

Architectural Walking Tour with Benedict O'Looney

Thursday 25 July 2013 Mayfair

As guide for our Summer Walk 2013 we were lucky enough to secure once again **Benedict O'Looney, M.Arch (Yale), RIBA**, architect and teacher who has worked at Kent University and the AA (the Architectural Association) as well as leading architectural practices.



On a boiling hot evening we met at Piccadilly Circus, which is for many the centre of London. Benedict began by explaining its origins in 1819, its later alterations and the significance of the statue of Eros, designed by Alfred Gilbert in the art nouveau style, in memory of the Earl of Shaftesbury. Describing Nash's original streetscape, arcaded to protect shoppers, he explained how it was replaced in the 1920s with the current larger, flat fronted buildings designed by, among others, Ernest Newton and Reginald Blomfield in the Beaux Arts style, using Portland stone in place of Nash's brick and stucco.



Moving onto Piccadilly, Benedict pointed out Eric Parry's new Eagle Place with its distinctive white terracotta tiling frontage and colourful roofline detailing. Nearby is a striking post modern building by Adam Architects and then Simpsons, the first welded steel building in London. Next is Wren's St James's church, in brick, echoed by Lutyens in his design for the adjoining building, with its typically free flowing command of the medium.



We peered first into the Albany, originally designed as a private house by Sir William Chambers and converted in 1800 by Henry Holland into gentlemen's lodgings, then into Burlington House, also originally a private house, remodelled most notably by Banks and Barry who designed the current imposing ornately decorated gateway and side ranges now occupied by the Royal Academy and several other royal societies.

On then to the Burlington Arcade, one of London's very first shopping arcades, built in 1819 to stop passers-by throwing rubbish into the garden of Burlington House and extensively remodelled by Beresford Pite. Galloping onwards to Old Bond Street we paused to admire a couple of buildings on Piccadilly, one originally housing an insurance company and the other Newey and Downes' Anglo-French Ritz Hotel. On the corner of Old Bond Street itself stands an arts and crafts, fearlessly Jacobean, building by Reid and MacDonald originally Stewart's Tea Room, a prime example of Edwardian free style.



Walking on up Bond Street, Benedict pointed out The Arcade, typical of Victorian flamboyant architecture, the late 1920s Atkinsons perfumiers by Vincent Harris, contrasting with Pennethorne's 1870s Burlington Gardens Museum of Mankind in a more florid Beaux Arts style, Aspreys with its cast iron columns and then Michael Rosenauer's 1951 modernist Time Life building with its Henry Moore sculptures celebrating the Festival of Britain.



Further on we saw more terracotta-clad buildings, especially Eric Parry's 50 New Bond Street with its striking terracotta cladding again by Shaws of Darwen.

Lastly we turned into Dering Street to admire a mix of styles: the Victorian Treadwell & Martin's much denser reworking of a Georgian building fronted with Jacobean oriel windows and art nouveau detailing in stone. They were also well-known pub architects. So after this last extravaganza we retired to the Duke of York next door for a drink and to celebrate great architecture and great sculptors.

AV Sutherland