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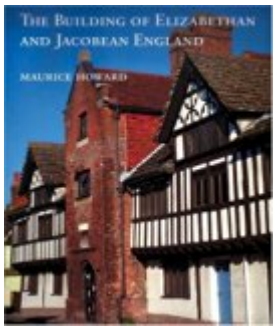

Maurice Howard. *The Building of Elizabethan and Jacobean England.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007. vii + 227 pp. $60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-13543-5.

Reviewed by Paul Hunneyball

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Commissioned by Brian S. Weiser (Metropolitan State College of Denver)

The Building of Elizabethan and Jacobean England is not quite the kind of book that one might expect from its title. This is not yet another contribution to the "Great Rebuilding(s)" debate on the modernization of housing in the early modern era, nor indeed an account of construction practices on the lines of Malcolm Airs's *The Tudor and Jacobean Country House: A Building History* (1995). As Maurice Howard himself is quick to explain, he is not presenting a comprehensive picture of architectural developments, and although England is his primary focus, the core period under consideration actually runs from the 1530s to the 1640s.

What Howard is actually trying to do is address one of the most problematic issues faced by historians of early modern British architecture. Despite our increasingly detailed understanding of what was built, how and by whom, there are relatively few contemporary written statements by patrons prior to the mid-seventeenth century that shed light on their stylistic choices, or their perceptions of the built environment in general. As Howard has recognized, the evidence must be sought elsewhere, in a broader range of both verbal and visual texts, and in reevaluation of the buildings themselves.

He presents his findings in five loosely linked chapters, which each examine a contrasting element of this field, and which collectively offer some striking conclusions about the subject as a whole. The first chapter explores the aftermath of the dissolution of the monasteries, territory that Howard first covered in his *The Early Tudor Country House: Architecture and Politics 1490-1550* (1987). While not disputing the considerable destruction of monastic fabric, he demonstrates that a surprising amount also survived, adapted to new forms and purposes, from domestic dwellings to public meeting halls. Moreover, after the initial phase of preservation, these buildings continued to be modified by subsequent generations whose requirements had changed.

Next, Howard turns his attention to urban communities, his primary objective being to es-

tablish how buildings reflected the needs of the populations that they served. Focusing primarily on churches, town halls, schools and almshouses, he again finds striking continuities with the past, not least because most towns lacked the financial resources to do more than repair and remodel. The Elizabethan church settlement also discouraged experiments in new, distinctively Protestant spaces for worship, while charitable foundations in part at least filled the void left by the abolition of chantries.

Of the remaining three chapters, two look at how written and visual records of buildings changed during this period. In a change of presentational tone, these sections essentially offer an overview of the range of options available to patrons for describing or conceptualizing their activities. On the one hand, increasingly precise building contracts emerged alongside a growing body of architectural treatises, topographical descriptions, and moralizing poetry. On the other hand, the gradual adoption of more sophisticated constructional drawings was accompanied by the increasing use of buildings in art, be it in realistic city panoramas or symbolic propaganda images.

Perched awkwardly between these two discussions is Howard's final element, a set of detailed case studies of architectural patronage, embracing courtiers, the gentry, the merchant class, and the clergy. This chapter rams home the important, and often overlooked, point that those with the means to do so routinely undertook a range of projects that embraced their domestic needs, charitable impulses, and ecclesiastical obligations, transcending the customary categorizations of modern architectural historians. Women, given the opportunity, acted in much the same way as men, but their social position increasingly dictated that they be managers rather than initiators of such works.

Early in the book Howard rejects traditional models of linear stylistic progression in the architecture of this era, and his own findings point to a very different, more complex, and indeed more realistic world. Taste was fluid, and subject to a surprisingly broad range of influences and value systems. Patrons, at least at gentry level and above, were becoming better informed about the options available to them, and more able to dictate their preferences. Classical designs became more widespread, but in certain contexts Gothic could still hold its own, and in towns practicalities were often the most important consideration. Buildings themselves acquired a new symbolic role in art and literature as the object of moralizing discourses and historical allusion.

By his own admission, Howard has been strongly influenced by the current, welcome shift toward interdisciplinary academic debate, and he offers an impressive range of reference points, from the artistic sensibilities of Renaissance Italy to English government policy on urban regeneration. The book is largely devoid of architectural jargon, and should be accessible to scholars in complementary fields. However, this is not a textbook introduction to the subject. Howard presumes a basic prior knowledge of the major stylistic trends of this period, and tends to flesh out only those background issues that are less familiar to architectural historians. For example, he provides a lucid overview of early topographical writings, but fails to explain the arcane rules that governed the use of different parts of a church building. Regional variations, an important stylistic consideration during these years, are rarely mentioned, and Howard deliberately avoids discussing sub-gentry rural housing at all. His coverage of written and visual records tells the reader much more about what was potentially on offer than about what people were actually doing, and some of the observations feel strained. The great architect Inigo Jones, living at the end of this period, was indeed capable of highly refined intellectual engagement with the treatises that he studied, but he was almost certainly an isolated figure in that respect. Nevertheless, such reservations aside, this is a penetrating, thought-provoking,

and beautifully illustrated work, which will be of value to anyone interested in the cultural life of early modern England.

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