

The Architecture of Sir Ernest George



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Hilary J. Grainger

with new photography by
Martin Charles

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For Colin, Alex and Jess

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Frontispiece: Buchan Hill, Peaslake near Crawley, West Sussex, by Ernest George & Peto, 1882-6, for Philip Felix Renaud Saillard. Entrance porch and tower.

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Opposite: Buscot village hall, tower and arcade, Berkshire, George & Peto (Yeates), 1892-7.

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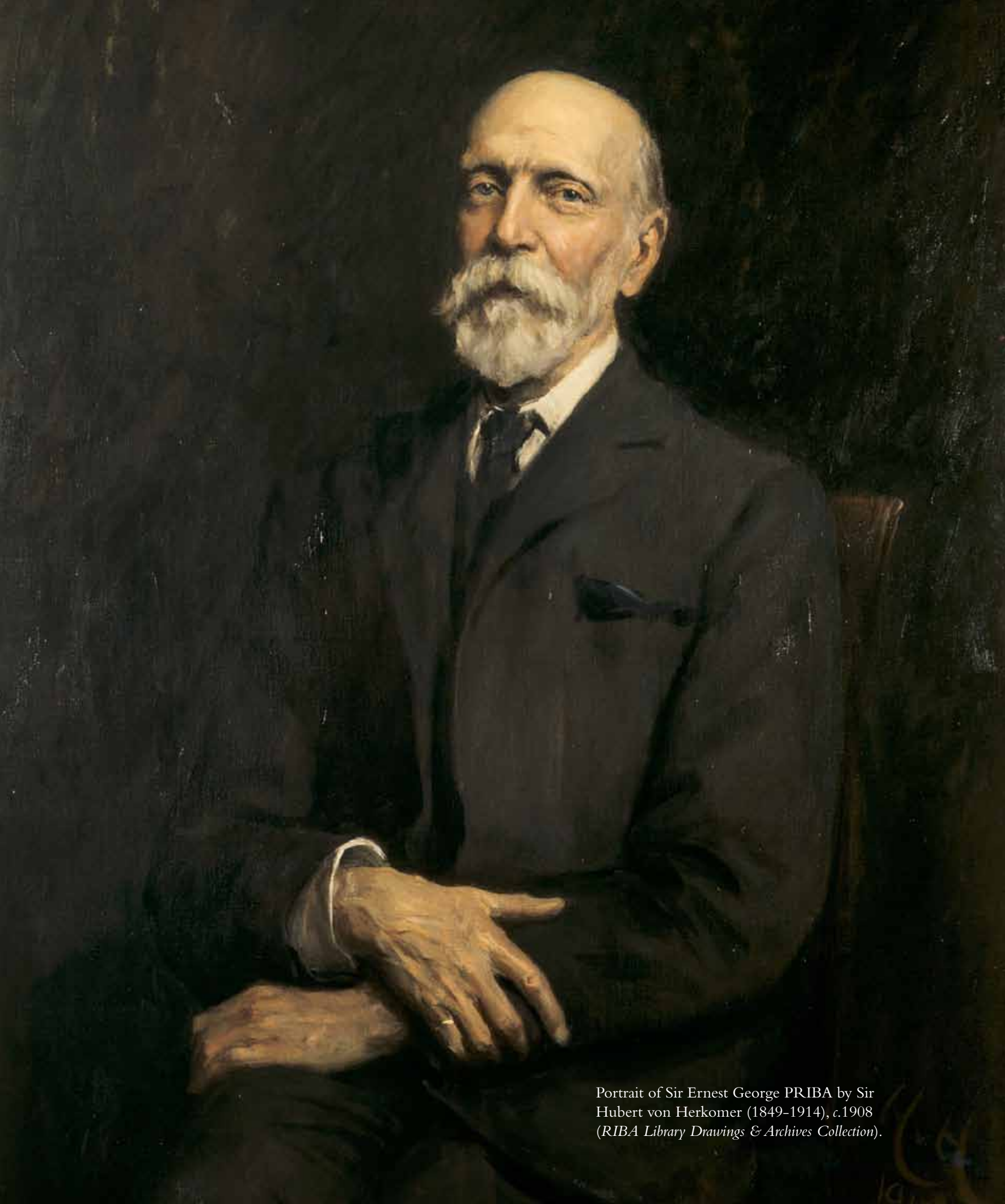
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Hilary J. Grainger
Sutton Coldfield, 2010



Portrait of Sir Ernest George PRIBA by Sir Hubert von Herkomer (1849-1914), c.1908 (RIBA Library Drawings & Archives Collection).

Introduction

An architect by profession, a sketcher by taste, a traveller for instruction and recreation.
P.G. Hamerton, *The Portfolio*, 1877

Sir Ernest George, architect, etcher and watercolourist, died quietly on 8 December 1922, aged 83, at his home in Palace Court, Bayswater, west London. A week before Christmas a group of distinguished mourners drawn from various realms of the arts, gathered with family members in the chapel at Golders Green Crematorium, designed by George himself some twenty years earlier, to hear his son-in-law, Canon C.H. Robinson, conduct his funeral service. Those congregating in the cloisters afterwards included such luminaries as the President of the Royal Academy, Sir Aston Webb; fellow architects Sir Alfred Brumwell Thomas and Sir John Burnet A.R.A.; sculptor Sir George Frampton R.A.; painter Sir Luke Fildes R.A., and engineer and promoter of the arts, Sir Isidore Spielmann.¹ As the coffin lay on the bronze catafalque, Beethoven's majestic funeral march, *On the Death of a Hero*, marked the passing of a man who 'had worked heroically and unremittingly for the good of his art and for bringing higher values into the lives of his contemporaries and successors'.²

Such a service and the adulatory but warmly appreciative obituaries that appeared in the following weeks befitted George. He was a Knight of the Realm, a RIBA Royal Gold Medallist, Royal Academician, Fellow of the Royal Society of Painter-Etchers and Engravers, member of the Royal Society of British Artists, one-time member of the Art Workers' Guild, Architectural Illustration Society, Foreign Architectural Book Society and Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. Not only was he a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, but he had also served as its President for two terms between 1908 and 1910.

By the time he retired in 1920, George had been in practice for nearly 60 years. His career began in London in the 1860s at a time of sweeping change and architectural opportunity and debate which involved, amongst other things, the Battle of the Styles and its pitting of Goths against Classicists in debates 'animated by a spirit of almost political bitterness and antagonism'.³ By 1922, the year of George's death, society faced the aftermath of the First World War, the Modern Movement was well established in Europe and America, and that year Le Corbusier exhibited plans for his Utopian *Ville Contemporaine*. In Britain the Gothic Revival had declined, giving way to stylistic confusion, the rise of the English Domestic Revival, the Arts and Crafts Movement and major shifts in the architectural profession, all of which George must have observed with interest. Although making his own distinctive contribution to the development of domestic architecture, he chose to maintain a degree of detachment from the shifting tides of stylistic preference and debate.

Throughout his professional life, George elected to work in partnership; first with Thomas Vaughan (1836-75) and subsequently with Harold Ainsworth Peto (1854-1933) and Alfred



Bowman Yeates (1867–1944), acknowledging that this arrangement enabled him ‘to work quietly, sheltered from the worries that disturb single-handed men’.⁴ Importantly, it allowed him to make one or two trips abroad every year to pursue his interest in sketching and watercolour painting (I.1). Despite being a modest and unassertive practitioner, George was unquestionably the principal designer throughout. Though his work at times encompassed commercial, ecclesiastical and public buildings, he was principally a domestic architect, designing the town and country houses considered to be his *métier*.

In common with many aspiring young practitioners, George’s early work in the late 1860s and early 1870s showed the indelible imprint of George Edmund Street (1824–81), by then ‘the leader of all young enthusiasts discontented with the correct architecture of their elders’.⁵ H.S. Goodhart-Rendel later included George in Street’s ‘flock’,⁶ comprising near contemporaries Richard Norman Shaw (1831–1912), Basil Champneys (1842–1935), Thomas Graham Jackson (1835–1924), Philip Webb (1831–1915) and Edward William Godwin (1833–86), who he argued had decided ‘suddenly that they were not going to be Gothic anymore, at least not anymore Gothic than they could help’.⁷ But George, as we shall see, was never subjected to the ‘hard Gothic training’ which Shaw, Godwin or J.J. Stevenson (1831–1908) ‘had to shake off’,⁸ but rather with ‘persistent elusiveness,’ was ‘content to remain aloof to continue in a path a little outside the issues’⁹ on either side of the stylistic battle lines.

By the mid-1870s, after 14 years in practice, George moved from being an architect of ‘promise’ and ‘talent’ to being something of an established practitioner, having attracted commissions from the Dukes of Wellington and Westminster and with several well-publicised commissions to his name. By far his most successful period, however, was between 1875 and the early 1890s in partnership with Peto whose influence and that of his family on George’s practice cannot be overestimated. Their partnership, lasting until 1892, was to be the highpoint of George’s long and prolific career, with many commissions plainly resulting from the Peto circle. Furthermore, the family provided a direct entrée into the London building world, historically through Sir Samuel, and contemporaneously through Harold’s older brothers Morton Kelsall (b.1845) and William Herbert (b.1849) whose building operations, Peto Brothers, were also to be of immense importance to the development of George & Peto’s practice. The 1880s were spectacularly successful, with over half of George’s total architectural output dating from this decade, at one point he was employing 16 of his final roll call of 82 pupils and assistants. Guy Dawber recalled when working as an assistant that at this point George was ‘perhaps one of the busiest architects in England, large country houses and other buildings filling his office with work’.¹⁰

George’s clientèle was, according to pupil Darcy Braddell, ‘drawn from the most highly clientele placed and the richest in the land’,¹¹ Goodhart-Rendel later arguing that George for a time occupied ‘a position analogous to that of Hopper, Burn, Blore or Salvin in the importance and social influence of clientele’.¹² Despite the fact that many of George’s most characteristic and successful houses dated from the 1880s, for a period in the 1890s, he assumed Shaw’s mantle as the leading country house architect until the appearance on the scene of his most celebrated pupil Edwin Landseer Lutyens (1869–1944). Darcy Braddell nevertheless recalled that between 1902 and 1905 George & Yeates were involved in four country house commissions, each costing more than £100,000.¹³ When Peto retired in 1892, the firm had emerged, without question, as one of the leading contemporary practices, rivalling those of

Opposite: I.1 Town Square, Rothenburg ob der Tauber, Bavaria, watercolour by George, 1898 (RIBA Library Drawings & Archives Collection).

I.2 35-37 Harrington Gardens, Kensington, 1881-2, RA perspective drawing by George.



J.D. Sedding (1838-91), Sir Arthur W. Blomfield (1829-99), Thomas E. Collcutt (1840-1924), J.J. Burnet (1857-1938), Alfred Waterhouse (1830-1905) and Shaw, with whose practice it was most often compared.

In Peto, George found not only the perfect complement to his own strengths and personality, but also a soulmate, both men being collectors of antique furniture and admirers of the art and architecture of the 'Old World'.¹⁴ They placed a high premium on quality and valued the importance of materials and craftsmanship and were thereby well placed, not only to advise clients on interior schemes, choice of furniture and aspects of garden design, but also in some instances, to buy items on behalf of clients. They both took pride in attention to detail; as one commentator remarked 'Ernest George is a master of small things, and that is why his houses are 'equipped' so perfectly, and why he is such a master of domestic planning'.¹⁵

After Peto's retirement on the grounds of ill health, the opportunities for large country house building began to wane, but notwithstanding several large commissions in the 1890s and early 1900s, George & Yeates developed something of a reputation for making thoughtful and well-informed additions and alterations to existing houses, more often than not Elizabethan, but occasionally classical. Their shared knowledge of, and sensitivity towards, older buildings allowed them to excel in this growing area of practice in the 1890s. Classicism, however, as even George's most ardent admirers were to concede, was never his strongest suit. Given that his preference was always for the picturesque, he encountered almost palpable discomfort when handling monumental forms and so, as the tide of taste turned, his work fell out of fashion. His reputation and standing, however, remained unscathed.

By 1904 George's position as a leader of the English Domestic Revival had been sealed by Hermann Muthesius (1861-1927), the foremost commentator on contemporary English domestic architecture. For Muthesius, George 'was by far the most important of the generation of domestic architects slightly junior to Norman Shaw'. Although he worked in the 'same good idiom of plain brickwork and homely interiors' as Shaw and his peers, 'yet', contended Muthesius, 'George occupied a special place among English architects'.¹⁶ While his country houses 'adhered more or less closely to the English tradition', it was his knowledge and intelligent application of foreign influences, especially Dutch and German, that made his townhouses so distinctive, prompting Muthesius to salute George's houses in Harrington and Collingham Gardens, Kensington, as 'amongst the finest examples of domestic architecture to be seen in London', arguing that their mood was 'almost romantic, fantastic'.¹⁷

George's distinction as a watercolourist and etcher was apparent from the outset. The charm of his sketches became legendary, allowing Dawber to claim that he was 'in some way without rival and might justly be ranked among the best architectural draughtsmen of the day'¹⁸ (I.2). His five volumes of etchings attracted the encouragement of John Ruskin, and George was arguably the only architectural draughtsman to escape the acerbic criticism of Joseph Pennell, who held him in high esteem (I.3).¹⁹ It was a widely held view that George might have been elected a Royal Academician for his watercolours and etchings, quite apart from his architectural successes. 'Architects have, indeed, often produced an occasional presentable watercolour drawing or etching; but we do doubt that any artist has practised concurrently these three arts so freely and abundantly as Mr George'.²⁰ His own preference, however, was



I.3 Etching of Loches, by George, a plate from *Etchings on the Loire and in the South of France* of 1874.

I.4 View of Limburg showing the cathedral of St George and medieval buildings with the River Lahn and a mill in the foreground, watercolour by George 1879 (*RIBA Library Drawings & Archives Collection*).



always clear: his great friend and travelling companion on sketching trips, A.H. Hallam Murray (1845–1934) recalled George’s reluctance to exhibit his watercolours widely, ‘fearing lest he should be regarded as a painter rather than an architect’.²¹ For George, architecture represented the ‘happiest of callings ... We may not gain credit for great originality, and yet in each essay there is an effort at invention and creation; and there is the after pleasure of realising our schemes – however imperfect – on a nice big scale; a result so much more tangible than that enjoyed by the painter or even the sculptor’.²²

George travelled abroad for several weeks a year, mainly in Europe, but latterly also in North Africa and Egypt, maintaining that ‘I have always felt that to leave one’s drawing board and see two or three marble cities in Italian sunshine, or to look on the big brick towers of a Hans town, was profitable and refreshing, and some safeguard against monotonous production’.²³ The resulting flow of watercolours and sketches were all imbued with George’s untiring delight in the romantic and the picturesque (**I.4**). His sense of the picturesque however, as Rudolf Dircks pointed out, ‘is expressed not only in his choice of subject – although it is largely in that – but also independently of his subject. You find it everywhere – in the flagstones of a dead pavement, in the plate-glass of a shop front, which, under his brush, become animated and delightful in form and schemes of colour’.²⁴ A frequent analogy invoked by critics was with romantic literature, many considering his work, whether in architecture, watercolour drawing or etching as clearly ‘a revolt against classicism as was the literature of Sir Walter Scott and Victor Hugo’.²⁵

His facility with pen and brush was reported as ‘breathtaking’ and the testimony of Dawber, serves to illustrate the views of many.

Beyond everything else, Ernest George was an artist with perhaps more of a bias towards the picturesque in architecture than the monumental, but as a draughtsman and water-colourist he was absolutely unrivalled ... to be with him, as I have, and to watch him put on paper with marvellous precision and rapidity a difficult and complicated subject, always selecting and grouping his sketch with intuitive knowledge of what was right, was a helpful, if depressing experience.

Many of his water-colour drawings will rank with those of our greatest architectural artists. His work was so free, so delicate, and yet so forcible. His drawings show a delightful freedom and yet absolute accuracy of perspective, a power of selection and composition which always appeals. His countless sketch books, filled with notes and sketches, measurements and details were really amazing, and oftentimes, I and others in the office, used, in his absence to look at them with wonder and delight.²⁶

His skill as draughtsman, together with his personal style of perspective drawing, employing a soft sepia pen and wash technique, undoubtedly contributed to his success and popularity **(I.5)**. He exhibited regularly in the architectural rooms of the Royal Academy and published in the weekly architectural press, his work by all accounts eagerly awaited by the architectural profession and public alike. George never allowed detail to overwhelm the viewer, relying instead on a form of subtle suggestion in which the character of buildings was evoked in terms of their silhouette and massing, the eye taking for granted a similar character in terms of the architectural detail and textures of the materials, even though George provided only a vague indication of what form these might take. This was a style of presentation particularly well suited to conveying natural materials, tile, brick and oak, and of suggesting that these were



I.5 Glencot, Wells, Somerset, 1887, RA perspective drawing by George, illustrated in the *Building News*, 13 May 1887, p. 714

buildings that had occupied the landscape for centuries. George also employed a low-viewpoint characterised by Lutyens as a ‘worm’s eye view’.²⁷

Above all, these perspectives brought art and architecture into confluence and were undoubtedly a key factor in attracting clients, presenting as they did, a charming, if somewhat romanticised image of their new property *in situ*. This gift, however, on occasions prompted scepticism (reported in the architectural press) as to whether the images were in some way misleading. The *Building News* was from the outset a great admirer and advocate of George, as were the *British Architect* and *The Architect*. *The Builder*, on the other hand, tended to blow hot and cold, vacillating between unmitigated delight and waspish irritation. There were two main concerns, the first of which being that the picturesque characteristics depicted might be lost in the translation to physical entity and the second that, as ‘rival architects might disagreeably suggest ... the task of providing their happily-imagined exteriors with convenient and constructible plans for every floor would often cause a good deal of trouble in the master’s office’.²⁸

Such concerns were, for the greater part, misplaced, since George was careful in his choice, and adept in his handling, of materials prompting his pupil Professor Stanley Adshead to conclude that ‘He was the only man who could successfully use terracotta. He was a great colourist’.²⁹ Colour was important to George who counselled students that ‘We architects do not sufficiently consider the value of colour. We think of form, and perhaps light and shadow; too often conceiving a scheme in elevation only. One who paints must consider buildings in perspective, also taking account of their colour and their relation to surroundings’.³⁰ Furthermore, George was fully cognisant of issues surrounding the place of drawing, cautioning students that ‘tricks are a hindrance to truthful expression’³¹ and advocating that ‘Methods of study and modes of working and drawing are but great preliminary steps and stages, looking on our great Cathedrals and the noblest monuments of the past, we must remember how little they owe to draughtsmanship’.³²

George’s approach was, however, undeniably pictorial. His perspectives were works of art in themselves and unlike many of his contemporaries he never employed a ghost perspectivist. But his artistic facility ought not in any way to be allowed to mask his considerable skills in construction and planning. Above all, George, Peto and Yeates were in the business of building houses. Their outstanding gift lay in an ability to design properties that gave the impression of having been lived in by many generations, in which the ‘richness of accumulated experience from the large English mansion’³³ and the charm and romance of olden days were combined with modern comfort and convenience. To stylistic variety and integrity, and sensitivity to location, George added sound and practical planning. Dawber considered him to be ‘an able and brilliant planner, and the ease with which his buildings grouped together in the peculiarly picturesque manner he made his own never ceased to excite our keen appreciation. His buildings were thoroughly English in construction, planning and general designs, though sometimes in detail and feeling they showed foreign influence’.³⁴

George and Peto both had an intuitive command of domestic requirements and George, in particular, ‘understood the mechanism of life as it was lived in great households’ and was only too aware of the importance of the ‘innumerable details (many of them not interesting), but on which the comfort of the house so largely depends’.³⁵ Muthesius maintained that George’s plans were ‘among the best achievements of contemporary architecture. They have a consistent clarity and simplicity which is pleasing’.³⁶

From the outset, a comparison with Shaw was inescapable and indeed by 1896, Gleeson White thought it

almost impossible to discuss the one without the other, not because they worked in similar styles, still less because George showed the influence of his predecessor; but rather because each was distinguished for their successful treatment of domestic architecture, each had left orthodox Gothic for styles derived chiefly from the Renaissance, and each was responsible for a very large number of entirely satisfactory buildings.³⁷

Subsequent writers have tended to follow suit, rarely discussing Shaw without at least a fleeting reference to George, the latter invariably following in the wake of the former.

George's work presents a certain paradox with many of his buildings appearing at first sight to be ornate, yet having an underlying simplicity. From a very early stage in his career, George showed a command of massing and composition, which is always present in his designs, however stylish and elaborate the overlaid detail.

The practice knew how to handle a client with respect and was mindful of his or her doubts and anxieties. George appears to have been particularly sensitive in curbing the aesthetic proclivities of some of his clients, who, as Gleeson White observed, were not always

capable of judging the effect of a building from a drawing, and the less eager they chance to be for economy, the more dangerous will be their influence. That Mr Ernest George, who seems to have almost a monopoly of palaces, has convinced his clients that the higher beauty of a building is unconnected with meretricious adornment, counts peculiarly to his credit.³⁸

George counselled students wisely not to vaunt their knowledge to a client,

but let your scheme seem to emanate from him. The plain man may tell you he 'knows what he likes', and what he possibly likes is abominable; do not tell him so, he will be converted by degrees to like what is good. You cannot have all your own way, and your pet schemes may often be frustrated. After all, it is not your house that you build, though you are allowed the fun of shaping it.³⁹

George's obituarists were unanimous about his potential long-term influence on domestic architecture, *The Builder* suggesting that

We can none of us fully estimate the widespread influence of Ernest George on our younger men. His powers developed at a time favourable to the growth of a more romantic style of work, and it is a question whether any architect of modern times has so directly and widely affected the work of others. We cannot call to mind all the names of those who passed through his office. Sir Edwin Lutyens, Herbert Baker, Guy Dawber, F.W. Bedford, Herbert Wigglesworth, J.J. Joass, D. Kennedy, Dan Gibson, Hart and Waterhouse, R.S. Weir, Read and Macdonald are names that at once occur to us.⁴⁰

The Architect proposed that he was 'one whose influence on the work of others was perhaps greater than that produced by his own achievement'⁴¹ and the *Building News* concluded that 'His activities as an architect were little short of marvellous, no other of his time left a more

enduring mark on our domestic architecture and few have rivalled him as an artist'.⁴² It was thought that 'he may justly be said to have, more than any other architect, formed a school of his own, for the many who worked under him, none was educated at any architectural school, and all passed through the ordinary office routine.'⁴³

George's office occupied a position of great significance over some 40 years, not least because over 80 architects, including many who went on to distinguished careers, passed through, learning a great deal about the craft and practice of architecture **(I.6)**. Darcy Braddell recalled that 'Young men scrambled to get into the office of "George and Peto", which soon began to be known all over the kingdom as a fashionable training ground',⁴⁴ dubbed as 'The Eton of offices'⁴⁵ and 'that cradle of the English Domestic Revival'.⁴⁶ George was understandably extraordinarily proud of that long list of able men – and indeed women – that he had trained. Aside from the better-known pupils and assistants already cited, of particular interest were the Charles sisters, the first women Associates of RIBA, and also his son Allan George, who went on to establish a distinguished practice in Toronto, Canada.

Paul Waterhouse hailed him as 'an inspiring master', not only to his pupils but other followers of his works 'in the sense that men of his artistic strength compel the homage of sympathy'.⁴⁷ Loyalty and admiration were earned from a lifetime of quiet devotion to his art. Dawber recalled, 'one whose welcome was never failing, one who was always interested in the doings of those whom he had sponsored into the world of architecture'.⁴⁸ George was possessed with the power, 'in his quiet, unassuming way of inspiring his pupils and assistants with a great love of architecture, and though he seldom talked about it yet the force of his example, his high ideals in art and his ceaseless and untiring energy infected us all with his spirit and enthusiasm'.⁴⁹

He was particularly touched when, after his election to the Royal Academy, more than 60 of his old pupils and assistants entertained him to 'a banquet' and presented him with a congratulatory address inscribed with their names and 'a fine early Georgian two-handled cup for remembrance'.⁵⁰

Amongst the appreciative outpourings after his death, was a plea from Paul Waterhouse, who believed George to be 'a great man, great with a greatness which even his almost startling modesty could not and must not obscure'.⁵¹ Ernest George, however, is not an easy man for the historian to get to know. We do not even know what he looked like as a young man. The first published photograph of him appeared in 1896, so depicting him in middle-age. Indeed the only detailed description, by Darcy Braddell, was of George aged 65, standing in his Maddox Street office

dressed in a blue serge suit and standing before a narrow oak table on which lay a large drawing. He wore a fairly close clipped beard, which had turned quite white, accentuating the brown of the face which it framed, and in which was set a pair of the brightest and purest blue eyes I have ever seen in my life. His head, but for a monkish tonsure, was bald and burnt to the same brown as his face. Below the silver-white of the moustache a pair of very red lips harmonised with the blue of the eyes above. His hands were very long and thin and as brown as the rest of him. He looked the picture of good health, and although the frame was spare and delicately formed, it gave one the feeling that it could stand up to any amount of strain.

If I have succeeded at all in painting this portrait it will be readily understood that there was something inexpressively alert, bright and birdlike in his personality.⁵²

Furthermore, we know little of his private life other than that he married in 1866, was

widowed after ten years and, together with his unmarried sister Mary, brought up his seven children. But there is every reason to suppose that the private Ernest George was not very different from the professional architect, for it was precisely the domestic virtues of a modest and kindly personality, which his architectural colleagues recalled after his death. Kindness was the keynote: 'a very dear man: modest, able and delightful in every way' (Aston Webb);⁵³ 'one of the kindest and most humane men that ever lived' (Reginald Blomfield);⁵⁴ 'If ever the word gentleman meant a man of perfect gentleness . . .' (Paul Waterhouse);⁵⁵ 'the kindest nature, modest, simple and unassuming, absolutely reliable and the soul of integrity, and all who knew him will miss his pleasant smile, the look of his keen blue eyes and cheering greeting' (Guy Dawber).⁵⁶ George was a modest and private individual and his few surviving letters to his family and to Harold Peto show that the welfare and happiness of his family were of paramount importance to him.

Furthermore, in George, architecture and personality were inextricably bound together. *The Builder* extolled his 'delightful facility' in watercolour drawing, adding 'it is given to few to unite such capacity with so loveable a personality as that which endeared Ernest George to us all'.⁵⁷ Indeed his personal qualities, expressed so deeply in the character of his work, meant that he was never destined to be a progressive, although he was described as 'a great pioneer and a pioneer of the right kind'.⁵⁸ As Paul Waterhouse remarked 'No man of his epoch was more

1.6 Group portrait of the office of Ernest George & Peto, 18 Maddox Street, London, 1887. The figure on the extreme left is probably Herbert Baker, aged 25, and that on the back row, second from left, is perhaps E. Guy Dawber, aged 26 (*RIBA Library Photographs Collection*).





filled with the obligations of truth to tradition. Yet no man filled this obedience to the part with a more conspicuously personal motive'.⁵⁹

To his contemporaries George was an architect of unquestionable importance. He was an indefatigable worker; his impressive output, both in terms of buildings and watercolours and sketches represented perfectly the industry and application that was the hallmark of the period (I.7). George, however, unlike many of his contemporaries, was no 'dashing iconoclast' neither was he responsible for 'audacious experiments', nor did he work 'in any propagandist spirit'.⁶⁰ He was neither a theorist nor a proselytiser, nor unlike his contemporaries Basil Champneys, J.J. Stevenson, T.G. Jackson, G.G. Scott Jnr was he a writer, but rather one who had come to prominence by means of his 'undisputed achievement'.⁶¹ This was underlined by Professor George Aitchison's comment, when presenting George with the RIBA Royal Gold Medal in 1896, that 'To give a list of his works would be like Homer's catalogue of the Greek fleet at Troy'.⁶²

A constellation of factors, however, has rendered George somewhat inaccessible and with a reputation eclipsed by many of his contemporaries – his innate modesty; the fact that he left very few records of his thinking, other than his addresses to students and fellow architects while President of the RIBA; the fact that no office papers survive; and the lack of any corpus of documentation personal or professional. Instead the history of the buildings and the office lie scattered in local history and family archives and in the scant recollections of his pupils and assistants. But while George might have fallen from view, he never suffered the indignity of dismissal. He emerges instead as an architect of unquestionable importance, his 'elusiveness'⁶³ only serving to add to the fascination of the story of his practice.

In the absence of any major study of George's work, this book necessarily accords primacy to his buildings, not least because they provide the basis upon which he deserves and would surely wish to be judged, given his avowed belief that a 'man should be known by the structures he has built, and not by the drawings he may have made'.⁶⁴ The pattern of patronage also assumes an importance in this story, as we shall see in the following chapters, since it is not only crucial in providing an insight into the period as a whole, but more particularly it reveals a great deal about the importance of his partnership with Harold Peto.

In common with Shaw, it is difficult to estimate George's 'wide, but undefined architectural influence',⁶⁵ given that studies of most of the 80 or more architects who passed through his office have yet to be written, but as John Summerson points out 'History is not only an affair of distinguishing in one generation the sign-posts seeming to point to what another generation thought was the right road. It is just as much concerned with exposing the pattern which one generation makes for itself in its own time out of a heritage it receives and cherishes and with the operation of many initiatives'.⁶⁶

A consideration of George's work has been long overdue in order to achieve a fuller understanding of architectural production and practice in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. His work is not only of major significance of itself, but, very importantly, it represents that which was held in the highest esteem in his own day by the public and the architectural profession alike.

Opposite: I.7 Malines, Belgium, watercolour by George, undated (private collection).