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THE MYSTERY OF ASHPITEL'S 'NOTEBOOK'

CHRIS MIELE

In the classics collection of the Avery Architectural Library at Columbia University is a nineteenth-century ledger book identified as 'William Hurst Ashpitel's Notebook, c. 1810–1828'.¹ It is 41 cm high by 28 cm wide, and has 275 unlined sheets which are tabbed alphabetically and indexed. The notebook is filled with a combination of written information and drawings. Most of the latter are black-lined in ink, and a number are coloured in what appears to be ink wash or watercolour (see Fig. 1). Here and there are rough outlines in pencil, an entry begun but not finished. There is no record of how this document came to New York or even when. It has left no trace in the secondary literature beyond Colvin's passing mention of it as one of two 'memorandum books' that 'throw considerable light on Ashpitel's practice as a London surveyor'.² The other was at the Royal West of England Academy in Bristol but it cannot now be located.³ This was very likely an office day book judging cross references in the surviving volume.⁴

'Memorandum book' is not quite right and neither is 'notebook'. Looking at it carefully, it soon becomes clear that it is a book of 'precedents': a collection of document templates, design patterns and practical advice for everything to do with the business of architecture and surveying. There is other information besides, for example, entries providing an insight into the social status of building professionals and their aspirations.

Precedents are the stock in trade of a busy office. They save time and ensure consistency, and

they enable senior professionals to delegate work to younger ones without having to worry too much about quality or professional liability. We have them still today, commonly in digital format. Some are built up through practice. Others are commercially available through specialist publishers or websites. The first to be published was *Architectural Graphic Standards* of 1932. The RICS' Red Book, a manual for surveying practice, came much later, in the 1970s.

Leaving aside the mystery of how such a book, prepared by an obscure surveyor in late Georgian Hackney, found its way to Manhattan, there can be no doubt that the Avery notebook does indeed tell us a great deal about the day to day practice of a typical building professional earning who earned his living across what we think of now as two distinct professions. In Ashpitel's day the line between architecture and surveying was not hard and fast. The Surveyors' Club, founded in 1792, had many architect members, and historians have for many years understood that the two areas of practice were often delivered by the same professionals. Summerson's masterpiece, *Georgian London*, describes that interchange, and so does Colvin in the introduction to the great *Biographical Dictionary*. We now that Soane provided other consultancy services, and Mylne too along with Taylor and of course Nash. To understand the surveying side of their practices means casting over many scattered sources. What Ashpitel's 'Notebook' does is to concentrate architecture and surveying into a single source.

The Avery notebook is all the more valuable because it illustrates how a typical practitioner – and Ashpitel was typical – earned a living from the breakneck growth of London, then the largest business and industrial centre in the world, the first World City as some have called it.⁵ Here was a city of unprecedented complexity and wealth. Population growth and economic activity expanded its physical boundaries and remade older parts. It was a landscape of great opportunity particularly for those who could deliver a spectrum of services to assist in the development process. Before considering this unusual and previously unstudied source, it is helpful to look at the man who had it compiled.

WILLIAM HURST ASHPITEL (1776–1852)

Ashpitel will be familiar only to local historians and specialists. He was active in the parish of Hackney and surrounding areas in the first third of the nineteenth century. There is an entry on him in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography⁶ along one for his son Arthur (1807–69) who trained in his father's office in the 1820s. This and Colvin are the two modern sources for the life. Both are brief. There is no corpus of papers or drawings, and nothing is known of his birth though the unusual family name is associated with Middlesex, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire. He could well have been born in Hackney, where he was most active. He had set up of his office here by the late 1790s, settled and raised his family at a modest villa at the northeast corner of Clapton Square, which he surveyed and designed. This property was a few minutes north of the newly rebuilt (1792) parish church of St John, a stunning Neo-classical design by James Spiller, a student of James Wyatt and associate of John Soane. Ashpitel, his wife and children are buried in the churchyard, in a plot marked by a handsome stone chest tomb.⁷

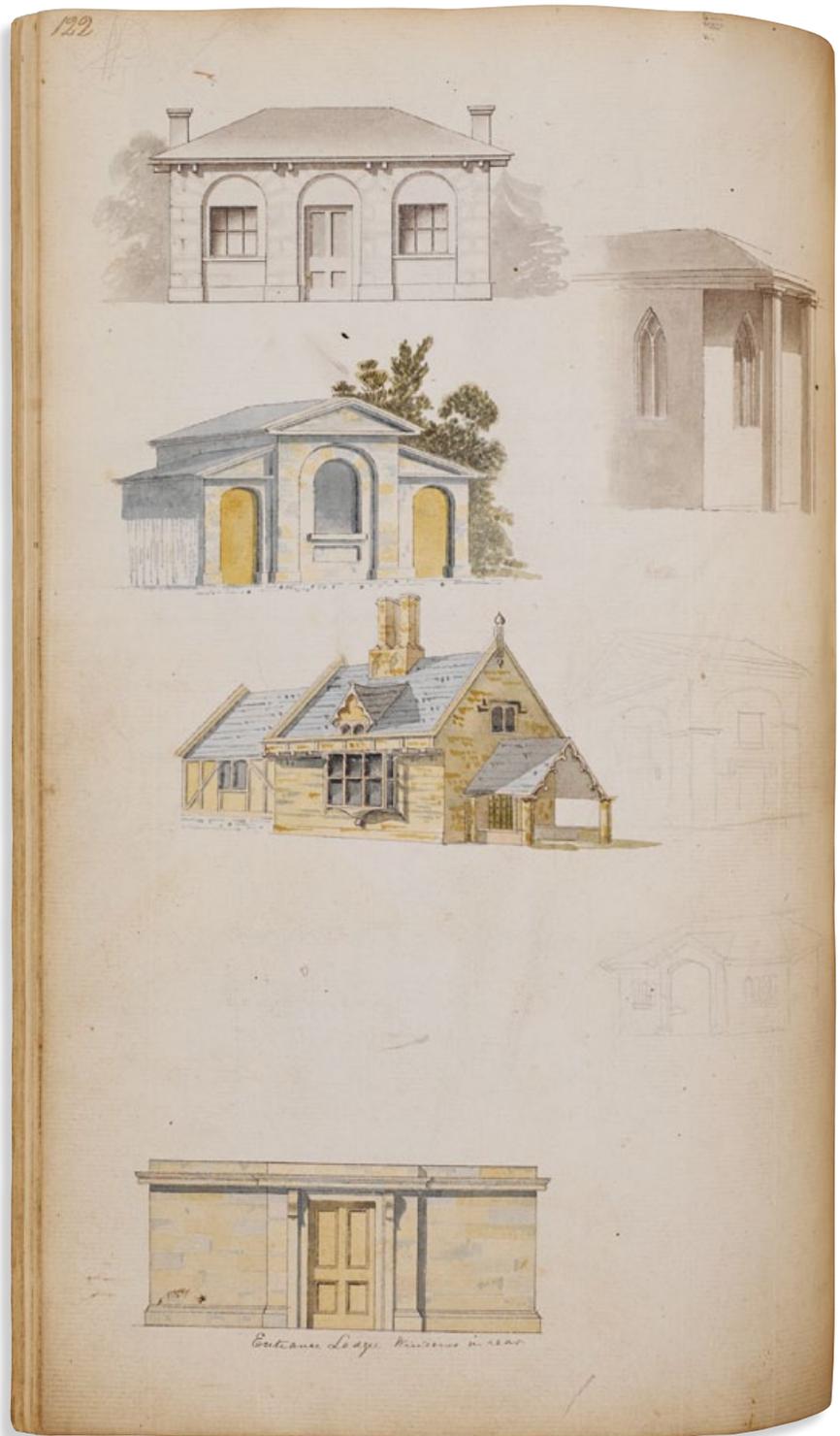
Ashpitel was articled to Daniel Asher Alexander (1768–1846), only just his senior, and probably

started the standard three-year term in spring 1791. In 1794 Alexander, who was both an architect and an engineer, then hired Ashpitel as a clerk to assist on the construction of the Avon and Kennett Canal. Alexander's other major instruction was for the London Dock Company, a private concern at Wapping constructed at about the same time as the East and West India Docks in the Isle of Dogs. Exposure to this type of work might have provided Ashpitel's son Arthur with useful contacts because he was active in this sector, albeit much later. Alexander was also surveyor to the Fishmonger's Company and then to Trinity House Estate. It was the sort of office, then, that provided an articled clerk with a wide range of experience in the business of property as well as in construction.

In that office Ashpitel met James Savage (1779–1852) best known as the designer of the Gothic Revival church of St Luke, Chelsea (1820–4), a pioneering example of the movement. Savage developed a specialism in arbitration and repair works, and through these instructions contributed to the development of the surveying profession. Savage was elected president of the Surveyor's Club in 1825. He was born and raised in Hackney, in the district known as Hoxton close to the City of London. This may explain how the two came to work together on a modest building, St John's Chapel of Ease, Well Street. There is, though, no evidence the two were in partnership as has been suggested. Whatever Ashpitel's reason for settling in Hackney, it turned out to be a good choice. Here he had access to a steady supply of surveying and architectural work, one large enough to build a practice that he passed on to his son after some thirty years.

The earliest evidence of Ashpitel's work is a 1799 survey he made for St Thomas's Hospital of land at Millfields, at Clapton, in the north of the parish.⁸ In that same year he acted for the Hackney Turnpike Trust, which was responsible for the rebuilding of Dalston Lane.⁹ In 1803 he prepared land for sale as building plots at auction on two estates, again in

Fig. 1. Cottages in Several Styles, sheet 122A, *Avery Classics*, *Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library*, *Columbia University* (hereafter, '*Avery Classics*').



Cottages Large Museum in rear

Hackney parish. One was for a Reverend Norris, later Ashpitel and Savage's client for St John's Chapel.¹⁰ Amidst this work, Ashpitel maintained his interest in architectural design, exhibiting, according to Colvin, a fantasy design for a Gothic villa at the Royal Academy in 1800.

Hackney was fast becoming a middle-class suburb within the orbit of the City of London, and one of the best first-hand accounts of that comes from Daniel Lysons. He first published his *Environs of London* in 1792. Here Hackney does not even get a mention, but in the second, much expanded, edition of 1811 Lysons devoted more than thirty pages to the parish's ancient history and modern development. One of the documents he had to hand was 'an accurate survey of the parish prepared by Mr Ashpitel, taken about five years ago, on order of the vestry'. This showed Hackney to comprise:

'3227 A[eres], 1 R[od], and 3 P[erches], of these, about 580 are arable, about 1570 under grass (in this is included the marsh which contains 36 acres); about 10 occupied by market-gardeners; about 40 by nurserymen; and nearly 170 in brick-fields. The remainder is occupied by buildings, yards, gardens, pleasure-grounds, and roads: the grass land is chiefly occupied by cow-keepers, who milk about 50 cows.'¹¹

The nurserymen dealt mainly in exotics for the tables, greenhouses and gardens of a burgeoning middle class. Of particular interest was land in the west of the parish, Kingsland, bisected by the modern A10. Here he reported brick earth

'... of so good [a] quality, and in such abundance, that £300 an acre has been given for the liberty of making bricks, besides the usual rent of the land. Vast quantities both of bricks and tiles have been made there; and some of the fields in which: the vein of clay is exhausted, have been put again into a state cultivation; and with the assistance of manure, are little less productive than in, their original state.'¹²

The annual baptism rate was rising along with the population growth from inward migration. Households nearly doubled between 1756 and 1793

to 1600. Returns made under the Population Act (1801) put the inhabitants at nearly 13,000 in 2050 houses. By 1811, Lysons records, 300 more houses had been completed. Urbanisation led to rapid rises in the poor rate, which trebled between 1794 and 1811. To meet this demand the vestry constructed four new buildings at the Mare Street workhouse.¹³ Though regular coach services connected the parish to the City from 1779, Hackney was within walking distance, about an hour's walk. Visitors to London from this time record throngs of people commuting on foot between the City and its suburbs to the east.¹⁴

As Elizabeth McKellar has written, these emerging areas on the edges of London were attractive to business people and professionals who converted intellectual capital into real capital.¹⁵ They were making, as she puts it, something out of nothing, just as speculative developers were transforming agricultural land into the larger metropolis. Nonconformist Evangelicals were especially active in these threshold areas. The process of transformation and the lack of established social hierarchies suited their own utopian views. Hackney's diverse religious culture was unmatched at the time, with High Church, Evangelical and Dissenter rubbing shoulders and building meeting houses and schools. It is not surprising that these years saw the crystallisation of a new middle-class housing type, the villa. Looking forward to Ashpitel's Notebook, we see there many designs for villas and rustic *cottages ornés*, just as many in fact as for the commoner sort of house, the terraced house of the second class specified in the London Building Act.

In 1811, the date of Lyson's second edition, Ashpitel was laying out building plots on Clapton Fields, immediately north of the parish church at Hackney, on land owned by the Tyssen-Amhurst estate.¹⁶ The scheme was completed in phases with a combination of terraces and semi-detached houses.¹⁷ He took one of the plots and built himself a small villa in amongst the terraced houses. This no longer survives. He had married a few years before, on

6 November 1807, in Christ Church, Newgate Street, in the City of London.

In 1818 Ashpitel had a passing involvement with the most ambitious planned estate in this part of London. The Regent's Canal was then being completed, and one part ran across the extensive De Beauvoir estate. William Rhodes, a local builder and brick maker, was keen to obtain a lease over it all. He and his brother Thomas had supplied bricks to the canal and were very active in land speculation in the southern part of the parish. Ashpitel represented the absentee landlord, the Rev. Peter de Beauvoir, in the negotiations, eventually valuing the land at £4,000, a good price. Nevertheless his client held out for two years, during which time Ashpitel himself tried, and failed, to establish an interest as a developer. De Beauvoir held firm until 1826 when he issued a single lease to develop 150 acres, a transaction reputed to be one of the largest of its kind in London.¹⁸ Ashpitel was by this point out of the picture and I am not aware of any other evidence that showed him as a developer or land speculator, though that would not have been at all unusual.

Though the documents all place Ashpitel in Hackney, the Avery notebook shows he worked across London, albeit in areas easily accessible by coach or foot from his office. He had projects in Covent Garden and the West End, including on the Grosvenor Estate in Mayfair. Most were for modest pieces of work: a new pub front, for example, or a single house valuation. The occasional nature of this work is not surprising. The market in professional services in central London was a competitive one, unlike the market in Hackney where several professionals could more or less monopolise work. On a few occasions Ashpitel ventured to the extremes of the metropolis, to Brompton and even to Richmond where he had a clerk sketch Asgill House, designed by the architect Robert Taylor for a City banker in the early 1760s. How Ashpitel learned of it is not clear, but, whatever the reason, the choice is telling because Asgill is a relatively modest villa, of a scale that would have

appealed to upper middle-class professionals in Hackney, Greenwich or Camberwell, where Ashpitel had a few villa projects, including a single house in the Old Kent Road, now in the London Borough of Southwark but then still Kentish farmland.

A well-travelled route from Hackney into the West End provided access across to Euston, where one of Ashpitel's students sketched details from W. and H. Inwood's Greek Revival church, the new St Pancras Church, distinguished by caryatid porches copied from the Acropolis. There were instructions a little further west, in Regent's Park where an assistant copied the details of a 'Gothic lodge'. We have to assume this information was picked up in spare moments as part of a planned site visit nearby, or on route. The only Home County destinations identified were to the south and west of London, Chertsey and Merton both in Surrey, and East Grinstead and Worth, both in Sussex.

The documentary trail runs out in the late 1820s. There is a survey in Hackney from 1828 and the latest entry in the notebook is 1830. In 1831 Ashpitel collaborated on a parish plan with two other local surveyors, Thomas Starling and James Edmeston (in whose office George Gilbert Scott completed his articles).¹⁹ At about that time Ashpitel took a lease on a public house in Ewell, drawing rent for twenty years.²⁰ In 1844 W. H. Ashpitel of 'Clapton Square, Hackney', is listed as one of the directors of the newly formed London to Canterbury Railway.²¹ His son carried on the architectural business, and we have no idea what his father did to occupy himself. Perhaps he lived between semi-retirement and land speculation or investment. Thirty plus years was perhaps enough for anyone in the hurly burly of London professional life.

What was the balance between his surveying and architectural work? The primary sources suggest most commissions were for surveying work. The notebook suggests otherwise. How did he think of himself or project his identity to clients? All we have on that count is a tantalising reference from

1817, when he was listed as one of 139 self-identified 'architects' working in London and named in *The Extracts for the Annals of the Fine Arts*. This list itself would repay some attention as a cross-section of names purporting to be working as architects, some well-known today but many more not. Colvin identifies, it is fair, some architectural commissions. The only really notable one was a new house at Chart Park, near Dorking in Surrey, for Sir Charles Talbot. This work probably began after 1802, when Talbot inherited the estate. The house did not last long. In 1819 Thomas Hope purchased it and knocked it down to enlarge his neighbouring estate at The Deepdene.

THE NOTEBOOK'S SCOPE

The Avery notebook describes five areas of professional activity which are today distinct areas of consultancy. First is everything to do with costing and procurement of buildings, in other words quantity surveying. The second area is advice on property, leases, valuations, even agency work; this specialism is now what we would call development surveying, which is the present author's business. Third is a much larger category of advice comprising the many subjects that have to do with construction, but stopping short of actual building contracting. Ashpitel appears never to have stepped over the line separating professionals from tradesmen. Instead he oversaw construction for others, as a building surveyor or project manager might today. Fourth is that body of information we understand as falling within the scope of an architect's work: the planning and layout of buildings, their exterior detailing and interior decoration (even furnishing), and their appearance or 'style'. Fifth, and finally, is a miscellany of information best described as relating to professional practice itself, from mundane matters such as the cost of drafting paper to more serious ones such as leading cases establishing professional liability.

The notebook presents them all together, in alphabetical order, without distinguishing one area from another, and that in itself is revealing. Some areas are discrete – valuations, for example. Others overlap, such as architectural design, costing and the supervision of construction. Anyone in the development industry will appreciate that a busy local surveyor would have instructions across this spectrum at any one time in the office, and indeed one still finds this mix of services in regional surveying and architectural firms. In what follows I will describe the sort of instructions Ashpitel discharged in each of this five 'service lines'. Some readers may criticise this approach as anachronistic. That may be fair, but I do not think so because it is clear that these several areas were distinct. Each presented different professional challenges and liabilities, and each served a particular phase in the development process. In any case, even accepting the charge, this grouping is perhaps the best way to understand the range and type of material.

DEVELOPMENT SURVEYING

Ashpitel clearly had a large practice advising on the business of property, what we today call 'development surveying'. This involved valuation, lease negotiations on behalf of landlords or tenants, and the laying out of new speculative housing for landowners, including a number of settled estates. He was well placed, literally, to carry out this last kind of instruction because he lived and worked close by agricultural fields that were being developed for housing. Ashpitel's own house looked out on arable land that was increasing in value because of London's economic development and consequent population growth.²²

The office advised at each stage of the development process. The notebook contains information on rents and the title values for each commodity, as well as sample agreements on how

such land should be valued (sheet 209A – all entries to the Notebook will be given parenthetically in the text). This was before the Tithe Act (1836) that substituted rents for what had previously been payments in kind. Potential housing land around Hackney was held by a number of estates and it was let to tenant farmers whose interests had a value that needed to be taken into account. Once the equation tipped in favour of development, Ashpitel might be instructed to survey the land and break it up into building plots for auction on the basis of leases he negotiated (124A and 126A). The surveys themselves were drawn up neatly, according to graphic conventions and colours illustrating each type of land – meadow, arable, pasture, along with water features and roads – and a legend and a key were prepared using standard script, all according to established Imperial scales. There are numerous sample building leases or agreements (see sheets 127 to 150A) set out in full.

The valuation of property is bread and butter for a surveyor, whether representing a vendor or a purchaser. Accordingly there is a sample estate valuation based on one done for a Rev. Thomas of Falmouth. There are three sample valuations of specific suburban properties of some scale in south-east London. One in Tulse Hill (Hindvale House) is described as having a 'verandah with a garden' and is valued at £1,325.00; a pair of cottages in Grove Lane, Camberwell (Nos. 21 and 22, since redeveloped) were valued £1,877.00 in 1828. The surveyor there was one W.B. Read, and the parties to the valuations are recorded (63A and B). Accompanying these are various forms for leasing, valuations and estate agency work, and also a separate note on the approach to single house valuation (115A and B, 118A and 119A). There are instructions on farm valuation (133A and B) too and finally a table of professional fees for this area of work (153B and 154B). These fees, like most on all areas of work, were charged on a commission reflecting a set percentage of the property value or capital cost of construction.

QUANTITY SURVEYING

Then as now, no building project proceeds without a pretty good idea about costs. Labour costs in Ashpitel's day tended to be fixed on day rates and were relatively stable over time in one place. Material costs varied according to supply and demand and their sourcing. Ashpitel was working at a time when the method of contracting for building works was changing. The traditional way had been for a developer to contract with individual tradesmen who either provided a price for the whole of the project or offered a list of prices for work which was then measured by the developer's architect or surveyor.²³ It is clear that Ashpitel was mostly working under that latter system. He also, however, had some familiarity with the newer method of general contracting (177B–181). Architects and surveyors were increasingly required to provide an indicative cost estimate to their clients for these kind of contracts, and so we find in the notebook some precedent pricing for completed typical projects as well. Thus we see that a 'small house on the Old Kent Road' – a Second Rate terraced house – cost about £80 to build (62B). A small, unnamed county gaol, illustrated with a plan, has a cost against it of £12,551 (92A). It is almost impossible to give a reliable estimate of what such costs would be in today's market. That house in the Old Kent Road probably had a gross internal area of, say, 200 sq.m., and the price an insurer would put on its replacement today would be, say, £450,000. A modest sized public facility, such as a gaol, could cost upwards of £30 million in today's money, more or less.

Most of the costing information Ashpitel recorded is set out according to materials and particular trades, but there is some information on specific items or fixtures available from specialist suppliers. Thus we have the cost of making 3,000 bricks in 1819, with quantities (29A). Also recorded is the amount and cost of timber obtained from a single mature softwood tree (126A) and the price of plate glass made by a specific works, in Albion

Place, Blackfriars (185A). Ashpitel had access to costs of stonework from the office of the younger John Rennie. This included a comparison between granite from Devon (Tamar) where Rennie was overseeing the construction of the Royal William Yard, as opposed to best 'Scotch' granite delivered to Ramsgate, and thence to London via either Wandsworth or Croydon (170A).²⁴ It is his past connection with Alexander, who had ties with Rennie, that might explain how Ashpitel came by this information. There is information, too, on the costs and quantities for chalk from Dover used to make lime (32A). There was another source of this material at a better price, from Merstham in Surrey (164).

The notebook names several masons and their respective prices (105A), along with glaziers (108A) and ornamental plasterers (based on Ashpitel's work repairing fancy Gothic ornament at Chertsey Church in 1806). Prices for slating a large roof of high quality are noted (again from the Chertsey repair job). Estimating required allowances to be made for other costs as well, and there is a schedule for the duty to be paid on different building stones (170B and 171A). Similarly, the use of materials from outside London incurred haulage costs (by canal and road at this date) on a price per tonne basis (260A). We have seen that Ashpitel, like any surveyor in the period, would be called on from time to time to advise turnpike trusts on road building and repairs, and so accordingly he recorded the price of road repair per mile in six different counties. Surrey was 'the most expensive in the kingdom', at £149 per mile. Then came, in descending order of cost: Sussex at £70, Buckinghamshire at £60, Berkshire at £47, Hampshire at £33 and Westmorland at £21, though we have no indication why Ashpitel needed information on that last county where he had no documented interests. This information probably came from a statistical extract on road construction, because his figure for total highway improvements in relation to Surrey is listed as £42,000 for 281 miles of improved road (218B).



Fig. 2. Elevations and Sections of a Lime Kiln, sheet 127A. (Avery Classics)

CONSTRUCTION AND THE TRADES

There is no evidence that Ashpitel ever acted as a contractor or builder. It is clear, though, that he did issue contracts and specifications for work to tradesmen on behalf of clients, much as a construction manager might today. There are full specifications or bills of work for each of the trades (70B, 151A and B) and short forms of specifications for contractors carrying out smaller scale works on existing buildings (177B to 181). The latter works are generally those scheduled as dilapidations at the end of a lease (146, 229A and B and 233A).

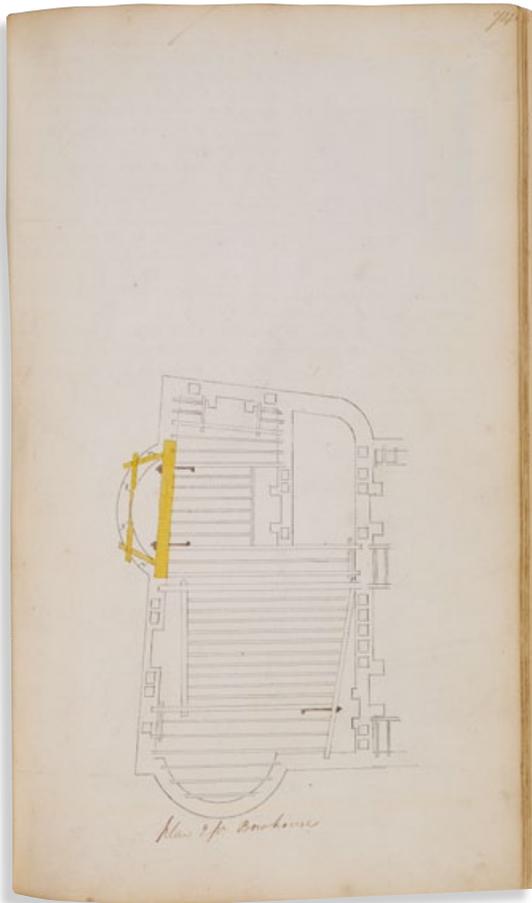


Fig. 3. Floor Frame of a Bow-fronted, End of Terrace House, sheet 74. (Avery Classics)

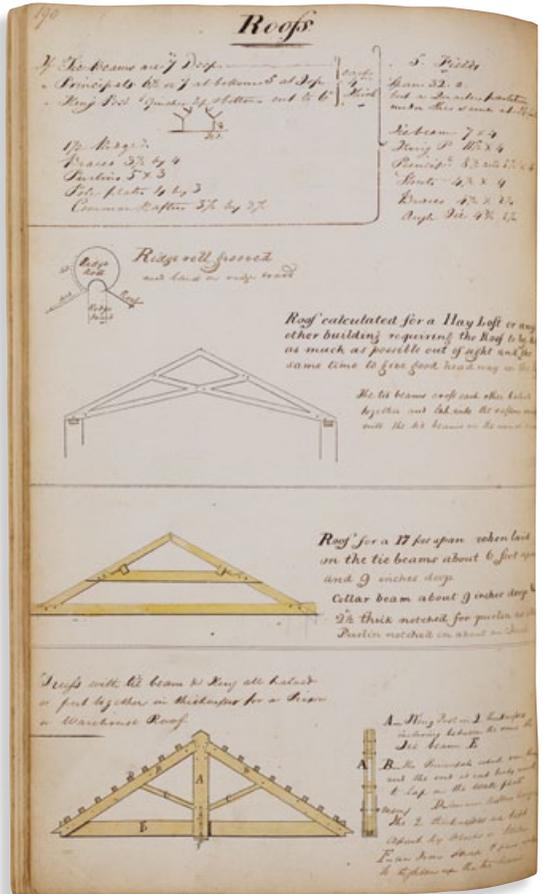


Fig. 4. Roof Trusses, sheet 190A. (Avery Classics)

And so, to advise his clients correctly, Ashpitel's needed information materials, building techniques and the trades. We find, then, a detailed drawing and notes explaining how to make a brick kiln capable of producing 30,000 bricks and tiles in 'one burn' and a lime kiln (127A – see Fig.2). This was based on one he supervised at Coldharbour Farm at East Grinstead. There are instructions on how to make a marl mill, essentially a machine to mix the precursor of cement (21B). Later is a separate recipe for Roman cement (250B). There is a sketch for a quarry crane and a mechanical digger for excavating

'vaults' and 'foundation trenches' (30A and 137B). Construction details fill page after page: bressumer beams, party walls, bond timbers, trimmers to hearths, brick skewback arches, cantilever iron and wood composite beams, timber floor frames, trussed girders and roof trusses (28A, 31B, 39–41A, 56A, 74A and B, and 84A – see Figs. 3 and 4).

Particular attention is given to those elements that deal with water: eaves gutters in tin and iron, wall plates set out in relation to the same, passing rails in sash windows (69A and B, 80B, and 86A). Many of these details are presented alongside

comprehensive trade specifications, including where they combine to produce important gross elements. There is, for example, a fine, fully dimensioned section of a roof truss with details of lead guttering set out in relation to a brick parapet (190A, 190B and 191B – see Fig. 5). Party walls were particularly sensitive items, and there are instructions for making them for each class of house (106A). Staircases are perhaps the most complex pieces of joinery or stonework in any property, and these are considered at different places, with a variety of examples. There is also a detailed specification for a general contractor as distinct from a tradesman (177B–181) because, as already noted, Ashpitel's generation saw the rise of this form of procurement.

Reliable tradesmen and suppliers are essential for the smooth running of any project, and the notebook identifies specialists in all the trades. Six slaters are listed, with addresses variously in Waterloo, Lambeth, and Tooley Street, all south of the river (205A and B). For specialist wrought-iron roofs, however, there is only one supplier named, one William Smith at Old Swan Stairs, London Bridge (217A). Individual masons are identified, again all south of the river, with prices for their work (105A), but there is only a single supplier of plate glass, then a special item (the name is not legible but he was based in Albion Place, Blackfriars, by the river, 184A).

ARCHITECTURE

Finally there is the material relating to architecture and design. This material is not presented as a single category but is spread out under different headings alphabetically amongst surveying information. The second observation on this material is the sheer range of it. There is a great deal of information on the design of minor elements which were effectively mass produced, which this author found surprising because it is often assumed that such standard details were left to the respective trades or to general

contractors. Then there are scaled sections and elevations for window architraves, sash windows, shutters, skirting boards, a stair handrail and folding doors and external masonry cornices (2A, 25A and B, 32B, 54A, 69A, 72A, 138A, and 202 – see Figs. 6 and 7). Within this category there are distinctions between Second and Third rate houses as defined under the London Building Act 1774, which codified different rates or categories of building and specified fire prevention requirements and other charges. There is only one reference in the whole of the notebook to a First Rate house, the top of the range,

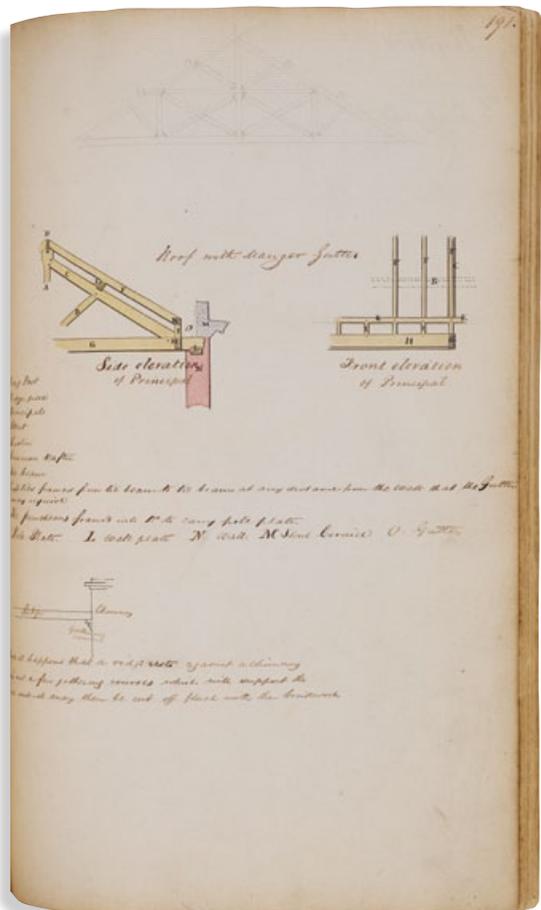


Fig. 5. Parapet Gutter Construction Detail, sheet 191.
(Avery Classics)

and only a single reference to a Fourth Rate one, at the other end of the social scale. Ashpitel's clientele were speculating for the middle and lower middle classes, people living in three- and four-storey terraced properties of modest dimensions. Where we find fancy joinery or details – a mahogany veneered door for example – it is tied to named status commission, often by a different architect. There must have been vanity at work here. Just as today an architect working on a small house extension might persuade his client to splash out on a special element, so Ashpitel probably found himself in a

position to suggest certain details and finishes such as those that might have been used in a nobleman's house in Mayfair.

It is worth reflecting a little on these pages and pages of typical details in timber and stone. They might have provided templates for working drawings, but it is just as likely they that provided standards which relatively inexperienced clerks or assistants could use as standards for the inspection of completed work and its approval.

Alongside workaday details are templates for more elaborate, bespoke detailing. These include a

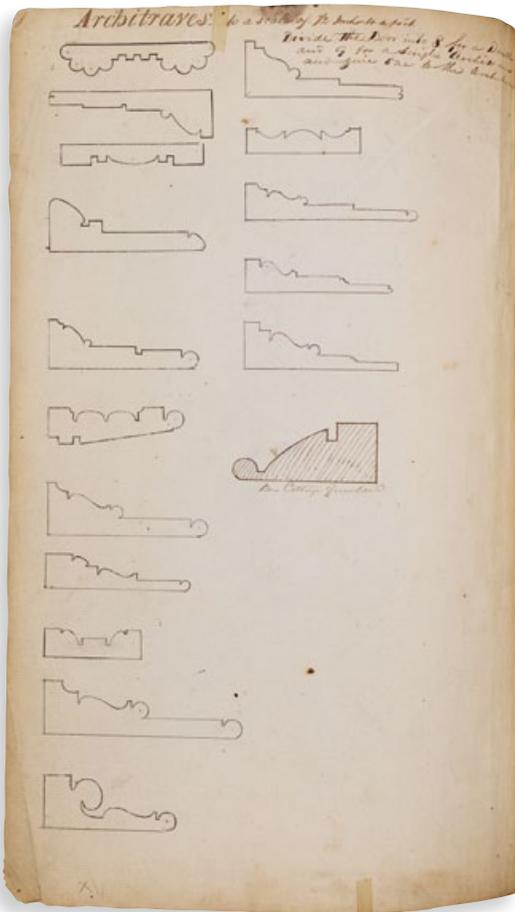


Fig. 6. Architrave Sections, sheet 2.
(Avery Classics)

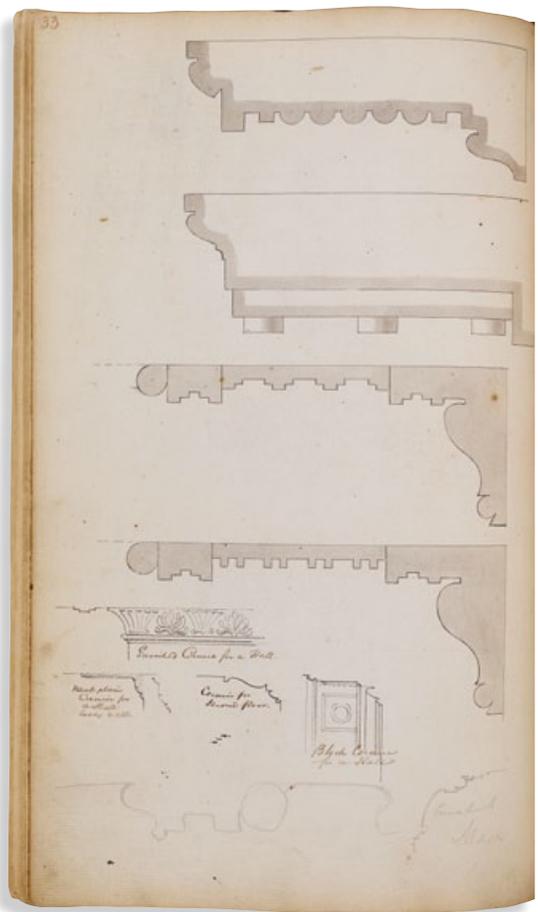


Fig. 7. Cornice Sections, sheet 33.
(Avery Classics)

significant number of plaster cornices, including one in the Corinthian order with accompanying room dimensions (45A and B), a fancy cornice of eclectic design in compo (35A, from the now demolished house of Clive of India, near St James's Park), another from a house by Robert Adam (32B and 33A, an unnamed house in the Adelphi development) and diverse ceiling roses and fanlights (67 and 68A – see Figs. 8 and 9). There are also precedents for richer materials, including different types of marbles and coloured building stones, and there is even an annotation identifying samples of English 'marbles'

from Devonshire being held as 'specimens in the office', just as architects and surveyors today would have sample panels from manufacturers or suppliers (127B and 128B).

There are sketches of complete interiors too, from skirting boards and architraves up to cornices. That from 6 Adelphi Terrace (Robert Adam again, see 22B) is accompanied by dimensions (30 × 20 × 15 ft.) and there are generic decorative schemes for a dining room and a drawing room (219A and B). The bulk of these are for residential developments, though there is one complete commercial interior, an office, from No. 9

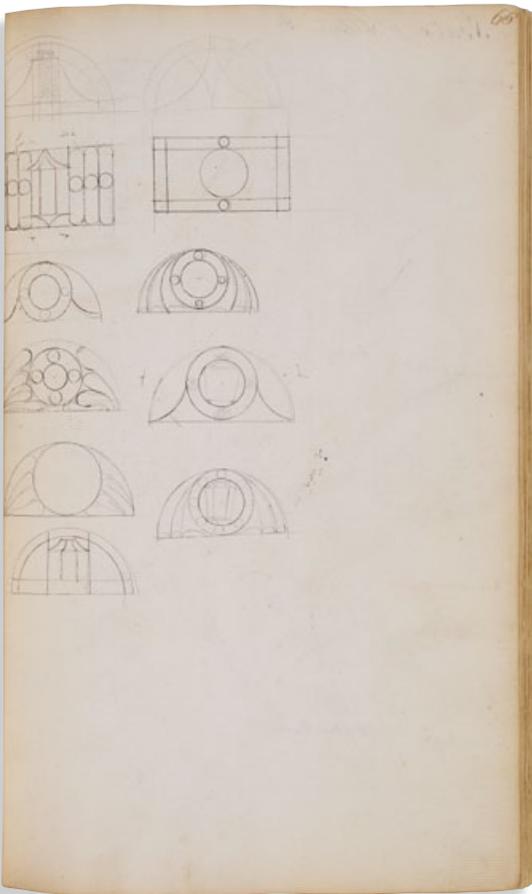


Fig. 8. Fanlight Patterns, sheet 67.
(Avery Classics)

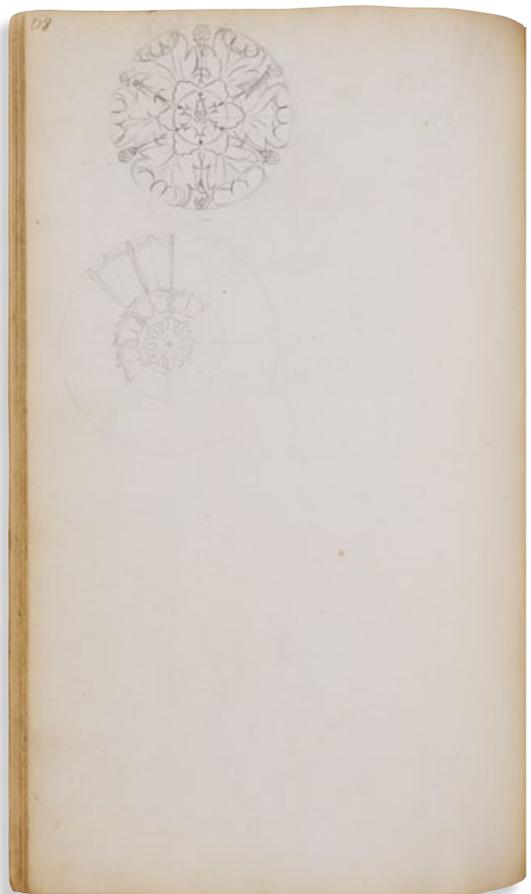
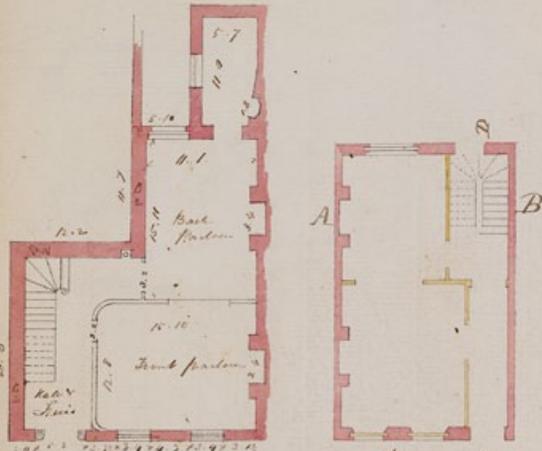


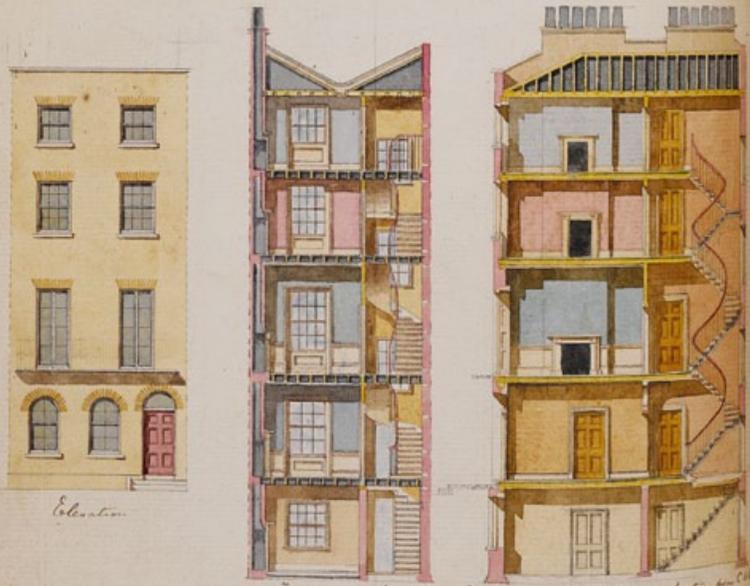
Fig. 9. Ceiling Rose Patterns, sheet 68A.
(Avery Classics)

62



Plan
2^d Rate house

*All Masons house in front to
Governor Square built by me
in a very advanced shape before
it front.*



*Dimensions of a 2^d Rate House to Estimate from
see plan above*

Fig. 10. Elevation and Cross Section of a Second Rate House with Indicative Decorative Schemes, sheet 62A. (Avery Classics)

Lincoln's Inn Fields. Perhaps the most remarkable decorative template is a full cross section of a Second Rate terraced house with tinted decoration to all the rooms, and accompanied by plans (62 – see Fig. 10). This demonstrates just how colourful a late Georgian middle class interior could be. This scheme contrasts with a simpler one for the interior of a smaller house in the country, described as a 'cottage' (48B). On one page (262A), there is a list of suppliers providing different colours in oil paint to order. There are a handful of sheets that deal with interior furnishings such as a floor cloth design (200A) and furniture for a drawing room, including an elegant Regency-styled 'Grecian sofa' (200B and 201A), a schedule of different-sized gilded looking glasses with accompanying prices (118B) and decorative 'China' (97A), as well as marble chimneypieces and advice on how to simulate mahogany graining on softwood doors.

Ashpitel has precedents for many different types of buildings, and these show the range of commissions he either discharged or sought to discharge. These break down into three categories: residential, commercial and public or civic (including churches). Starting with the first, there are different designs for what are labelled 'cottages', a generic term at the time referring often to modest country dwellings in the so-called cottage style popularised by James Malton (c.1765–1803) in two publications of 1798 and 1802 respectively (see Fig. 1).²⁵ One is identified as coming from Turner's Hill at Crawley in West Sussex (8A); others are clearly gardeners' cottages (37A and B). The term 'cottage' was also applied to smaller terraces of a recognisably urban form, and Ashpitel records one – Bow Cottage in Grove Lane, south of Camberwell Green (62B) – that he designed for a Mr Williams. This area was currently being developed by small-scale speculators building single villas, single semi-detached houses and short runs of terraced housing. For a 'Villa estate and country park' such as the Grove, near Worth in West Sussex, Ashpitel relied on his own work, but there are also a few pretty

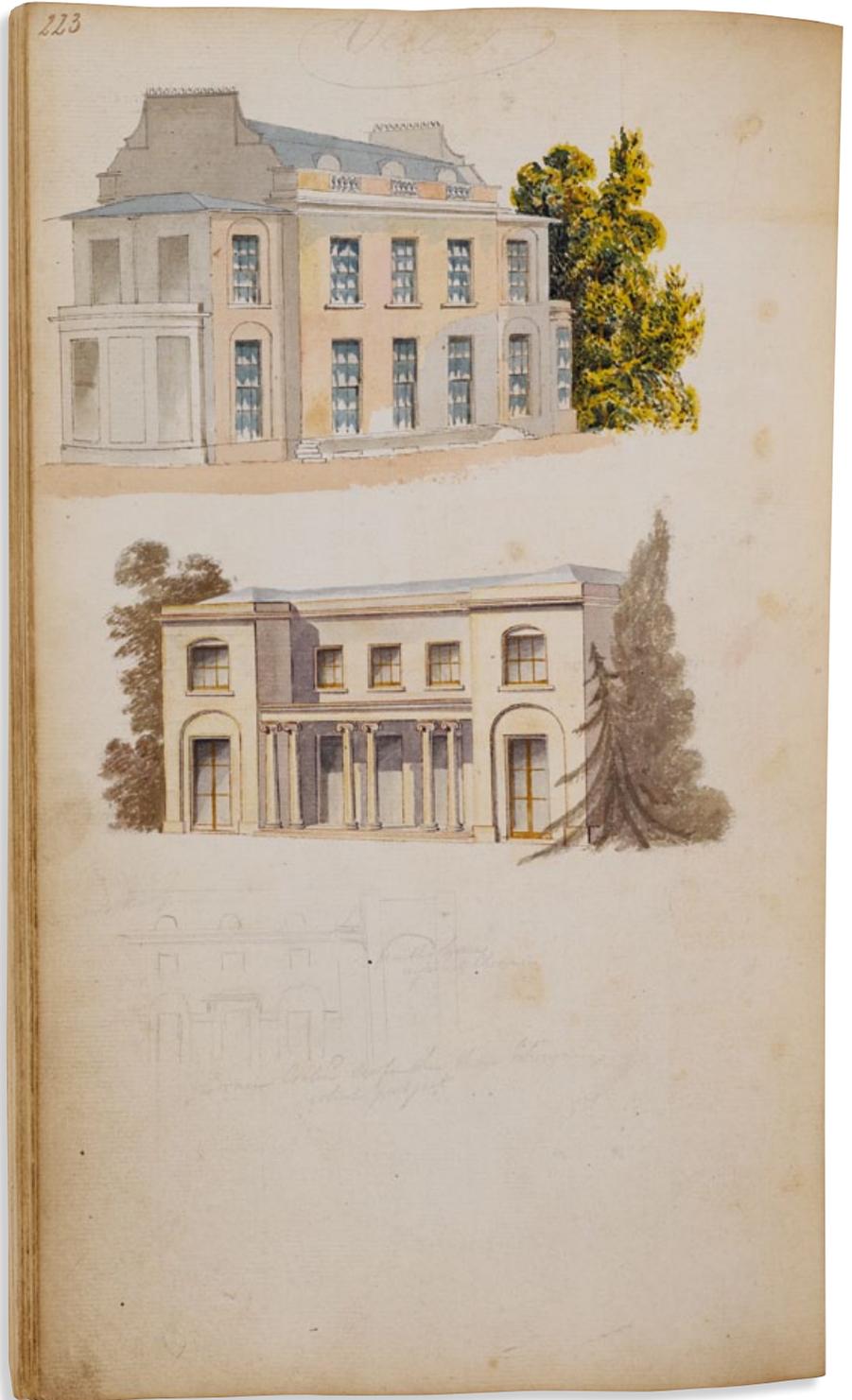
coloured perspectives of pattern book neo-Palladian villas on a modest scale (223A and B – see Fig. 11) and there is a separate design for a typical Neo-Classical residence, described as a 'Grecian House', which was accompanied by a complete set of plans (186A). Ashpitel was at the ready to design a complete country seat if the opportunity arose, with models for entrance lodges in alternative styles, Palladian, Gothic or Neo-Classical (122A and 180B), and for stables and coach houses to accompany a villa (40A, 118A and 208A: Fig. 12). These are in addition to the Second and Third Rate terraced housing that formed the backbone of his practice.

Whether as models to emulate or as points of reference to demonstrate learning, the notebook lists a total of nine 'County Seats' (67A). One, Ingestre Hall, in Staffordshire was a remodelling by John Nash of a Jacobean house. Another was Allerton House in North Yorkshire, a eighteenth-century classical house. The notebook also identifies Foxley, the early eighteenth-century house of Sir Uvedale Price, the noted aesthetic theorist, whose gardens he improved. The identities of others are, sadly, hard to decipher.

The commercial precedents include two shop fronts, one in Long Acre, near Covent Garden (18B) and another, which is fully specified, in St Martin's Lane (166A and 213A). There is also an unnamed 'commercial chambers', or office building (185B), and the another in Lincoln's Inn Fields already cited (34A). The greater range of exemplars comprise public buildings or churches, and their sheer number reflects the opportunity this kind of building represented for an aspiring architect. The growth of public law and the advent of modernising legislation created a host of new commissions for architects, many awarded by corporate bodies through competitions. It made sense for anyone wanting to attempt these to have ready, standardised information to hand to save time and resources.

Ashpitel gathered a great deal of information on Anglican churches. Most telling is a detailed table that lists 'Commissioners Churches' in London.

Fig. 11. Villas in the 'Grecian' and 'Roman' or Palladian styles, sheet 223. (*Avery Classics*)



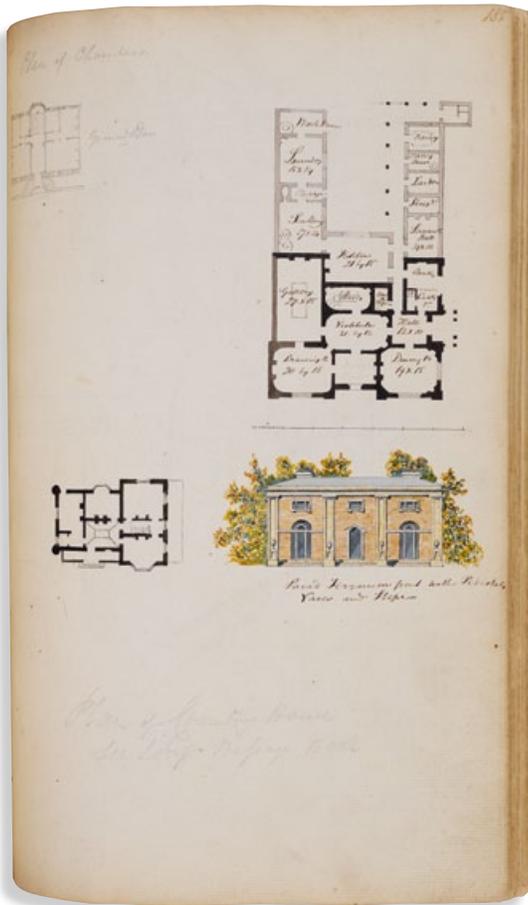


Fig. 12. A Villa with Stabling and Services, sheet 185B. (Avery Classics)

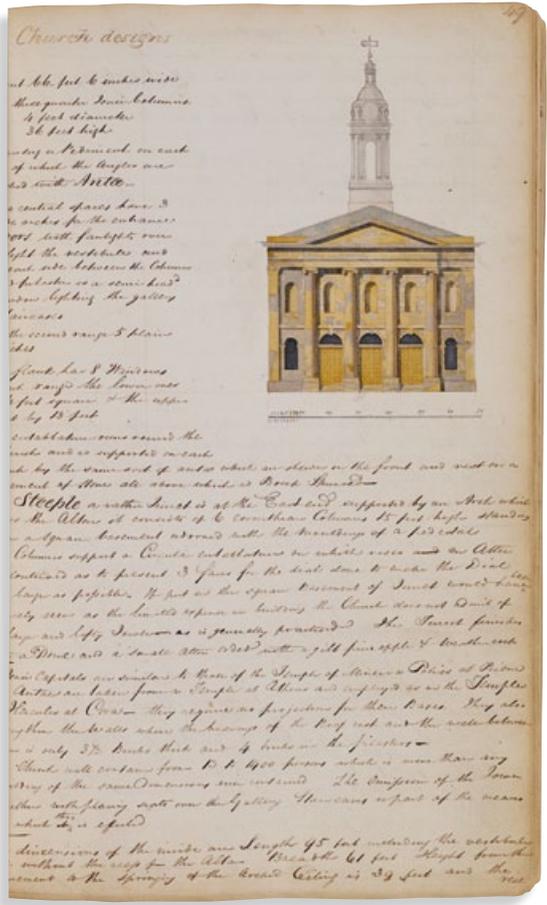


Fig. 13. A Typical Commissioners' Church, sheet 49B. (Avery Classics)

He recorded a price for a 'typical' church in the classical style, with dimensions of 66 ½ by 96 ft., and seats for between 1300 and 1400 worshippers, that is, £8,000 (see Fig. 13). There is also a summary of the July 1827 report of the Church Building Commission (established in 1818) which identified 64 completed buildings funded out of the first Parliamentary grant and a second list of sites under construction. The items copied down are not restricted to London or the Home Counties (49B and 50A). Architects and surveyors were then, it will be remembered, sometimes required to price for the

capital cost of construction in bids or given budgets. Information on prices and scale of completed works made their estimating more accurate. For smaller instructions, Ashpitel's precedent was 'Lewis's Chapel of Ease' in Islington, fully described in plan and elevations including decoration which was noted to be very 'extensive' (236B). The template for the Commission's new churches required a tower or cupola, and that in turn often contained a clock, which explains why there is a detailed entry on 'Church Clocks' with costs attached (162A). The only Gothic church identified is James Savage's

St Luke's Chelsea (83B), included most likely because of Ashpitel's friendship with that architect. For all the effort Ashpitel put into assembling this information, he does not appear to have been instructed to design a single church.²⁶

Another new building type comprised schools funded through charitable grants, though they were far less profitable than Commissioners' Churches. There were two categories, and Ashpitel had precedents for each. The first was promoted by a Southwark-born Quaker, Joseph Lancaster. He established the first free elementary school in Borough Road and in 1808 founded the Society for Promoting the Lancastrian System for the Education of the Poor, later shortened to the British and Foreign Schools Society. The notebook has a sample design for one of these institutions (261A and B and 263A). Lancaster's method was effectively a development of a system devised the Scottish Episcopal minister Dr Andrew Bell, responsible for the other type of school, organised on the so-called Madras System because it had evolved through Bell's missionary work in India. Both pedagogies relied on older pupils instructing younger ones. Bell, however, was working strictly for the Established Church, which is clear from name of the body he founded in 1811 to promote it, the National Society for the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Church of England. Ashpitel recorded two precedent designs for National Schools, one a real scheme identified only as being 'in Hackney'. The other is generic, but providing the same level of detail as his British and Foreign Schools' model (57A and 198B).

The largest single project in the Ashpitel's precedent book was for the new gaol at Maidstone, a building complex covering more than 14 acres and costing, he recorded, a total of £300,000 (92A). This was the work of his master, Alexander, who designed the building and supervised its construction between 1810 and 1823. In 1819 this had been subject to a special inquiry investigating the role of the architect into cost overruns. Although

the notebook does not describe those proceedings, it was a leading case that stood as a reminder to professionals about the potential legal liabilities of their trade.²⁷ This commission came at a time of national interest in prison reform and this, in turn, led to experimentation with new layouts. The critical date is 1810, when a Parliamentary Select Committee investigated penitentiaries, hearing evidence from Jeremy Bentham. This debate led ultimately to the construction of Millbank Prison in London (on the site of Tate Britain), roughly contemporary with Maidstone. Alexander's, however, followed a different plan arrangement, albeit one also based on the strict separation system.²⁸ Again, prison reform presented an opportunity and it may be Ashpitel competed for these commissions just as he may have done for Commissioners' Churches. Any successes have not been recorded.

The notebook is particularly interesting to historians of taste for what it records about how a typical practice dealt with eclecticism. On the classical side, Ashpitel understood the difference between an older Palladian style and Neo-Classicism. The former is identified in one entry as 'Roman' architecture, and described with extracts from William Chambers' popular *Treatise on Civil Architecture*. The latter is described as 'Grecian' (see two drawings on the same sheet, 223). The only example cited is W. and H. Inwood's design for the vicarage to the Neo-Classical St Pancras New Church in Euston Road, completed in 1823. There are many designs and precedents for rustic buildings, from gate lodges and summerhouses to small middle class dwellings, all in Malton's cottage style (37A and ff). Finally, there is a great detail of information on 'Gothic' design, a whole villa in brick in Regent's Park, and every kind of ornament, ribs, mouldings, vault patterns, chimneystacks (81A to 87B – see Fig. 14). Ashpitel cites one source on which he clearly relied for most of these details, P.F. Robinson's *Rural Architecture...*, published in 1822 and then in three subsequent editions over the next decade.

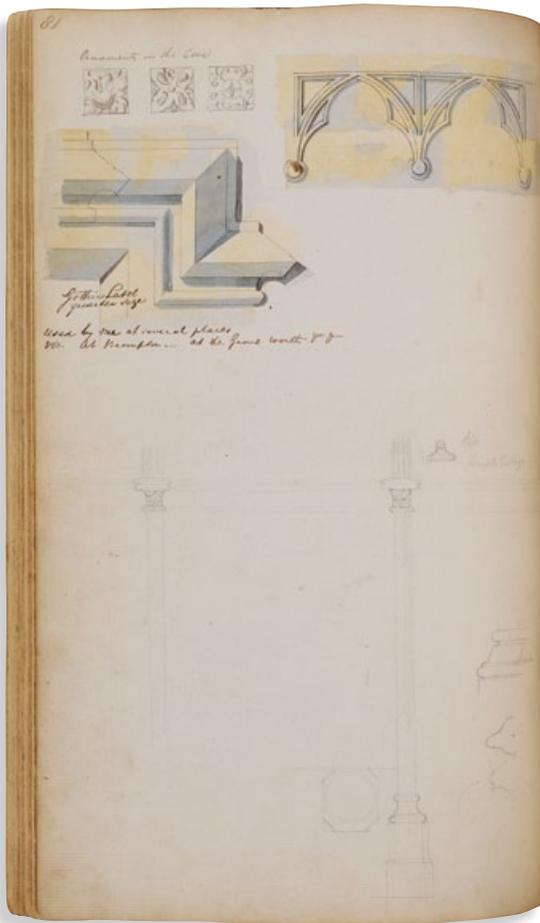


Fig. 14. Sheet of Gothic Details, sheet 84A.
(*Avery Classics*)

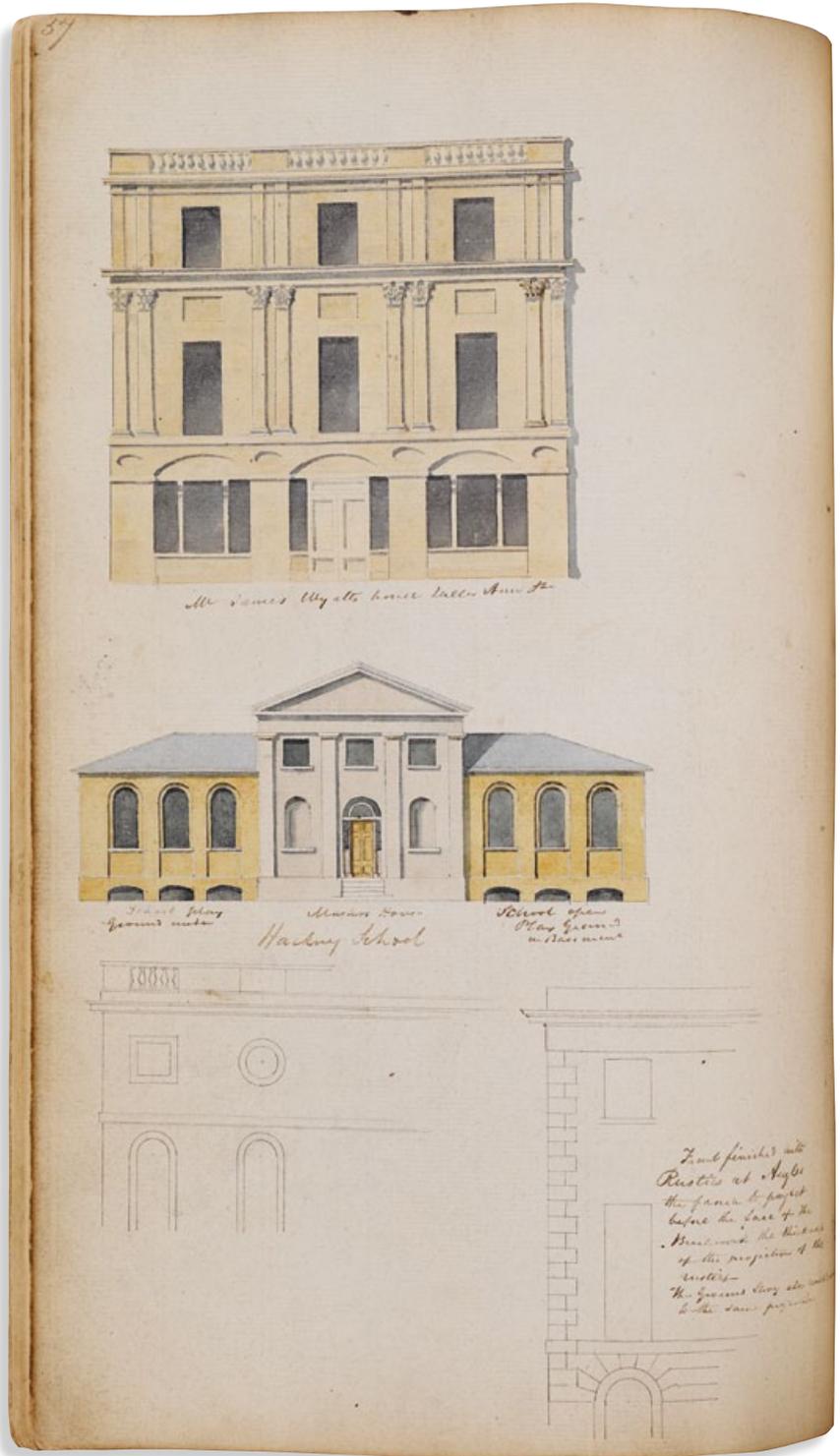
Landscape design was an essential part of late Georgian residential development. Ashpitel was not called on to prepare planting plans or to lay out beds. In the sort of modest houses he designed this fell to commercial nurseryman. Nevertheless, he was clearly asked to design features that enabled the garden to be used and admired. We therefore find sketches for garden urns (196), instructions on forecourt paving and the composition of beds and kerbing, and even instructions on how to bore water for an ornamental fountain (71B, 75A and B). His professional services

stretched to rustic garden seats, but only to the extent that he referred clients to a particular supplier, one John Ingram of No. 29 City Road, maker of mass-produced garden furniture and, as we see, all other garden supplies, including small vases (250A). The notebook has typical details for structures that bring the house and garden into communication: conservatories, a verandah in the Chinese style, and cast-iron balconies in every fashionable pattern of the day.

PROFESSIONAL STATUS

Finally, the notebook tells us something about the social standing Ashpitel aspired to achieve. We already know that architects were seeking to enhance their status at this time, but the literature on surveyors is very limited. What the notebook does, as a source, is to move that understanding on, showing that surveyors went through a similar process. The most telling evidence of this is a finished watercolour elevation of James Wyatt's own house in Foley Place (then Queen Ann Street), a richly ornamented piece of bravura Neo-Classicism which was widely admired. This sits rather improbably on the same sheet as a unidentified mission school (57A – see Fig. 15).²⁹ Wyatt's house is presented not so much as a type to follow but as a reward for professional achievement, and it stood in contrast to Ashpitel's own quite modest house in a sleepy corner of a remote square in Hackney, on the edge of London. Any aspirational architect also needed points of reference to be able to cultivate clients, and so we find a long list of famous artists and architects, Renaissance to eighteenth-century, listed with their dates over two pages (262B and 267A). There is also a note on the different types of port wine (175A) and a reference to Lord Elgin's exhibition of an Egyptian stone sarcophagus at Millbank (212). It often fell to architects to make speeches at ceremonies marking the start or finish of

Fig. 15. James Wyatt's house and an Unidentified Mission School in Hackney, sheet 57A. (*Avery Classics*)



projects or at professional gatherings, and so we find Ashpitel preparing some 'how-to' notes (139A) for public speaking engagements.

It will be appreciated that some of this information was directed to the young men in articles, who often lived with the architect. He had a duty of care for their professional education and a pastoral role too, since they joined usually at the age of sixteen. And so the notebook contains a recipe for a laxative and for an 'elixir of health and longevity' (104A and 265A) and detailed notes on how to maintain good health through exercise, hygiene and diet. There is a warning about over-indulgence in alcohol and advice on how to avoid drunkenness at public banquets, namely by drinking a lot of water (246A, 257A and 258A).

More sobering was the gradual realisation amongst building professionals that their consultancy services engaged legal liabilities that arose from construction and valuation. Perhaps the best-known – and it is still featured in surveying textbooks – is the dispute over the new Customs House, just upstream from the Tower of London. This was built to the designs of David Laing, commencing in 1812. He had estimated a budget of £229,000 in all, but the tender was won by contractors Miles and Peto for a much lower price, £169,000. By 1829 the total cost had come in at £435,000, and official inquiries had been critical of both Laing, who was accused of directing unauthorised work of alterations to the tender scheme, and of Miles and Peto, who had knowingly executed the works. Essentially, the contractors moved during the course of construction from a gross contract to an older form of pricing, where trades were paid on the value of work executed. The real stimuli behind this dispute were the structural defects that plagued the building, leading to collapses in 1824–25. The experience destroyed Laing's practice, and he had to rely on charitable assistance for the rest of his days. There was no more salutary reminder to any professional involved in the building industry. The sad circumstances of the

matter are set out fully in the notebook (77 and 129A) and in a seminal article by J. Mordaunt Crook.³⁰

Whether or not contractors had fairly charged for costs incurred and the basis for charging were matters of great concern for surveyors and architects, because they certified bills by issuing certificates releasing payments. Hence there was always a risk that the professional had been duped by the builder, whose sharp practice would be exposed through a transaction or, worse, a collapse. A leading case in this matter was that of *Curtis v. Potts*. Heard in 1814, the claimant sought recovery of building costs from the surveyor (the facts are summarised on page 4A) who had wrongly certified works were completed according to the tender.³¹ The construction of the new sessions house and prison in Knutsford (Cheshire) resulted in a claim by the builder against the client, on the basis its surveyor had not accurately priced additional works (90A and 92A).

Finally, one large area of risk – and it remains a live one to this day – is property valuation. There were a number of cases around this topic during the 1820s which arose in connection with the compulsory purchase of land to enable the construction of the new London and Westminster Bridges, both designed by John Rennie. The celebrity of these projects meant the cases were widely reported, explaining why they figured in three citations in the notebook (251A, 252B and 260A).

THE NOTEBOOK AS A SOURCE

London's roaring economy in the first third of the nineteenth century offered a range of opportunities for enterprising and nimble building professionals. There were new types of buildings and a strong demand for speculative housing, though this came and went in cycles that remain depressingly familiar. Shortage of supply increased the value of land on the edges, and so there was a role for professionals to measure it, divide it into building plots, value it and then issue

leases to develop it. With each of these areas came significant financial risks, at a time when there was no professional indemnity insurance. In parallel there was an increase in potential private clients who wanted houses in one style or another, and of businesses that wanted commercial premises suited to their requirements. Ashpitel's notebook is a window into this world, a cross section of what was, at the time, a typical practice combining areas of professional work that would shortly divide, in London at any rate. Outside London, there was less specialisation.

As a primary source, Ashpitel's notebook appears to be unique. In any event the present author has not been able to locate another quite like it. That is not to say there is not another, somewhere. It must mean, though, that the notebook is at least a rare survival. Was it, then, rare in its own time? Was Ashpitel acting in some novel way, pioneering an efficient and modern form of practice that had not previously occurred to his contemporaries or earlier practitioners? He cannot have been. Collections of precedents were then well established in legal practice, and they are – indeed have to be – an important part of all modern professional work, because of the obvious efficiencies they enable and the way they can assist in developing younger members of the professions. Ashpitel's decision to bring these precedents together in a single bound volume could well have been unusual; however, any office would have had some stock of forms and precedents for ready reference, whether bound or kept loosely as single items in files.

That begs a further question. If collections of this sort of information were common, why have other examples not survived as single bound volumes or even loose collections? The simple answer is that the mundane tools of any professional trade rarely do. Changing taste makes sample patterns redundant. Regulations and laws change over time. Building technology and practice evolve. Professions develop new service lines or specialise in particular ones, and so come to have less need for precedents covering all

areas of practice. As a class of literature, precedents must, therefore, have a limited shelf life.

Office archives are usually destroyed when the normal term of professional liability expires or when practices change hands or stop trading entirely. Paper takes up space in a commercial office, where rentals are charged per square foot. Archive space is cheaper, but it still is an expense. There is also, it must be said, something about the mentality of a busy professional office that simply works against the archival impulse. We live furiously in the moment, and I suspect any professional today turning the pages of the Avery notebook will feel a combination of wonder and terror: wonder at the sheer scope of it, terror at the sheer amount of it, and much of that dull and formulaic. We have so little intellectual space to think that the documents we rely on, day in and day out, might have any potential interest to future historians. The Avery notebook tells us just how short sighted that point of view is.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Shelfmark AA997 As 36 AS36 F. I am grateful to Chris Cowell for transcribing this document from the Avery Classics Collection, Columbia University. All plates are kindly reproduced through the courtesy of the Avery Library.
- 2 See H.M. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600–1840* (New Haven and London, 4th ed., 2008), p. 75.
- 3 Email correspondence between the author and RWEA, June to September 2015.
- 4 This is on the basis of cross references to specific days, for further details, for example, sheet 118B citing an entry of 20 July 1823 and 175A, on a steam engine design, citing another for 31 October 1819. Hereafter all references to that source will be parenthetical in the text.
- 5 C. Fox (ed.), *London – World City 1800–1840* (New Haven & London, 1992). For an overview of this professional milieu in this volume, see A. Saint, 'The Building Art of the First Industrial Metropolis', pp. 51–76.

- 6 Online edn, Jan 2008 <http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/article/767>), accessed 12 Feb 2016.
- 7 The tomb inscriptions can be made out partially: Sacred to the memory of Elizabeth, wife of W H Ashpitel, who died 14 April 1840, aged 57 years. Also the above William Hurst Ashpitel, who died 23 April 1852 aged 75 years. Also Arthur Ashpitel, son of the above who died 18 January 1863, aged 62 years. Also Anne Ashpitel, eldest daughter of the above William Hurst and Elizabeth Ashpitel who died 29 January 1883, aged 74 years.
- 8 London Metropolitan Archives, Corporation of London, H01/ST/E/114/004.
- 9 See the *Victoria County History for Middlesex*, vol. 10, at British history on line (<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol10/pp4-10#highlight-first>).
- 10 The first was auctioned at Christie's in South Kensington, London, on 19 May 2000, lot 98, and catalogued in C. Plante, *Inside Out: Historic Watercolour Drawings, Oil sketches and Paintings of Interiors and Exteriors 1770-1870*, London, 2000, no. 16. The second is found in the Hackney Council Archives Department, 2008/24.
- 11 D Lysons, *The Environs of London: Being an Historical Account of the Towns, Villages, and Hamlets within Twelve Miles of that Capital, Interspersed with Biographical Anecdotes*, Vol. II, Pt 1, *County of Middlesex* (London, Cadell and Davies, 1811), p. 294.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 295. See also P. Guillery, *The Small House in Eighteenth-Century London: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven & London, 2004), chapter 5 on Kingsland.
- 13 Lysons, *op. cit.*, p. 315.
- 14 F. von Raumer (trans. S. Austin and H. E. Lloyd, *England in 1835: Being a Series of Letters Written to Friends in Germany* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Blanchard, 1836), pp. 60-62, 131-4.
- 15 E. McKellar, *Landscapes of London. The City, the Country and the Suburbs 1660-1840* (New Haven and London, 2013), pp. 18-19, 169-171, 186-201.
- 16 *Morning Chronicle*, 7 September 1811, p. 1.
- 17 E. Robinson, *Lost Hackney* (London: the Hackney Society, 1989), pp. 18-19.
- 18 Undated article prepared from information by Frank Kelsall, in the De Beauvoir Town newsletter, 1989, copy at Hackney Archives Department.
- 19 See London Metropolitan Archives, MA/A/J3/30, survey of a common manor in Hackney, January and February 1828, and a parish plan of Hackney he made with James Edmeston and Thomas Starling, published in 1831, held by the Hackney Archives Department.
- 20 Surrey County Record Office, Northey Papers, item 2238, plot 284.
- 21 *The Railway Journal*, 5 October 1844, p. 618.
- 22 As can be established by Thomas Milne's *Land Use Map of London and Its Environs in 1800*, reprinted with an introduction by G. G. Bull by the London Topographical Society, Vols.118 and 119 (1975-76).
- 23 As summarised in H. Hobhouse, *Thomas Cubitt. Master Builder* (repr. Didcot, Oxon: Management Books Ltd, 1995/2000), p. 14.
- 24 There is a summary specification for the work of constructing new London Bridge, another work by the younger Rennie, one of the most important infrastructure projects in London during the 1820s. See 20A.
- 25 J. Malton, *An Essay on British Cottage Architecture... and A Collection of Designs for Rural Retreats or Villas*.
- 26 He is not listed in M. H. Port's *Six Hundred New Churches. The Church Building Commission 1818-1856* (Reading: Spire Books, 2006), list of architects, p. 349.
- 27 There is a passing mention in J. M. Crook, 'The Custom House Scandal', *Architectural History*, 6 (1963), p. 97.
- 28 A. Brodie, J. Croom and J. O'Davies, *English Prisons. An Architectural History* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2002), pp. 59-61, 69-70.
- 29 J. M. Robinson, *James Wyatt. Architect to George III* (New Haven & London, 2012), pp. 59-61, 66-8, 87, 109, 337.
- 30 J. M. Crook, loc.cit., 1963, pp. 91-102.
- 31 W. H. Watson, *A Treatise on the Law of Arbitration and Awards between Masters and Workmen with an Appendix of Precedents*, 2nd edition (London & Dublin: Sweet & Maxwell, 1835), pp. 14, 31, 293.