a term drawn from what we would now call sociology as from the technical language of the architectural profession.

And 'religious' – that too may have carried more specific meanings than seems obvious today; as a kind of inverse to 'real', it was evidently mainly a social term but one which carried an architectural connotation. It sounds primarily as if it should mean 'devotional', and Anglican writers such as Heygate and Ovenden, wanting to avoid any suggestion that 'religious' might imply a mere popish ceremonialism, appear to conflate the two. They evidently believed that anyone following a religious life should always act in an outwardly devotional way. It seems logical to suppose that for an architect the word 'religious' when applied to buildings meant a form of construction that determined or emphasised that devotional way of life. In other words, 'religious architecture' actually meant at this time 'realist architecture for religious people'. And that, it seems to me, is precisely the key to what was happening in parsonage architecture in the years following the launch of Pugin's career.

An important question then for those who pressed for ecclesiastical reform was how to determine what that religious life should consist of; and in a parallel fashion to all that we have heard here about the architectural profession, church reformers were also trying to

standardise their own profession, and in a similarly technical and 'scientific' way. Indeed, architects and churchmen were going hand in hand. The period was one when the daily life and ritual of churchmen was being defined in a manner that was unprecedented in England since the middle ages; in the case of Roman Catholics, new foundations of monasteries and convents from the late 1830s made the circumscription of daily life a priority. The creation of mediaevalising 'Rules' along the lines of those of monastic orders was a significant feature of the new religious life, especially in the light of the reappearance of the twelfth-century *Chronicle* of Jocelyn de Brakelond, the basis of Thomas Carlyle's *Past and present* in 1843 and published in translation in 1844.<sup>2</sup> These new 'Rules' required different codes of behaviour for different places, and architects – especially Pugin – seem to have designed buildings that exaggerated that differentness for the various areas of a religious institution.<sup>3</sup>

During Pugin's working life, however, there was as yet no 'Rule' that applied to the daily life and living conditions of the Roman Catholic priest; and what happened in the Church of England was a matter of individual discretion. In these situations Pugin seems to have provided his clients with a kind of house that met their expectations. He demonstrated realism by his demand that each room be separately articulated according to its function, as realised in the pinwheel plan houses; he thus created an external manifestation of the real nature of the activities within but balanced by architectural control expressed for example through his continuous ridge heights, so different from the happy variety of the picturesque. Each of Pugin's three major rooms, typically study, library and dining room, has a distinct external presence because of the pinwheel plan and the gabled arrangement of the roofs – a design that contrasts with classical-Georgian convention and with Loudon's preferred solutions, which were also intended to be primarily practical and functional, but which were typically organised to form a simple geometrical shape that could be easily and cheaply roofed. Pugin's houses were also distinct from the rarer L-plan type houses, because in these the principal rooms were tucked into a simple geometrical shape rather than fully expressed externally. The fact that he was aware of the importance of what he was trying to do is clearly indicated by the fact that after its construction he drew the Grange, the first of the pinwheel plans, with the south library wall projecting

southwards from the face of the dining-room wall, even though in reality it was flush with it.<sup>4</sup>

Pugin may have been drawn to these designs for architectural reasons; but their attraction for religious people, looking for an architecture which expressed time of day, uniqueness of place, and changes of mood and movement between different spaces can be easily understood. So in this way his architecture was 'religious' too, because it varied from one part of a house to the next; the character of each place was modified according to the expected activity in it and the full value of a building is experienced by moving from room to room, in sequence, according to a regular timetable. Procession and formal movement between rooms reappear in the pious Victorian household. If the 'real' building reflects the needs of the occupants, the 'religious' building imposes on the occupants what their needs should be and 'tells' them how to behave in it. To achieve this, religious architecture acts as a prompt and a tool for measuring something that was otherwise hard to judge: the different behavioural response of a person according to the situation he or she is in. People will have known, as they still do, in which room to drop their voices without being told, and Pugin's cloisters and corridors provided appropriate transitional areas. The dynamism of the pinwheel house plans is the key to the layout. The stair at the centre of the house acts as a hub; the rooms are, as it were, thrown outwards from it, each one distinct and yet clearly part of a whole. In the past I have put it like this: architects before Pugin made a plan into a diagram, because they made an arrangement of rooms and then fitted it somehow into a simple shape dictated by convention and economy; Pugin on the other hand turned a diagram into a plan: he mapped out the various spaces and the relationships between them the way he wanted them, and then froze this into a plan.<sup>5</sup> Some of the very odd and technically inefficient plans of his institutional buildings seem to have been devised this way. At the same time, as George Gilbert Scott observed, Pugin remained enough of an artist to ensure that his buildings remained visually coherent.<sup>6</sup> That central stair hall and that strong geometrical form provided coherence. By the 1850s, what gothic architects are primarily trying to do is to balance the variety they wanted across their facades with an overall form that asserted the required architectural discipline. Pugin had shown them how.



But it is the fact that Pugin designed a kind of architecture that met these demands not only to architects but to a large group of politically and socially influential people such as theologians, reformers and preachers who really had no idea about what a modern house should look like is what has assured him of his central role in this book. He is part of a general phenomenon which one can see spread right across the society of his day. Forty's first definition of realism – that of form representing the real nature of use – was shared, in Pugin's working life, by creative artists in other fields, by rational thinkers such as Loudon who were struggling to create technical definitions for vague ideas, and by the new emerging sciences, such as sociology, which, like Britton's contemporary *Architectural antiquities*, strove to make scientific judgments from apparently irrational phenomena.<sup>7</sup> Pugin himself borrowed realist devices from non-architectural sources such as these early on in his career, for example from Walter Scott whose shadow hangs over the whole of the popular artistic world of the 1820s and 1830s. Scott created realistic figures inhabiting realistic settings, meticulously described. In *Kenilworth* (1821), Countess Amy's apartments at Cumnor Place are arranged in a series of rooms, each leading from the next, each with its own design identity, and with the most intimate of the chambers placed at the deepest point.<sup>8</sup> The significance of Scott's description is that the rooms do not only have a merely metaphorical quality that expresses the events happening inside in the manner of a didactic, romantic or picturesque fable, but are clearly 'real' rooms with highly detailed architecture. As we have seen, Pugin reproduced Scott's Cumnor Place in the arrangement of rooms at St Marie's Grange in 1835: the three rooms on the principal floor lead off from one another without a corridor, a plan entirely unlike any new architect-designed house of similar scale of the period, and indicating the literal way in which an ambitious architect hungry to realise his ideas can translate a literary conceit into an architectural one.

Indeed Pugin also closely echoed the foremost realist writer of his period, the French novelist Honoré de Balzac. Balzac's novels presented rooms in an anthropomorphic or symbolic way that had long been characteristic of novel writing.<sup>9</sup> Unlike his predecessors, however, he described architectural settings to a degree of precision that suggests that they *are* real, a sense of reality far enhanced above that of Scott by

the contemporary context of the stories. The descriptions of the house forming the claustrophobic setting for *Eugénie Grandet* (1833) are so detailed that it is possible to work out even the relationship between the doors of rooms. Strikingly, Balzac described his *Père Goriot* (1834–5) as a meditation ‘upon natural principles’ wherein he will see ‘Societies depart from or approach “the eternal rule, the true, the beautiful”’ (in Balzac’s own words, *la règle éternelle, le vrai, le beau*)<sup>10</sup> – an announcement echoed only a few years later by Pugin’s declaration that ‘the Beautiful and the True’ be the watchwords of architecture.<sup>11</sup> Unlike the case of *Kenilworth*, I am not suggesting that Pugin was familiar with Balzac’s writing; but the coincidence in the phrasing is remarkable. Since architects are not generally particularly deft with words, it seems very likely that Pugin was picking up on phrases and ideas that were going around at the time and appealed to him. And if the realist novel writer allows every detail to build up a consistent picture of a realistic whole, which is in itself part of the portrayal of a good or bad character, the realist architect designs a building such that each part of it both expresses the activity within, but is also utterly consistent with the whole and in its details – a process that has a parallel both in the reforming construction industry of Bartholomew’s day but also in the new medical and pseudo-medical sciences in that all were concerned with making distinctions between different types of human behaviour ever more precise.

As Walter Scott was enjoying his public success, from the 1820s and at least until the conclusion of Pugin’s working life, a major international movement established throughout Europe a link between two-dimensional diagrams – plans – and personal behavioural traits in public perception: phrenology. Franz Josef Gall, the ‘inventor’ of phrenology, visited Britain in 1823, and his associate Spurzheim based himself in London from that time onwards. When pointing out the vast sales of George Combe’s phrenologically orientated ‘Constitution of Man’, which had sold over 80,500 copies in Britain by 1847, Roger Cooter in his comprehensive study of the subject remarks that Combe was attempting ‘a demonstration of morality as a science’ – in other words, that it was possible to translate abstract behavioural qualities into finite analytical diagrams.<sup>12</sup> Cooter provides the following gloss on Combe’s theories of rationally derived happiness: ‘For happiness, all that was required was that people come

into harmony with and abide by the natural laws of mind and morality'. These natural laws were derived from a supposedly rational analysis of the physical form of the skull. 'In a way that would appeal to a Dickensian character, all was made plain: The mind was no longer "chaos of Passion all confus'd," it was a set of physiological structures functioning in an orderly way'.<sup>13</sup> The cranial map that phrenology used and widely publicised was a translation of behavioural attributes to a two-dimensional plan draped across a skull. Pugin's translation of the behavioural expectations of a modern religious life into an architectural diagram – and then a house or convent plan – is undoubtedly part of a similar manoeuvre. One sees there too an attempt not only to categorise and to rationalise indistinct information, but also to represent it in two and three-dimensional form. Looking at this absorption of a general principle into the very specific world of early Victorian design, one might conclude that a distinguishing characteristic of the kind of Victorian architecture practised by Pugin and his admirers was that it mapped out the mind and the mind's perceived division into distinct behavioural characteristics. A room for praying; a room for thinking; a room for eating; a room for marital relations – and all with precise physical relationships to one another. In that way it seems to me – as I have also suggested elsewhere – that the kind of Victorian architecture exemplified by our parsonages marks a distinct contrast to the popular idea, much rehearsed by its adherents, that a classical building is meant in some way to be a representation of the physical characteristics of the body, a matter of external balance and hierarchy.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, once one starts to look one finds other links between contemporary popular culture and the apparently elevated and restricted writings of church and social reformers. Here we are properly in the territory of the social or political historian; but the architectural historian too soon finds valuable leads. For example, there is clearly a strong link between the gothic revival and a significant characteristic of phrenology: social dissent. Pugin's approving view of the feudal past is not to be confused with an acquiescence with the social and political *status quo*: in the wake of the Great Reform Act and the long period of ineffectiveness of the Tory party and the landed aristocracy that dated from Lord Liverpool's government, he was as opposed to contemporary Toryism as was, say, the author of *Coningsby*; and his strong belief that the primary distinction in worship should be between the clergy and



their lay congregation, rather than between the different social layers of the congregation alone – an idea expressed emphatically in his championing of the revival of the rood screen in Catholic churches in the late 1840s – is an example of how his traditionalism opposed contemporary practice.

It was a primary goal of the ecclesiological movement to end the social hierarchies inherent within congregations in the rented pew system in English churches. It is an important issue, because it addresses the desire of the reformers to break down the private sphere of life – in this case the comfy rented box with its curtains, like the Owendens' at Barham – and amalgamate it with the public one. It was the central theme of more than one of the pamphlets of the leading ecclesiologist J. M. Neale, and also an incidental one both in his widely circulated *A few words to churchwardens* and in his novel *Ayton Priory* (1843), the story of a landed family that returns their property to the church, and thus reverses England's post-Reformation settlement.<sup>15</sup> *A few words to churchwardens* reached its fourteenth edition within a few years of its first publication. William Butterfield, the ecclesiologists' primary designer after the death of R. C. Carpenter, introduced benches for common use to replace pews whenever he could, and he was widely imitated.<sup>16</sup> The degree to which this blatantly anti-establishment aspect of ecclesiology was successful in Pugin's work can be gauged from this late nineteenth-century description of the congregation of one of his churches:

There were rags and satins, moleskins and patent kids, corduroys and smooth broad black cloths, silks and cottons, with every style of fashion, from the old-fashioned frill cap, to the most exalted chignon, from the common plaid shawl to the very antipodes of dress *a la mode*; all this could be seen at St. Mary's Catholic Chapel, Norton Road, Stockton-on-Tees, in the County of Durham.<sup>17</sup>

This architecturalisation of social dissent was not confined to churches. George Roberts' anonymous publication *Speculum episcopi* ('The mirror of a bishop') (1848), which was widely reviewed, including in the *Dublin review*, was principally an attack on the way in which the contemporary Anglican bishop was isolated in his palace from his clergy; the author pointed out that amongst Roman Catholics bishops



and priests are, because of the way they live together, in 'continual intercourse' with each other.<sup>18</sup> The plans of Pugin's large clergy houses, with their common staircases and long narrow corridors that contrast so starkly with the central staircases and formal arrangements of contemporary new bishops' palaces, make contact between the clergy inevitable. Indeed at Birmingham, the most prestigious of all these houses, the bishop is required to walk almost the longest distance possible through his house if he is to reach its major public space from the front door. It could even be said that Pugin's simple architrave joinery, which did not distinguish between the rooms of clergymen and their servants, also has a social aspect to it: in other architects' houses, superior rooms were always marked by grander architraves and that is why the Hansoms, T. H. Wyatt and Fowler restricted the use of the simple kind, when they borrowed it for private residences, to attic and service rooms. What distinguishes Pugin from all the gothic-revival architects of his generation is not only the fact that he was in many respects the first to create a coherent new architectural style of form and detail; it is also that wherever one looks one sees that the connotations of his work correspond to more and more aspects of contemporary society in general; and time and time again one sees too that the new rectories he designed, and the many he inspired, play a role in more than just the history of an architectural style.

There is a limit to the extent that a single architect can influence the course of architecture, but by way of conclusion it has seemed to me that the prevalence of Pugin and Puginite ideas in the latter part of this book has required some further justification. A change in English domestic architecture as dramatic as that from the simple and elegant Georgian house to the complex, even tortured, Victorian one – a place that was never intended to be conventionally beautiful – so completely, and in so short a period of time, can only have come from the unusual coincidence of a politically strong social movement with a clear set of ideas and needs on the one hand, and on the other, an architectural visionary of unparalleled creative power.

Many of the ideas raised briefly here in this Epilogue deserve fuller treatment: it is unwise for an architectural historian to immerse himself in subjects that have been better and more appropriately presented by the historians of the various fields. But there are places where the study of architecture has more to offer than may at first

be obvious. It was the design of the parsonage, the place where the technical world could interfere in the religious, and the religious in the technical, that fused disparate elements together so powerfully. Pugin's knowledge of gothic and his many thousands of designs created an architectural realism which was without precedent in English architecture; it was his ability to transform what had previously only existed as theoretical concepts into a vocabulary of detailed, reliable and comprehensive design that marked him out from every other gothic architect of his generation. He combined, however, the world of the realist with that of the fantasist, possessed of an architectural vision that went beyond what had become standard architectural questions of style and layout, and which was much more closely related to abstract literary concepts of imaginary worlds in which every action had its appropriate place and method. His constant repetition, in different ways, of a series of very few historical sources and the presentation of ideas that had possessed him since his earliest childhood all testify to an easily identifiable personal vision of great power. When Loudon, with customary foresight, had suggested in 1833 that prospective architects should be tested upon phrenological principles for their suitability for their intended profession, he would have been correct in implying that only someone of very unusual character and imagination could have brought about the transformation in English architecture that many sought.<sup>19</sup>