

Georgian Pamphlet No. 3

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THE GEORGIAN GROUP

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\* *In preparation.*

The GEORGIAN GROUP was founded in 1937. Its aims are :

- (1) to awaken public interest in Georgian architecture and town planning ;
- (2) to afford advice in regard to the preservation, repair and use to-day of Georgian buildings ;
- (3) to save from destruction and disfigurement Georgian squares, terraces, streets and individual buildings of special merit ;
- (4) to ensure, when an area is replanned, that Georgian buildings are not wantonly destroyed, and that the new buildings harmonise (though they may contrast) with the old.

*Particulars of Membership may be obtained from the Secretary.*

## PAINT, COLOUR-WASH AND CLIMBING PLANTS

### *External Painting*

THE purpose of external painting on buildings is two-fold : the protection of materials from the weather ; and to produce an attractive appearance. These notes deal with the latter aspect, i.e., colour in relation to design, except for a section drawing attention to "cement paint," a new product of greater durability than tinted limewashes and therefore a valuable medium for wall finishes in regions where colour is traditional. For the technical aspects of paint the reader is recommended to consult *Post-War Building Studies No. 5, The Painting of Buildings*, by a Committee convened by the Paint Research Association (Stationery Office, 1s.), which reviews current practice in the manufacture and application of paints and puts forward useful recommendations for standard technical practice. But it makes no recommendations as to the colouring best to be employed.

Colour in Georgian as in all buildings conditions the effect they produce on the eye, and so on the mind, far more than would be supposed from the scanty references to the factor in descriptive writing ancient or modern. We can rarely tell from literary sources what were the colour schemes of Georgian buildings. Yet colour is as visually important as form. Good buildings are often spoilt, and bad or indifferent ones improved, by colouring. Many years' arrears of repainting are now overdue in Britain. It will in any case have to be done, so that there is at present a unique opportunity, involving no additional cost, to make good much that was ill or thoughtlessly conceived, and in innumerable instances to restore, even to create, beauty by this means. The greatest opportunity is in country towns where colour-wash is often traditional and paint of the right colours can make all the difference between bright gaiety and depressing drabness—or "Chain Taste" monotony. Much "Country Georgian" architecture is actually a plaster facing of older building and is largely dependent on colour for its effect. In urban architecture, though the scope is more restricted, it is all

the more important that the principles that ought to govern the application of colour should be understood.

The principles of external colouring proceed from the nature of the light prevailing and of the materials employed. Generally speaking, fine architecture is the result of bright light illuminating a fine material. Where shapes cannot be seen they are not enjoyed. A leading principle of colouring is therefore to give brightness or restore brightness lost owing to defective light, weathering, or atmospheric pollution. In England, still more so in Wales and Scotland, the total light is less than in the Mediterranean countries where classical architecture was evolved ; but the normal Northern sky reflects and diffuses a relatively greater proportion of light. This means that light is shed vertically downwards from a diffused overhead source rather than projected at an angle from the sun. Also the ground reflects less light, so that, lacking the warm upward reflection that causes cast shadows to glow in Southern climates, in Britain soffits are relatively darker. Here a classic design therefore requires a bright paving beneath it to cast up as much light as possible on to soffits, which themselves may require light colouring. The English climate has produced no general tradition for the application of colour to classical buildings, as in Greece, the Alpine region, or Russia (in relation to sun and snow respectively), beyond a desire to create a bright glow as in the painted Regency stucco convention and the colour-washes of regional tradition. On the other hand we have an exceptionally wide and rich colour range in natural materials (flints, bricks, tiles, coloured limestones and sandstones) further enlarged by action of weather. Painting of walls, therefore, has been usually employed to produce the effect of bright masonry rather than colour harmonies for their own sake ; and the colouring of incidental woodwork been employed to warm or lighten the cast shadows in soffits and apertures (*see* Atkinson and Bagenal, *Theory and Elements of Architecture*, pp. 23-28).

### *Windows*

Contrast is the most effective means of procuring brightness by increasing the apparent strength of light. Whilst it is out of place (for the reason just stated) on lit surfaces, contrast is

invaluable to enliven shadows. Hence the tradition, that should invariably be followed in Georgian buildings, of painting the bars and frames of sash windows white, thus intensifying by the contrast of black and white the apparent intensity of the light, whilst also extending over the voids the overall texture of the wall-surface. The white used for windows may be dead white, putty colour or cream. Frames are sometimes painted another colour, but in almost every case the best effect is produced by frames and sashes being of the same light paint. On a dark front the reveals round the windows can also be painted light, as is the practice in Ireland with Georgian buildings. In a white or light coloured house the sashes and frames can be painted a colour other than white, etc., but the selection and mixing of precisely the right shade is a matter for expert discrimination in each individual instance.

Having discussed briefly the factor of sunlight we can consider painting in relation to the principal building materials.

### *Stone Buildings*

Colour is most necessary in stone buildings where they have lost or cannot be given appropriate brightness. In a prevalently grey climate the rubble walls of a simple building are effectively white-washed to contrast with stone quoins or other dressings (e.g., Cumberland, Scotland and Wales). In England much fine stone architecture has lost its original brightness through atmospheric pollution or darkening by exposure. The aim of painting in this case should be to restore the contrast of light and shade which has been lost. White fenestration woodwork is the first essential. In nearly all cases the door frames should also be white or light colour, especially in a brick or darkish stone house. For doors personal taste can be allowed latitude but it is generally best if a definite colour complementary to that of the stone is used : white, etc. (in the country) ; a medium blue if the stone inclines to gold ; black (or near black) in the case of silvery or white stone. In the Adam type doorways, the fanlight and decorative members of the framework are best white, even if the doors are not.

## *Brick*

Brick building in England gives the widest scope for colour, both in the material and in painted adjuncts. Georgian builders employed a richer range of coloured bricks than is realised now in London after two centuries of pollution, including red and grey "stocks"—the grey varying from redish brown to yellowish through an attractive scale of greys—a pale yellow-brown brick, scarlet cutting bricks for dressings and blue or grey flared headers. The combination of red and yellow can be seen in the Hanover Square region of London and the Octagon (by James Gibbs) of Orleans House, Twickenham, where it is combined with white Portland stone.

The exposed woodwork of cornices and entablatures, being intended to represent stone, needs to be painted a broken white or cream, occasionally almost yellow, and the same applies to ornamental key-stones and quoins unless of a quality for the stone to be exposed. Wooden porches, overhanging or supported on columns, and doorcases with classical entablatures, being derived from stone prototypes were intended to be light in colour—stone, white, or cream. Exceptions are the elaborately carved hoods on some Queen Anne houses which, being unequivocally woodwork, should be grained, or frankly painted brown. The correct colouring of the flush window frames, originally with thick sash bars, prevalent till c. 1770, is white, but provided the sashes and bars are white, the frames may repeat the front door colour. In the recessed type of window the reveals, if painted, should be the same colour as the frames, for preference the same light paint as the sashes.

For door colour, in brick buildings the range is limited only by personal taste so long as it is complementary to the brick (rust red or chocolate brown are *not* complementary). Decorative wooden features (cupolas, balustrades) follow the rules for cornices.

## *Plaster and Rendered Brickwork*

Plaster and stucco surfaces are capable of affording the most delightful and the most depressing colour effects, according to whether they are rightly or wrongly painted or not at all.



Tinted lime washed plaster is traditional in many parts of England, whether white, cream, pink or yellow ochre (*see* below, "Cement Paints"). Old pargeted plasterwork should generally be washed white or cream to display the modelling. The later and commoner plaster skins of patched or inferior wall-surfaces (and often of poor brickwork) can be painted, in addition to the above standard colours, any *warm* colour—including chocolate, tan, pale viridian green—where the colour pattern of the street allows and provided the colour is relieved with contrasting white and possibly black. The cold colours (neutral grey, pale blue) are not generally suited to the English light, though a warm grey is traditional in some Western regions and is pleasing where quoins, lintels, etc., are painted a contrasting warmer or light colour. (The recent repainting of Kilmainham Hospital, Dublin, under the direction of Mr. Raymond McGrath, of the Eire Office of Works, can be cited as a successful instance : mushroom-grey walls are set off with a pinky cream in the cornice and window mouldings.) The use of contrasting colours in wall and woodwork, or lower and upper storey, is also traditional in the colouring of many humble early 19th-century buildings in S.E. England such as shops and public houses : cream with Indian red ; cream or white and green ; burnt sienna and black or peacock blue. Too self-conscious good taste runs the risk of emasculating the urban picturesque of country market towns if thereby the unforeseeable colour combinations of personal preference are over-disciplined and sicklied o'er. These may often be vulgar but are at least vital, and preferable to neutral gentility. Imagination and a wider range of colouring is to be encouraged within the bounds of harmony.

The streets of many villages and country towns could be transformed from undistinguished drabness to brightness if residents co-operated, or competed amicably, with one another in the repainting of their premises now in most cases overdue, in order to produce harmonising colour effects within the wide range offered by local tradition.

From the commercial angle, inevitably a big factor with shopkeepers and businesses, imaginative use of colour can supply that smartness sought in the glazed and chromium facias

of modern usage without the latter's shiny slickness. "Chain Taste," as Mr. John Piper has termed this insidious convention, "brings death not life to the country town," giving each a spurious resemblance to all. Instead of chromium monotony, we advocate varied paint as the means to individuality in country towns.

Here a plea may be made for the brilliant, indeed garish, colouring of pubs which is customary in Dublin and includes marbling, elaborate lettering and scrolling, "prismatic bricks" and the brightest colours of the palette. In drab surroundings such uninhibited colouring is undeniably effective and constitutes in fact a genuine folk art of the kind restricted in England to fair grounds and canal barges. It is to be feared, however, that the requisite craftsmanship and techniques are almost extinct among English painters, whilst the desire for slick, stream-lined gentility makes for thin, metallic, self-conscious effects.

Much bad architecture and buildings constructed of unattractive materials can be ameliorated by being painted. Poor Gothic revival structures, painted white with their stone mouldings unpainted, or walls painted yellow ochre or pink relieved with white, attain a new but not misplaced brightness. Similarly, modern brickwork of indifferent quality (housing, workshops) is at once ameliorated by a wash of slurry in stone districts, cream or yellow ochre or pink limewash in Southern counties. Even when this wears off it leaves a pleasant texture.

### *Stucco*

"The stucco buildings of the 18th and early 19th centuries were carefully scored with horizontal and vertical lines to represent stone jointing. Each separate 'stone' was 'frescoed' to imitate the weathering of the real thing. Nash thought of all his London work in terms of Bath stone. Our modern view of painted stucco is really more candid and sensible and offers greater possibilities."—John Summerson, *Georgian London*, p. 112.

The oil-painting of stucco a uniform stone colour gives a radiance from the reflected light to grey urban scenes and provides a brilliant setting to decoration. Streets and terraces

forming a single architectural composition should be painted not only uniformly but at the same time. The Crown leases in London stipulate regular repainting but provide no facilities for its being done all at once. This, of course, besides producing the best result is a considerable saving in cost. It is urged that estates owning stucco-faced property should, as is the case in a few instances, arrange to undertake repainting at tenants' expense. Where this is not practicable it is to the interest of householders to make their own co-operative arrangements for the work.

Variation in stone colour within the classical framework admits, in suitable cases, of relief ornament being picked out in white, terra-cotta, or occasionally Pompeian red. In those seaside and other towns endowed with classical architecture in stucco, the London convention of stone colour is preferable to the variations sometimes seen: dead white, which, though intensifying the effect of bright sunlight at first, is less resistant to deleterious effects of weather; or deep yellow which, probably applied for the same reason, has the effect of dulling the brightness of a classical façade.

Detached or individual buildings, whilst not subject to the requirements of uniformity, are best treated by following the same rules. Somewhat wider latitude is allowable, but the infallible guide is that stucco is imitation stonework and its virtue to be bright. Eccentric colouring—green, red, blue, etc.—is out of place except occasionally where a contrast is justified.

*Adjuncts of Stucco Buildings.* The pillars of porches can sometimes be marbled, or painted a strong colour representing marble.

Doors and window woodwork (excepting the white sashes) can be in strong colours, but black always looks smartest as it gives the strongest contrast to the bright stone colour.

For windows in stucco buildings, *see* "Windows" above.

### *Cement Paints*

There have recently been placed on the market several proprietary brands of "cement paint," or coloured rendering materials for use on rubble masonry, brickwork, concrete and plaster. A deterrent to the wider use of the traditional tinted

limewashes has always been their short life and the consequent need for repeated application. The life of cement paints is estimated at from seven to ten years, i.e., it can be renewed at every *second* normal repainting period. As these cement paints can be satisfactorily applied with a spraying machine the cost is small.

Cement paints are made by The Cement Marketing Co., 192 Ashley Gardens, S.W.1 ("Snowcem"), the Adamite Co., Manfield House, Strand, W.C.2 ("Ellicem"), and George Lillington & Co. Ltd., Sutton, Surrey ("Paintcrete"). "Snowcem" is at present made for external use in white, cream, grey, and a light pink. "Ellicem" is usable externally in white or cream. The makers of "Paintcrete" advertise eleven colours (ranging from broken white, three cream shades, primrose, and daffodil, to buff, pastel blue, apple green, and brick red) for external use. They have in addition produced a pink similar to the traditional Somerset pink.

All three brands, whilst at present differing in their colour ranges, have been found good and durable. Their being available should greatly facilitate the external colouring of walls.

### *Ironwork*

Wrought ironwork detached from, but in relation to, stone or brick buildings, e.g., area railings, should be also painted black or dark blue, except perhaps in certain cases in front of very dark backgrounds when broken white is permissible (though blue is better). On wrought ironwork of important character some gilding gives appropriate richness.

Cast ironwork, which largely took the place of wrought iron in the later 18th century, when excellent and delicate designs were standard in balconies, should in general repeat the colour of the front door. In relation to stucco buildings, ironwork can admit of bright colouring, especially in the verandahs of detached villas where a touch of fantasy is appropriate. Bronze-green, turquoise-green, or blue are attractive in this connection (but *see* note below on green in general). Cast ironwork should never be treated with aluminium paint (as is at present taking place in London), which draws attention to its coarse design, is meaningless, and weathers to a drab grey.

Rain-water and soil pipes on brick and stone buildings are best leaden grey ; on painted stucco, however, they should be the same colour as the stucco.

*A Note on Green.* Green was almost certainly much used in the 18th century for doors and external woodwork but cannot now be recommended unreservedly for use in connection with buildings with pretensions to distinction, owing to this otherwise excellent colour's excessive popularity. Colours inevitably acquire certain associations of ideas, just as they are subject to vogue, and this consideration cannot be ignored in discussing the subject. The modern vogue for green seems to have originated with the rural-romantic fashion of the late 19th century deriving from William Morris and Kate Greenaway and the "greenery yallery." From being usually applied by so many householders during the last half century for its rural connotation, green has become associated with suburbia, the "Green Line," "the Green Belt," and garden woodwork—where, however, it is least suitable owing to its inevitably unsuccessful competition with the greens of nature.

A further disadvantage of green paint, *qua* paint, is the fading of such greens as are obtained by the mixing of chrome yellow and Prussian Blue owing to the total disappearance of the chrome and loss in tone of the Prussian Blue. The resulting colour is itself often very beautiful—a whitish turquoise-blue which it is often attempted to match, but usually unsuccessfully, in original colour schemes. In its faded state, the paint not only fails to protect the woodwork but is apt to come off as a dust when touched.

Where, however, it is desired to use green—and there are very many instances where this, perhaps hypercritical, objection does not apply—the use can be recommended of the proprietary Suffield greens for their permanence and good body. The bluish "Burwood" Green, stocked by Messrs. Murray & Jones, Meredith Street, E.13, approximates to faded Brunswick Green and is reasonably permanent.

### *Wall-planting*

Climbing plants, whilst misplaced if they conceal or blur architecture of distinction, are of great value in contributing

incidental colour and pictorial charm to buildings of secondary interest and in masking altogether what is better not seen. Even on distinguished buildings climbing plants are admissible if confined to those portions not essential to the design, e.g., the sides of a detached building in a street, or, in the case of light foliated plants, to the façade itself if they are carefully pruned to avoid concealing the features of the design. On Georgian buildings there are often blank spaces of walling, such as flanking wings, the sides of porches, or between some of the windows in a repetitive design, which it is not essential to expose and to which plants can add interest and colour.

The two commonest climbing plants, Ivy and Virginia Creeper (*Ampelopsis Veitchii*), should only be used in exceptional cases or where concealment is the intention. Ivy is destructive owing to the insinuating growth of its fine suckers which eventually disintegrate masonry. *Ampelopsis*, though more easily removed, and popular for its scarlet autumn colour, grows so rapidly that it can cover a whole building in a few years unless constantly controlled. *Polygonum Baldschuanicum*, with its creamy froth of flower in autumn, is even more rampant, though for that reason useful for covering rapidly an unsightly place.

Whilst all climbing plants involve some superficial damage to wall-surfaces (by pinning if not from suckers), and all require supervision, nearly all are to be preferred to Ivy and Virginia Creeper for their intrinsic qualities of shape, transparency, and colour in flower and fruit—and in many cases of leaf.

Selection should be made according to (1) the requirements of the plant and (2) the requirements of the building. Under (1) are involved the questions of aspect, exposure to (or protection from) wind, sun, and frost, dryness or moisture, and whether the plant is a true climber or requires support. Under (2) come the questions whether an evergreen or deciduous plant is required, and its habit in relation to the building. Shrubs of upright habit look best against a building with vertical emphasis; those with horizontal growth such as *Wistaria* are best fitted to horizontal designs. Before planting it is generally advisable to take out the soil to a depth of 2 or 3 feet (it will often be found to be largely builders' rubbish) and replace with fresh compost.

<i>Plant</i>	<i>Aspect</i>	<i>Soil</i>	<i>Decorative Value and Cultural Requirement</i>
<i>Azara microphylla</i> ..	North (west or south in northern districts)	Ordinary loam	Small dark shining leaves borne densely in sprays. Attains height of 15-20 ft.
<i>Buddleia variabilis</i> ..	All aspects	Ordinary to heavy, preferring a touch of lime	Shapely spikes of violet flowers July-October. Attains 15 ft. Vigorous grower; requires training back and the removal of projecting shoots.
" <i>var. Veitchii</i>			
" <i>var. magnifica</i>			
<i>Bignonia (Tecoma) radicans</i>	South	Ordinary medium	Large orange-scarlet trumpet flowers. Attains 15-20 ft.
<i>Camelia</i> ..	North and west	Loam	Perfectly hardy as a shrub at the base of a wall, or trained, with these aspects.
<i>Ceanothus thyrsiflorus</i> ..	West or south	Loam	Powdery blue flowers, evergreen. Attains 15-20 ft. An admirable harmony for stone or brick.
" <i>floribundus</i>			
" <i>rigidus</i>			
" <i>Gloire de Versailles</i>			
<i>Clematis montana</i> ..	North or east	Limy	Rapid grower, masses of white or pink flowers in spring. Requires training or pinning.
" <i>var. Rubens</i>			
<i>Cotoneaster horizontalis</i> ..	All aspects	Any soil	Requires fan training to be effective. The wing "sail-like" branches laden with very red berries attain 6-8 ft.
<i>Cydonia japonica</i> ..	All aspects	Any soil	Coral-red flowers December-March. Requires a little support and hard pruning.
" <i>Maulei</i>			
<i>Garrya elliptica</i> ..	North and east	Ordinary loam	Graceful greenish-yellow catkins in winter, foliage greyish.

<i>Plant</i>	<i>Aspect</i>	<i>Soil</i>	<i>Decorative Value and Cultural Requirement</i>
Holboelia Coriacea ..	West and south	Ordinary loam	A first rate shrub with dark evergreen shining foliage; branches and leaves droop gracefully forming a fine drapery if trained.
Hydrangea petiolaris ..	North and east	Fairly heavy	Very useful climber requiring little support. Large white paniculate flowers in summer; reddish-brown young wood in winter; large fresh green leaves; vigorous.
Jasminum nudiflorum ..	All aspects (north and east preferably)	Ordinary loam	Bright yellow flowers all winter. Officinal valuable for its evergreen feathery foliage and sweet-scented white flowers.
” officinale			
Lonicera fragrantissima ..	South	Rich loam	Honeysuckles, requiring a sunny position. Creamy white sweet-scented flowers January-March.
” tragophylla			
Magnolia grandiflora ..	South and west	Rich well-drained loam	One of finest plants for walls: large evergreen leaves and great waxy white flowers. Should be trained well back both vertically and horizontally.
Pyracantha angustifolia..	Any aspect, with- standing hard frost	Ordinary loam	The finest decorative wall shrubs in fruit and evergreen foliage: the red berried varieties (especially Coccinea Lalandii) not suitable against bright red brick as the berries clash with it.
” coccinea var. Lalandii			
” crenulata var. yunnanensis			



<i>Plant</i>	<i>Aspect</i>	<i>Soil</i>	<i>Decorative Value and Cultural Requirement</i>
<i>Solanum crispum</i> ..	South and west	Ordinary	Very fast growing, sub-evergreen, light foliage; the purple "deadly-nightshade" flower blooms for a full two months in summer.
<i>Tamarix gallica</i> ..	North and east	Prefers sandy inclined to moist soil	Feathery foliage. Attains 8-10 ft. Requires training back.
<i>Viburnum rhytidophyllum</i>	West to south	Ordinary	Long handsome leaves, flowers and fruit also attractive.
<i>Vitis coignetiae</i> ..	All aspects	Preferably a fairly heavy rich soil with a touch of lime	The ornamental vines are the finest true climbers for wall decoration. Their beautiful foliage assumes gorgeous autumnal tints. Habit of growth ideal for cultivation. The vines appear best against stonework of mellow colouring.
" <i>Thomsonii</i>			
" <i>vinifera</i> var. <i>pureum</i>			
" <i>Thunbergii</i>			
<i>Wistaria sinensis</i> ..	All aspects	Prefers a fairly deep loam	One of the loveliest wall shrubs especially against stonework. Attains 20-30 ft. Can be trained round all sides where space or design permit, and then the flowering period is prolonged. A rapid grower and can be trained on a single stem principle, with horizontal branches, up to a considerable height when it is most effective in flower.
" <i>alba</i>			

The use of roses is so well-known that they are omitted from this list. All the climbing hybrid teas, polyanthas, and wichuraiana hybrids are adaptable and satisfactory.

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The short list of the best wall plants is based on that given in *Garden Ornament*, by Gertrude Jekyll and Christopher Hussey, second (revised) edition, 1927, published by *Country Life*.

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