

## Richard Coad (1825-1900): A Work in Progress

by Paul Holden

I did not anticipate on my arrival at Lanhydrock House some five years ago, that we would be celebrating the life of a little known Victorian architect called Richard Coad. Indeed, five years ago I can honestly say that I had never even heard of him! Not surprisingly, having a particular interest in architectural history, I was drawn to the fine collection of beautifully executed architectural plans in our possession, some kindly donated to the National Trust by Mr George Vaughan-Ellis RIBA, some years ago. I must say that I am extremely grateful to George for getting this far in researching an architect whom Professor Gavin Stamp has called 'the elusive Coad'.<sup>[1]</sup> In conducting this investigation, Coad has, indeed, proved elusive. Despite the fact that between us George and I have visited all of Coad's known architectural works, as well as archives in Cornwall, Devon, London and Edinburgh, our findings are as notable for what we have not discovered - most significantly we do not, as yet, have any photographic image of the man. It would be wise, at this early stage, to add that our research is far from finished and we live in hope that new information will be uncovered by our future efforts - by that very nature, this paper must be reasonably entitled 'Richard Coad: Architect. A Work in Progress'.

My initial thoughts were that it seemed odd that Coad had received little recognition, not only from a multitude of well meaning architectural historians but, more significantly, from his own contemporaries. Leaf through the index of any architectural monograph or generic study and the name Coad is unlikely to be present. Moreover, details contained within Coad's Royal Institute of British Architects biographical file hardly warrants a mention here. The index of the most successful architectural journal of the Victorian period *The Builder* does mention our Mr Coad

once, although no obituary was published.<sup>ii[2]</sup> Conversely, if we analyse the body of recent scholarly research, some works do actually mention him. Professor Chris Brooks' magisterial study on the Albert Memorial mentions Coad twice, both times travelling to the Midlands in his capacity as George Gilbert Scott's representative to ensure the quality of Francis Skidmore's ironwork.<sup>iii[3]</sup> Professor Stamp's recent work on George Gilbert Scott's 1862 continental tour, recently published in *The Society of Architectural Historians*, reveals only that Scott and his assistant Coad met up for a single day in France.<sup>iv[4]</sup> It would seem that from there on Coad completed his travels around Europe with two of Scott's sons which, in hindsight, would not have been surprising as Scott notoriously liked to travel alone. However, most recently, Alan Calder's splendid monograph entitled *James MacLaren: Arts and Crafts Pioneer* carries a whole chapter on MacLaren's association with Coad during the 1880s, during which time the pair shared offices at 3 Duke Street, Adelphi.<sup>v[5]</sup>

So the first question to address is - why such an obvious neglect of somebody who, in our opinion, was such a competent architect? Sir John Summerson's study entitled 'The London Building World of the 1860s' gives us a good starting point towards providing some answer to this question.<sup>vi[6]</sup> It was the sheer scale of London's expansion during this period that prompted aspiring architects like Coad to seek their fortunes far from their homelands. By 1861, the post office directory records 1,459 practising architects in the capital. Therefore, as Summerson tells us, 38% of all architects practising in England and Wales were based in the first city.<sup>vii[7]</sup> Coad, however, cannot realistically be championed as an architect in his own right until his departure from Scott's London office in Spring Gardens. An incidental reflection of Coad's status as Scott's office manager was later highlighted in a letter from Giles Gilbert Scott to John Irvine in 1881. He states 'My Dearest Friend, Do you remember saying once, years long ago, in "Coad's Room" at Spring Gardens?....'<sup>viii[8]</sup> The

famous, or maybe infamous, 'Coad's room' was vacated in 1864 with his position being taken by another up-and-coming architect, Arthur Baker. Despite the security and prestige of working for Scott and the amount of work available in London it would seem that the incentive for Coad's disaffiliation from Spring Gardens was his close involvement with the Albert Memorial project. How long Coad was involved in this project is difficult to deduce. It is clear, however, that Professor Brook's study has underestimated Coad's contribution by not alluding to the copious number of working drawings he produced with John Oldrich Scott or the fact that Coad was present with senior dignitaries for key ceremonials.<sup>ix[9]</sup> We can, therefore, say with confidence that he had a minimum involvement of four years although Coad's association may well have continued until the unveiling of the memorial. The Royal Archives at Windsor clarifies their working arrangement some more, in particular itemising payments received as £5,000 for Scott (5% of £100,000) with Coad 'an excellent geologist' taking a rather generous £600 out of the memorial funds.<sup>x[10]</sup>

It was in 1857, during his time with Scott, that Coad first worked at Lanhydrock House in Cornwall. As Scott's representative on site Coad oversaw the internal refurbishment of the mansion, construction of a new coach house and the laying out of George Truefitt's formal garden design. Coad introduced plans of his own for the garden walls and outbuildings.<sup>xi[11]</sup> Some years later, on 14 July 1877, an invoice was passed on to Lord Robartes of Lanhydrock from Spring Gardens with respect to 'alterations and additions to Lanhydrock House, erection of stables, boundary and terrace walls &c'. It is significant that both Coad and Scott received £300 for this work.<sup>xii[12]</sup> Such a figure gives some context to Coad's seemingly exceptional earnings for the Albert Memorial.

Coad, like many of the period, did not achieve any great recognition as a member of the lower school of Victorian architects either by his peers, as Charles Eastlake, or critics like Benjamin Webb or Beresford Hope. Much of the reason for this was that the fashionable Gothic Revival style and the copious amount of church work available during this period created a plethora of practising architects – many, like Coad, producing works of an exceptionally high standard. Consequently, many fine architects of the period remain unobserved by present day architectural historians. Hence, the inattention to Coad's work was based on two brutal truths. First, Coad maintained a small architectural office and as a result was not responsible for a large output of work and second, his buildings did not have the inventiveness of many of his contemporaries. During the 1860s, Gilbert Scott continued to defend the principles of Gothic design. In his Exeter Cathedral notebook Scott wrote, 'Why are we to condemn the endless repetition of the same style [Gothic]? Freedom, variety, improvement -unforgiving in every other matter but architecture'.<sup>xiii[13]</sup> While the tide of popular taste was flowing against Scott he did, of course, have his supporters. Beresford Hope, architect and critic, described Gothic as 'the movement most practicable for the material, and the social, and the political, and the religious needs of this progressive and agitated century'.<sup>xiv[14]</sup> Once in private practice Coad followed another piece of Scott's advice, that 'An architect must be influenced by his own views and caste or he is not worth calling [an architect]'.<sup>xv[15]</sup>

Coad had taken pupilage under Henry Rice of Liskeard and had studied under Professor Cockerall at the Royal Academy yet by the time he had set up his own architectural practice in 1864, the movement towards a new style, inspired partly by the abolition of glass tax in 1845, brick tax in 1850 and window tax in 1851, was already well in place.<sup>xvi[16]</sup> Such a desire for stylistic digression would explain Coad's involvement in the progressive Architectural Association from 1852, being nominated and

elected as a committee member on the 24 June 1853.<sup>xvii[17]</sup> However, unlike many of his contemporaries, he did not publish within the society and parted company from the association within three years.<sup>xviii[18]</sup> By 1868, reflecting his position as his own man now independent of Scott, Coad displayed his potential through the execution of two new build churches, Galampton Church in South Devon and St Ederne, Gwynedd, North Wales, both executed in the Early English style. These churches remain a far removal from what we might have expected from Coad's Classical training and Gothic apprenticeship displaying simple interiors expressing a greater shift towards the vernacular.<sup>xix[19]</sup>

Coad was enthusiastic in coming to terms with the architectural excesses of the period, hence his involvement with the Architectural Association. Soon after Galampton Church, Coad designed and constructed one of his few secular buildings - the Cocks and Biddulph Bank - built between the years 1870-3 in the Queen Anne Revival style.<sup>xx[20]</sup> Somewhat crushed between its imposing neighbours in Whitehall, Coad's eclectic-fashioned façade with its polychromed brickwork with terracotta details, was another radical change in direction for the Cornishman. The interior of the bank (now a public house) remains significant in its similarity to Bowringsleigh and Lanhydrock in both design, use of materials and deployment of technological innovation. The December 1873 edition of *The Builder* carries a detailed description of the completed building but fails to use any complimentary adjectives towards its aesthetic qualities.<sup>xxi[21]</sup>

After several competent conservationist restorations Coad arranged a fusion of Gothic styles for the new build St Augustine's Church in Halifax between 1873 and 1879.<sup>xxii[22]</sup> Drawing on continental influences, presumably picked up on his aforementioned 1862 continental tour, St Augustine's retains a strong influence of, amongst others, William White

and George Edmund Street and it may be significant that Street endorsed Coad's design for this work. More importantly, such a fine Gothic structure would have been more acceptable to the Ecclesiology Movement as a 'truthful' building. It was during this project that George Gilbert Scott died, just as his beloved Gothic Revival movement was finally losing momentum.

In *c.*1876, as Coad was in pursuit of his architectural loyalties, he first met the young James MacLaren (1853-90) who may well have been the catalyst that made him divert from the Gothic style in order to further embrace the vernacular movement - a revival of local building traditions utilising varied window forms, changes in angular projection, exciting relationships between form and texture of design and materials. Coad recommended James MacLaren to the Royal Academy architectural school and the young Scot was duly accepted.

In April 1881 a fire severely damaged Lanhydrock House and Coad was commissioned to oversee a refurbishment and enrichment of the mansion at an eventual cost of £73,000, nearly four times more than the original estimate.<sup>xxiii[23]</sup> The sheer scale of the project would have put pressure on Coad to employ additional labour - hence it is my belief that 1881 would be the year that realistically Coad and MacLaren formed a working affiliation - although the first reference to their association dates to 1883. Stylistically Lanhydrock House was certainly the most eclectic and complex commission that Coad had undertaken to date. While it would have been easier to demolish the fire-damaged Jacobean structure, the brief given by Lord Robartes to his architect was to reconstruct the house largely as it was prior to the fire.

One wonders how much influence the promising architect James MacLaren had on the now fifty-six-year-old Richard Coad as he secured

his most important commission to date? Coad's perception of progressive liberalism of the Aesthetic movement did change as a result of his association with MacLaren. This can be seen by exploring the architectural legacy and primary documented evidence, in particular the letters in the Cornwall Record Office and the architectural plans held at Lanhydrock. The exterior architecture remains undeniably Coad's yet MacLaren's architectural intellect can be seen throughout the house, conveying taste and fashion to some of the interiors. Indeed, MacLaren's hand and signature style is easily distinguishable on many interior drawings despite the fact that he signs all of his drawings in Coad's name and uses the Duke Street address. Some of the large 1881 contract plans of Lanhydrock too may well display MacLaren's skilled hand in the draughtsmanship. MacLaren's contribution includes the Aesthetic style Dining Room, Scottish Baronial Teak Stairs and Rococo style Prayer Room chimneypiece. In addition, many other features appear to be progressive enough to be by the Scot, in particular the Billiard Room, Inner Hall and Drawing Room.<sup>xxiv[24]</sup> As it happens MacLaren's designs show 'A Unity of all the Aesthetic Arts' - the very motto of the Art Workers Guild of which he was a member from 1886. Is it no mere coincidence therefore, that it was some of these features that MacLaren drew in perspective and exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1885.<sup>xxv[25]</sup>

These details, in my opinion, suggest that Coad and MacLaren's work at Lanhydrock was not a joint venture, quite the opposite the eager MacLaren took work from the overburdened Coad. Silvanus Jenkin, the Lanhydrock steward, confirms this when he identifies MacLaren as Coad's 'assistant'. It is also of note that 3 Duke Street, Adelphi, facilitated a whole range of migrant architects, the most notable being the fledgling Aston Webb. It is likely that Coad drew on the services of other architects from the Duke Street address in order to help him fulfil this exhausting commission. After sharing Coad's office, as soon as space became

available MacLaren set up his own architectural practice from the same Duke Street address. Thus just as Scott supported Coad into private practice it would seem that Coad initially supported MacLaren in the same way.<sup>xxvi[26]</sup> It is also likely that Coad provided MacLaren's first independent commission at Ledbury Park in Herefordshire through his connections with the Biddulph family. Indeed Coad was corresponding to the Lanhydrock steward from Ledbury from 1881.

Before his departure from Coad's employment the Scot witnessed some contractual drawings of Lansallos Church in 1884 and, as Alan Calder suggests, the Arts and Crafts iron gates at the entry to the churchyard may indeed be his.<sup>xxvii[27]</sup> The sympathetic restoration of Bowringsleigh, a commission that started in the 1870s and completed in 1887, requires some further investigation although again, as Alan Calder highlights, MacLaren's hand appears to be at work here.<sup>xxviii[28]</sup> MacLaren's time with Coad had a profound influence on the latter's treatment of the vernacular style. In 1887 MacLaren produced another independent commission from the Duke Street Office - a substantial new wing to Stirling High School. This new work bears a striking resemblance to Lanhydrock House, Coad's bank and the Bowringsleigh tower. MacLaren's obituary, published on 7 November 1890 in *The British Architect*, simply records that 'From [Richard Coad] he received much kindness and several commissions, which encouraged him to set up for himself'.<sup>xxix[29]</sup>

Why then did Coad achieve such a small architectural output? Having such a small office, Coad took personal control of all his commissions. Most of the 1,000-odd drawings of Lanhydrock, from full contract plans to studies of minor details on frail oil-impregnated papers, seem either to have been executed in Coad's own hand, or, at least, have detailed corrections by the architect. It is clear, studying the plans, that

only three or possibly four hands are at work on these drawings. Apart from MacLaren, another of Coad's assistants was the Cornishman John Sansom who drew a couple of perspective drawings of Lanhydrock interiors dated 1885 although the draughtsmanship of these drawings are not of the same quality of MacLaren's Royal Academy perspectives.<sup>xxx[30]</sup> Sansom's association with Coad at the Duke Street office certainly pre-dates 1881, when he features in the London census returns.

Coad also relied extensively on social contacts for his work, unlike MacLaren who entered the rather doubtful world of competitions. The Biddulph family brought him the Cocks and Biddulph Bank and Ledbury Park contracts. The Bowringsleigh commission came, most likely, from the grandfather of Margaret Ilbert, the Rev Alfred Earle, who was the moving spirit behind the building of Galmpton. Finally, the post-fire Lanhydrock contract was clearly influenced by Coad's and Gilbert Scott's association with the property between 1857 and 1864. As we have seen, Coad's knowledge of the pre-fire Lanhydrock would have made him an ideal architect for the subsequent refurbishment. Indeed the only surviving pre-fire architectural plans of the house are in Coad's hand.

The work at Lanhydrock unfortunately resulted in tension between patron and architect. The job was drastically overspent and some mistrust of the architect's decisions caused friction. MacLaren, too, added to Coad's problems through a letter to Lanhydrock dated 15 January 1884 criticising Coad and saying, 'I refuse to be associated with such needless neglect'. Perhaps Coad's and MacLaren's association declined further during the Ledbury Park contract. A letter to Lanhydrock in 1885 attempts to elevate Coad to his patron by advocating the Royal Academy perspectives with some false modesty without a single mention of the artist, MacLaren. Another letter of 1885 in the Lanhydrock archives from Lanhydrock's incumbent vicar quotes

We had a conversation about architects, but nothing settled. Lady R said that one reason for delaying the church had been that they could not begin to employ a second architect until the first had cleared out.<sup>xxxii[31]</sup>

It was George Vialls, not Coad, who was employed on the church refurbishment in 1886 and it would appear to be John Sansom who completed the house and outbuildings in the 1890s.

By the end of the 1880s Coad's career was all but over. He was devastated not only by his dismissal but by dry-rot problems that had plagued Lanhydrock into the 1890s. Coad was a popular and compassionate man, well liked and respected within his profession. In November 1887, Richard Coad was the leading signatory, along with J Drayton Wyatt, T.G. Jackson and Francis E Jones, to an appeal for money for the widow and daughters of Joseph M Bignell, formerly an associate at Spring Gardens.<sup>xxxiii[32]</sup> By January 1889, the fund raised £362 4s, of which Coad contributed £10 before Bignell's death, and £10 afterwards.<sup>xxxiii[33]</sup> However, by January 1890 Drayton-Wyatt writes to John Irvine commenting on, amongst other things, the health of the old Spring Garden's members. He writes 'Poor Coad is in a wrecked state, I fear far removed from the "Richard" of old'.<sup>xxxiv[34]</sup> A year later, Drayton-Wyatt reports 'Nor have I lately heard anything of any of the old Spring Gardens folks, whom we used to know there: not even Coad'.<sup>xxxv[35]</sup>

Richard Coad died in Battersea on 1 November 1900 and was buried in Norwood cemetery. He remained a bachelor all his life and left £12,000 in his will to his immediate family. Coad was an extremely competent architect displaying a vast knowledge of contemporary building practice and remained eager to accept architectural developments throughout the

second half of the nineteenth century. It would seem fitting, to leave the last words on the likes of Coad to James MacLaren. In a short published article, dated 1889 in the *Architectural Association*, MacLaren writes of the silent band of workers scattered up and down in the profession, and among the allied arts, patiently working out of tradition "things both old and new" - in them are the hopes of English art centred.<sup>xxxvi[36]</sup>

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- i[1] Private letter with author
- ii[2] This entry dated 1873 relates to the Cock's and Biddulph Bank, London
- iii[3] Chris Brooks (Ed), *The Albert Memorial*, Yale University Press, 2000, p.273 & p.277
- iv[4] Gavin Stamp, 'In Search of the Byzantine: George Gilbert Scott's Diary of an Architectural Tour in France in 1862', *Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain*, Vol. 46, 2003, p.199.
- v[5] Alan Calder, *James MacLaren: Arts and Crafts Pioneer*, Donnington, 2003, pp 42-62
- vi[6] John Summerson, 'The London Building World of the 1860s', *The Unromantic Castle*, 1990, pp 175-92
- vii[7] *Ibid*, 178
- viii[8] Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (hereafter RCAHMS)  
MS/28/SAS
- ix[9] *The National Memorial to His Royal Highness the Prince Consort*, London, 1873, p.42
- x[10] Royal Archives, Windsor, H2/ 1359 & H2/794.
- xi[11] Paul Holden, , 'A Recently Discovered Cornish Garden Design by George Truefitt', *The Cornish Garden*, 2005, pp 24-9
- xiii[12] Lanhydrock House Archives
- xiii[13] RCAHMS, Exeter Cathedral Notebook MS 104a
- xiv[14] A.J.B. Beresford Hope, *The Condition and Prospect of Architectural Art*, 1863, p.13
- xv[15] RCAHMS. MS 104a
- xvi[16] Coad was recommended to the Royal Academy by George Gilbert Scott in 1844, presumably when Scott was working with Rice in Cornwall.
- xvii[17] Thanks to Edward Bottoms at the Architectural Association Library for passing on these details.
- xviii[18] Membership records held in archives of the Architectural Association
- xix[19] Plans held in Lambeth Palace Archive
- xx[20] This fine building was overlooked by Pevsner.
- xxi[21] *The Builder*, 20 December 1873. The contractors were Messers George Trollope & Sons
- xxii[22] The church was illustrated on the cover of 'St Augustine's Parish Magazine' December 1923. West Yorkshire Record Office, WDP183. Original architectural plans are in the collection of Mr G. Vaughan-Ellis RIBA. Contract plans in the possession of Lambeth Palace Archive.
- xxiii[23] Lanhydrock House Archives
- xxiv[24] MacLaren's obituary in the *British Architect* records that 'he was at his best in Scotch Baronial'.
- xxv[25] Illustrated in *Building News*, 16 October & 4 December 1885.
- xxvi[26] Calder, *op.cite.*, pp 54-8.
- xxvii[27] Architectural plans in the collection of Mr G Vaughan-Ellis, RIBA. Alan Calder, *James MacLaren: Arts and Crafts Pioneer*, 2003, p. 50. This church was tragically the victim of an arson attack in 2004 – much of Coad's work was destroyed as a result.
- xxviii[28] The drawings we examined by kind permission of Mr M. Manisty of Bowringsleigh all of those examined were clearly dated or postmarked to prior Coad and MacLaren's first association.
- xxix[29] *British Architect*, XXXIV, 1890, pp 340-1
- xxx[30] *The Building News*, 10 & 23 July 1885
- xxxi[31] Lanhydrock House Archives
- xxxii[32] RCAHMS. MS/28/SAS/62
- xxxiii[33] RCAHMS. MS/28/SAS/64
- xxxiv[34] RCAHMS. MS/28/SAS/68
- xxxv[35] RCAHMS. MS/28/SAS/70
- xxxvi[36] *Architectural Association Notes*, 1889, 58