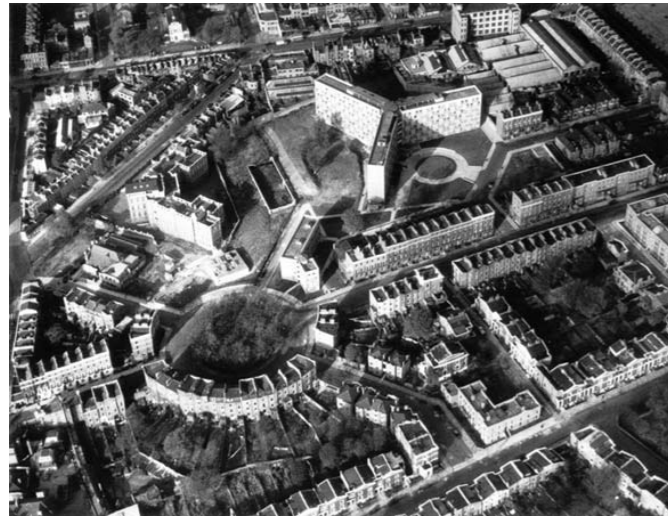


"We wanted to give a face to our age", **Berthold Lubetkin's** biographer John Allan remembers him saying, and his projects in London, from the exquisitely tiny Penguin Pool to the comprehensive plan for redeveloping the Borough of Finsbury all give architectural shape to his far-reaching ideas about art and society. Powerful form conveyed the potential of radical change, and even small buildings like the Finsbury Health Centre were rhetorical beacons, as well as functional demonstrations. Several post war housing schemes took that combination to a larger scale.



Aerial View of Bevin Court, by Tecton/ Skinner, Bailey & Lubetkin. Photograph: Aerofilms

Many of the paradoxes in 'making London' come to a head with the **London County Council**. It was a body created to govern rather than to make London, but it quickly had to engage in the sort of 'urban improvement' so popular around 1900 such as slum clearance. The task of designing replacement homes was given to its architects' department. Early schemes such as Boundary Estate in Shoreditch and the Milbank Estate in Pimlico set a very high standard for the time, exuding a sense that even homes for the poor deserved a degree of monumental expression.



Millbank Estate, Pimlico, by London County Council, 1897-1902

Not surprisingly the LCC's influence reached across and beyond the city. It began to address the imbalance between the north and south banks of the Thames in 1908 with the competition for County Hall, on which Aston Webb and Norman Shaw were assessors and Lutyens a disappointed entrant. It worked hard to link them with a series of bridges, and continued the slow change of the South Bank from an industrial area, to a heart of the city, with the Royal Festival Hall in 1951. In the meantime it had created numerous 'cottage estates' on the fringe, as counterparts to the city centre tenements. By commissioning Sir Patrick Abercrombie for the 1943 County of London Plan, it made an important contribution to the national planning framework which still shapes London today.

Where architects of earlier generations 'remade London' adapted purely architectural traditions, the architects featured in this display, found ways of giving form and expression to unprecedented ideas that came from far beyond architecture.

Text by Jeremy Melvin

***Artful Practice: Architectural Drawings by Richard Norman Shaw RA (1831-1912)**

*Tennant Room Exhibition
The John Madejski Fine Rooms*

23 February – 25 May
1pm–4.30pm Tues– Fri
10am–6pm Sat & Sun (closed Mon)

Lecture Series

The Architects Who Made London with Maxwell Hutchinson

*Geological Society Lecture Theatre, Piccadilly, W1;
6.30–8.00pm; £10/£5 conc. (incl. drink)
For information or to book call 020 7300 5839*

Sir Aston Webb PRA: Ian Dungavell
Monday 11 February

Richard Norman Shaw RA: Andrew Saint
Monday 25 February

Sir Edwin Lutyens PRA: Margaret Richardson
Monday 10 March

Charles Holden: Eitan Karol
Monday 31 March

Tecton and Berthold Lubetkin RA: John Allan
Monday 14 April

London County Council: Simon Pepper
Monday 28 April



THE ARCHITECTS WHO MADE LONDON

1877 – 1951

The Architecture Space
Royal Academy of Arts
15 February – 4 June 2008

The display *The Architects Who Made London* is curated by Kate Goodwin and Jeremy Melvin

London panorama images by Richard Bryant from his *London Project*, a limited edition book by Rizzoli, that will be published in October this year.

What it meant to be an 'architect who made London' changed radically in the decades around 1900. In the years up to that date the city had become the world's first metropolis, whose size, as well as its physical and social complexity posed entirely new problems for architects, politicians and administrators. Early in the twentieth century, London was briefly an imperial stage, but fifty years later the Empire had effectively ceased to exist and very different social beliefs underpinned the city's development and architecture.

The architects featured in this display had to take account of developments that their predecessors never envisaged, such as new modes of transport, different sources and supplies of energy and giant infrastructure works which reached their apogee with the new sewage system. All were fundamental in helping the city cope with its growing population and area. Creating and managing these shifting conditions made the need for a new political framework obvious and resulted in the establishment of the London County Council in 1889.

All these developments contributed to 'making' London, but none of them were primarily architectural in motivation or intent. Each of the six architects featured in this display— five individuals who headed important firms and the LCC's own architects' department— evolved their own way of expressing these new phenomena in physical form. Norman Shaw, Aston Webb and above all Edwin Lutyens drew heavily on architectural tradition, but in different degrees reconfigured it for the needs of their time. Charles Holden and Berthold Lubetkin showed their commitment to a new society by shunning overt reference to tradition. The LCC, under different chief architects and with numerous employees from 1890 onwards, moved from skilfully adapting traditional architecture to an enthusiastic embrace of modernism, but in each case giving physical expression to social purpose.

Architectural traditions were first stretched, then reconfigured and eventually shattered. It became impossible to make the city conform to a single vision as the architects in the first RA series of talks held in 2007, were able to do. Inigo Jones (1573-1652) introduced Palladianism; during the following century Robert Adam's grandiose schemes gave London a flavour of Ancient Rome; while in the early 1800s John Nash drew on the Picturesque to remake the West End. In each case architecture provided the undisputed public face of the city. The final architect George Gilbert Scott prefigured the future with St Pancras Station, where symbolically, engineering became architecture's equal, if incongruous, partner.



Richard Norman Shaw's* contributions to Bedford Park in West London and Aston Webb's scheme for the Mall demonstrate different aspects of the new conditions. The development of Bedford Park was already under way when Shaw arrived there in 1877. His work – a hotel and parade of shops, a church, and standard house designs which were repeatedly copied– gave a civic identity to this new railway suburb. They set a pattern for subsequent developments of hotel and shops clustered around a railway station. His skilful and delicate adaptation of vernacular tradition at Bedford Park and in his artist's houses continues to inform deeply embedded notions of domesticity.

However consummate and attractive his city centre schemes such as New Scotland Yard on the Embankment and the Piccadilly Hotel, their influence has not reached beyond their physical presence. The subtlety and delight of his best designs are evident in his work at the RA. He designed the restaurant, the Weston Rooms, and staircase which links them, and contains part of this display.

Aston Webb's creation of the Mall unfolded from the initial commission to design the 'architectural treatment' of the Victoria Memorial in 1901. His plans evolved over several years, scaling down the memorial itself, but expanding to include the entire Mall, with Admiralty Arch at one end and the refacing of Buckingham Palace at the other, all in commemoration of the Queen and in celebration of the Empire. As it took shape in the first decade of the twentieth century, Webb and his backers



consciously conceived it as a backdrop for Imperial show, to give London a vista that matched those in Paris or Berlin. Its manner is a stretched and stripped classicism. That Buckingham Palace was merely refaced and not rebuilt reinforces its stage-like qualities, but so skilfully was it formed and so easy is it to televise, that it makes up part of the mental image of London for people who may not have even visited the city.

In 1919, only six years after the Webb's Mall was completed, **Edwin Lutyens** designed his greatest London work: the Cenotaph in Whitehall. It is our national memorial to the fallen of the British Empire, a design of abstraction and geometric subtlety, and conceived in just a few weeks. What appealed most was that such an apparently simple model could express such a catastrophic loss of life.



Its form and meaning is radically different to the swaggeringly self-confident imperialism of less than a decade earlier, but like the Mall it distils a much broader concept of the city into a small fragment.

His headquarters for *Country Life* (1904) introduced his 'Wrenaissance' style to the capital. It was a reticent and inventive take on the architecture of Wren's Hampton Court and other London buildings of the late seventeenth century. He later developed it in several finely proportioned red brick houses in Westminster, and his branches for Midland Bank, contributing to the Neo-Georgian style, that became very influential in central London during the inter war period.

During the 1920s Lutyens designed several of the palatial new banks and headquarters buildings that were becoming a feature of the City of London. These include Britannic House for BP on Finsbury Circus, the former Midland Bank on Poultry and simplified variants in the Leadenhall Street Midland Bank and Reuter's on Fleet Street.

With his most significant works split between the city centre and the suburbs, **Charles Holden** highlights the scale of the challenge for an architect who had ambitions to 'make London'. Both his two monumental institutional headquarters, for London Transport and the University of London, are markers in their central locations: the latter was London's tallest building when it was completed though its reputation has never quite recovered from George Orwell's characterisation of it as the Ministry of Truth in 1984.



But it is the extraordinarily inventive series of tube stations he designed on the Piccadilly, Northern and Central Lines that have entered the popular consciousness of London. Many Londoners' daily journeys begin and end in Holden's ticket halls, while those in the outer suburbs not only give them a semblance of civic focus, but are also the most persuasive evidence that Arncliffe and Acton Town are in the same city.