

Rare Public Appearances of Mr. Philip Webb

Ray Watkinson

In the *Saturday Review* for February 13th, 1858, there is a two-column notice of the Architectural Exhibition in the Suffolk Place Gallery, London. It includes (page 160, col. one) mention of the Clutton/Burges design for the Lille Cathedral Competition of 1856, which had taken first prize over Street's when in that year he had taken his pupil Morris over with him to help set up the drawings in the exhibition. In the same column, designs for the conversion of "the old stables in the Pavilion at Brighton" – Porden's Riding School – "into a sort of Jardin d'Hiver" by architects Green and De Ville; Manning and E.E. Scott; and W. Webbe. Webbe was not Philip Webb: E.E. Scott was later to design the last of the great Wagner churches in Brighton, Saint Bartholomew's.

In the second column of page 160, there is a passage on "That useful organisation, the Class of Design of the Architectural Association, which maintains a continual contest of extempore private competitions for mutual improvement, [and] submits twenty two of its sketches. Some of them are destitute of much character, but several

are indicative of thought in the concept and of spirit in the execution: out of these we should select a simple covered market for a country town, by Mr. R. Druce; – a more elaborate design for the same by Mr. P. Webb, and a piquant iron balcony and verandah by Mr. R.N. Shaw.”

In the number for 29th May is a review – “Fine Art of 1858 – Architecture” – of the architectural drawings in the Royal Academy Exhibition. Here Street’s projected conversion of St. Dionisus, Backchurch is commended, perhaps more for its quality as drawing than for its architectural merit; Webb would have been at work still in the office, in London. And a little lower down he appears: “Mr. Webb, in his interior of an imaginary town church, drawn of great width and destitute of aisles, shows, in the treatment alike of the drawing and of the building itself, the school of Mr. Street. This young aspirant indicates promise.”

In April that year, Morris and Jane Burden had become engaged. That August, Webb, with Morris and Charles Faulkner, sent a boat over to France, went to Paris, and rowed and sailed down the Seine to Rouen – where Morris had taken his decision to become an architect. Part of their time was spent discussing and planning the house that Webb was to build for Morris. A year later, Webb had left Street’s office and was designing Red House for the acre-and-a-quarter site which Morris had bought at Upton, Bexley, Kent.