Rediscovering Herbert Horne

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The Craftsman and Architect

As with his poetry, Horne's work in design tapers off sharply after 1890. In that year, his partnership with Mackmurdo was dissolved. Horne had become, in Mackmurdo's version, too absorbed in his literary work to be much assistance with the firm's architectural commissions, though Horne was to be engaged for a year or two afterwards on one of his own more ambitious buildings.

During the 1880s, Horne seems to have executed a number of designs for the Guild on his own account, and a list in his own hand survives in the archives of the Museo Horne. These include items as diverse as cretonnes, tapestries, chairs, fenders, ecclesiastical chintz, panels for cabinets, pictures in watercolours and oils, wood blocks and a reredos. This again casts some doubt on Mackmurdo's account of Horne's work for the Guild—that it was sparse and that Horne's talent was assimilative, not creative.¹

Horne's dissatisfaction with his own creative work, and perhaps with the historicism that inhibited it, emerges from the introduction he wrote for his edition of the anonymous play
Nero (1624), in a volume of the Mermaid series containing three other plays with introductions by other writers. It can be assumed that the play represented in some measure Horne's own choice. Indeed, both the choice of play and introduction show Horne moving towards a more disciplined, severer taste. Nero is an academic play, performed no doubt at the University, written by a scholar and intended for a scholarly audience. It is for a Jacobean play remarkably unified in its design, for it is without any comic element. Plot is rigidly subordinated to historical material. Nero lies, then, in the tradition of Jonson's Sejanus, a filiation which Horne himself does not observe.

Horne's was not pioneer work. A. H. Bullen had already edited Nero from the two extant quartos, but Horne was the first to use the manuscript version. In his reference to the early printed texts, Horne reveals a precision unusual even among more professional editors of that time. The introduction is more interesting as revealing certain pressures at work in Horne's mind than in presenting the background of the play: very often it reads like a personal statement of ideas that possess a merely tangential relationship to the play itself. But this is very different in kind from the subjective approach then in vogue—the approach, for example, followed by Pater's young disciple Arthur Symons, whose editorial work is also represented in the Mermaid volume. In this respect, Horne's introduction may be seen as a remarkably early reaction against the disjunctive method of Lamb's Specimens, no less than a veering away from the Paterian approach:

we of this nineteenth century are, alas! too often content to judge of a work of art by fragments, and this is quite an impossible way to judge of a work of art, no matter if it be a piece of architecture, a picture, or a play.
This strongly hints at tension between the framework of fact and the individual response, a tension felt also in Pater's approach to the Renaissance. In Pater's case this was resolved by turning away from history to fantasy in Imaginary Portraits and to the novel in Marius the Epicurean. In his Letters and Papers of Adam Legendre, which began publication in the Century Guild Hobby Horse in 1890, Horne was turning to fantasy of a severer form, but from then on retreated into pure scholarship.

The last act of Nero, Horne complains, is comparatively pallid when set beside the other four, for the tragedy expressed in the famous, apocryphal qualis artifex pereo, an emperor-aesthete who attempts to modulate politics in the spirit of art, is not emphasised. Horne did not have sufficient knowledge of Elizabethan dramatic conventions to approach the play directly: he does not see that the subdued conclusion to Nero is prescribed. What he can do is refer to the historical material out of which this somewhat heavily sententious play is made. In doing so, he proffers an interesting, if obscure, argument, which precisely springs from the misunderstanding of Elizabethan convention:

History seeks to show us men and events as they really were; while the end of great dramatic writing is not merely to hold the mirror up to Nature, but looking upon Nature to distinguish between what is transitory and what is abiding, what is accidental and what is essential, and so, choosing those qualities and traits of men and women which are the more lasting and precious for our warning and example, and heightening their various passions and circumstances, to mould all into a work of art. If this is so, there would seem to be between History and Dramatic writing a radical contradiction. To say that it is vain that an artist should attempt to hide this contradiction would be an absurdity; for whatever is possible to Art, that also is lawful. Still the question remains, has any writer completely overcome what would seem to be an insuperable objection?
Superficially, this passage re-states the traditional tension between poetry and history found in Aristotle's *Poetics*, but there seems to be some deeper scepticism at work. History with all its morally irrelevant detail is directly related to life; art with its conscious stress on selected morally important detail remains subtly distanced from life. This statement reflects a crisis in Horne's thinking—a dissatisfaction with his own multifariousness.

A similar concern with "architectural" unity appears in a lengthy letter Horne contributed to the *Church Reformer* (March 1888), condemning Bodley and Garner's reredos, recently erected in the chord of the apse of St. Paul's at a cost of close on £30,000. With its statuary, the reredos was barely calculated to satisfy the increasing austerity of Horne's taste.

Horne's analysis of St. Paul's in this article is sensitive and scholarly, yet fails to isolate the Baroque elements; but Baroque was hardly a concept in the architectural criticism of the English 1890s, though Wolfflin's *Renaissance und Barock*, which distinguished the two styles, had appeared in 1888. While he misses the play of solemnity and solidity against dynamic spatial effects in the interior, Horne does isolate Wren's contrast of rectilinear and curved lines. For him, however, the contrast is static. His essay of 1893 on Michelangelo shows him reacting uneasily against violent developments in the Renaissance style.

In 1889 Horne was afforded the opportunity of applying his architectural ideals. A year or two before he had become friendly with Frederic Shields (1833–1911), a friend of Rossetti in his later years (who was to contribute memories of Rossetti to the *Century Guild Hobby Horse*). Since 1883 Shields had been friendly with Mrs. Russell Gurney, a pious and wealthy widow connected with the Quaker banking family. In 1887 Mrs. Gurney decided to build a chapel for rest and meditation to be decorated with symbolic murals by Shields. A site was
chosen on the north side of the Bayswater Road: a disused burial ground with an old chapel and a caretaker's house. Horne was appointed architect, and on 1 January 1889 we hear of him visiting the site for the first time with Shields. In the summer of that same year, architect and painter made a tour in Italy at Mrs. Gurney's expense to study some of the principal church decorations, though Horne's role was simply to provide wall-space for Shield's murals. Horne admired particularly the façade of Santa Maria della Grazie at Pietrasanta near Carrara. Saxl has indeed shown that this provides the model for Horne's design.4

Mackmurdo lays claim to the Chapel of the Ascension in his autobiographical notes, but a plan of the building in Horne's hand survives in the Victoria and Albert Museum.5 That Mackmurdo gave some mild assistance is evident from a letter Selwyn Image addressed to him on 26 September 1889:

I received last night a letter full of commissions from H. P. H. Among them is this which concerns you . . .

"Will you ask Mackmurdo to do the following:

1) Get carefully surveyed all the burial ground, at Hyde Park Place, upon which we are to build the Shields chapel, against my coming home. Particularly, the position of the tombs at the back of the present building. I shall have so very little time to get out my plans, that it is very important that this survey should be taken before I return."6

It was not until February 1890, five months later, that the plans were completed. The site was narrow and rendered the more exigent since the tombs, the ante-chapel and the caretaker's house had all to be preserved. Moreover, the site concerned a number of authorities. "Progress was barred," Horne wrote, "by a special Act of Parliament, a Rector, Churchwardens, a Vestry, and a Burial Board; also, if I remember rightly, a Duke and his interests came in, some way or another."7 The building was finally completed in 1892 and
Shields's decorative scheme was finished in 1894. Like much of Horne's ecclesiastical work, the Chapel suffered in the blitz and has recently been demolished. So far as can be gathered from photographs, there was a beamed roof and some simply designed stalls arranged to face one another across a central aisle in the manner of a College chapel.

Horne's other work in architecture deserves some brief allusion. About 1893, he and Image worked on the interior of Percy Dearmer's Church, St. Anne's Lambeth. A year or two later, Horne added a baptistery and designed furnishings for St. Luke's, Camberwell, which became another war casualty. From plans in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Baptistery seems to have followed Italian Romanesque models and the design for the bench-ends contains stylized flowers loosely surrounded by streamers. That Horne provided elaborate wall decorations we gather from sketches which are extant. Horne also designed a porch, with a library above, in severe Renaissance idiom for the now demolished Positivist Chapel of Humanity, Chapel Street.

Of his secular work, the most striking designs are High House, at Brook Green, a girls' school, and a house that was never in fact built in Gliddon Road, West Kensington. Both are in late Renaissance style: the Gliddon Road house rather surprisingly presents such Baroque features as a fat swag across the lintel of the front door and a broken pediment on the window immediately above. Horne also designed the new buildings in Brewhouse Court, Eton College; a public house along the Uxbridge Road and some minor domestic work; a house at St. Margaret's; alterations to Mrs. E. L. Vaughan's house, the Marches, Willowbrook, Eton; and a bridge in the year 1891.

Horne seems also to have designed or collaborated with Mackmurdo in the design of the Savoy Hotel. As an architect, he was inclined, like Mackmurdo, to work regardless of cost,
which explains why a number of his buildings never transcended the drawing board.

In October 1889, Mackmurdo purchased 20 Fitzroy Street, an Adam building of the 1790s, and like most buildings connected with the Guild, destroyed in the war of 1939-1945. The ground floor was fitted out as workrooms for the Guild. Image, Horne and the painter T. Hope McLachlan had studios on the first floor, and Lionel Johnson lived in two rooms on the top floor between 1890 and 1895.¹³

Henry Sirr has left us a description of the interior at this period:

Mackmurdo [had] enlivened its face by white paint on the woodwork of windows, door and fanlight, and a number and knocker in brass. Window blinds of slight strips slung together afforded ventilation besides shade, but he advocated, if not entirely closed, nearly closed windows during strong sunlight. An entrant was greeted by a circular warm Della Robbia relief let into a wall of the white tinted vestibule. An imposing Italian painting of fine colouring in [the] original frame overspread the width of the projecting breast above the mantel in the drawing office adjoining, this space afterwards well filled by a Selwyn Image cartoon. Happy colouring of the wall covering secured brightness for two large rooms which could be thrown into one on the first floor, enhanced by lustre of his fitments, brass wall sconces and hanging candelabra, and long low mantel mirror with reflecting facets in richly gilded framework. Opportunity was not missed for an inscription of excellent lettering on the front of a fixed cupboard in the cream coloured refectory below the drawing office.

Dullness was absent, disposal of furniture was discriminating and airiness prevailed.¹⁴

The house was called "Whiteladies," though known more generally to two generations as "The Fitzroy Settlement." (It was from here, as well as from Mackmurdo's office at 28
Southampton Street, Strand, that the *Century Guild Hobby Horse* was edited).

Sirr recalls for us the personages who frequented 20 Fitzroy Street in the 1890s, many of them contributors to the Guild's magazine: Dowson being lighted downstairs in the early hours by Lionel Johnson, both missing their footing and landing in a scurry of broken glass at the bottom of the steps; Johnson creeping like a spider up the ninety-seven steps to his rooms; Sturge Moore, looking with his flowing beard like one of the apostles, reciting verse to the zither; Yeats declaiming. Sickert, Crane, Augustus John, Rothenstein, Jepson, Rhys, Wilde, Symons: hardly a representative figure of the decade is missing from the list of those who at one time or another were entertained by conversation, poetry reading—the meetings here developed into the slightly less informal Rhymers' Club—and the concerts under the direction of Dolmetsch. From records in the Dolmetsch archives at Haslemere, it can be gathered that five concerts were held at 20 Fitzroy Street between 19 December 1891 and May 1892. Horne was deeply interested in early music and instruments and this interest is reflected in the *Century Guild Hobby Horse*. Helen Combe, who decorated Dolmetsch's "green" harpsichord, and was later to marry Roger Fry, was a frequent visitor. So too was Fry himself. His Omega Workshops were to prolong in somewhat different form the ideals of the Century Guild into the twentieth century.