



THE
GEORGIAN
GROUP

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Introduction by J. Mordaunt Crook

Styles in architecture — as Spooner said of undergraduates — are rather like decimals: they recur. So do fashions in architectural history. When the Georgian Group was founded in 1937, a fondness for Georgian Gothick was considered chic. The foundation of the Victorian Society in 1958 marked a distinct shift in taste: from the lacy delicacy of Rococo Gothick to the exaggeration, vigour and punch of Victorian GO. Twenty five years later the Victorians are no less fashionable, but the Georgians have staged something of a come-back. These six papers sum up recent research in one particularly fruitful field of 18th century architectural studies, the Gothic Revival. All stylistic revivals involve an element of self-conscious choice, and it is the conscious mediaevalism of much 18th century architecture which is the linking theme in all six papers. The approach of Wren and Dickinson was essentially environmental: Gothic was chosen at Tom Tower and at Westminster Abbey to avoid "a disagreeable mixture". William Kent went one stage further: his tentative syntheses of Gothic and Classic — at Esher, Hampton Court or Rousham — indicate a progression from environmental to associational design. And in the work of Batty Langley and Sanderson Miller the evolution from environmental to associational thinking is complete. Thanks partly to the cult of picturesque attitudes — at Painshill, Hagley, Frampton or Edge Hill for instance — architectural designs become scenic devices: the buildings are pictorially conceived as memories in three dimensions. Of course mediaevalism was an amorphous concept. It embraced battlements as well as pointed arches, Neo-Norman as well as Neo-Gothic: Vanbrugh as well as Hawksmoor, Shirburn Castle as well as Clearwell. In such diversity of choice lay the seeds of many a future dilemma — dilemmas which would make the choice between Carpenter's Gothic and Connoisseur's Gothic look comparatively simple.