



Issue 41:
August 2011

Events calendar:

- **24 September—Herefordshire Ramble**, with visits to Cadmore Millennium Tower, Westonbury Water Gardens and Hampton Court. Details from pfgod-frey@gmail.com
- **16 October—'Burt's Bits:'** A tour of George Burt's follies at Swanage, Dorset. Details from jm.holt@virgin.net

Heritage Open Days:

- **8-11 September—England.** Details from www.heritageopendays.org.uk
- **10-11 September—Northern Ireland.** Details from www.doeni.gov.uk
- **All weekends in September—Wales and Scotland.** Details from www.civictrustwales.org and www.doorsopendays.org.uk

The Folly Fellowship

Articles, pictures, comments and feedback for the e-Bulletin should be sent to andrew@follies.fsnet.co.uk. All other correspondence should be sent to membership@follies.org.uk.

Picturesque in aquatint



Design for a Boathouse from P. F. Robinson's *Rural Architecture or Designs for Cottages* (1837)

In the period between 1780 and 1830, a fascinating series of books helped to change the shape of the British landscape and create a rural idyll that many people still seek today. What was interesting about them was that their authors no longer promoted large Palladian mansions for the nobility but instead provided designs for cottages, villas and farm buildings for the middle-classes.

Fascinating though this change in target audience was, it was not the only transformation made. The factor that really set this group of books apart from earlier ones was the quality of their illustrations, and in particular their use of the newly perfected aquatint process.

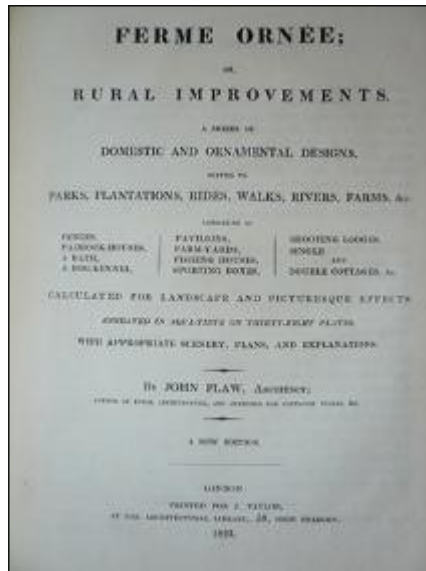
Prior to this architectural books had been limited by copper plate engravings, most of which were hard and dark in their appearance, and struggled to communicate any sense of location. In contrast, this new process allowed illustrations to be in sepia-tone or colour, and showed buildings in soft, natural-looking settings. The change was a revelation and offered a perfect medium for promoting the Picturesque Movement that had been nurtured so assiduously by Horace Walpole and his friends.

William Hogarth kick-started it with the release of his *Analysis of Beauty* book published in 1753, describing in sentimental terms his theory of grace and visual beauty,

and extolling the virtue of irregular contours and 'the serpentine line.' His thoughts were expanded in Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful with an introductory Discourse concerning Taste*, released in 1756. It was essentially a treatise on aesthetics, attracting the attention of prominent European thinkers like Immanuel Kant and Denis Diderot, and opening the minds of his readers to the power of nature and the emotion of light, shadow, colour and smell in the natural landscape.

The theme was echoed by the Rev'd William Gilpin in his many books on Picturesque beauty and travel. He began with his *Essay on Prints* (1768) defining picturesque as 'that kind of beauty which is agreeable in a picture.' He also started to expand his own principles of picturesque based mainly on his knowledge of landscape painting. He achieved this by travelling across Britain in the 1760s and 70s, and writing to his friends about what he saw. It led to the publication of his more famous book *Observations on the River Wye and several parts of the South West relative to Picturesque Beauty* (1782), illustrated by his nephew, William.

This wider promotion of the picturesque encouraged the better off middle classes to build country retreats for themselves. It also triggered the publication of portfo-



lios put together by aspiring architects who were keen to promote their skills to this newly emerging and wealthy market.

The first to do this was John Plaw, whose *Rural Architecture* book (published in 1785) was so successful that it eventually ran into at least eight editions. Another was Robert Lugar's *Architectural Sketches for Cottages, Rural Dwellings, and Villas, in the Grecian, Gothic, and fancy styles with plans; suitable to persons of genteel life and moderate Fortune. Preceded by some observations on scenery and character proper for picturesque buildings. All elegantly engraved on thirty-eight plates*, released in 1805.

John Plaw's books were especially successful and he made no secret of their aim, writing in the introduction to *Rural Architecture*



▲ One of the aquatinted villas in John Plaw's *Rural Architecture* book (1785)

◀ The title page from John Plaw's book *Ferre Ornee or Rural Improvements* (1823)

how he hoped 'to improve upon the ideas which these designs may convey to his Employers, and that upon receiving their communications, he shall be able to construct plans suitable to their different inclinations, situations and circumstances', going on to say that he 'respectfully begs leave to acquaint them with designs, working drawings, or models for public or private buildings.'

James Randall did much the same, concluding the preface to his *Collection of Architectural Designs* (1806) by saying: 'Many of these designs have been composed for particular situations, and approved of, they will, I hope, be found entitled to some praise and give proofs of my not having studied an elegant and useful art in vain.'

For the most part these books provided a peculiar range of classical or vernacular designs, some being more attractive than others. Now and then the authors allowed themselves to delve into the exotic by adding a Swiss Chalet or house in the oriental style. Most of them included a short description of their buildings followed by a plan and a perspective illustration, but some authors used the opportunity to express their own theories of architecture, often in exhausting detail. Almost all were united in expressing the significance of choosing the right style of architecture for the site with reference to the latest views on 'picturesque theory' by celebrated writers like Humphrey Repton, Richard Payne Knight and Uvedale Price.

Not all of the books were a suc-

◀ P F Robinson's design for a Swiss Chalet from his *Rural Architecture* book of 1837

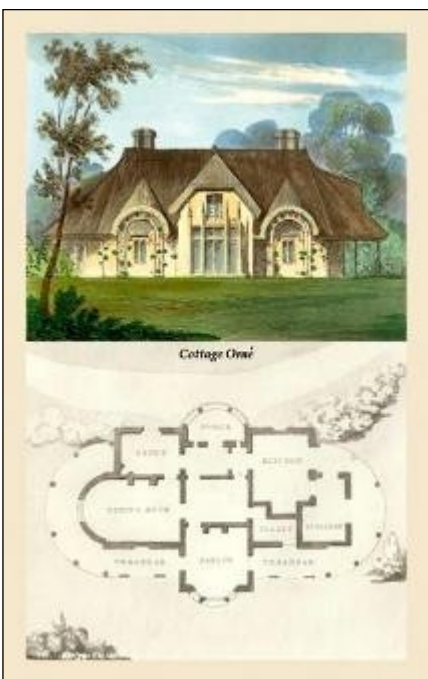




cess, and few of the designs appear to have been realised. The best known of the successes was Sir John Soane, who published his book *Sketches in Architecture* in 1793, and went on to have a spectacular career culminating in the design of the Bank of England (London). John Papworth, whose *Rural Residences* book was published in 1818 and Robert Lugar were equally successful and went on to be prolific architects in their day.

The London born John Plaw was another success but is largely forgotten despite the fact that some of his pattern-books are still in print today. He had a penchant for designing circular houses, only two of which survive: his villa on

◀ A Cottage Ornée from J B Papworth's *Rural Residences* book, 2nd edition 1832



▲ One of the Frontispiece drawings from John Plaw's *Rural Architecture* (1785)

◀ Belle Isle Round House, Lake Windermere. Photo: Steve Daniels on Geograph.

Belle Isle, Windermere (Cumbria), and the Round House at Havering-atte-Bower (Essex), built 1792-4. After a period designing military barracks in Southampton and on the Isle of Wight, he emigrated to Prince Edward Island (Canada) in 1807 and continued his practice there.

David Laing's career took off after the release of his *Hints for Dwellings* book in 1800, but came to an embarrassing end after his London Customs House collapsed in 1825. Although he was later exonerated from blame by Sir Robert Smirke—the blame being put on the builder for not sticking to the specification—the damage to Laing's reputation had already been done.

Many authors were unsuccessful and remain largely unknown. James Randall enjoyed a short career after releasing his *Designs for mansions, casinos, villas, lodges and cottages* in 1806, but died as a young man. Edward Gyfford, who published his *Designs for Small Picturesque Cottages and Hunting Boxes, adapted for Ornamental retreats for Hunting and Shooting, also Some Designs for Park Entrances, Bridges etc* in 1807, showed him to be a better illustrator than architect and the same was true of Thomas Dearn, who released his *Designs for Lodges and Entrances to Parks, Paddocks and Pleasure Gardens* in 1811.

The influence of these books was huge and is still visible in many of the picturesque parts of Britain. Sadly, many of the cottages ornés that were built have subsequently been ruined in recent years with insensitive extensions and alterations, spoiling their appearance and scale. Just as



John Plaw's Round House at Havering-atte-Bower, from a postcard c.1910

sad is the fact that many of these books have been ripped apart to allow the aquatint plates to be sold off as individual prints.

By 1840 publishers were using the cheaper lithographic system instead of aquatint, and it changed again the character of architectural pattern-books. By a strange twist of fate it also paralleled the gradual move away from Georgian picturesque elegance and delight, and progression to the weightier styles of the Victorian era.

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In the News

Painshill Park Trust at Chobham (Surrey) has been awarded a huge grant of £747,000 by the Heritage Lottery Fund to continue the restoration of its famous crystal grotto. Designed by Joseph Lane in 1760 it was described by the German landscape designer Friedrich Ludwig von Sckell (1750-1823) as "the finest of its type ever built."

The grant is a welcome addition to the Trust, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. Work on the grotto is due to last for 24 months and be completed in 2013.



Swiss Cottage, Cassiobury Park, Watford, Hertfordshire (c.1818), 1930s postcard

Swiss Garden Cottage: Origins of the Chalet Style in British Architecture

The narrative of the discourse is concerned with the rustic tradition in British architecture. It emerged in the English landscape garden during the 19th century when enlightened thinkers and enthusiastic disciples indulged their romantic ideas in garden art. The tenets for this activity had been fashioned by 18th-century naturalists and philosophers re-addressing their relationship with the natural world. Those who narrated their response to the Swiss Alps recorded a landscape that was both sublime and beautiful. Here the life of the mountain shepherd, at one with nature, still revolved around the fruits of the land. The European tourist, steeped in this ideology, became fascinated with Switzerland's mountains and its rural architecture embodied within it. Importantly, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) had promoted this in *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, published in 1761. Simultaneously, the English were cultivating a garden style that was stripped of organized frippery. Scenes of pastoral and sublime pastiche emerged as an aide-memoire to the Grand Tour. As such the Swiss chalet motif was introduced into the English landscape garden as an architectural point of view within an imagined Alpine tableau.

Scholars writing in English, who have made an assessment of 'Picturesque' gardening, have cited the occasional Swiss cottage where they have appeared in a garden plan as a sub-aspect to the thrust of their investigations. However, hitherto this fascinating subject has not been examined in any detail and warrants some academic kudos. To purists the Swiss chalet was falsely projected outside its indigenous con-

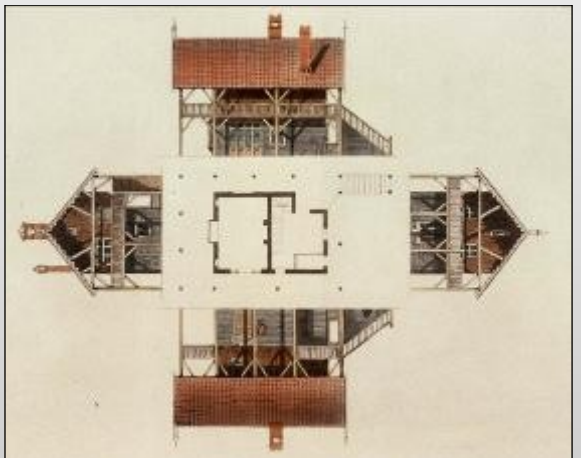
text, yet its manifestation can be attributed to the rise of *le chalet Suisse* as one of Switzerland's national symbols. Ironically, in spite of this icon being appreciated by the foreigner in Europe, the presence of the significant other – the Swiss garden cottage – has evoked little response from the Swiss.

My argument challenges the view that the Swiss garden cottage was nothing more than stylistic novelty, a fabricated confection – *pin d'épice* or 'Gingerbread'. As such, my discourse marks a point of departure from architectural prejudices, addressing the knowledge gap, and defining the importance of vernacular art embracing regional associations in the construct of a designed landscape. Moreover, it provides from a foreign perspective an insight into how the real value of national identities can be appreciated.

Prefacing the case studies is an exploration of the literature and visual representations of how the Swiss Alps had been understood addressing why Switzerland had captured the European imagination. Following on is an examination of the garden types in Europe associated with the introduction of a Swiss pastoral motif. Emphasis has been given to the English development where the emergence of a chalet style was formalized in architectural pattern-books and in support of this there is an illustrated gazetteer that forms a major appendix.

Subsequent to the scope of this study, Swiss chalet elements disseminated into villa and cottage architecture globally, par-

Swiss Cottage, Cassiobury Park (Herts). Plan by A.C. Pugin c.1819 Britton (1837) *The History of Cassiobury Park, Hertfordshire*, pl.XV. By kind permission and © British Library Board, 562*.h.6.



ticularly North America between 1850 and 1870 which will make an important coda to the investigation and add to the body of evidence that gave rise to Switzerland's iconic symbol of national identity in the imagination of the tourist – arguably the lifeblood of Swiss Alpine sustainability.

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Dr Sue Wilson is an independent scholar having received her PhD from the University of Bristol in 2010. Her research specialisms include the 18th-century English garden, British domestic architecture and the Swiss Grand Tour. As a member of the Folly Fellowship, she has kindly provided an abstract of her thesis which is in the process of revision for a book manuscript.

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