

and Greece, but he also visited London to study technical aspects of building. With the aid of load-bearing iron frames he designed a new type of compact 'storage library' (for the university libraries in Kiel, Greifswald and Halle).

Körte has divided the extensive material on Gropius's life and works into three periods. In so doing, he aims to draw links between the architect's background circumstances and his career and make these more comprehensible to the reader. The buildings are in turn divided into groups (such as houses, hospitals, tombs, university and library buildings, office blocks and furnishings). Because such division into projects can seldom be combined smoothly with a description of a career, the structure of the book is not always clear. In addition, a few projects are singled out with their own chapters (the mental hospital at Eberswalde, the competition for Berlin cathedral and the competition for the Reichstag), whereas the Museum of Decorative Arts, which could have had a chapter to itself, is buried in the group 'Late Works'.

Körte studied architecture at the Technische Hochschule in Munich and Harvard University. He was also a colleague of Walter Gropius in his office, the Architects' Collaborative, in Boston. After returning to Europe he was professor at the Technical University Darmstadt from 1980 to 2000. The fact that he repeatedly refers to Martin Gropius as the 'precursor of Modernism' and his architecture as 'early Modern' or the 'transition to Modernism' can be explained by his adherence to a teleological historiography of Modernism. Nevertheless, this extensive and detailed monograph is a long-awaited and important contribution to the architectural history of the late nineteenth century.

TEPPO JOKINEN

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PETER ELLIS

**Architect of Oriel Chambers and
16 Cook Street, Liverpool**
by Robert Ainsworth and Graham Jones
Liverpool History Society, 2013,
228pp
ISBN 9780955942839
£24pb

The title of this book tells us pretty much all that anyone knows about Peter Ellis. Not to be confused with his older and short-lived brother of

the same name, this Peter Ellis was born in 1805 in Liverpool, where his father, similarly Peter Ellis, was a builder and, by 1832, styled also as an architect. Ainsworth and Jones speculate that their Peter Ellis might have learned his draughting skills from James Sherriff, a surveyor and cartographer, but he would almost certainly have learned his building skills from his father while developing areas such as those around Great George Square and Kent Square, now demolished. By 1834, Peter Ellis *fills* is listed in *Gore's Directory* as an architect in Renshaw Street.

In 1839 Ellis submitted designs for the new St George's Hall, and, following Harvey Lonsdale Elmes's success in the competition, published his proposals as a book, *Rejected Designs for the Intended St George's Hall, Liverpool* (1839). His solution was a Roman Corinthian design with a raised hexastyle portico to the south and four pilastered corner pavilions, which signified the broad circumferential corridor. The centrally placed and galleried great hall, which could seat 2,000 (or 1,200 for dinner), rose 72ft (21.6m) to a coffered and coved ceiling. The 500-seat barrel-vaulted concert hall appeared mean by comparison and was pushed away into the north portico. However, this initial competition was not acted upon and another for an Assize Court was launched, but it is not known if Ellis participated. In the event, Elmes won this too and the present building is the result.

Whereas Ellis's design for St George's Hall might be expected, that for Oriel Chambers was not. It was described first by *The Porcupine* and then *The Builder* as a 'vast abortion', and by *The Building News* as 'a kind of greenhouse architecture run mad'. Nevertheless, since the exposing of its structure during the Blitz, this cast-iron build has been much recognised for its novelty, and even its proto-Modernism. Here, 140 pages into the book, one might hope for an architectural discussion, but none is forthcoming. Maybe that is understandable, for Ainsworth, who, as the book's biographies declare, was 'deeply concerned with conservation [and] helped set up the Liverpool Cultural Heritage Forum', sadly died before the book was complete, and his co-author, who completed the text, by his own admission 'knows absolutely nothing about architecture'.

And so one looks again at the title,

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In the Footsteps..., and realises, in fact, that much of this book is just that: an illustrated walk, in the company of 'Peter', as the author refers to him, through nineteenth-century Liverpool.

No. 16 Cook Street, Ellis's one other surviving building, is as curious as Oriel Chambers. Once again a cast-iron frame is employed, now supporting the shallow-vaulted, fire-proof brick ceilings and the improbable, glazed warehouse façade. Even more improbable is the glazed spiral stair at the rear. Here, in something that presages the stair towers at Walter Gropius's model factory built for the 1914 Deutscher Werkbund exhibition in Cologne, Ellis is at what might be regarded his most Modern. But this, I think, is an analysis in search of an argument. For Ellis was, ultimately a Liverpool architect/surveyor who, as this book shows, settled arbitrations, invented and patented a lift, and designed, as well as an Italianate homeopathic dispensary, a school and a chapel in an unconvincing Gothic-revival style. Whereas we should be grateful that the Luftwaffe did not do more damage to Oriel Chambers than it did, we should be equally grateful that it was Elmes's entry that won the competition for St George's Hall.

NEIL JACKSON

For details of a special readers' offer on *In The Footsteps Of Peter Ellis* turn to page 34

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