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Reviewed Work(s): Elizabethan Architecture: Its Rise and Fall, 1540–1640 by Mark Girouard

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Review

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Mark Girouard. *Elizabethan Architecture: Its Rise and Fall, 1540–1640*.

The Paul Mellon Centre for British Art. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. xx + 516 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$65. ISBN: 978-0-300-09386-5.

In the endnotes to this volume Mark Girouard often refers to his authoritative publications on Tudor architecture and the English country house. Here he has enviably seized an opportunity to return to, refine, and emend what has already appeared in print. His topic — and his signal efforts to elucidate it — springs to reinvigorated and revelatory life in a large-format book that abounds with hundreds of sharp color photographs. That said, the book's title is misleading. In 1540, Princess Elizabeth was eighteen years from mounting the throne; in 1640, the queen had been dead for thirty-seven years. What is more, certain characteristics of the Jacobean era, which the author takes pains to delineate, do distinguish it from what came before. This is especially — and interestingly — the case in the eighth and final chapter, in which the Gothic style adopted in ecclesiastical and collegiate architecture is discussed. Also, to have learned directly from the plate captions themselves which repositories house the illustrated drawings, prints, and books would have been a boon to many readers. The wholly unnecessary editorial choice to offer a closely printed page of photographic acknowledgments actually discourages follow-up.

The first chapter examines patrons' considerable abilities to draw and think architecturally, the diverse social and political motivations that led them to build, and the corresponding scale and ambition of the projects undertaken. Invoking both the terminology applied to workers in the building trades and the objects in various materials that they produced and coordinated, the author throws the world of skilled guild labor into sharp relief and provides insight into technical process. Artisans' domestic and foreign origins come into focus; so, too, their movements within England (and, to a lesser extent, Wales and Scotland), their specializations and collaborations, as well as their responsibilities and reputations. Productive comments on the components, types, and roles of drawings round out these observations.

In his introduction, Girouard notes a conspicuous desire among contemporaries for exterior symmetry in house design. The second chapter makes that point again with respect to facades and courtyard elevations. It also enumerates those interior rooms (kitchen, hall, parlor, gallery) and separate freestanding structures (lodges, banqueting houses, and gatehouses) that linked the differently scaled houses of nobility, gentry, and wealthy merchants. Galleries were for displaying pictures and also for strolling, and their length became a point of reference and explicit emulation. (In fair weather, flat lead roofs did double duty as places for exercise, yet their span correlates with an important practical effect below, namely the "double pile," rooms ranged lengthwise along a shared wall whose fireplaces advantageously kept heat indoors.) Gatehouses and hall screens marked boundaries, framed space, and established axes that structured movement. Alterations carried out in high-ranking ministers' houses made possible the reception of royal guests, an expensive undertaking that was a virtual requirement of office under Elizabeth I and James I.

In the third and sixth chapters, the author explains how, to varying degrees, Frenchmen and Flemings active in England, Sebastiano Serlio's treatise (appearing in Latin and four vernacular languages during the sixteenth century, but not in English until 1611), and various publications from Flanders, spread knowledge of the orders and renowned ancient Roman buildings. Famous ensembles such as Nonsuch Palace, Kirby Hall, Longleat House, Burghley House, and Holdenby House are investigated, as are tomb monuments, chimneypieces (especially prominent constituents of stylish interiors), doorframes, and fountains. The fourth chapter considers the Bible, classical history and mythology, allegory, heraldry, emblems and imprese (these latter falling under the general category of devices), and geometrically inventive planning. Imaginative permutations of these sources invested buildings with many, sometimes enigmatic meanings whose patient decoding required sophisticated visual acuity. In terms of materials, copious amounts of glass render sixteenth-century English domestic (and some commercial and municipal) buildings distinctive; the same holds for plasterwork ceilings, which sometimes masked older timber constructions.

The author's observations open students' eyes anew to the richness of English architecture in the period examined, however one struggles to name it. Girouard rightly exhorts us not only to understand but to relish varieties of decoration applied to interior and exterior surfaces, elements of classical and Gothic (i.e., modern) inspiration on the same structure, "without [the] presupposition that such a conjunction is ridiculous" (436).

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