

**OLIVER HILL AND THE ENIGMA OF BRITISH MODERNISM DURING THE
INTER-WAR PERIOD**

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Fig. 1 Oliver Hill (1887 – 1968), RIBA Library Photographs Collection.

Abstract

This thesis analyses the work of Oliver Hill (1887-1968) from 1920 to 1935 a period of significance for his architectural practice. The study of Hill's career during these years offers a revealing point of entry into various modernist languages that were developing in early twentieth century Britain. Although hugely popular during his lifetime, Hill has been largely neglected in the selective historiography of modernism, which continues to place his work in opposition to an 'authoritative' modernity derived from continental architectural practices and which has achieved prominence in the post-war era. This research seeks to challenge this restrictive view by locating Hill at the centre of architectural research into British modernism rather than on the margins, hence shedding new light on alternative expressions of modernism emerging in British interwar architecture.

Drawing on the Oliver Hill papers stored in the archives of the RIBA, this thesis explores Hill's position and approach to modernity and it offers an expanded and more sympathetic framework using key examples of Hill's architecture, interiors and exhibition design practice produced during the period, for the interpretation of his work. This study highlights the diverse ways in which architects interwove their own beliefs with those of their clients to achieve designs which were responsive to a broader cultural context. My proposal is that Hill's approach offered a highly sophisticated engagement to modern social life and its connections with commerce, gender and the past. This wider context challenges more conventional understandings of Hill's position within British architecture of the 1920s and 30s and illuminates the importance that emerging patronage groups held for his work.

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List of Abbreviations

AA	Architectural Association
AAD	Archive of Art and Design at the Victoria & Albert Museum
ACES	Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society
CAI	Council for Art and Industry
CL	Country Life
DIA	Design and Industries Association
HiO	Oliver Hill Papers held at the Royal Institute of British Architects
M.A.R.S	Modern Architectural Research Group
NAL	National Art Library
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
V&A	Victoria and Albert Museum

Acknowledgements

This thesis has been a long time in the making and at many points during this project the thought of writing this page seemed remote. I am glad, however, to have finally reached this moment of wrapping up of what has truly been a challenge, and which wouldn't have been possible without the help and support of others.

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This thesis is dedicated to Carmel Bruggemeyer who did not live to see the completion of this text but who was pleased to know that it was getting there.

Introduction

‘Most architects don’t really want to do decoration which is the feminine side of a masculine job’.

Architectural Review (1930, p.225).

This thesis traces the career of the British architect Oliver Hill (1887-1968) [1] and it will investigate how social, economic and cultural contexts shaped Hill’s own architectural practice and philosophy, illuminating the important historical context played in the formation of British modernism. To this end, this research will move away from analysing Hill’s work through the application of aesthetic forms and stylistic labels. Rather it will adopt a revised approach in which the importance of the client role is acknowledged. Furthermore it will recast notions of provincialism thereby enabling us to rethink the parameters of modernism in architecture and design during the interwar period in Britain.

Although Hill’s career spanned fifty years the focus will be mainly on the fifteen year period from 1920 to 1935, which were his most productive years. This period saw British society undergoing unprecedented social and architectural changes that would have an enormous impact on architecture and design. These influences can roughly be traced from the early twenties through to the Great Depression.

Throughout the 1920s and 30s, Hill’s work was extensively published in the leading journals on architecture and design in Britain such as the *Architectural Review*, *Country Life*, *Ideal Home* and *The Studio*. A survey of these journals, not only reveals Hill’s understanding of the media and the power of a well photographed building, but more obviously, the popularity that he enjoyed during this period. Throughout the interwar period, Hill was able to navigate the boundaries of architectural style and social manners in a way that was perhaps, best highlighted by a cartoon published in the *Architect and Building News* in 1928 [2].

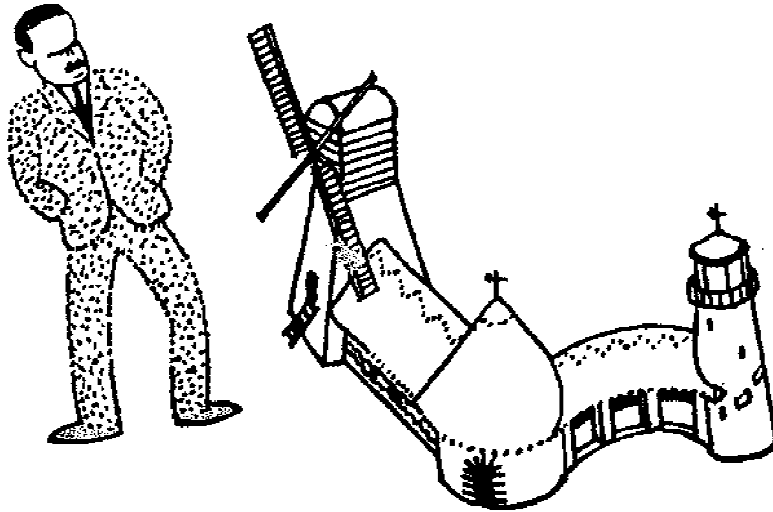


Fig. 2 Mr Oliver Hill will tackle new and interesting problems in Domestic Architecture, 1928, Architect and Building News.

This sketch shows Hill intently looking at a strange idiosyncratic domestic concoction perpetuating his distinctive approach to architecture. Sketches such as these illustrate the antipathy that was felt by Hill's younger contemporaries towards his approach (see chapter 4). Serge Chermayeff, for example, wrote of Hill's display at the 1934 Dorland Hall exhibition: 'Unfortunately, decorative mountains have been made out of Oliver Hills, which loom large in the public eye but do not represent the industrial age at all' (cited in Powers, 2001, p.58).

This portrayal of Hill as having a 'whimsical approach to domestic architecture' (Holland, p.2) has been perpetuated in many retrospective discussions of Hill's *oeuvre*, beginning with the inclusion of several of Hill's houses in Jeremy Gould's (1977) *Modern Houses in Britain 1919-1939*. Here Gould re-emphasises Chermayeff's disapproval of Hill's work due to its fashion-consciousness, stating that his inspiration didn't come: 'from the theories of Le Corbusier or Walter Gropius but more from the pages of the *Architectural Review* and even *The Ideal Home*' (Gould, 1977, p.15).

Although recent studies such as *Britain: Modern Architectures in History* by Alan Powers (2007), Elizabeth Darling's *Re-forming Britain: Narratives of Modernity before Reconstruction* (2007), Andrew Higgott's *Mediating Modernism: Architectural Cultures in Britain* (2007) and to a certain extent *Making a New World: Architecture and Communities in Interwar Europe* (Heynickx and

Avermaete, 2012) have provided us with a more pluralist view of Modernism, there remains an anxiety towards architects such as Hill who successfully incorporated alternative qualities to build up his own modernist language.

Similar disparaging references to Hill were made in a special issue of *Architectural Design* in 1979 dedicated to 'Britain in the thirties' and edited by Gavin Stamp and David Watkin. Although Stamp, in his introduction to this special issue, claims that he wants to move away from 'the heroic propaganda of Richards and Pevsner' (Stamp, 1979, p.2) he still seems to uphold the belief that if some form of socio-cultural *zeitgeist* can be identified it should also be possible to determine: 'the respective "modernity" or non-modernity of the work' (Vidler, 2005)¹. Stamp consequently seeks to separate the 'charlatans' from 'the really good architects of the Thirties'. Using a quote from architects F.R.S. Yorke and Colin Penn those charlatans were defined as 'anyone who did not share their own preference for the approved style of 'Modern Architecture' as opposed to modern or 'Modernistic'. Hill, according to Stamp, should be placed outside Modernism as 'sitting unhappily or equivocally between the older generation' and 'the younger 'Modern Movement' architects and writers' (Stamp, 1979, p. 3).

The idea of 'style mongering' was also upheld by Roderick Gradidge author of 'The Architecture of Oliver Hill', an illustrative chapter featured in *Britain in the thirties*. Gradidge explains this 'style mongering' as being due to Hill having been: 'brought up under the overpowering shadow of the eclectic Edwin Lutyens' (Gradidge, 1979, p.30). And because of this positioning in Lutyens' shadow, Gradidge argues that: 'the modern style was no more than just another style that could be used at the appropriate time or at the request of the client' (Gradidge, 1979, p.30). This claim for the overriding importance of the client in the design process, is employed to reiterate the view of Hill being able and willing to compromise his design in any style requested by his clients. This one-sided view was once again emphasised through cartoons. Gradidge sets Hill's work against the meticulously drawn, satirical cartoons of Osbert Lancaster depicting styles with names we still use today such as 'Vogue Regency',^{20th}

¹ Thoughts which were put forward by the historical examinations of modern architecture by historiographers such as Pevsner and Giedion

Century Functional' and 'Stockbroker Tudor' (Gradidge, 1979, p.35)². Such a comparison not only emphasises Hill's eclectic approach to architecture but draws attention to the architect's lack of sustained engagement with any single style.

This perceived flexibility of style is echoed by other sources on Hill such as the entry on Hill in RIBA Drawings Collection Catalogue by Jill Lever (1973). Here Hill once again is condemned for donning his high society hat and for his popularity and fashionability:

[Hill] aimed at designing not only houses and gardens, but furniture, decor, upholstery and maids' dresses, summer and winter. He gained a considerable reputation for his extravagant interiors, using engraved glass, chromium, vitrolite, silver and gold foil, fluted marble, onyx, alabaster, exotic woods, silver mosaic, for a series of luxurious bathrooms, boudoirs etc. – This was the world of Oliver Messel, Noël Coward, Rex Whistler and Madame Chanel (Lever, 1973, p.106)

Here Hill is linked to the glitz and glamour of the twenties and thirties and to the world of fashion, theatre and interior decoration. His impressive list of wealthy clients seemed, according to Gradidge and Lever, to have protected him and his office from any of the economic uncertainties brought by the Slump (1929 – 1931) (Taylor, 1965, p.284). Archival material, however, shows a considerable drop in Hill's large scale commissions and an increase in small scale alterations and exhibition designs (discussed in chapter 4). Such interpretations have reinforced an unbalanced view of Hill's career during the interwar period, as they have not engaged with the period's broader cultural and social context. In these accounts Hill's skilful understanding of the media, his interest in self-promotion and his positive approach to commercialism seem to be sidelined by a more formalist discourse in search of an 'authentic' modernism; modelled on limited artistic and aesthetic definitions. In these accounts, references to decoration and fashion are deemed secondary and illegitimate. This thesis

² Sir Osbert Lancaster (1908 – 1986) is best known for his cartoons published in the *Daily Express* and his work as an art critic and stage designer. Some of his drawings have been used as programme covers for the Glyndebourne festival of 1960 and 1969.

seeks to redress those formalist discussions of Hill's work and show the importance of his work and such allegiances in understanding the wider impact of social and economic factors on British modernism during the interwar period.

Against such limited approaches there has, however, been a development of more well rounded views concerning Hill's oeuvre, including a catalogue: *Oliver Hill: Architect and Lover of Life 1887 – 1968* by Alan Powers (1989). This biography accompanied a solo exhibition on Hill at the RIBA Heinz Gallery in London, also organised by Powers. The catalogue provides the reader with a useful overview of Hill's career. Published nearly 24 years ago this work remains the most comprehensive study that has been published on Hill, and Powers has since done much to increase Hill's profile through journal articles such as '*The Charm of the Chameleon*' (1987) and '*Oliver Hill*' (1989). However, as the former title suggests, these biographical studies still put Hill forward as an odd, eclectic figure, although Powers acknowledges that further work needs to be done. He points out that:

A superficial analysis of style is too easy, and only the experience of the actual buildings begins to reveal the thread binding them together. Neither the long-standing modernist historiography nor the more recent anti-modernist position is adequate to encompass Hill's variety, or to understand what was the common thread in his work (Powers, 1989, p.3)

Although, revealing the 'common thread' in Hill's work was not possible within the scope of his catalogue, Powers has continued to throw a spotlight on different aspects of Hill's work in the more detailed article '*Oliver Hill as Exhibition Designer*' (1991). Here, Powers charts Hill's work as an exhibition designer and rightly points out that: 'Oliver Hill's exhibition work helps to chart the reception and modification of modernist ideas in England, and their absorption into a national tradition.' (Powers, 1991, p.38). Although an important survey of Hill's exhibition work it does not provide a comprehensive analysis of its' commercial and educational contexts. Broadening this scope this thesis provides a revealing analysis of Hill's modernism, setting it within commercial, stylistic and aesthetic frameworks.

A further article by Powers, '*The Real Oliver Hill*' (2002), can be seen as a crucial start in establishing a deeper understanding of Hill's work, as the author sets out to: 'try to tease apart some of the concepts through which we would normally view an architect such as Oliver Hill' (Powers, 2002, p. 161). These concepts include: Eclecticism, Modernism, History and Time, Architecture and the Body, Nature and Culture, Englishness, Craftsmanship – 'Happy Artisans', Purity and Daneway and the Seventeenth Century. This approach builds on John Cornforth's article '*Houses of Oliver Hill*' (1989) in which he discusses Hill's personality as key to understanding his architectural output: 'His aim – and his achievement – was to make his way of life an enjoyable work of art' (Cornforth, 1989, p.70). There is nevertheless an omission of Hill's employment of the 'decorative', which is exemplified by the omission of his work from "*The Reconditioned Eye*": *Architects and Artists in English Modernism*' by Alan Powers (1993).

However, the most comprehensive study to date is an unpublished PhD thesis by Jessica Holland; '*An English sensibility: the architecture of Oliver Hill*' (2011). In her detailed analysis, Holland investigates: 'the common themes that exist in Hill's architecture' and the role Hill has played 'in the assimilation of Modern architecture into the British national tradition' by also addressing 'more general themes of Englishness, Modernism and national tradition' (Holland, 2011, pp.10-12). Her work has contributed a great deal to re assessing Oliver Hill's *oeuvre* and also in repositioning him within a revised British historiography. Disproving views of Hill that are deep-rooted in architectural discourse, Holland's thesis is timely in its relevance as it counters the unbalanced view of Hill's architecture that keeps haunting the published accounts of British interwar architecture, such as '*Connell Ward & Lucas: Modern Movement Architects in England 1929 – 1939*' (2008). Once again Hill is positioned within the 'modernity' (i.e. Connel Ward & Lucas) / 'non-modernity' discourse and described as 'the eclectic architect par excellence of the era' it characterises Hill disparagingly as: 'capable of producing nice buildings for charming clients, meeting the programme requirement for the modern (or partially modern), the traditional or the simply "bright" scheme' (Sharp and Rendel, 2008, p.26).

Approached through recent cultural histories such as Michael T. Saler's '*The Avant Garde in Interwar England*' (1999) that used the life and work of Frank

Pick in order to trace comparisons between nineteenth century medievalism and English modernism, Hill's position is less idiosyncratic. In many ways, Saler's interrogation of 'consumption with a conscience' (Saler, 1999, p.141) and his sense of designers' commitment: 'to the medieval modernist project of integrating art with life' (Saler, 1999, p.141) seems to offer a more compelling model of enquiry for Hill. There is need for more attention to the particularities of referencing and symbolism, and a sense of the commercial context of Hill's practices. Nevertheless, as my thesis will demonstrate, Hill actively embraced a wide ranging set of styles and aesthetic forms, mixed with the use of local materials and exploiting national traditions out of which he developed a commercially successful, fashionably eclectic and distinctively 'modernist' vocabulary in architecture and design

Aims

This thesis sets up a discussion around the work of Oliver Hill within the architecture and design context of the interwar period in Britain. The main intention, therefore, has not been to provide a *catalogue raisonnée* of Hill's *oeuvre* in these years but rather to develop a discussion on a variety of influences that underlie his work during this period, and also, to a certain extent, to explore the variety of modernisms developing in British architectural culture as a whole.

This thesis aims to foster a broader cultural analysis, one engaging with patronage and consumption and examining the location of architecture and design within the wider realm of inter-war British culture.

Through Hill's domestic work and exhibition designs I address the role that Hill's clients, professional and personal networks played in promoting diverse forms of British modernism during the interwar period.

As Royston Landau put it in his 'Notes on the concept of an architectural production' (1981):

So my enterprise begins with a need to find a way of approaching and characterising, first, particular individual sets of architectural beliefs, then secondly, to be able to shift from

the sets of individual beliefs to the sources of those beliefs, which may be exposed in the writings, readings, conversations, interactions – all contributing to the discourses of the community of interest and out of which the architect's beliefs come to be formulated (Landau, 1981, p.111).

My aim in this thesis is to excavate and examine the 'discourses of Hill's community of interest', and, as the contents at the RIBA Archive exposed, to provide a more fruitful cultural context within which to evaluate British modernism.

Terminology

Modernism and what it refers to in architecture in Britain is the main premise of this thesis. 'Modernism' as Lisa Tickner argues (2000, p.184): 'refers to a range of cultural practices deriving from, and promising expression to, the characteristic belief and experiences of modernity'. Modernism has been interpreted in various ways and, in line with Tickner's analysis of Modernism and Modernity (2000), is regularly referred to through four chief components: First, a highly selective tradition that produced a tradition of architects and architectural projects that aligned with continental European ideals and practices developing in the interwar years and promoted in the USA in the post-war decades. These canonical works were assembled by Nikolaus Pevsner (*Pioneers of the Modern Movement*, 1936) and Sigfried Giedion (*Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, 1941) in order to trace modernism's origin and development. Secondly, 'Modernism' is seen as aligned to 'processes of social modernisation' and reflective of the experiences of modernity from the mid-19th century onwards. Third, 'Modernism' articulating in a complex way the nature of modern conditions is evidenced in new forms, styles, technologies and products resulting in an 'avant-garde' aesthetic. Fourth, Modernism is proposed as as a self conscious style of architecture that post-Bauhaus opposed decorative, non-utilitarian, commercial and local/traditional influences in favour of an international style which attracted international audiences (notably in the USA) and critical applause.

These interpretations, however, make modernism in architecture understood only through its avant-garde protagonists and it fails to reflect on its exclusions; those aspects to which it was nevertheless inextricably linked such as gender, fashion and commerce. Focussing on the work of Oliver Hill during the interwar period, this thesis offers an ideal springboard to re-assess the importance of popular culture and the complex influence of cultural, social and economic changes in the history of modern architecture in Britain. Hill's domestic work (see chapter two and three) and exhibition design (see chapter four) offer revealing case studies to investigate and evaluate modernism's historiography and its perceived antipathy towards decoration, mass consumption and the regional.

Methodology

The methodology of this thesis was shaped by the archival material donated by Titania Hill (Hill's widow) to the RIBA following his death in 1968. Although a synopsis of this archival material has already been published by David Dean (1983), this offers an incomplete analysis of this rich material. Closer examination has revealed a figure who was interested in the opinions of clients and friends, showed great attention to detail and reinforced the extent to which his work was intertwined with his life. It is this connection with the contemporary circumstances of Hill's life which will generate a deeper understanding of one of the period's most complex and intriguing architects.

Most accounts of architectural modernism in inter-war Britain adopt a post-war approach that privileges the assimilation of continental architectural theories, advanced materials and innovative functional design as a sign of progressive studies of key buildings and the biographies of its main protagonists reinforce such an approach and affirm the belatedness or marginal nature of British architectural and design cultures. Whilst acknowledging the importance of Hill's biography and critically evaluating key commissions, my approach engages with Hill's 'belief system', the importance of his personal and professional networks, the commercial contexts of his works' production and the socio-historical factors of its consumption. In this sense, it adopts a socio-historical approach, informed by design history and cultural studies, that sees Hill's attitude as both reflective of and yet actively shaping – and shaped by – historical and cultural conditions.

Recent descriptions and analyses of Hill's work have all used what Peter Wollen (1993, pp.14-15) has called 'a cascade of antinomies' to assess and evaluate his work. Wollen has argued that modernism has been deployed as a cluster of oppositions in which modernism defines itself by distancing itself from its 'other'. Oppositional pairings such as 'functional/decorative, masculine/feminine, machine/body' etc are used to legitimise an 'authentic' modernism against an inferior form. Hill's work overlaps these oppositions on many occasions making it difficult to incorporate it into more restrictive definitions of modernism. Signalling the fluidity of these boundaries in Hill's work, these examples can be used to highlight that these polarities were not as deeply rooted or well-defined as doctrinaire modernists would have us believe in when it came to Britain during the late twenties and thirties³

The fluidity of these boundaries is nowhere clearer than in the modern interior, as Penny Sparke argues; and her approach offers an insightful model for my study:

Unlike the modern painting, the modern poem and the modern novel, all of whose high cultural forms are fairly easily identified by their rejection of one set of cultural traditions and values and their adaptation of new strategies, the modern interior, which crossed the bridge between high and everyday culture, was a much more complex phenomenon. (Sparke, 2008, p.11)

The influence of the individual client and also their shared experience of the world around them was equally important in architecture. Hill's work exemplifies not only the weakness of the antinomies that Wollen is talking about but it demonstrates the tensions, contradictions, paradoxes and ambiguities that Sparke highlights within the modern interior (Sparke, 2008, p10).

As a result, the complexity of Hill's work cannot, therefore, be understood by analysing the built form of his oeuvre alone. A wider critical framework that engages not only history and influence (as argued by Holland) is needed but also one which acknowledges buildings as being more than fabricated

³ This approach was taken by Mark Wigley (2001) in 'White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture'. Here Wigley highlights the close relationship between doctrinaire modernists such as Le Corbusier and the psychosexual economy of fashion.

dwellings. Such an approach will allow less direct referents such as nationality, popular culture, architectural beliefs and commerce to be discussed.

I believe that an analysis of Hill's work in this broadened context will make his work more fully understood.

Structure

This thesis which exploits the archival legacy left by Hill's widow and stored at the RIBA uses a thematic approach and is structured in four chapters preceded by an introduction, and followed by a conclusion. The first chapter follows a biographical chronology whilst the following three thematic chapters analyse Hill's use of (and reaction to) regionalism, nostalgia and consumerism. My belief is that by approaching Hill's work within such a thematic analysis will allow his work and its historical context to be understood more fully and the eclecticism of his modernism better illuminated.

The first chapter outlines Hill's life, with a particular focus on his formative and cultural influences; notably the importance of his upbringing and family connections to his personal and professional life.

Chapter two examines the complex interaction between regionalism and modernity. This chapter understands regionalism:

Not as a well-defined style or stylistic issue but as a broad concept, an underlying idea that promotes the use of a local architectural vocabulary and local building materials, regionalism as an attitude that strives for a close interaction with the perception of the '*genius loci*', the '*spirit of the place*' (Meganck, Van Santvoort, De Mayer, 2013, p.7)

In this chapter Hill's architecture is used as one example of many British architects who embraced the regionalist principle of providing continuity through the incorporation of the local traditions with the new, hence using regionalism as an adaptive strategy.

Chapter three takes a closer look at Hill's interior design through the frame of the nostalgic. Using key examples of Hill's designs as a touchstone, this chapter

will highlight how the nostalgic is often located through its relationship to the 'feminine' and how this carries implications for particular forms of architectural practice. This chapter further seeks to analyse what nostalgia has to offer by way of an alternative towards understanding 'otherist' projects produced during the twentieth century.

Developing these ideas further, chapter four examines Hill's cosmopolitan interests, such as in film, which provided Hill with a rich source of ideas. Specific emphasis is placed in this chapter on Hill's exhibition design for the Dorland Hall (1933) which is scrutinised in relation to ideas about the education of the consumer and disseminating modernist ideas into a national tradition. This case study will show how alternative expressions of modernism were received and evaluated in the period.

My conclusion will draw together many of my arguments making the proposal that Hill's work demands to be evaluated in a wider framework than usually understood. Moreover, it will demonstrate that by situating Hill's architectural and design practices within this expanded field, a more nuanced and complex picture of architects and designers engagement with modernism in inter-war Britain emerges; one that situates Hill not as a marginal and idiosyncratic figure, but as a compelling and powerful example of the ways in which cosmopolitan, national and local cultural forces shaped ideals and practices in architecture and design.

Chapter One

Biographical outline

‘ Oliver Hill is a romantic in the central tradition of English landscape. He has a strong decorative sense and an instinctive feeling for tone [...] and is not afraid of bold contrasts of colour.’
Ralph Edwards (1945, p.6)

Oliver Hill was born on 15 June, 1887 in 89 Queen’s Gate, a large stuccoed Victorian house in South Kensington London. He was the son of William Neave Hill, a successful city banker, and Kate Ida Frank, a well respected Edwardian society lady. Out of seven children born to the couple Hill was the youngest, with twenty five years between him and his eldest sister Enid.

The family home must have left little real impression on him, as Hill was to say that he only thought his mother bought this house as it was close to the Natural History Museum where the children would safely be deposited and got out of the way on rainy days (Hill, 1949, p.29).

At the time Hill was born much was happening in the world. Queen Victoria was celebrating her Golden Jubilee, and Britain still assumed the position of one of the strongest nations in the world. It was a time of great social change, and wealth was abundant – despite the agricultural depression of the 1880’s. Hill’s neighbourhood had recently been developed as a result of the newly established South Kensington Museum, and its surrounding area would prove architecturally influential for the budding architect during the first twenty years of his life. Within the security of his privileged Edwardian upbringing, Hill remembered that his ‘life was governed by an unchanging ritual. Nursemaids’ walk in Kensington gardens, where we exercised, was then thronged with children and their attendants and there were crowds of them watching the sailing boats on the Round Pond’ (Hill, 1949, p.48). On the way to Kensington Gardens the party would always pass 170 Queen’s Gate, built by Richard Norman Shaw. This ‘large red brick house with the green shutters’ left a remarkable impression on the young Hill as he wrote that: ‘I used to think it was the loveliest house in London, and still do’ (Hill, 1949, p.29). Although Shaw’s delicate flattened neo-Georgian style was, as Powers mentions, recreated in

several of Hill's later town houses, it seems highly likely that Shaw's use of colour was equally attractive, especially as Hill felt that Queen's Gate was nothing more than a 'gaunt Victorian street'. An attempt at ameliorating the situation would happen 'during his tenth year' as 'while recovering from an operation for tonsillitis, my mother, before going for her usual carriage drive, looked into the nursery to see how I was getting on, bringing pencil and paper for me to amuse myself. 'Draw the houses opposite,' she said [3]. I endeavoured to make the gaunt Victorian street a little more cheerful, chiefly, I remember, by means of crazy pavement' (Hill, 1949, p.29). This would prove the decisive moment for Hill's architectural career, as his mother, on seeing the result, told Hill: 'you must be an architect' an ambition that Hill determined to fulfil from that day onwards (Hill, 1949, p.29).

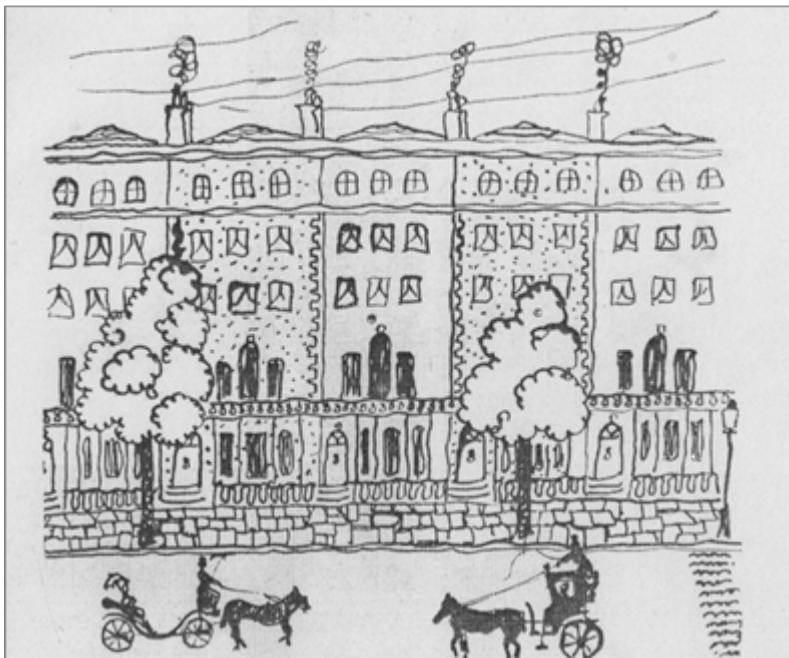


Fig. 3 "Queen's Gate seen from my nursery window, at the age of ten", drawing by Oliver Hill, 1949. (1949, Building)

Hill's architectural awakening continued; recalling that he was about twelve 'when the appearance of my environment finally dawned upon me' (Hill, 1949, p.48). His environment is interestingly described through the family's interiors, as he starts by giving a short description of his house, its interiors and their decoration. Hill describes the dining room at 89 Queen's Gate as having 'ponderous pre-Raphaelite 'Gothic' furniture of the 70's' enlivened by his father's collections of Nanking porcelain. The other rooms of the house were

fitted with: 'charming bits of old furniture my mother was always collecting [...]' (Hill, 1949, p.29). Their house in the country (Tofte Manor at Sharnbrook in Bedfordshire), however: 'was lovely inside and out' (Hill, 1949, p.29). It was the drawing room which impressed him the most. This was a long ceilinged room that had been decorated by James McNeill Whistler. 'The walls were covered with gold leaf, washed over with a grey-green glaze through which the rectangle of each leaf faintly glowed. The memory of that room has always remained an inspiration and I have often attempted to emulate its effect' (Hill, 1949, p.29). Tofte Manor not only inspired Hill's later interior designs (especially Whistler's use of materials and colour) but must also have proven important in nurturing his interest in country houses, which would become a lifelong passion.

Both interiors would prove hugely influential in the development of his architectural interest, as it was the domestic that would prove inspirational throughout his career:

For as long as I can remember it was to architecture, of a domestic nature in particular, that I was always most attracted. This was inevitable: architecture was one of my father's passions and my mother was always an inveterate collector of old furniture. I was fortunate, therefore, to have been brought up among beautiful things. My sensibility for environment was, no doubt, awakened from an early age (Hill, 1949, p.332).

'Being brought up among beautiful things' proved not only influential in his domestic designs. It would also prove the driving motor behind Hill's interest in the younger generation, believing that they were the citizens of tomorrow and that they should be educated in matters of good design.

Hill's early education was started at Reigate School but from the age of fourteen he joined his elder brothers Ernest and Wilfrid at Uppingham in Leicestershire from May 1901 to April 1904 (Uppingham School Roll, 1880-1921, 1922, pp. 46,127,160). The young architect seemed to have been somewhat frustrated by the lack of opportunities the school offered in terms of exploring the old buildings and churches as he was used to being taken around by his father. Instead the school, as any public school during the time, devoted whole

afternoons to sporting events. He specifically found: 'the summer afternoons of interminable cricket (at which I was a most indifferent performer) an unbearable waste of time'. The call of the neighbouring red sandstone villages and house proved very strong, as Hill finally collected enough courage to approach his headmaster requesting grant of release for the afternoon so he could go and sketch and explore the countryside. Much to Hill's delight this request was granted, not only for one afternoon but for the rest of his time at Uppingham (Hill, 1949, p. 92).

Hill's housemaster proved to be quite unconventional, and hence quite helpful, in letting Hill pursue his architectural interests. Like Hill's parents, he was an 'ardent collector and delighted to awaken in us an interest in such things'. Luckily too, according to Hill: 'he subscribed to *Country Life*, then in its earliest years, and it was his habit to pass on the old numbers to the house library. I used to pore [sic] over the articles on houses and gardens and I cut out those that specially appealed to me to put in a scrapbook' (Hill, 1949, p. 92). From then onwards *Country Life* would become a permanent fixture within his life. The magazine, as Holland (2011, p.66) rightly pointed out: 'provided the young Hill with a deep understanding and enjoyment of the countryside, architectural and social traditions, and an appreciation for traditional craftsmanship that endured throughout his life, influencing both his career and his own way of living'.

However, it would be wrong to describe Hill's early education solely as a studious sketching of his environment and a constant study of *Country Life*. There is certain schoolboy naughtiness at play here, which is to become part and parcel of Hill's general character and outlook on life. Hill's later fascination with the human body can already be discerned in his willingness to give up a whole term's pocket money spent on an 18th century engraving of Sophia Western (Tom Jones's wife-to-be in Henry Fielding's picaresque novel) which he ordered from Basil Dighton (Hill, 1949, p. 92). His choice of a woman is an interesting one as Ms Western can be interpreted as an allegorical figure meant to represent the feminine ideal. His choice can, perhaps, also be seen as an affinity with the novel's heroes, as a sympathetic outsider untouched by the rules by the false rules of society ('Picaresque Novel' 2013). Hill certainly remained the outsider at Uppingham, as he continued his expeditions from

school, which not only brought him to his favourite village of Leddington down the Welland Valley but also to the local inn for tea (strictly out of bounds) with a 'congenial companion or two'. Trips like these were described by Hill as 'red letter days' (Hill, 1949, p.129). One of these trips in particular left the young Hill profoundly exhilarated. Whilst in the school's sick room quarantined with eczema, the housemaster's wife came in with sandwiches and suggested (rather strangely as the young boy was quarantined) that Hill 'must go and see Kirby Hall'. After a 'long and tiring walk' Hill discovered the building in a semi ruinous state. Remembering the site in his autobiography he goes on to say that: 'lambs were being born in some of the ground-floor rooms, but its deserted appearance rather accentuated its grave, quiet beauty. Kirby Hall exemplifies to perfection that exquisite moment in English architecture, the dawn of the Renaissance. Here is the spirit of Italy interpreted in English stone by Inigo Jones and the King's master-mason, Nicolas Stone [...] This is a place where music and poetry linger, and I can recall no more lovely or imaginative building, and certainly none that could have exhilarated me more powerfully.' (Hill, 1949, p.129) These poetic evocations would equally be stirred on the many visits Hill undertook with his father to various Cathedral cities in England instilling in Hill the importance of *genius loci*, as well as the history of English architecture. Hill was to write nearly fifty years later that Leeds Castle, Inghtam Mote, Knole and Penshurst Place were the first of the old houses he visited with his father which made a lasting impression. On Penshurst he wrote:

Garden and house, the treasures within, and the literary associations connected with the place, make it as priceless a heritage as any we possess. The Long Gallery, with its portraits of the Sidney Family, the oak panelled walls bleached and weathered like the bloom on a plum, the sumptuous gilt tables with their purple marble tops, and the state chairs upholstered in velvet of the same tone, combine to make this apartment the loveliest room in England (Hill, 1949, p. 332).

Poetic descriptions such as these show Hill's lifelong passion in trying to integrate architecture, art and interior design in the vein of the *ensemblier* system which would later be successfully used in France. Hill would once claim

that he designed everything, including the maid's uniforms for both summer and winter (Verity, 2008), a similar position adhered to by the Deutsche Werkbund, as well as the Art Nouveau artists such as Henry Van de Velde (1863-1957) working in Belgium (but more than likely developed independently). Van de Velde famously went from designing his wives' dresses at Bloemenwerf and would also put his hand at designing many furniture ensembles and individual pieces throughout his career⁴.

Neave Hill not only made sure his son was well travelled in England. He equally made sure that Hill was well informed on a historical sense of place in Europe. The aesthetic interests of his father were further influential in the sense that he combined his banking job with a keen interest in painting. 'A small room at the top of the house was his special sanctum. Its walls were covered with his pen and ink sketches, done on the Continent after the manner of Prout. He would get up at six and draw till breakfast, before starting off to business in the City.' (Hill, 1949, p. 48). The sketchbooks that were produced by Samuel Prout (1783-1852) on his many trips to the Continent proved to be hugely influential during the nineteenth century. John Ruskin became a famous follower, setting out on his own sketch tour with his family after Prout's publication of *Sketches in Flanders and Germany* (1833)⁵. As Holland (2011, p.48) has pointed out: 'Following Prout and Ruskin's respective recording of continental culture, tours of Europe became increasingly common for 'earnest and extremely proper' Victorians with a 'serious purpose' to their holidays'. Hill's first 'tour' in search of Prout's 'Picturesque' came when he was about seventeen, when his father sent him with 'fifteen pounds in his pocket' to 'see what he could of Normandy' (Hill, 1949, p. 289). Hill would accompany his father on several more sketching tours. One came two years after the Normandy trip where the Hills visited the chateaux of the Loire. The young Hill described this tour as 'an exhilarating adventure' that was also his 'first introduction to French domestic architecture' (Hill, 1949, p. 289). It is interesting to note how contradiction already makes an appearance in Hill's mind and how he feels about it as he mentions that: 'Curiously enough, since I was now more or less committed to the pursuit of the picturesque, the classic front of Blois fascinated me as much as anything I saw,

⁴ For a more detailed overview of Henry Van de Velde and Art Nouveau in Belgium see Vandenbreeden and Dierkens-Aubry (1999)

⁵ For more information on this publication see Lockett (1985)

rather, I felt, to the consternation of my father' (Hill, 1949, p. 289). Indeed this feeling would not have been in the spirit of the Gothic that his father tried to instil in his son. A similar 'curiosity' already happened as mentioned earlier in Hill's fascination with Shaw's flattened Neo-Georgian facade of 170 Queen's Gate. In the eyes of his critics contradiction and paradox would become part and parcel of Hill's architectural career.

On 'another adventure of these years' Hill seems to have taken the reins; taking his father in search for Schloss Elz on the Moselle in Germany [4] (Hill, 1949, p. 289). Hill had discovered this 'extraordinary place' in a portfolio of Ernest George's sketches. Ernest George (1839-1922) was a talented architect and artist whose watercolours and sketches were much appreciated by Ruskin, especially the publication of *Ernest George's Sketches, German and Swiss* of 1870. This sketchbook shows George's fascination with the picturesque. Hill must also have been aware of George's admiration for the local vernacular, as well as his sensitivity to site, indigenous materials and practices. His hero and family friend Sir Edwin Landseer Lutyens (1869 – 1944) joined the George and Peto offices in 1887 until he set up his own practice in 1889 (Grainger, 2011, p. 451 and p. 267). As etching became a lifelong passion for George so did sketching and especially water colouring for Hill.

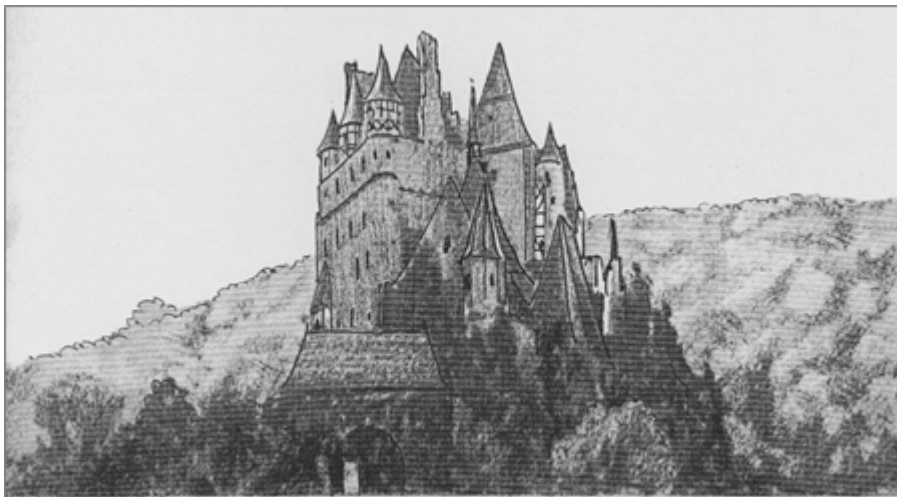


Fig. 4 "The Schloss Eltz from a sketchbook of the time, Drawing by Oliver Hill, 1949 (1949, Building)

Hill recalled that they did find the castle after an exhausting journey. They found it: '[...] perched on the summit of its rock pinnacle, surrounded by deep gorges and pine covered slopes. Nothing could be more romantic than this jumble of

steep pitched roofs, dormers, chimneys and towers, tightly bunched together and soaring to the clouds. I felt I was well set on the pursuit of the picturesque' (Hill, 1949, p. 289). It is this jumble that would also attract Hill to Scottish castles referring to the austerity of the castles being 'broken by a riot of chimneys and turrets bursting out from the skyline 'like a bunch of rockets'' (Hill, 1953, p.22).

Hill's early years would continue to be steeped in the picturesque qualities of various European towns and cities. An interesting choice was made by the Hills' to send their youngest, after he finished school, to live with a Belgian professor in Brussels, where he was expected to improve his French 'and perhaps acquire a little Polish [sic]' (Hill, 1949, p.166). Hill, however, doesn't seem to have been inspired by the Brussels architecture which he thought had nothing comparable to the Place des Vosges, Hotel Carnavalet and Place Vendôme in Paris. However, Hill did find inspiration and distraction 'in the many English girls finishing schools in the town, and tennis at the English club' (Hill, 1949, p.166). Regardless of his extracurricular activities, the teenager still found time to make several architectural expeditions to Gent, Leuven, Antwerpen and Brugge and, although he was struck by the Gothic splendour of the Hotels de Villes and visited what must have been 'hundreds of churches', he was still 'far more interested in domestic work, and good houses were rare and hard to find' (Hill, 1949, p.166). The only good house Hill mentions was the house of the 14th century printers of Plantijn and Moretus in Antwerp. It would, however, be very unlikely for Hill on his trip to Gent not have seen the storehouses and dwellings on the Koren- and Kruidlei, which George also sketched and admiringly described in his *Etchings in Belgium* (1877) (Grainger, 2011, p. 108). Perhaps Hill took on the view that was published in many guide books that 'there was no worthy architecture to extol in Holland' (Grainger, 2011, p. 106)⁶. A similar viewpoint was also held at the Architectural Association (the place where Hill would later take evening classes). In a lecture, Richard Phené Spiers addressed the Association cautiously warned against the over-enthusiasm for Queen Anne style in general and Dutch architecture in particular which, according to Spiers, could lead to unfortunate results by immature architectural students (Grainger, 2011, p. 106).

⁶ Holland meaning Belgian and Dutch architecture

Hill would not only benefit from his father's passion for art, travel and the picturesque. He would equally benefit from the position his parents occupied within Edwardian Society. His parents' contacts would prove indispensable, not only for 'learning the job', but also for providing those quintessential first commissions as Hill (1933, HiO 28/3 (2/2), RIBA) would later state: 'We architects are solely dependent on patronage'.

One of the first names that Hill was accustomed to hearing at an early age was Charles Lutyens. By the time Hill returned from Brussels his son Edwin Lutyens (Ned) 'was flourishing, he had been in practice about 10 years and was already the outstanding domestic architect of the day, and he was naturally consulted as how I should set about learning the job' (Hill, 1949, p. 205). The same fate that befell Lutyens also waited for Hill. Lutyens first wanted to join Norman Shaw's office but entered the George and Peto offices instead, whilst Hill would have jumped at the opportunity to work for Lutyens but was instead advised to work in a builder's yard to get 'a knowledge' of materials. The firm that was recommended by Lutyens was: 'an old established London firm J. Simpson & Son, whose proprietor, as it happened, was an old hunting friend of my father's' (Hill, 1949, p. 205). Hill would spend 'a year or more there, working at a bench in the woodworking mill, joiner's shop, stonemason's yard smithy, and the painter and polisher's shops.' (Hill, 1949, p. 205). The year he spend here seemed to have made a big impact upon him, as he saw this to be the place where he acquired an appreciation and knowledge of the inherent qualities of building materials, a knowledge that can be discerned throughout his career.

It is, however, not only his love for materials that he acquired on the building yard. He also thought he gained some knowledge 'of the men who work them and the way they would set about their job' (Hill, 1949, p. 205). This would provide Hill with the solid knowledge of how to incorporate local traditions with the new in many of his domestic projects and hence providing continuity with the past. He would later, on many occasions, use local builders (craftsmanship) to provide this continuity, not only with the past but also with the place where he was building (see chapter 2).

In his autobiography, talking about his time at Simpson's, Hill particularly mentions that he knew nothing then of design, and was heartily ashamed of the few dreadful pieces of furniture he made whilst he was there (Hill, 1949, p. 205).

Despite this lack of understanding, design would become one of Hill's key interests. Whilst working at the builder's yard during the week Hill would embark on a mission of study during the weekends, when he usually spent his Saturdays at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Here he found endless pleasure in measuring and sketching details that were of interest, or he could be found 'merely browsing among the galleries' (Hill, 1949, p.237). It is interesting to note that Hill had already picked up on the consumption of design, and how it was exhibited and possibly perceived. Talking about Sir Charles Robinson, who was appointed by the Prince Consort to set up the core of the museum's collection, Hill mentions that: 'there were few collectors of antiques in his day, and the purchase prices, which were negligible compared to today's values, were noted on the labels of the exhibits and gave them an added interest' (Hill, 1949, p.237). This note already shows a developing interest in market culture which would lead to very successful exhibition designs during the 1930s (see chapter 4).

These walks through the galleries would also enhance Hill's understanding of colour and of how it was applied. Each day ended with: 'a visit to the Chinese and Persian pottery galleries. These I find inexhaustible sources of inspiration, not only in the matter of design, but especially, in the application of colour, and what little I know about this I think I acquired there' (Hill, 1949, p.237). Hill's sketching activities also took him to the British Museum to draw the Elgin Marbles. What is of particular interest is that he remembered the environment at the British museum as 'grim and forbidding' in comparison to 'the friendly feeling of the Victoria and Albert':

We seem rather unfortunate in the style of these two buildings and I've always found it difficult to enjoy myself in the frothy and exuberant decoration of the Victoria and Albert, while the British Museum is gloomy and depressing as a tomb; I think a plain, well-lit and whitewashed interior would be a far better setting for the display of works of art (Hill, 1949, p.237).

Hill's attention to the display of works of art and how this influenced the perception of the viewer would become of paramount importance to his exhibition designs, as successful displays proved excellent vehicles in the battle

to educate the consumer. His description also shows what design meant for him, as he neither enjoyed just exuberance nor austerity. Hill's designs seem to be free of the contest between these two design modes, as both were allowed to happily play together in many of his designs; a quality which he equally admired in the architecture of Scottish castles, described in an unreferenced quote as: 'lovely, austere and delicate as ever found expression in the dwellings of men' (Hill, 1953, p.21). This paradox, as Alan Powers (2002, p.167) points out, might be seen as an essential quality that was understood by architects of Hill's generation. More importantly, as Hill writes in his book on Scottish castles, places with these characteristics: 'could never fail to set our imagination aflame' (Hill, 1953, p.21). This was an ambition that Hill equally aspired to with his exhibition designs, such as his glass and stone ensemble at the Exhibition of Industrial Art in Relation to the Home (1933).

Hill's interest in antiques was also encouraged by the decorating firm Lenygons in Old Burlington Street. Here Hill was given 'the run of the place' and became much impressed with the work of William Kent. The house the firm occupied was designed by Kent and still maintained 'many fine pieces of furniture' by him. Hill would equally find historical examples to measure and sketch in premises run by other 'dealer friends', such as Basil Dighton (Hill, 1949, p.237).

During this period Hill also acquired a great admiration for the period decorator Andrew Russell, whose house at 8 Clifford Street, Mayfair (London) contained 'a magnificent 18th Century painted staircase'. It was through Russell that Hill: 'came to know and admire the work of Daniel Marot, the seventeenth century interior designer, whose designs were to provide me with inspiration for several years ahead' (Hill, 1949, p.237). Marot is mostly known for bringing the Louis XIV style to the Netherlands. His engravings, however, proved less popular in England after their publication. Marot scholarship only started in Britain around 1912 when a copy of catalogue *Das Ornamentwerk des Daniel Marot* (1892) was bought for the National Art Library in the Victoria and Albert Museum. This volume contains plates concerning architecture, sculpture, ornament, decoration, interiors, furniture, textiles and gardens (Bowett, 2007, 92). The fact that Hill was aware of, and studied these designs shows that he was very much up to date with current design fashions, and wasn't interested in the 'Picturesque' alone.

The generous support Hill got from these 'dealers' proved to be 'invariably helpful'. He went on to mention that: 'By nature they are individualists, and consequently I have always found them the most interesting companions' (Hill, 1949, p.237), an interesting observation as it is this individualism that will characterise Hill's work in the following years of his career.

Hill's interest in the Louis XIV would further be ignited when he became an articled pupil of architect William Flockhart (1854 – 1913) in 1907. Stanley Davenport Adshead, who also worked in the office, described Flockhart as skilled draughtsman and watercolour artist who:

Thoroughly understood the uses of bodycolour, of ruling architectural drawings with a T-square and a brush. He could make beautiful drawings of interiors of furnished rooms and was adept at showing tapestries and plush ... Few architects possessed his knowledge of Louis *Quinze* and *Quatorze* and other semi-decadent English styles. These gave him the opportunity for originality of composition, and did not tie him down to the severity of pure style (Richardson, 1983, p.135).

These skills didn't pass Hill by [5], and the period he spent in this office would be 'the most important phase of his training' (Hill, 1949, p.406). The ability of moving between different architectural styles and draughtsmanship were not the only lessons Hill would learn, as he would also experience at firsthand how to deal with both clients ('Rich members of the old religion' (Hill, 1949, p.406)) and contractors, which would show him how a building came to be constructed.



Fig. 5 Design for a house near Cambridge by William Flockhart, Drawing by Oliver Hill, 1908, RIBA Library Drawings Collection.

Flockhart would also provide his articulated pupils with an understanding of the regional, as he had a sensitive approach to materials, craftsmanship and tradition. Stanley Adshead noted that Flockhart would always defer back to the old if he considered this to be the appropriate (Powers, 1981, p. 115). It is this understanding of the *genius loci* that would become apparent in his early work (see chapter 2).

This Arts and Crafts outlook and diversifications into Classicism were also adhered to in the evening classes Hill attended at the Architectural Association. After a day's work in the Flockhart office, Hill made his way to Tufton Street where he was taught by C.E. Varndell, A.C. Dickie and 'occasionally' Theodore Fyfe, who according to Hill: 'did his best to awaken in us an appreciation of the subtleties of Greek detail', and J.B. Scott who: 'fully made up for any lack of learning by adroit improvisation and the force of a magnetic personality' (Hill, 1949, p.406). The education Hill received at the AA must have seen as a natural continuation from what he was being taught in the Flockhart's office, as the emphasis was put on draughtsmanship (with Maule and Varndell insisting on perspectives for design projects), domestic work and materials.

Hill established his own architectural practice in 1910 upon his departure from the Flockhart office. Again, Hill's family would be instrumental in providing his first ever commission; for Charles Birch Crisp, a city banker and close friend of the Hill family. Birch Crisp needed a sumptuous setting for entertaining, resulting in him buying the lease for Moor Close (Binfield, Berkshire) from William Neave Hill, and giving Hill his first job remodelling the existing Victorian house and laying out the gardens. The affluence of Hill's first client would become a recurring feature of his future client list, making his own upbringing a valuable asset in dealing with the social milieu of most of his domestic clientele.

Moor Close, however, would be one of only two projects completed before World War I. During the war, Hill served in the London Scottish Regiment, not only leading his men into battle but also teaching them about the pleasure of sunbathing and swimming in shell-holes (Powers, 1989, pp.7-8). It seems he was already advocating the open-air culture that he saw as one of the

characteristics of the Modern Movement, as stated in his similarly named article '*The Modern Movement*':

Directness, fitness, and economy are the paramount requisites, while simplicity, a maximum of sunlight and such facilities for recreation and exercise, dancing, swimming, and squash, as may be possible, will be large factors to be provided for in the modern house (Hill, 1931, p.461).

Hill recalled the Great War as one of the happiest times of his life (he even tried to rejoin the army at the outbreak of the Second World War). However, it remains extremely difficult to go beyond anecdotal tales in order to find out what impact the fighting in the trenches left on Hill and if this was translated into his architecture other than in war memorials built for the London Scottish Regiment such as those at: St Columba's Church, London (1920); Messines, Belgium (1920); Walpole St. Peter, Norfolk (1920). Hill's military backgrounds might also have been valuable when he designed the interior for the YMCA King George's club for officers (1942) and created a War Memorial extension to the Uppingham school Library, Rutland (1948-50) and a memorial for the London Scottish Regiment Headquarters, Buckingham Gate, London (1952).

Hill's training and studies show his deep rooted interest in the artistic qualities of architecture irrespective of architectural style. This wide spectrum of interest was not only due to his training but can also be attributed to the motley crew of friends and acquaintances that Hill would get to know throughout his life. The influence of Lutyens on his architectural career has already been well documented, through research by Powers and Holland. Less attention, however, has been given to the importance several strong female characters, who seem to have played a role in various ways throughout his life and career.

The task of 'fairy godmother' (Hill, 1967, p.70) was taken on by Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932). Jekyll, together with Lutyens, proved influential in showing Hill the full integration of house and garden, which is one of the key characteristics of Hill's work; more particularly his 'unusual sensitivity towards colour relationships between houses and planting schemes' as Powers has put it (Powers, 2002, p. 166). Jekyll and Hill worked together on several occasions, creating gardens for the Warners [6-7] (Maryland, Hurtwood, Surrey) and a proposed rebuilding of

Brackley Grange in Northamptonshire. Garden designs, as a setting for architecture - be it his own houses or settings which he altered, were always of great importance to Hill. The care and detail he took in planting schemes and their colour in relation to architecture can be seen in his correspondence to Jekyll regarding Maryland. The soft grey colour of the plants would, according to Hill: tone admirably with the blue green of the roof (Hill, 1929).



Fig. 6-7 Exterior Marylands, Hurtwood, Ewhurst, Surrey. Oliver Hill, 1931. Dell & Wainwright / RIBA Library Photographs Collection

Equally influential would be the work of Vita Sackville-West (1892-1962) at Sissinghurst, which Hill described as: ‘momentous; it so captured my heart that for the rest of Vita Sackville-West’s life I returned on successive birthdays. These invariably terminated with champagne repasts in the garden [...]’ (Hill, 1967). Sackville-West’s approach to her own gardening seems to illuminate how her designs might have struck a chord within Hill, as her approach has been described as: ‘profusion, even extravagance and exuberance, within confines of the utmost linear severity’ (Dennison, 2012). Like Jekyll and Sackville-West, Hill enjoyed gardening himself. Through gardening and the design of gardens Hill seemed to have been inspired by both women to search and to make visible the *genius loci*, the spirit of the place, thereby creating an ultimate aesthetic coherence that was reached in creations made by (and for) himself at Valewood Farm [8], Sussex (where the garden was created with the help of Jekyll, 1926-35) and at Sapperton, Daneway(1948 -68).

Other examples of Hill’s garden designs include: Moor Close, Binfield, Berkshire (1910-13); Prinsted Farmhouse, Prinsted, Hampshire (1921); Wilbraham House, D’Oyley Street, London (1922, garden planting by Jekyll); Fox Steep,

Wargrave, Berkshire (1923-24, garden planting by Jekyll); Woodhouse Copse, Holmbury St. Mary, Surrey (1924, garden planting by Jekyll); Thorpe Mandeville, Northamptonshire (1925 – 37); Churt Gate House, Westcott, Surrey (1926); Tye House, Hartfield, East Sussex (1927-29); Maryland, Hurtwood, Surrey (1927 – 31, garden planting by Jekyll) ; 11 Hans Place, London (1928 – 29); Bastide de La Roquette, Alpes Maritimes, France (1928-34); 41 Chelsea Square, London (1932-35); Burrows Wood, Shere, Surrey (1936-39).



Fig. 8 View towards farm and bathing pool, Valewood Farm, Sussex (1935, CL)

Hill's passion for gardening illuminates his interest in the wider issues of the relationship between nature and the body, which were prevalent during the interwar period. Hill enjoyed spending a lot of his time outdoors and has even been said to have had lunch in the garden during winter (Powers, 2002, p.166). The, at the time, fashionable pursuit of nudism was enthusiastically taken up by Hill and encouraged in others. Soldiers under his command during World War I were taught to follow his example whilst his friend Wamsley Lewis (1898-1978) was taken on holiday to a German nudist camp but wasn't as keen as Hill would have hoped (Powers, 2002, p.165).

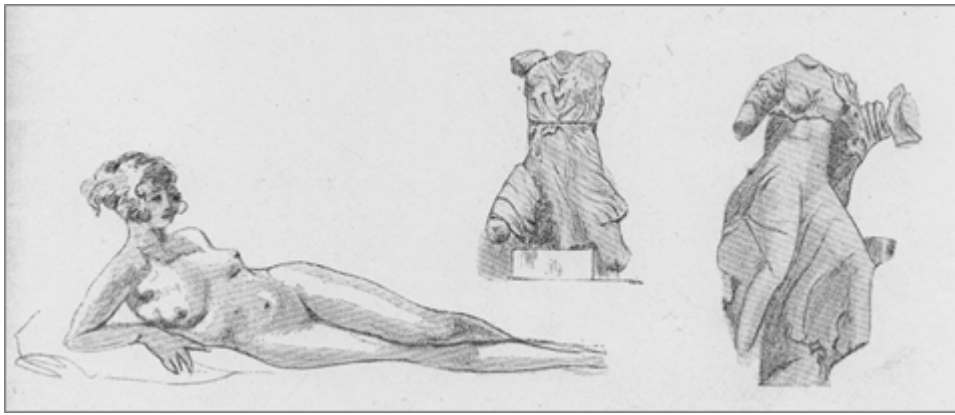


Fig. 9 'Sketches', Oliver Hill. (1949 Building)

Hill's interest in the naked body is most evident in his sketchbooks [9] – where numerous pages are taken up by various sketches of naked boys, girls and women – as well as *The Garden of Adonis* (1923), *Pan's Garden* (1928) and *Jonquil* (1930), three books published by Hill with photographs of naked children interspersed with poetry [10]⁷.



Fig. 10 Children at the bathing pool at Valewood farm, *Jonquil*, Photograph by Oliver Hill, (1930)

Although one can interpret these works in an analytical or voyeuristic manner they show that Hill had a keen interest in the body, which goes a long way in explaining his concern for children's welfare evident in his school buildings; such as Lyndhurst Grove School, Camberwell, London (1937); Whitwood Mere Infants' School, Castleford West Yorkshire [11-12] (1937-39); and in unrealised projects such as Rothwell, Methley Senior School (1939); Middle Park Junior School, Eltham (1938); and the British Council for Child Research (1928).

⁷ Most of the photographs are in natural settings whilst some were taken at Valewood. For more information on the use of the male nude by artists such as Hill during the interwar period in Britain see Cooper, E. (1995) *Fully Exposed: The Male Nude in Photography*. Oxon: Routledge.



Fig. 11 View from the south, Whitwood Mere Infants' School, Castleford, West Yorkshire, Oliver Hill, 1937-39 (2012, JH).



Fig. 12 Frieze of life-sized animals by John Skeaping on the north façade, Whitwood Mere Infants' School, Castleford, West Yorkshire, Oliver Hill, 1937-39 (2012, JH).

The latter project illustrates the influence of Hill's close relationship with Dr Helena Wright (1887-1982), gynaecologist and birth control pioneer (with whom he shared Daneway House, Sapperton, Gloucestershire), and her sister Dr Margeret Lowenfeld, a child psychologist (1890-1973), who wanted the aforementioned scheme to 'save as many children as possible from developing any specific tendencies towards abnormality that may be the result of environment or curable physical or psychological disadvantages' (British Council for child research, 1928, pp.3-5). He also shared Lowenfeld's interest in self-directed learning; principles first laid down by Maria Montessori (1870-1952), and which would be embraced in many of Hill's designs for children, be it schools, books such as *Balbus: a picture book of building* (1944) and *Wheels* (1946) (both with illustrations by Hans Tisdall), nurseries designed in the houses for his wealthy clients, or nursery exhibits as the first British industrial Art exhibition at Dorland Hall, London (1933), which included toys by the educationalists Paul (1899 – 1971) and Marjorie Abbat (1899 – 1991).

Hill's interest in the body not only stemmed from an interest in children's welfare, hygiene and open air living (as espoused by many Modernist principles of the time) which can also be seen in other projects by Hill such as an airfield clubhouse, at Rudderbar, Hanworth Park in Middlesex (1931-32). His interest also hints at a more aesthetic interest in the body and in the female body in particular. In a rare written note, Hill jotted down some ideas on the female body. Here he quoted William Etty (1787 – 1849) declaring that he considered:

'God's most glorious work to be woman and that all human beauty has been created in her.' (Hill, no date, HiO 92, p.60). Hill goes on to say that: 'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and therefore what is held to be beauty is ever varying [...] Contemplation on the various kinds of charm a woman's body is able to exert reveals that in the presence of true beauty mind and soul as well as the senses are moved to reverence and admiration' (Hill, no date, HiO 92, p.60). These ideas were shared with his friend Eric Gill (1882 – 1940) who, on many occasions, would adorn Hill's work with female nudes such as: the white line nudes behind panels of glass over the fireplace in the drawing room at 35 Clivendon Place, London (Hill's own residence) [13] and a relief for the Shanks' showroom by Hill in New Bond Street (which Gill was asked to alter).



Fig. 13 Sitting room of 35 Clivendon place, London. Oliver Hill 1937-38. Photographed by Dell & Wainwright, Shaw (1949).

The female nude would also be celebrated in Hill's lavish bathroom designs such as: Lady Mount Temple's all glass bathroom in Gayfere House; Mrs Hudsons' bathroom at North House with its Edward Bawden's 'Seaweed' paper (Both houses executed between 1929-33 in Westminster, London) or the more public Ariadne's bath; a set design for the Ideal Home Exhibition (1930, see appendix 1). His appreciation of a woman's silhouette can also go some way in explaining his original use of curves in many of his designs such as: the

Prospect Inn at Minster in Thanet, Kent (1936-39) and the tunnel shaped bus station at Newbury Park, Ilford, Essex (1937-49). However, the most famous example of his use of curves is at Joldwynds, Holmbury St Mary, Surrey [14] (1930-32) in what was to become Hill's first house built in the modernist idiom.



Fig. 14 Joldwynds, Holmbury St Mary, Surrey. Oliver Hill, 1930-32. Photographed by Dell & Wainwright (1934, RIBA Library Photographs Collection)

Joldwynds didn't turn out a happy story but ended in bitter arguments between clients and architect. This disastrous first modernist venture didn't dampen Hill's enthusiasm for modernism and several buildings within the modernist idiom found more happy endings such as Fostums , Aldington, Kent (1932-34) a house designed for Francis Harper; Holthanger (now Cherry Hill) Virginia Water, Surrey built for Miss Newton (1933-36) and Landfall, Poole, Dorset for Dudley Shaw Ashton (1937-38). Another excursion into modernism was finished a few years later as the Hill House for Gerald Schlesinger in Redington Road, Hampstead, London (1936-38) built in natural brick, with plywood panelled main

rooms, demonstrated Hill's enthusiasm for different textures and materials pointing towards a more rigorous aesthetic [15].

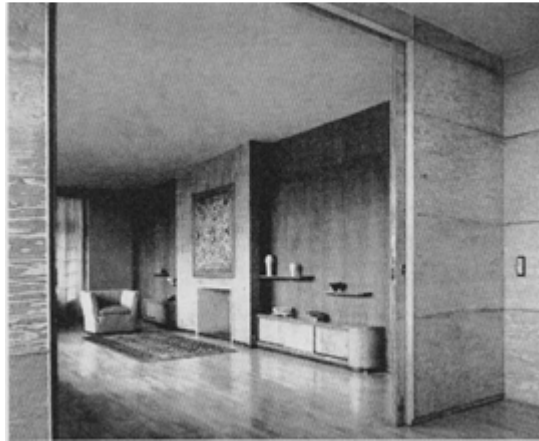


Fig. 15 View into the Living Room, Hill House, Oliver Hill, 1936-8 (1939, CL)

Hill's feelings for materials (old and new) combined with the latest technologies not only found expression in the domestic environments for his upper-class clientele but it was also communicated through several public buildings such as the Midland Hotel, Morecambe, Lancashire (1932-33). The choice of architect by The London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS) was based on the belief that a 'modern' hotel might attract a younger clientele whilst at the same time boosting confidence in the future (Powers, 1989, p.34). The LMS's unlikely choice of architect proved to be successful. Hill not only educated the hotel's visitors in the art of open air living with the inclusion of a rooftop terrace, loggias and balconies, but the budget also allowed him to turn the hotel into a total work of art including: a polished Perrycot Portland limestone panel carved by Gill (depicting Odysseus welcomed from the sea by Nausicaa); a mural: Night and Day by Eric Ravilious [16] and textiles by artists such as Marion Dorn [17], Duncan Grant, Frank Dobson and Allan Walton.

Hill's panache for design obviously met the LMS's approval as Hill went on to remodel the entrance hall of the Euston Hotel (1933-36) as well as designing an American bar for the St. Pancras Hotel (1934).



Fig. 16 Cafe with fresco 'Morning' by Eric Ravilious, Midland Hotel, Morecambe, Lancashire, Oliver Hill, 1932-3 (1933, Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Library Photographs Collection).

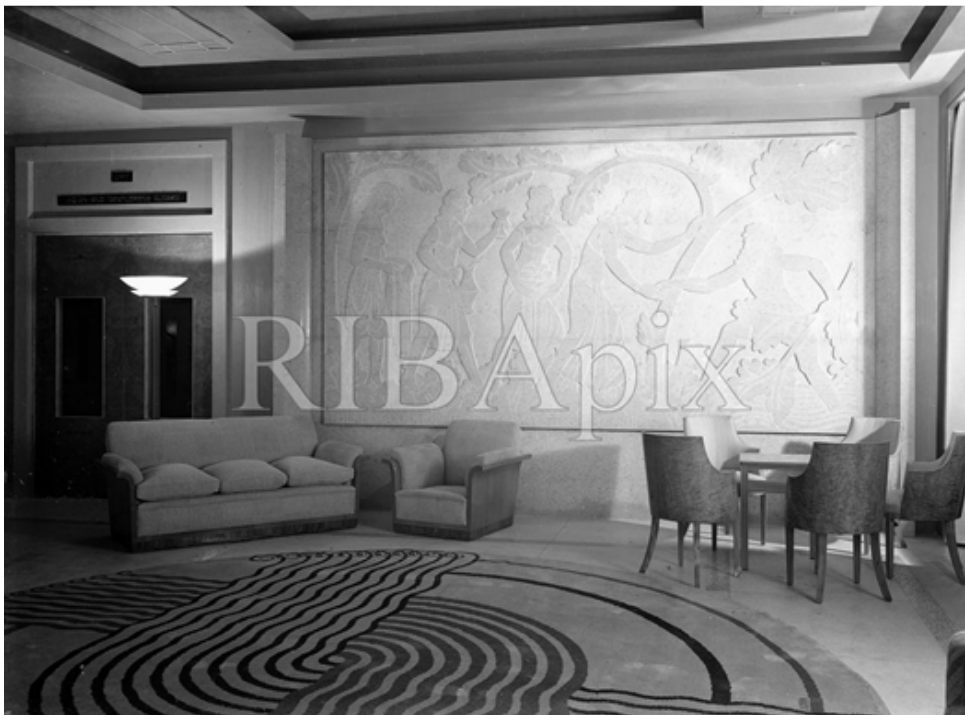


Fig. 17 Corner of the hall with stone relief by Eric Gill and rug by Marion Dorn, Midland Hotel, Morecambe, Lancashire, Oliver Hill, 1932-3 (1933, Architectural Press Archive / RIBA Library Photographs Collection).

The Midland Hotel marks a trend in Hill's career towards an increasing number of public commissions, a move which seems to coincide with Hill joining the Council for Art and Industry (CAI) in 1934. This government backed body sought to educate the British public in matters of good design in everyday life, a

cause which was close to Hill's heart and which was also shared by the committee's vice-chairman Frank Pick. The influence of Pick was not only visible in the five school designs for the CAI but also in Hill's exhibition designs. Their closest collaboration would be the British Pavilion for the 1937 Paris Exhibition (commissioned and supervised by Pick). The final result, however, proved disappointing as one journalist complained about the pavilion: 'We appear as a refined rustic little country, a more aristocratic Denmark. No one would guess from the pavilion that we had any heavy industry' (Mortimer, 1937, p.184). Hill's visual language aimed at educating the consumer. However, it would have its greatest impact through his exhibition designs for the Dorland Hall's, Exhibition of Industrial Art in Relation to the Home (1933, designed in close collaboration with Christopher Hussey) and its follow up: again at the Dorland Hall, the Exhibition of Contemporary Design in the Home (1934). Although Hill was not new to the design of exhibition displays (his earliest being the pottery section at the British Empire Exhibition of 1924) both Dorland Hall exhibitions are crucial in showing how Hill's work illustrates alternative expressions of modernism that were at play within inter-war Britain.

Hill's exhibition designs also demonstrated his belief in the importance of the *ensemblier* system where a creative relationship is promoted between architects and artists. This conviction runs throughout Hill's work and it is summarised in his publication on the history of modern architecture *Fair Horizon: Buildings of To-day*. Hill (1950, p.123) writes:

Architecture, Painting and Sculpture are complementary to each other, and great architecture can only be realised through the complete fusion of the work of architect, sculptor, painter, landscapist and city planner... striving in harmony to achieve a common ideal.

The visual language Hill created through the use of the *ensemblier* system often resulted in the creation of one-off expensive craftsman-made objects which weren't deemed appropriately modern by the younger generation of architects. These architects wanted the public to see objects and settings that had relevance for mass production. However, the acrimony towards Hill's 'popular' designs did not deter him as he went on to design a showroom for the Dolores Hat Shop (Beak Street, London, 1933); a garden room; bedroom and two

bathrooms for the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1935 followed by the design for a case for a semi-circular Strohmeier grand piano displayed at the 1935 Piano exhibition at the Dorland Hall. 1935 seemed to have been a particularly busy year for Hill as he also managed to oversee a large mural *The Pageant of Beauty* by Clara Fargo Thomas, commissioned by Elizabeth Arden for the Dorland Hall.

Similarly Hill's passion for exhibition design remained undeterred after World War II. Although, he was not invited to take part in the Festival of Britain, Hill set up: 'The Cotswold Tradition' of 1951. He designed the exhibition in line with his overall attitude towards life creating a modern outlook through his up to date exhibition techniques whilst at the same time embracing history and tradition through artefacts with a personal connection or found on many trips throughout the countryside⁸. The 1951 exhibition was followed by Hill's last exhibition design for the exhibition of the guild of Gloucestershire Craftsmen at Painswick.

This exhibition history not only charts Hill's alternative expressions of modernism, but it also illustrates the underlying current that informed his life and work. In his own words this was 'a local co-partnership between man and nature' (Corinium Museum, no date, cited in Holland, 2011, p. 411) that enabled Hill to visualise the *genius loci* which became an important characteristic of regionalism in Britain. Hill nurtured the idea of the *genius loci* as seen in commissions such as: Woodhouse Copse, Holmbury St Mary, Surrey (1924); Moor Close, Binfield, Berkshire (1910-13); Dolphin House, Aldeburgh, Suffolk (1926), Prinstead Farmhouse, West Sussex (1921), Merryfield House, Witney, Oxfordshire (1927) and the Thatched House, Knowle, Warwickshire (1923-25).

The interest of the role of architecture in landscape was shared by Hill's close friend Christopher Hussey (1899-1970), the editor of *Country Life*, and with whom Hill shared Valewood Farm. Both men not only admired the work of Lutyens, but they (as well as an interest in the Picturesque) also had a mutual appreciation for the recent developments in Swedish architecture. This appreciation was based on their first hand experience of their travels exploring recent architecture in Europe during the late 1920s. Hussey (1927, p. 187) believed 'picturesque architecture' to be defined as: 'building and design

⁸ For more detailed information on Hill's later exhibition designs see: (Holland, 2011, pp.406-413) and (Powers, 1991, pp.28-39).

conceived in relation to landscape, whether as a setting, or as the source of certain qualities and features reflected in the architecture'. This outlook was the foundation of Hill's architectural philosophy and it would be maintained throughout his career as a letter to Lady Freda Forres (Hill, 1936, HiO 24/3 (1/2), RIBA) explained:

Dear Freda,

I send you the elevations of the Irish house I spoke about last Sunday in case you like to send them to your Englefield Green friends to look at.

The site of this particular house is so lovely that I have purposely kept the facades as plain as possible in contrast. Anyway, I think they may like to see them and know that my feeling for the eighteenth century is undiminished.

Hill's adherence to the 'Picturesque' remained intact irrespective of style. As shown in his anxiety towards the overall presentation of the Frinton Park Estate (Frinton-On-Sea, Essex, 1934-37), Hill made clear to the client that he: '[..] could only be interested if the work were treated as a whole, to ensure the necessary harmony of the idea throughout [...] I am so anxious to avoid the usual indiscriminate building without any reference to the effect of the whole.' (Verity, 2008).

Hill's 'lifelong pursuit of the picturesque' would eventually bring him back to his 'natural home' (Verity, 2008). Indeed, in 1948 Hill took tenure of Daneway House **[18–19]** (Sapperton, Gloucestershire). Here, Hill and his wife: Margaret Beverly (whom Hill married in 1953 and soon renamed Titania) would pursue 'The Simple Life'. As Holland (2011, p.407) mentions: 'Merging a respect for tradition with elements of fantasy, Hill and his wife created a retreat that recalled Hill's earlier country house at Valewood Farm in Sussex'. 'The Simple Life' he led here combined with a lack of commissions during and after the Second World War forced Hill to return to painting and writing.



Fig. 18 South Elevation, Daneway House, Sapperton, Gloucestershire (2008, CL).



Fig. 19 South Courtyard, Daneway House, Sapperton, Gloucestershire (1952, CL).

1950 saw the publication of *Fair Horizon: Buildings of To-day*. The book charts the history of Modern architecture as it was understood at the time. In it, Hill (1950, p.125) acknowledges his debt to Russell Hitchcock and Siegfried Giedion for giving permission to include certain extracts from *Modern Architecture* (1929) and *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941). A large part of the book is made up by photographs many of which ‘were collected under difficult conditions during the war’ (1950, p.125) and introduced the work of pioneer architects such as: Frank Lloyd Wright, J.J.P. Oud, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Adolf Loos, Mies van der Rohe, Gunnar Asplund and Alvar Aalto. Although *Fair Horizon* mainly follows the taste followed in other publications and the interests of the AA, it is possible to discern Hill’s own opinion through his inclusion of Adolf Loos (a pioneer who was suffered a lack of interest during the years following the Second World War) but also through the continued influence of the *ensemblier* system (see chapter 4).

Hill continued writing about passions and themes that were developed during his formative years. Three years after his history of the modern movement Hill (1953) published a book on: *Scottish Castles of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (published by *Country Life*) illustrating his continued interest in regionalism and in the architecture of the seventeenth century which was illustrated in *English Country Houses: Caroline 1625-1685* (Hill and Cornforth,

1966); a book co-authored with John Cornforth also published by *Country Life* that showed his continued loyalty to the magazine and his sustained interest in traditional craftsmanship and architecture.

The continuation with tradition was also evident in Hill's other artistic pursuits. A chance meeting during the Second World War with the artist Bernard Adams gave him '[...] much valuable criticism and help.' (Edwards, 1945, p.6). Hill's English landscape paintings are celebratory of the English landscape displaying a romantic interest in vernacular and historic buildings as well as landscapes celebrating a national self discovery similar to artists such as John Piper (1903-1992), John Betjeman (1906-1984) and Vita Sackville-West.⁹ Hill's evocation of this neo-medievalism proved successful as he was given his first opportunity to exhibit at the Leicester Galleries in February 1945; followed by a joint exhibition with Feliks Topolski at the same gallery (*Drawings and Paintings by Feliks Topoloski and Paintings by Oliver Hill*, 1946). The decision to have both Topolski and Hill co-exhibit can be seen as indicative of not only the fact that both men during this period of their lives were deemed rather unfashionable, but also that both men worked in a very illustrative way. Topolski's desire was to document the century whilst Hill's documentary style was expressed in a neo-Romantic view of Britain .

Hill like Topolski believed that artistic work should be available to a wide audience. In an article passionately defending mural painting in war canteens and British restaurants, Hill (1943, p.147) ended by writing:

The great painters must show a willingness to collaborate with the young architects of vision in all our new official, welfare and educational buildings, and allow their transcendent gifts to be devoted to the pleasure and enjoyment of the many rather than to those of the few

This sentiment reiterates Hill's lifelong interest in educating the general public , but also, his ambition to promote young architects and artists. Although these concerns would certainly have continued to play a major role in his post-war career, a slump in commissions made it difficult for Hill to regain a foothold on

⁹ For a detailed account of this English Renaissance during the 30's and 40's see Alexandra Harris (2010) and Saler (1999).

the now firmly established stage for British Modernism. Hill, nevertheless, continued working until his death on the 29th April 1968. Living in his own 'Romantic Retreat' in the heart of the Cotswolds Hill was able to reflect and refer back to his lifelong respect for regional traditions, his enjoyment of open air living and indulge in his: 'affection for the craftsmanship that created these simple things and built up traditions of our past' (Hill, 1937, HiO 79/2, RIBA).

Chapter Two

Reassessing Regionalism in Britain during the inter-war period.

‘It is only for the reconditioned eye that the past becomes contemporary’
(Powers, 1993, p. 58)

The relationship modernism had, or might have, with regionalism was, and is, largely ignored by the contemporary chroniclers of the Modern Movement and many current historians alike. All too often the study of British interwar architecture seems to be focussed on how the continental modernist vocabulary was appropriated. If, however, we stop looking at the interwar period as a conflict between modernism, regionalism and many other ideologies, a more inclusive understanding of the built environment could be formulated and, more specifically, the characteristics of British cultural identity and its search for modernity would become an integral part of this understanding.

Modernism and regionalism are not the only schools of thought that are often considered to be at odds with one another. The vernacular also needs to be considered in this discussion; since it was a significant influence on British architectural expressions. Indeed, the vernacular becomes a central notion in interpreting regionalism in architecture in Britain during these decades. This chapter will examine these issues and contexts thereby opening up Hill’s work and its interpretation to a new revisionist approach.

Regionalism can be seen as part of a struggle to preserve regional traditions through a process of continuity that incorporated local particularity, domestic vernacular, national identity and individuality. As in many other countries during the interwar period, Britain was going through various changes – not only political, but also social and cultural. It is in connection with these changes that regionalism plays an important role in defining the architectural language used in Britain between the wars. The changing environment inherently brought with it a sense of loss and anxiety, and though people were looking for comfort in what was known (more specifically in the English landscape and countryside), there are clear indicators that regional characteristics were interwoven with the signs of modernity. The presence of regional characteristics within modernism

is especially apparent in a generation of architects setting up practice in Britain just after the First World War. With a heritage from the Arts and Crafts movement, people like Grey Wornum (1888 – 1957) and Edward Maufe (1883 – 1957) embraced modernism (where possible) whilst at the same time following the regionalist principle of providing continuity through the incorporation of the local traditions with the new. The modernism they were seeking incorporated a vast array of ideas committed to art and life. Not as forceful as the modernism promoted by doctrinaire followers of the Modern Movement, it was also to seep through the nooks and crannies of design, be it in inside or outside, locally, nationally or internationally.

The feeling of loss of place and tradition was brought on by rapid modernisation that began to accelerate during the Nineteenth Century.¹⁰ It was this feeling, perhaps, that encouraged these young architects to search for an architecture that was rooted in tradition. However, their aim was neither pastiche nor traditionalism. Rather, they searched for a new architecture that could soothe the anxieties surrounding the loss of local and national identities, dwindling rural life in England and the continuous anxiety that was found all around. In other words they were looking for a visual output that would lead to a modern and orderly Britain. It is only if we interpret these notions of loss in respect to regionalism and modernism that we can gain a broader understanding of how these seemingly opposite characteristics worked hand-in-hand. Or, in the words of C.H. Reilly (1844 – 1928) writing on the architecture of Hill: ‘... no one can be successfully ‘modern’ who does not know, and know well, the old ways too’ (Reilly, 1938,p.315).

One way to seek an understanding of the contemporary built environment in Britain is through the examination of a prolific and well-accepted architect of the interwar period. Such an architect is Hill. Hill built continuously throughout the Twenties and Thirties, but his work is still seen as being outside the realm of modernism. An analysis of his life and work during this period can help in understanding what Vincent B. Canizaro (2007, p.10) calls: the lost legacy of regional modernism pioneered by a number of mid-century architects.

¹⁰ For a detailed study on Regionalism during the Nineteenth Century see: Van Santvoort , De Maeyer and Verschaffel (2008).

Although not known for his intellectual approach to architecture, Hill set out to introduce into Britain a conscious vocabulary of modernity that related to both the spirit of the client and the spirit of the place where he was active. Whilst not intended as a biography of Hill, this chapter will use aspects of his career as a vehicle for linking ideas that are often considered to be in opposition. By doing this it is possible to ensure an analysis that is inclusive, rather than exclusive, of themes such as the vernacular, Englishness and regionalism, together with modernism during the interwar period.

As well as seeing regionalism manifested in direct visual references to place, and as invocations of the vernacular, we also need to consider an architecture that portrays the character of a certain region; to see regionalism as a cultural phenomenon particular to a certain period in time. Only then can we embrace a wide range of architectural manifestations that can, perhaps, be seen as modernism tempered by regionalism. These manifestations embrace and respect not only the international modernist spirit, but also the local regionalist spirit. Before we can begin analysing British regionalism in the context of Hill's work, it is necessary to analyse and understand the relationship between regionalism and the geography of Britain.

Our first point of call should be the examination of regional differentiation within Britain – more specifically the distinction between Britishness (seen as a political and cultural unity on a national level) and Englishness, Scottishness or Welshness. This differentiation is analogous to the concept of '*Heimat*' in the way that inhabitants of the individual countries within Britain resist the political over-branding of 'Britishness' through regionalistic expressions (Burden, 2006, p.15). Problems surrounding this 'political over-branding' have also been highlighted by Robert Colls (2008, pp.16-31) when he mentions that: '[...] like nations, regions are best conceived in terms of how people understand, and imagine them, rather than according to any arbitrary administrative boundaries or unthinking reliance on the visible 'facts'.

Whilst the concepts of Englishness and Britishness seem to pull in different directions, they cannot be considered to be in opposition. Ideas on Englishness and Britishness should not be seen as polarities but as a more inclusive way of understanding aspects of differentiation within architecture built during the interwar period. We also need to be careful of studies that portray these

concepts as insular. With this in mind, I agree with the assumption that David Matless (1998, p.17) makes on his study of *Landscape and Englishness* that: 'a definition of Englishness as insular or unitary would not only be undesirable but also impossible to sustain. National identity is regarded as a relative concept and is always constituted through definitions of Self and Other and always subject to internal differentiation'.

The dialectically differing characteristics of Britishness and Englishness should be stressed. Looking at them not from an 'either-or' perspective (in light of these characteristics) but from an integrated view, in which one might be more prominent than the other at any given time, will help us in understanding British regionalism within a modern context. An understanding of this relationship is also necessary when it comes to the study of architects who were active during the interwar period; architects such as Hill, whose work was a synthesis of his Scottish and English heritage. In other words, to truly understand the regional tendencies of a specific building, it is necessary to look not only at the built environment of the region within which it is situated, but it is also necessary to look at both the creator and the client in order to determine their connections with other regional backgrounds. These connections might be regionally very specific (i.e. at a local scale), or they might transcend those boundaries to be part of the historic past of the Scots, the Welsh or the English. This outlook has the benefit of including Celtic regional influences, and also makes it possible to acknowledge international regionalistic influences (Stephens, C., 2002, p.227).

There are also some variations within Englishness that we need to consider in this particular study. These can again be seen in opposition to Nikolaus Pevsner's (1902–1983) ideas of arts and architecture as being manifestations of a national character.¹¹ When Henry Canova Vollam Morton (1892–1979)¹² set out on his search for England he went looking for 'a rural, or small town, an England of thatched cottages, market towns and cathedral closes, its centre of

¹¹ This is particularly apparent in one of the Reith lectures (broadcast weekly in the Home Service from 16 October 1955 until 27 November 1955) see Pevsner, N. (1955). One particular area of British Regionalism that one can focus on is the North-South divide and its specific relationship to regional Modernism during the interwar period.

¹² H.V. Morton started out as a journalist and gained success as a travel writer discovering Britain in his car during the twenties. He has been praised for combining journalistic writing with enthusiasm and love for his home country, making: Morton, H.V.C. (1927) an instant success. He managed to capture the changing spirit of Britain during the 1920's, which encouraged him to write several other travel books on various regions in the UK, and later countries such as South Africa and Turkey.

gravity in the Georgian South Country of Richard Jeffries, Edward Thomas, and the ruralists. It is a vision of England manifested and fed by sources as varied as; Cecil Sharp's scholarship of folk songs, the country dancing movement, the illustrations of Helen Allingham, the garden design of Gertrude Jekyll, and the music of Edward Elgar and Ralph Vaughan Williams' (Knights, 2006, p.172). You could say that he went in search of an England of the South. In comparison, Frank Pick (1878 – 1941) tried to find a modernism that was more in tune with the English character of the North.¹³ This division should particularly be seen in light of the conflicting attitudes that arose out of the influence that London held over the Provinces. This was particularly evident when it came to the adoption of a more cosmopolitan modernism in London, as compared with the North. London saw itself as independent / cosmopolitan and claimed to be much more at the forefront when it came to experiments in modernism that, at the same time, incorporated the best of the English past. This attitude is also apparent in those people that Michael Saler (1999, p.xi) dubbed 'Medieval Modernists'; those that believed that ideas from the North and a northern perspective were more English than those produced in the South, which they viewed as being susceptible to French (perhaps also American) influences. Whilst in the South, however, there was a belief that national cultural identity would be generated from the metropolitan centre.

Described as 'a quintessential figure of the interwar period, a dabbler in many styles, and a brilliant decorator' (Powers, 1989, p.3) Hill is still a largely forgotten figure. Even when his work is known it is mostly ignored. This was, however, not always the case. When one looks back at his output of buildings, and the attention his architecture received in the national press during the period under consideration, Hill was anything but a forgotten figure; being described as the best 'person in this country to carry out the ideas you have in mind', as well as being able to make modern design persuasive. (Hill, 1930-1933 and 1937). This, I feel, is largely to do with the way modernism has been interpreted and explained (especially in terms of opposition) long after these individuals were active.

¹³ As manager of the London Underground during the 1920's and 1930's Frank Pick became a key figure (through his patronage of various artists) in bringing modern architecture and design to the public. It is also important to recall that Pick was very pro-German (as well as pro-German Werkbund) and studied mass transport designs and architecture in Berlin.

To understand regional modernism as it relates to the interwar domestic architecture of Hill, we need to look at a new domestic building type that was becoming increasingly popular. In the period from the 1860s up until the Second World War, the country cottage was gaining a lot of attention and becoming increasingly popular. The country cottage formed the perfect backdrop in which to pursue leisurely activities in the open air. This type of cottage, together with its outdoor activities, is part and parcel of understanding the typical English concept of the 'Weekend'. They were also to become well known requisites of the increasingly wealthy middle and upper classes that chose the 'Home' counties such as Surrey, Kent and Sussex as their new play ground; a means of getting away from all the unpleasantness that City life brought with it during the week. Hermann Muthesius (1861–1927), in his rare study on the English house, rightly pointed out that this fashion for owning a country getaway stemmed from the English custom of visiting summer retreats, and from a natural love for country life that was much keener in the English rather than any other people. Muthesius also went on to say that the new move to the country might also have to do with the English preference for the types of sport that required a stay in the open country. However he stated more importantly that the English love of gardens and the growing of plants and flowers that is perhaps the most significant in understanding why the English feel the need for a country cottage (Muthesius, 1987, p.130) In facilitating their move to the country, people were drawn to Hill as their architect, as he was able to incorporate modern comfort and convenience (e.g. Luxurious bathrooms, swimming pools, central heating...) into his designs – be they new build or conversions – without losing any of the historical charm that these clients demanded in their new domestic environments.

The increasing popularity of the car made it possible for the middle and upper classes to search for the traditional countryside, resulting in the fact that rural leisure became restyled around the petrol engine. What pre-1914 was seen by the lower middle classes as a 'symbol of reckless modernity and abuse of social standing [...] was now being welcomed by the middle and upper classes alike. Hill, as mentioned by his friend Reilly, was often seen slipping away at 50 mph in his car to his farmhouse in Sussex (Matless, 1998, pp.62-64).

But the popularity of the railways and the motoring industries was not the only factor that played a role in the rediscovery of the countryside and this appreciation of nature. The publication of magazines such as *Country Life* also played an active role in promoting this way of living and all that was connected with it. Hill was never shy in talking about his debt to *Country Life*. In an article aptly titled 'An architect's debt to *Country Life*', Hill mentions that he was greatly interested in the articles on restoring old cottages, an interest that was to be expanded with a growing appreciation for the early Edwin Landseer Lutyens (1869 – 1944) houses (Hill, 1967, pp. 70 – 72).

Country Life was to play an even more immediate role in the architecture of Hill. Having established friendships with the editors Edward Hudson (1854 – 1936) and, later, Christopher Hussey (1899 – 1970) (who was to share Hill's country cottage Valewood farm during many weekends), both wrote numerous articles on Hill's architecture. However, it was the relationship with Hussey that would prove to be most valuable in promoting his work to future clients, and it also proved fruitful in promoting an architecture that sought continuity with the past. Hussey shared Hill's passion for Lutyens and for the English vernacular traditions, believing that new buildings being put up were only successful if they showed a strong continuation of past traditions into present times; claiming that 'when a house is built a little bit of England is permanently changed' (Hussey, 1923, p.404).

Surrey was the county where Hill would indulge to full extent his love for the architecture of Lutyens, especially in the work in which he collaborated with Gertrude Jekyll . The work that Hill did with Jekyll meant that it was possible for him to study and be influenced by one of the creators of the Surrey Style¹⁴. The development of this style came about because of the fact that the farmland was poor. It meant that this part of the country never attracted those with the wealth and inclination to set up vast estates with houses to match. Instead, as Roderick Gradidge (1991, p.7) mentions: 'it was chosen by the comfortably wealthy – courtiers and merchants – who did not feel the need for broad acres to support their wealth, and it was this gentry class that built the small manor houses that abound in the country'. These clients, wanting to escape their

¹⁴ The Surrey style refers to the domestic buildings in this county, and more specifically to the period between the 1880's and 1930's when the region's architectural traditions were being rediscovered and assimilated in a regionalist architecture.

everyday London lives, would employ architects that were sensitive to their desire for the England that they felt was lost in the urban sprawl of London – without missing out, however, on the modern conveniences with which they were now accustomed. This was to give Hill the perfect opportunity to experiment with vernacular building traditions whilst engaging with modern day requirements, creating a dwelling that would express the spirit of the place as well as the spirit of its inhabitants. In the words of Hussey (1935, p.300):

For the countryman, with his daily dealings with the realities of life in the country, the idealisations of the weekender may savour of exaggeration. But so, to the hard-working townsman, do the feverish indulgences of the country cousin in the pleasures of the town. Each needs the essence of antithesis in concentrated form

Wood House Copse (1924-1926) at Holmbury St Mary in Surrey [20] is one example of Hill's domestic architecture that can be interpreted as an expression of regional modernism.



Fig. 20 Garden front from the south-east, Wood house Copse, Surrey, Oliver Hill, 1924-6 (1926, CL)

Here Hill used local materials and local builders, and gave the building a vernacular feel that was combined with a genuine sense of the identity of his

client, Mr W.D. Brand. In doing so he managed to stamp it with his own identity too. Throughout his domestic work Hill provided a permanent record for the individual identities in an engraving, usually found on one of the windows. In the present example the engraving can be found on the living room window and reads, as follows (R.R.P., 1926, p.594):

Deane built this house
So fair to see
In Nineteen twenty-five A.D.
For Amy's use with Amey's skill,
And the oak that he'd brought from Coulsdon Mill

This verse (giving the Christian name of the client as well as the first name of his wife, Amy, and the surname of the foreman: Amey) was followed by a portrait of 'Laird, Our Dog, with below the names of the architect and the workmen' (R.R.P., 1926, p.594).

Although this house has been described as having a *Cottage Orné* appearance, I would like to argue that this cottage has more regard for local styles than any of the original *Cottage Orné* at Blaise Hamlet by John Nash (1752 – 1835). Although the sentimentality is certainly present in Woodhouse Copse, it is the interpretation and blending of local styles and materials with the spirit of modernity, as well as the spirit of the place and his client, that make this building successfully engage with regional modernism.

Here Hill used a combination of thatch, weatherboarding, brick and stone that would not only make him famous in the twenties (other examples include Cock Rock at Croyde and the Thatched House at Knowle). It would also allow him to experiment with various textures and colours. The use of these local materials was not out of place in counties such as Surrey, Kent and Sussex, where they were numerous. As a result, buildings took on a similar appearance in these neighbouring counties, and it was possible for one house to be a mixture of several materials throughout. These similarities were not just a thing of the new modern approach, as Jekyll (1904, p. VII) mentioned in the preface of her book on the Old West Surrey style, mentioning that:

[...] after all, geographical distinctions are purely arbitrary, and only really appreciable on the map, where they show in

different colours; whereas, in the real world, one steps without knowing it from Surrey into Hampshire on the dry heath-land, and out of Surrey into Sussex from one clay puddle into the next, without being aware in either case that the land is called by another name.

What better place than Surrey for Hill to draw his inspiration, as most of the vernacular buildings in this part of England grew out of a number of additions. This resulted in a complementary mixture of materials that retained the same manner as the original, and it was with this intermingling that Hill experimented with enthusiastically. His understanding of this vast array of local materials, together with his attention to decoration, would enable him to rework well known vernacular traditions in combination with his own innovative ideas and those desired by his clients.

Hill's approach is particularly visible in his design of the chimneystack. The chimneys are usually the most eye-catching part as they are large and built mostly out of red brick using the Surrey Vernacular style. Although the chimney dominates the building, Hill diverts from Surrey Vernacular by using plain coloured stone. The use of stone is particularly interesting as it can lead one to think that Hill took his inspiration mostly from ancient farmhouses, particularly because brick, as being more fire resistant, had replaced stone. Placing the chimney centrally, Hill followed a trend that was broadly used in small buildings in the South Eastern counties enabling builders to give their small houses an unexpected dignity (Clifton-Taylor, 1972, p.259). However, it also enabled Hill to work with one of his favourite materials, as stone would be a material with which he would continually experiment.

Wood House Copse (like Cock Rock at Croyde and the Thatched House at Knowle) also showed Hill's enthusiasm for British traditional Arts and Crafts design. It also revealed the influence that Jekyll had on Hill, as she was a firm believer in the simple rural arts and crafts styles. This commitment was in stark contrast to people like W.R. Lethaby (1857 – 1931), who stood for more sophisticated arts and crafts styles (Gradidge, 1991, p.23; p.10; p.75).

The house used timber from an old mill near Coulsdon, which provided Hill with additional inspiration for the design of the building – most evident in the main

staircase [21-22]. This staircase was formed around the stem post from the old mill that, now, does its job as a massive newel.

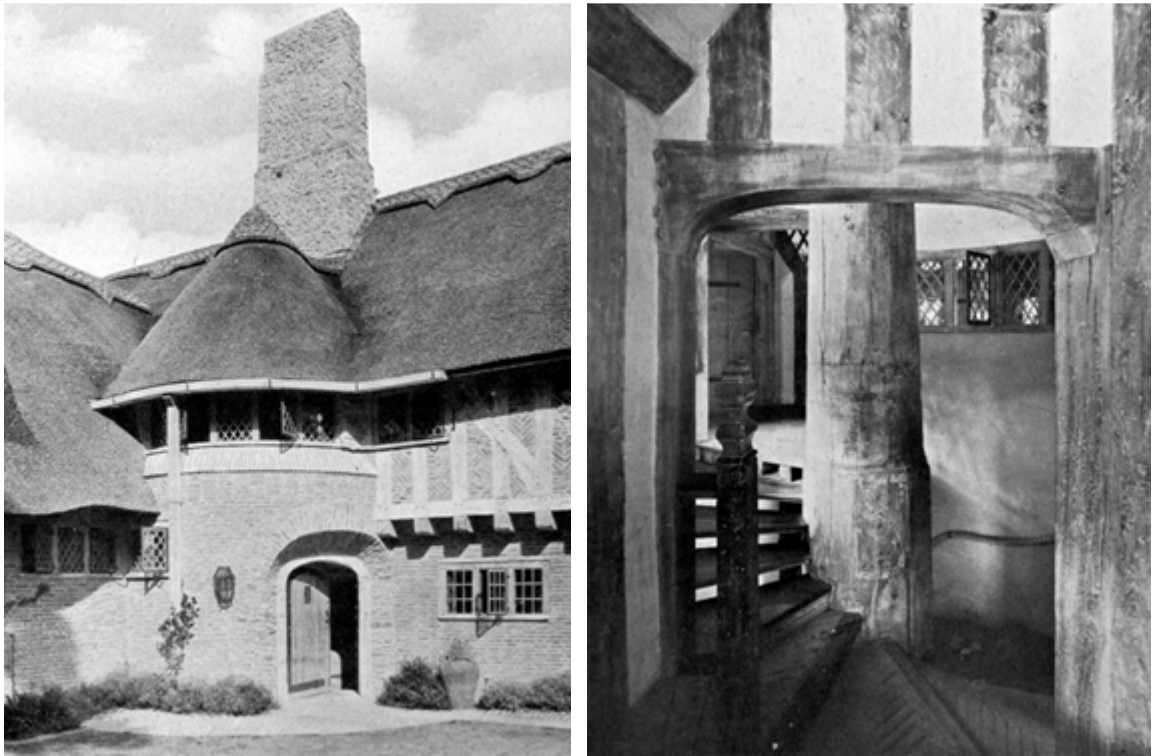


Fig. 21-22 Front entrance view of spiral staircase and staircase with old mill post at first floor level, Wood house Copse, Surrey, Oliver Hill, 1924-6 (1926, CL)

The mill was described by Jekyll (1939, p.158) as one of the dying features of the countryside and as being something that needed to be treasured for its ability to bring to people a sense of proximity with a thing that has gone unchanged throughout the centuries. To be able to reuse this timber from the old mill must have been a great opportunity for Hill. Incorporating parts of this old structure into a newly built country cottage meant that he could create the continuity he was seeking between the past and his own work.

In one of his many articles dedicated to the architecture of Hill, Hussey was to describe Wood House Copse as 'farmhousey', a house with a certain air of easy going about it, and touches here and there of a playful fancy. The house certainly had a barn like feeling to it, allowing for a large living room that refers back to the hall houses of earlier times. But this, I feel, is not the only continuity with past farmhouses that Hill was trying to seek. Traditional circular dovecotes

might have inspired the gazebo that he placed at the end of the pergola, as these were quite common additions to local barns.

By thatching the roof, weatherboarding the garden facade and combining brick (i.e. bricknogging on the front facade) and stone Hill was able to give the building texture and colour that would blend in with the environment over time, and at the same time, able to collaborate with local craftsman using local materials, and in doing so give impetus to the use of old handcrafts.

The employment of local craftsman can also be seen as one of the key characteristics for understanding the regionalism that was at play in his work. These craftsmen used traditions particular to their locale, whilst, at the same time, Hill was able to combine these efforts with elements from a British national heritage, such as the Arts and Crafts traditions (in this case timber and thatch and the belief in reviving building traditions). More to the point, it can be suggested that the use of craftsmen to maintain links with the past was extremely important for Hill. He saw it as a form of education, not only for his client, but in general for the younger generation (local as well as national). Discussing Castle Fraser in Scotland in one of his numerous articles for *Country Life* on the subject, Hill (1945, p.71) suggests that some of these castles should be used as youth hostels. He declared:

In these days of rapid disintegration and the dissolving links with the past, the rising generation from the industrial south has few opportunities of getting to know the people and life of the North. This would be a perfect opportunity for young people to make a contact which could engender pride in the grandeurs of their great national heritage.

This pursuit of outdoor leisure activities was to become one of the major characteristics of what it meant to be English during the interwar period. However, statements such as these not only demonstrate Hill's belief in the qualities and benefits of open-air life, but also show the importance he gave to the British countryside and its past. They also demonstrate his concern for educating the citizens of tomorrow in a love and care for their national heritage that would, in its turn, help with the continuity that was sought as a key element in creating modern architecture. This 'education of the citizens of tomorrow' was

to be a lifelong interest of Hill's, exemplified by his active membership of the Council of Visual Education; an organisation that saw its task 'to make of the pupil a good citizen-ideally a citizen of the world, but in any case a citizen of his own country, the child should be taught impatience with things unnecessarily drab or sordid, and should be infected with a desire to remove or improve them' (Matless, 1998, p.261).

This visual education extended into Hill's personal life and can best be exemplified by taking a closer look at his own weekend retreat, Valewood Farm (a typical yeoman's house assigned to the fourteenth or fifteenth century) in Sussex [23]. This farmhouse would prove to be a perfect environment for him to create his own interpretation of regional modernism. Although this farm provides us, at least at first sight, with nothing more than the typical characteristics of a Sussex farmhouse, it is on closer inspection revealing of the way in which Hill adapted this building to his own needs. It allows us to understand more of the refinements typical in his architecture. By restoring and adapting this building to his needs (and the requirements of his time) Hill was able to provide a timely connection between himself, the building's history and its locality.



Fig. 23 Valewood Farm, Sussex, Oliver Hill (1928, CL)

The value of the '*genius loci*' was certainly nurtured by Hill as he positioned himself in the long line of builders that preceded him. He used well-known traditional details in such a way that they produced the same freshness and individuality as from the anonymous builders that went before. Hussey (1935,

p.302) identified the importance of this old farm building in understanding Hill's distinction as an architect when he proposed that:

Here we are given an insight into a designer's workshop, or rather mental background: a rich reservoir of materials and colours, whether vegetable, animal, or artifact, into which he can dip the broad brush of his imagination, or derive stimulus from it. The place is largely what a library is to a literary artist. Such close contact as Valewood farm affords to its architect-tenant with an exquisitely unspoilt countryside and to the sensuous qualities of light, colour and form, must be of considerable importance to him individually. More, it might be a good thing on general principles for designers in modern mediums all to have such opportunities of absorbing, in their hours of rest, the essential qualities of their native scene and of nature as a whole. Their work would gain greatly in vitality, imaginative range and authenticity.

It is from this reservoir of materials and colours (both modern and traditional) that Hill was able to create his own version of modernism. This set him apart from many other contemporaries that were also trying to introduce the Modernist Movement to Britain that was sympathetic to the national traditions of the past. People like Hussey saw modernism as a continuation of Regency Classicism whilst Hill believed that the modern could only be achieved by a close study of the older (vernacular) past. However, for Hill the biggest factor in creating a building that could belong to the modern movement was 'grace' or, as he was to say in one of his rare statements on the modern movement:

Much of what passes for "modern" has very little to be said in its favour, mainly perhaps owing to its lack of grace. Grace, it seems to me, is the supreme desirability in fine architecture and can only be achieved by a close study and respect of the work of the past. We find it in the old houses of this country, which, with their settings, equipment and contents, are as glorious a heritage as may be found elsewhere. Tradition among their builders remained for so long unbroken and the

culture of their owners enabled them to appreciate and to employ the finest taste available (Hill, 1930-1931, p.461).

His old farmhouse thus proved to be an ideal setting for Hill to study the past that he felt connected to and infuse it with modernity.

Like Wood House Copse, Hill set up Valewood Farm as a weekend cottage. Here he could escape the hectic London life style and retreat into an England of the past, perhaps the England he knew from his childhood. It also showed a somewhat typical character of domestic architecture in Britain at the time. Instead of building a new house according to the principles of the 'Modern Movement', Hill opted for the conversion of an old building. This might perhaps have been for reasons of economy. However, it was more to do with the general appreciation that existed during the interwar period for traditional English house forms. This was often mentioned in the travel writings of Howard Robertson (1888 – 1963) and Frank Yerbury (1885 – 1970) who stated that the new architecture of Europe would not appeal to the English, since there existed already a perfectly good tradition of building small comfortable houses and cottages (Higgott, 1989, p.14). It would be fair to state that Hill didn't choose the type of his weekend retreat out of theoretical considerations, but rather from nostalgia for an England that was not available to him during the week. Here he chose to 'enter another kind of life, donning any absurd suit of clothes to suit his mood' (Powers, 1989, p.24). It is, however, when one looks more closely at how Hill lived at Valewood that one can discern clues as to what Hill perceived modernism to be.

Hill felt a strong sympathy towards the new architecture being built in Sweden at the time. In a letter to Ragnar Østberg (1866 – 1945), Hill mentioned that the Stockholm Town Hall (1911 – 1922) built by Østberg was the most beautiful of all modern buildings (Hill, 1928). However, this sympathy went beyond the town hall, as it was Sweden's study of the past and their interest in the allied crafts that made Swedish architecture so successful. In his previously mentioned statement on the modern movement Hill (1930-31, p.461) went on to say:

I believe the cause of Sweden's pre-eminence in this field today is the culture of her race and the resultant demand in that enlightened country for the best, not only in the

architecture of her buildings but also in the kindred crafts of sculpture, decorative painting, furniture and the applied arts. So persistent is the demand that her manufacturers have been forced to employ the most skilled designers to co-operate in the manufacture of the ordinary articles of daily use. These have not thrown over tradition, but have studied and assimilated the best of their respective traditional work, and the brilliance we admire to-day has its rootage in the earliest Scandinavian art and may be traced back to the primitive work of the peasants and of the more immediate past to be found in their national museums and palaces.

It was Valewood that provided Hill with, as Hussey previously mentioned, a background into which he could dip in and out to find inspiration from the vernacular and the country crafts and into which he could then assimilate the newest trends available in domestic architecture and the decorative arts.

This way of working is especially visible in dwellings such as Cock Rock (Croyde, Devon, 1925-26) and Maryland (Hurtwood, Surrey, 1927-31). It would find a natural conclusion in Daneway (Gloucestershire) where from 1949 until his death Hill made extensive alterations whilst still maintaining its setting, thereby creating a setting described as: 'magic on a scale as never before or since – bizarre, magnificent, crazy, culturally unbelievably rich.' (Powers, 1989, p.60).

The concessions to contemporary taste that Hill incorporated at Valewood Farm are most notably the oval swimming pool [24] in the centre of the old farmyard, the white parlour [25], and a white sleeping room in the base of the dovecot.



Fig. 24 Bathing pool and barn, Valewood Farm, Sussex, Oliver Hill (1928, CL)



Fig. 25 White Parlour, Valewood Farm, Sussex, Oliver Hill (1935, CL)



Fig. 26 Bedroom, Valewood Farm, Sussex, Oliver Hill (1935, CL)

This combination of old and new also extended towards the decoration in and around the farm. A visitor would find a fantastic crew of carved wood figures of all ages and sizes [27], an astonishing assortment of hats [26], ship models and nautical gear, examples of Sussex ironwork, ancient and modern pottery, and quantities of glass ranging from coloured lumps of the raw material to a fine array of green glass doorstops and outsize bottles [28]. These quirky combinations enabled Hill to create for himself a dwelling that related to the spirit of the place and at the same time to his own identity – as shown in all of the different artefacts he had displayed throughout the place. Hill's belief in the importance of the decorative arts when creating a new architecture was specific to the British context of the time, whilst pioneers of the Modern Movement (such

as Le Corbusier) stated quite clearly that architecture is everything except the decorative arts.



Fig. 27 Converted Byre, Valewood Farm, Sussex, Oliver Hill (1935, CL)

By acknowledging the decorative arts in houses like Wood House Copse, Hill was able to capture his own identity as well as the identity of his clients. At Valewood farm he displayed an eclectic collection of found objects that were able to convey both the character of its inhabitant and the character of the place in which they were displayed. Many of these objects not only showed his interest in, and relationship with, British country life but equally acknowledged the importance that Hill placed on the capabilities of modern life – as seen in the additions to the farm, such as the swimming pool.



Fig. 28 Sitting and Dining Room, Valewood Farm, Sussex, Oliver Hill (1935, CL)

The importance of the decorative arts in relation to the new architecture is not restricted to the examples discussed here (Woodhouse Copse and Valewood farm). This approach towards a regional modernism can also be found in the architectural examples in which Hill was able to fully embrace modernism. Although less visible, and to a certain extent less successful, than previous examples, houses such as Joldwynds provide us with an alternative interpretation of regional modernism; one that sought to incorporate a vast array of ideas committed to art and life, and that was steeped in an Arts and Crafts heritage reflecting what he had seen in current Swedish architecture.

Joldwynds (Holmbury St Mary, Surrey, 1931-32) [14] was described in the contemporary press as an interesting attempt to create a modern house with beauty by modifying the stark utilitarian factors in modern structures in line with certain ingrained preferences of the human eye. Hill was applauded for approaching the 'new architecture' not from a theorist's book and the drawing board but rather from a picturesque imagination and his feeling for materials. In other words, Hill was able to translate the rational modernist forms into a more sensuous design that could be fused with the culture of everyday life in a way that was better than could be managed by any rationalist design. The house was designed as a group of white shapes, with a semi-circular staircase window, topped with a white drum. Interpreting modernist forms in terms of

curves enabled Hill to soften the usual modernist rectangularity, and this in turn helped the house to fit snugly within the well matured garden of the Phillip Webb (1831-1915) house that was demolished to make place for Joldwynds - hence the survival of the fully mature trees on the site [29]. One could even go as far as to say that Hill sought his own connection between the 'new style' and the past by arranging the plan such that the French windows of the dining room were aligned on an axis that passed through the great pine (Hussey, 1934, p.277).

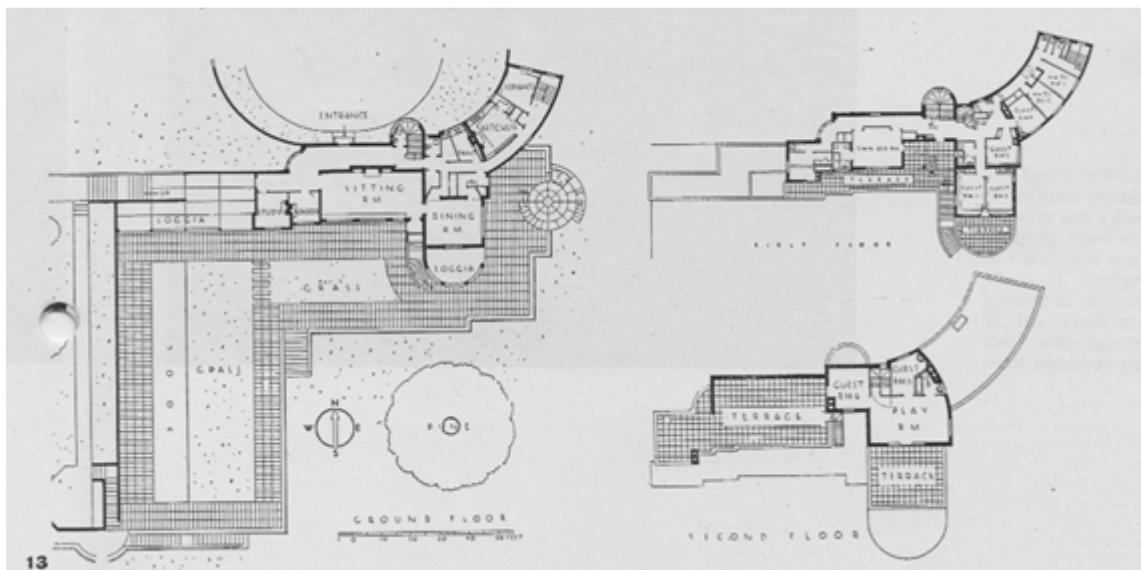


Fig. 29 Joldwynds, Holmbury St Mary, Surrey. Oliver Hill, 1930-32. (LXXVI, *Architectural Review*)

This continuation with the past, and the fusion of art with life, was not only to be found on the outside of the house. The inside (although less appreciated than the exterior) shows Hill's flair and passion for creating interiors that produce individual and harmonious results, and can be attributed to his belief in the ensembler system [30]. As many Arts and Crafts theorists before him, Hill believed that people such as the architect, the painter, the furniture designer, the textile manufacturer, sculptor etc. should all co operate in order to avoid the quarrelsome confusion of the ordinary room that existed because these people never met. Ideas such as this show that there was no rift between the past and post-World War I, but rather an adaptation; an engagement of arts and crafts ideals with contemporary concerns, such as commerce, that went on throughout the interwar period. This alliance between crafts people, designers and manufacturers (also actively promoted by the government bodies such as the

Design and Industries Association) can be seen throughout the interior of Joldwynds.



Fig. 30 Dining Room, Joldwynds, Holmbury St. Mary, Surrey.
Oliver Hill, 1930-32 (1934, CL)

Here Hill combined new manufacturing methods (as seen in the plastic paints he used, concealed tubular lighting as well as radiators) with the traditional such as the hearth together with modern day crafts such as textiles woven by Marion Dorn (1896-1964), paintings by Ivon Hitchens (1893-1979) and furniture made by himself. His use of the ensemblier system enabled him to produce individual and harmonious results which were fully appreciated by the artists he worked with, such as McKnight Kauffer (1890-1954). Hussey went on to say that: 'Hill is the only architect interested in modern houses who seems to be able to produce a descent looking interior'; an achievement made possible by assimilating a respect for the past with modern day manufacture, and giving a well needed impetus to the artistic development of his country (Hill, 1934-37, HiO 10/1, RIBA).

Although the need for a '*reconditioned eye*' is less acute now than it was in the latter part of the Twentieth Century, there is still a need to re-evaluate a number of architectural discourses (especially relating to the interwar period) that sought answers to a rapidly changing world through a variety of approaches. As a nation coming out of the First World War, Britain, like many other nations, felt a desperate need for a return to tranquillity on the political front. However, on the social and cultural front there was also a feeling of loss and anxiety that was

brought on by rapid modernisation. These feelings were interpreted in manifold ways, and it is with a number of these interpretations that regionalism becomes apparent, with a number of mid century architects seeking to provide continuity between the old traditions and the new. By providing this continuity, certain architects were able to adapt the more forceful vocabulary of the Modern Movement into an approach that also incorporated both tradition and a sense of place.

The visualisation of the '*genius loci*', as I have argued, became an important characteristic of regionalism in Britain and can help us in coming to a closer understanding of why people such as Hill were able to build using a vast array of styles throughout their career. In light of Christian Norberg-Schulz's explanation of '*genius loci*', this stylistic diversity comes about from the fact that each building is born from different situations and, therefore, requires different solutions. Equally as important is the facts that by looking to build dwellings in which people can 'identify' and 'orientate' themselves, architects could provide the all-needed continuity that was sought after by a huge number of people in Britain.

Consequently we should look at the period between the wars not as a break with long standing traditions (such as the Arts and Crafts) but rather as a continuation from them. Nevertheless, with architects such as Hill this continuity was also sought by reference to regional vernacular traditions – by taking inspiration from the way builders were trying to form solutions to a particular geography and available materiality in an unconscious way. The regional modernist used these references in a conscious design decision to create a symbiosis between their buildings and their surroundings. However, this in itself was not sufficient to counter the feelings of alienation brought on by the changing world, nor to act as an adequate inspiration for how to best respond to different needs and different locales on a more abstract level of national and local identity.

Seeing regionalism as a cultural phenomenon, particularly as it relates to a certain historical period, enables us to follow its manifestations in relation to the geography of Britain. Acknowledging nationalistic tendencies (be they English, Scottish, Irish or Welsh) and the way that they played a part in shaping the identity of the architect and the client, can help us to evaluate the built

environment in greater detail, it will also enable us to uncover the importance that these nationalistic tendencies play in shaping certain buildings.

It is in this context that Hill can be considered an important figure in understanding regionalism in Britain. His response to modernity has always displayed varying levels of regionalism throughout his artistic output. More importantly, however, it is only by acknowledging the multitudinous influences at play within the overarching design of each individual “architected” solution (house, exhibition, or other) that we can achieve a more inclusive regionalist historiography, and, at the same time, gain a more complete picture of the complex built environment of the British interwar period.

Chapter Three

Approaching the Nostalgic in inter-war British architecture

Modernist revisionism has drawn attention to the cultural and political paradoxes of modernity and shown, especially in relation to English modernism, that there are various models which are not readily mapped onto dominant Continental European models. This revisionism has already resulted in several interesting studies that have disproved the notion of British interwar architecture being of mediocre quality in comparison to work completed on the continent. One line of argument that is particularly helpful in analysing the period under discussion is the relationship that modernism has with history. Although several architectural historians and writers such as Panayotis Tournikiotis (1999) and Anthony Vidler (2005) have concluded that hard lined modernists such as Sigfried Giedion, Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius had a sophisticated and complex relation to the past, we are often only presented with part of the picture since writings such as these are still very much focussed on doctrinaire modernists. However, when we look more closely at the architectural output which was hugely popular during the interwar period in countries such as Britain we uncover an architectural outlook that sought to make a fascinating synthesis between history, tradition and modernity. It is this altered way of mapping newer developments with older forms within a framework of 'nostalgia' that I want to examine further in this chapter.

One feature that can be helpful in analysing the particularity of English modernism is the argument that has often been made in architectural history that there is an inherent dualism between modernism and nostalgia. At its most reductive, this model sets a social, political and aesthetic progressive liberalism against a conservative and retrogressive imperative. The dominant note in these approaches is that the British seek through the trope of nostalgia to find an escape or refuge from social change and 'modernity'; from the violence and threat of contemporary city life to the peaceful idyll of the rural and in the English countryside. In recent years, many scholars have started to question

this antipathy, along with other oppositional pairings (i.e. modernism/mass market, modernism/regionalism, modernism/decoration, etc.). It is significant that most of these revisionist studies of doctrinaire modernism have come from studies in English literature or sociology¹⁵. Architecture, which was, after all, one of the key players in the development of *high Modernism*, appears especially reluctant to question these established dualisms. However, given these revised parameters, it is now timely to focus renewed attention on those architects and interior designers of the interwar period who were hugely popular during their lifetime, but who have been largely neglected in the historiography of modernism. In their work, there is a distinctive mix of vernacular forms, historicist referencing and traditional materials alongside a positive engagement with the latest technology and design features befitting a contemporary lifestyle. A closer inspection of Hill's architecture¹⁵ would allow the complexities of this approach to architectural modernism to be better appreciated and better evaluated. At the centre of my research is the belief that the distinctiveness of Hill's artistic output was forged in the close relations Hill had with his clients. His commissions were rooted in their experience of everyday life and within their social interactions. As I will argue, approached within such an altered framework, the range and quality of Hill's work made him anything but a marginal player on the architectural scene of the time.

First I want to highlight how the nostalgic is often located through its relationship with the 'feminine' and how this carries implications for understanding the development of particular forms of architectural practice within modernism. As Rita Felski (1995, p.57) argues in *The Gender of Modernity*, 'nostalgia is conventionally linked with the 'feminine', and by implication with the domestic and the home.' And she continues: 'To focus only upon the rationalised character of the public world is to ignore the centrality of erotically and aesthetically charged representations in the formation of modern social experience'. Within key modernist texts such as those by Georg Simmel¹⁶, women were frequently associated with a nostalgic vision of tradition, in which nature and continuity were interlaced and the 'feminine' was often set in opposition to the processes of rationalisation and metropolitanisation that became identified with a more strident 'masculine' modernity. However, this

¹⁵ These include Childs, P. (2008); Felski, R. (1995) and Williams R.(2007).

¹⁶ See Simmel. G. (1984) and Simmel. G (1903) .

correlation marginalises Hill, in whose work the 'feminine' brings this form of nostalgia into play. Hill's domestic work demonstrates an approach to architecture and interior design that shouldn't be seen as a betrayal of modernity but rather acknowledged and valued as a peculiarly English approach to social change. It is one that clearly shows a commitment to contemporaneity and to what it meant to be alive at that time - incorporating a rich correlation between the nostalgic and the 'feminine'. In this chapter I will argue that by looking more closely at 'the feminine' in Hill's work, what is revealed is woman as an active participant in the formation, design and experience of social modernity instead of merely having her traditional maternal role restabilised as was the case in many Western countries after the First World War¹⁷.

A first glance at houses such as Cock Rock, Devon; Gayfere House; and North House, London, might superficially support the easy dismissal of Hill's work. Cock Rock is usually described in an unfavourable light by its reviewers. One mentions that 'The house pretends to be, what in fact it is not, a haphazard growth, like these cottages of the countryside which many generations have pulled about and altered to their needs' (W.G.N., 1925, p.214). Even as late as 1998, Jeremy Gould (1977, p.19), in a similar vein compares Cock Rock to the thatched houses of Fred Harrild¹⁸ (1883-1969), which he describes as: 'examples of his vernacular style with informal plans, rough stone walls and thatched roofs which seem to parody the vernacular, based on Arcadian imaginary rather than academic study of the real thing'. Reading reviews such as these make it very tempting to dismiss these projects as mere sentimental idealisations of the past and nothing more. A more detailed investigation, however, demonstrates an alternative model of evaluating the past which carries within it more complex and sophisticated notions of a tension between modernity and nostalgia.

Cock Rock **[31]** was never meant to be a parody of the vernacular. On the contrary, the owners had very specific requirements of what their country retreat should be like. Brenda Girvin (n.d.) wrote that the house was to be built of local

¹⁷ See Felski, R. (1995) pp.35-60. For an analysis of modernity and nostalgia and how these are related with politics and economy and the view of "woman-as-nature" see: Golan. R. (1995).

¹⁸ Harrild was a pupil of Lutyens and is known for interwar suburban housing such as the Thatched House, Mead Road, Torbay (grade II listed 04/02/10).

materials and in using the cream washed farms of Devon as inspiration, the house was designed to appear seemly in the landscape. She also prescribed that the house had to have 'local stone for its chimneys, blue pebbles gathered above the high-tide line for the paths, timber from sloop wrecked on the shore for beams' (Girvin, n.d.). In my view this house is a fine example of regionalism used in a domestic setting to satisfy clients who had a very specific set of requirements and thoughts on how this holiday retreat was to be designed and work for them. These requirements, I argue, are what have made this domestic setting an example of where modernity and dwelling aren't at odds (as e.g. Heidegger (1971) would have it)¹⁹ but are rather interlinked with each other.



Fig. 31 View towards main entrance, Cock Rock, Croyde, Devon, Oliver Hill, 1925 (1926, RIBA)

As two cohabiting females, the clients' approach signal a desire to break away from their or Hill's Edwardian upbringing and tastes. Brenda Girvin was a writer of children's fiction and both she and Monica Cousens were popular playwrights whose reputations were established through plays such as *Cautious Campbell* (Royalty Theatre 1927) and *Madame Plays Nap* (New Theatre 1929).²⁰

¹⁹ See Heidegger, M. (1971) 'Building Dwelling Thinking' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. By A. Hofstadter, London: Harper & Row, pp.143-61.

²⁰ Their work, interestingly enough, seems to suffer from a similar neglect in the historiography of literature as does Hill's in architectural historiography. Popular writing, such as theirs, seems to be easily dismissed, but their writing, as that of many other female writers during that time, seems concerned with managing the change that was happening during the interwar period. For more information see Ouditt, S. (1999).

Together, Girvin and Cousens can be seen as a modern professional couple, of a new domestic type. As playwrights both women worked within and outside the home, which would make a more formally designed Edwardian plan/house irrelevant to their lifestyle. On closer inspection we can see that both architect and client have left behind their more formal and strict Edwardian upbringing for a more comfortable way of living suited to the client's very specific domestic and professional needs. I agree with Jessica Holland, who argues that the sprawling romantic plan of Cock Rock may be attributed to the client's desire for an informal country retreat, with requirements for ample servant accommodation as required, yet flexibility when demanded.

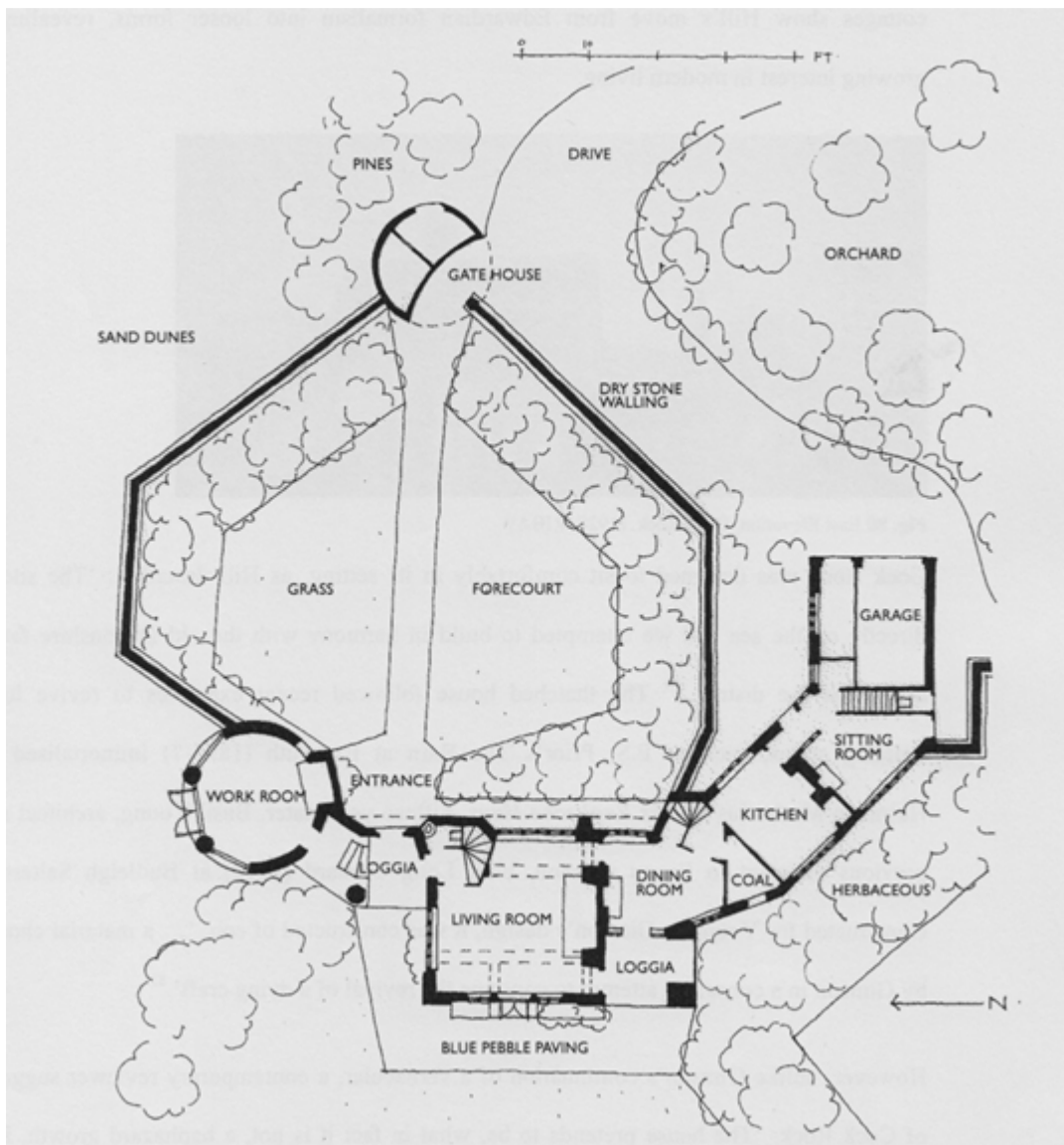


Fig. 32 Floor plan, Cock Rock, Croyde, Devon, Oliver Hill, 1925. (Powers, 1989)

The two wings of the plan [32] were designed to be closed up in winter, as it was required that the house be able to take seven people in the summer and only two for the rest of the year (Holland, pp.124-125). In comparison to other plans inhabited by the more 'traditional couple', their design shows their relationship as a partnership of equals; one requiring different degrees of privacy and sociability. Such a claim is supported by the lack of a specific female space, such as the boudoir, and the absence of a study or drawing room which was a requirement of traditional living arrangements. Instead a circular work room terminates the plan (A devise that Hill will often continue to use in his later houses). The lack of the study and the boudoir, which were traditionally seen as the 'masculine' and 'feminine' spaces of the house, seems to mimic their relationship, in which both women required similar spaces for socialising rather than a formal space that is decorated to show the husband's wealth and social standing. Hill recognised the need for privacy in his design of the circular workroom (together with bedroom above). The use of a cranked plan sets this room apart from the rest of the house and enabled Hill to open up the room towards the sand dunes whilst creating extra shelter with a herbaceous border on one side and part of the forecourt wall on the other side. This privacy is also enhanced by the fact that, although being positioned right next to the entrance, the visitor's gaze is interrupted by a chimney stack of local stone and a whitewashed wall. Therefore, the only opportunity to see into this private space is by peering through the small window next to the chimney stack. This oscillation between the public and the private is also to be found as the visitor approaches the house where a circular gatehouse closes off a grass forecourt which is surrounded by dry stone walling and traditional Cornish hedges. This forecourt encloses the main part of the house whilst the drive ingeniously leads visitors to the servants' wing of the house.

Consequently, this overriding sense of the need to maintain privacy, especially from the servants' quarter, is maintained by the cranked plan which curves inland and its windows facing the drive in contrast to the owners' part of the house facing the sea. One could argue that the clients' profession as playwrights is metaphorically translated into architectural drama. This is particularly so in that what appears to be the front door leads, with a *coup de theatre*, straight into the seaward garden, as Powers (1989, p.11) has aptly described it [33].



Fig. 33 Entrance, Cock Rock, Croyde, Devon, Oliver Hill, 1925 (Powers, 1989)

However, it might also be seen as ploy to let the visitor feel that direct access and visibility are denied. This secrecy contrasts with the core of the house which is by comparison, open and accessible. The large living room becomes a semi public area big enough to entertain those seven people that Brenda Girvin was eager to entertain (one of which was Sybil Thorndyke) (Gould, 1977,p.36)²¹. One could, perhaps, go as far as to state that this room becomes a carefully orchestrated stage setting aligned to offer a spectacular view of the sea.

Although Cock Rock's planning and design can be read as a result of a good relationship between architect and client it can also have been informed by then popular works on architecture and design such as 'The decoration of Houses' by Edith Wharton (1898). Although there is no evidence to suggest that either Hill or his clients met Wharton, it is more than likely that they knew about her work since *House of Mirth* (1902) had already been published and Wharton herself travelled to Europe around 1895 in order to meet Gertrude Jekyll 'whose emphasis on naturalistic gardening and native plants greatly influenced her own work' (Benert, 2007, p.27).

In 'The Decoration of Houses' Wharton laments the lack of privacy. 'Privacy' she claims 'would seem to be one of the first requisites of civilised life, yet it is only necessary to observe the planning and arrangement of the average house to see how little this need is recognised' (Wharton, 1898, p.22). Wharton

²¹ Gould goes on to describe the house as theatrical, as a contemporary film set.

incorporated this play between the private and the public within her own houses such as The Mount, Lenox, Massachusetts [34] (1902) where 'both house and grounds [...] facilitate the pleasures of solitary work and friendly hospitality' (Benert, 2007, p.35).



Fig. 34 The Mount, Lenox, Massachusetts, Edith Wharton, 1902 (n.d. Dashiell)

This sense of the articulation of a sophisticated 'feminine' modernity was not only represented through the plan of the house, but also through the visual and material culture on display within the home. This approach is most evident when looking in detail at his interior decorations, which give expression to the distinctive way that Hill and his clients envisioned, experienced, and even negotiated a self-assured sense of their modernity. It is particularly apparent in the way his interior designs are linked with the 'feminine', and, embrace a pleasure-seeking outlook on life. A case in point is Gayfere House, built in Smith Square, London (1930-35) which is a crucial example that brings the experience and execution of particular aspects of nostalgia into full view [35].



Fig. 35 Gayfere House, Westminster, Oliver Hill, 1929-33 (1932, CL)

Hill couldn't have asked for a better patron than Lady Mount Temple. An artist herself, and not afraid to experiment, she proved to be a perfect match for Hill. She wished the house to be a monument to present day craftsmanship, to be

out of the ordinary and to be able to attract attention. Following my earlier arguments, the house can be seen as a distinctive example of the incorporation of feminine values (i.e. through the use of a sensuous aestheticism found in materials, lighting, etc.) within an emerging modernist vocabulary (i.e. demonstrated through the use of transparency, new materials, and a concern with light and hygiene etc.). Hill was the one who translated her ideas of what a modern house should be into reality and in this respect Gayfere House can be seen as a collaboration between the 'New Woman,' Lady Mount Temple, on the one hand, and the creative architect on the other.



Fig. 36 Bathroom, Gayfere House, Westminster, Oliver Hill, 1929-33 (1938, Duncan Miller, RIBA)

Behind the demure, Neo Georgian façade of Gayfere House it is the bathroom [36] that is the centre of my interest as it best epitomises this cosmopolitan interaction between the modern, the nostalgic and the 'feminine' what is of particular significance is that in all of the inter-war journals in which this house appeared, the focus of attention was mostly on the bathroom; a domestic space conventionally associated with privacy and femininity it is also a room that is, by and large, ignored within the historiography of modernism since it is usually associated with the 'feminine' and exotism, and set in opposition to

modernism's 'masculine' control and logic (Massey,p.123). The bathroom is commonly linked to female activities and to traits such as beauty, allure and the erotic, all in themselves fleeting by nature and almost impossible to rationalise. Nevertheless, these non-public spaces lay at the centre of the vision of modernity held by people such as Lady Mount Temple and Hill and underpinned by an approach that valued and indulged emotional and erotic ideals, and that located sexuality as very much a part of evolving modern social experience.

Bathrooms gave women the opportunity to play an active role and to interact with modernity. This also meant that by doing so they were able to control their modern social experience. Although not a boudoir in the strictest sense of the word, the bathroom at Gayfere House can certainly be seen as a modern translation of one. Traditionally the boudoir has been described by Le Camus de Mézières (1780, cited in Troutman, 2005, p.299) as:

the abode of delight, here she seems to reflect on her designs and to yield to her inclinations ... this room is a lady of fashion to be adorned ... light and rhythmical, the forms not pronounced ... all must be convenient and all must please ... details seen to be close must satisfy by their harmony. The burden of the whole is this: that enjoyment is close at hand.

The bathroom at Gayfere House was certainly designed for a lady of fashion. The bathroom was adorned according to the latest innovations with glass and electricity. The walls were decorated by two shades of deep grey silvered glass and the floor was covered in glossy black Belgian marble. Hill once mentioned that Lady Mount Temple had said that she could see herself in 47 different places in the bathroom! To which he said that he didn't know there were 47 different places in the bathroom (Verity, 2008). This provocative use of glass, however, was not as new as it might seem in a place such as this; historically the boudoir was often lined with mirrors. Although the use of glass and marble might seem a world away from the historic haptic boudoirs, I want to argue that this bathroom is an evolution of the boudoir, highlighting the influence of the feminine values of the upper classes.

The mirrored dressing table [37] is a case in point demonstrating how femininity was represented through visual and material culture within the home, and how it

was connected to the outside world. Lady Mount Temple it has been noted was dressed by Elsa Schiaparelli and ordered flowers from Constance Spry to match the dress she wore. She is also said to be the first woman in London to paint her nails red (Powers, 2011, p.64). Here Mount-Temple was able to prepare herself for the outside world whilst seated on an Empire-style stool in front of the dressing table. It had incorporated into its design a hidden tray top in which the gold-sprayed stain cushion could be stored after Lady Mount Temple had finished getting ready. It is important to note that make-up became a progressive technology during the interwar period used by the modern woman to create and fashion a public image. As Kathy Peiss (1996, p.322) stated: 'That making up was preparation for women's legitimate public performances ... implies a degree of agency, self-creation, and pleasure in self-representation'.

The luxuriousness of this dressing table and bathroom was in stark contrast to the dressing table designed by Le Corbusier at the villa Savoye [38]. Here, Le Corbusier created a mere basic form leaving no space it seems for Savoye to store her make-up or any other private possessions. Mrs Savoye was given a dressing table as a result of a translation through Le Corbusier's particular modernist mantra of health, hygiene and light. This result can perhaps also be linked to the fact that 'direct discussion about gender' as Nigel Whiteley (1997, p.200) has suggested: 'was minimal in modernist design discourse, but the implication was that 'the modern individual' was beyond significant gender differentiation in design needs'. There is little evidence of what role Mrs Savoye played in the development of this boudoir, but the fact that this was a holiday home might explain her willingness to accept a dressing room that could be considered Spartan when compared to the luxuriousness of Lady Mount Temple's dressing table.



Fig. 37 Dressing table, Bathroom, Gayfere House, Westminster, Oliver Hill, 1929-33, (1932, CL)



Fig. 38 Dressing table, Boudoir, Villa Savoye, Poissy, Le Corbusier 1929-30 (2006, Mary Ann Sullivan)

I also believe that such differences raise questions about the interaction and relationship between the female client and the male architect. The bathroom in Gayfere House is very suggestive of the influence of feminine values and I feel, therefore, deemed as 'otherist' because of this link with the 'feminine', and hence also the theatre of effeminacy. However, in common with the boudoir of the Villa Savoye, Hill's bathroom at Gayfere House (as a whole) shows a particular translation of the cult of health, hygiene and light into an interwar design. The glass, the hidden strips of light, and details such as the Lalique glass basin taps made to resemble motorcars, are certainly a modern touch, and are often described as having hard lines when compared to the more feminine touches, such as the blue opaline glass vessels holding white Madonna lilies and the handles of dragonfly wings in glass for the shower (Powers, 2011, pp. 65). However, I would like to argue that, although a room covered with glass such as this was according to the latest fashions, it also offered a unique intersection, as Anne Troutman (2005, pp.304-313) rightly pointed out, between eroticism, modernism and the feminine.

The fact that Hollywood film had a huge influence on the design of these bathrooms can be seen as another reason why Hill's architecture has been marginalised. American films were hugely popular and fashionable at the time and the popularity of these films played an influential part in disseminating alternative concepts of modernity. However, their adaptation of modernity was

not the one the doctrinaire continental European modernists of the twenties and thirties had in mind. If we take another look at the bathroom and boudoir in the Villa Savoye, we can see that this is an almost exact realisation of how Le Corbusier (2007, p. 172) conceptualised the modern bathroom. 'Demand a bathroom in full sunlight' he urged in *Vers une architecture* two years earlier. He continued saying that it should be 'one of the largest rooms in the apartment, the old drawing room for example. One wall that's all windows, opening if possible onto a terrace for sunbathing; porcelain sinks, bathtub, shower, exercise equipment'. Although this bathroom lacks the gymnastic appliances Le Corbusier was advocating to style the body beautiful, he was able to realise a bathroom that was equal in size to the bedroom. This athletic modernity was to do away with the bourgeois cult of coziness and bring in its place 'emancipation, rationality, social equality, and purity' (Van Herck, 2005, p.125).

This was decidedly NOT the vision of architectural modernism that the broadest segments of middle and upper class society were aspiring to. Instead what was desired was the glamorous bathroom as it was frequently portrayed within American films. The more typical cinematic bathroom, as Donald Albrecht (1986, p.122) has observed: 'was the scene of recreation that was more amorous than athletic'. An example Albrecht uses to exemplify such a bathroom was the one created by Cecil B. DeMille for the wealthy socialite in *Dynamite* (1929). Her bath was gilt lined with languid curves meant to be replicating the chaise longue whilst the front was made out of glass and the whole put on a marble platform with symmetrical pilasters to make it the focal point of the bathroom. The room was completed by textured rugs and towels in black and white geometric patterns [39]. The use of neo-classical details such as the swags and pilasters were very much loved by the Hollywood film makers in spite of being rejected by modernist architects, as being ill suited to the twentieth century (Albrecht, 1986, pp.122-123).



Fig. 39 Kay Johnson in the bathroom for *Dynamite*, Cecil B. De Mille, 1929 (2005, moviediva)

Such elements, however, were brilliantly used by Hill in his design of the bathroom in North House built for Mrs Hudson (the American wife of a British Member of Parliament), which contained a luxurious mix of classical details with expensive materials and furnishings. Hill used Edward Bawden's seaweed wallpaper, as Holland (2011, p.216) rightly pointed out, to suggest an underwater theme [40]. The oval bath, which was fluted and flared, was lined with silver mosaics and surrounded by a bevelled grey mirror as if to mimic quicksilver.



Fig. 40 Bathroom, North House, Westminster, Oliver Hill, 1929 – 33, (1931, CL)



Fig. 41 Bathroom, Middleton park, Middleton Stoney, Edwin and Robert Lutyens, 1938 (1936, CL)

This fluted pattern can be seen as a reference to the scallop motif and to complete the underwater theme. The use of scallop shells was not a one off. It could be seen on the silver screen in films such as *Topaze* (1933) as well as in real life as in the bathroom for Virginia Cherrill at Middleton Park where Lutyens placed an inverted scallop shell underneath the sink [41]. As has been pointed out by Albrecht Donald, the use of inverted scallop shells might refer to Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*. From a more traditional interpretation of the nostalgic, such symbolism might also be perceived as a longing for a return to an authentic point of origin, this point being the woman as the object of nostalgic desire. Hence, the woman becoming the other of history against which modern identity is defined as Susan Stewart (1984, pp.23) pointed out: 'The prevailing motif of nostalgia is the erasure of the gap between nature and culture, and hence a return to the utopia of biology and symbol united within the walled city of the maternal'. However, if we use nostalgia, as mentioned before, in a more critical way we can interpret the possible reference to the *Venus of Botticelli* in a more positive light.

In the references to nature that Hill uses in Mrs Hudson's bathroom he exploits his own interest in nature and the body. Unlike the rational ideal of beauty that

was upheld by many of the doctrinaire modernists, Hill stood for a more voluptuous and wholesome interpretation of the female body. He lamented that 'women have been the uncomplaining victims of fashion dictators [...] and that the sheep like following of the flock should have such disastrous results on their appearance.' (Hill, no date, HiO 92, p.60). This more nostalgic aesthetic is exhibited in sensuous bathrooms such as this one can be contrasted with Paul Nash's bathroom for Tilly Losh which adhered more closely to the Bauhaus ideal and therefore fell in line with a more rationalised character of modernity **[42-43]**.

It is interesting to note that, although these feminized interiors spaces were hugely popular at the time, they were (perhaps not unsurprisingly) undervalued by many modern architects, who saw such domestic interiors as merely sentimental and nostalgic. As Cheryl Buckley (2002, p.84) states:

Femininity came under intense scrutiny between the wars. On the one hand, it signified a peaceful, alternative way forward following the ultimate masculine folly of war. On the other hand, discussions around femininity raised anxieties about woman's roles as wives and mothers, and the price to be paid for their economic and personal independence, as well as foregrounding a host of issues about women's sexuality, identity and their relationships with men and with each other.

Even Sir Charles Reilly (1930, p.438), a friend of Hill's, ended an article on Gayfere House wishing that the architect 'would soon cease to give up so much of his time to these ephemeral things, and tackle more of the formal architecture of the streets, such as banks and insurance offices instead of so many ladies' bathrooms and boudoirs in Mayfair'. Reilly's derogatory use of the words 'ephemeral' and 'ladies' is particularly revealing, as these terms are conventionally linked with the 'feminine', with fashion and the decorative, and by implication marked by a debilitating notion of nostalgia. As deployed by Reilly in connection to the 'masculine' 'public' spaces and architecture of the office and the bank, Hill's approach would seem to suggest that he subscribed to an alternative trope of modernism, in which personal taste set standards above the usual and the ordinary. This is precisely what Hill claimed that he had done in Gayfere House; namely he had created a portrait of Lady Mount Temple in

glass, marble and steel that translated her needs and her desires (Hill, 1931, HiO 34/2 (2/2), RIBA). What he had produced were interior spaces in which, as a modern women, she could perform her own modernity and play out her thoroughly contemporary lifestyle.



Fig. 42-43 Tilly Losch's Bathroom, 35 Wimpole Street, Paul Nash, 1932 (1932, RIBA)

Chapter Four

Locating Exhibition Design as a means of marketing architectural modernism in inter-war Britain.

‘Man’s rapid progress is based on words, we think in words, our minds string words like beads ... Pictures, visions, memories of things seen are neglected. Children see the visions more than grown-ups. We teach them the craft of word-spinning. The damage is done, we should be teaching them the art of seeing’
(Pick, 1922, cited in Barman, 1979, pp.168-169)

Throughout the interwar period many dialects of modernist visual languages were developed, and all of them are important to our understanding of how people approached and negotiated modernity often mediated by the technologies of photography, film and design. Of particular relevance to this account is the discourse that emphasised *seeing*, or in other words, the *visual*. The negotiation of modernity through the visual and people’s own senses of being ‘modern’ was to become one of the key features characterising the artistic and architectural output of several key figures - such as Hill - in the years of the economic depression from c. 1930 -1933. Thus the artistic output of Hill can be seen as a significant contribution toward establishing visual design on a par with the literary arts (Saler, 2001, p.VIII)²².

The rapidly expanding, technologically sophisticated forms of inter-war mass media such as film, radio, photography and the illustrated press have attracted considerable critical attention in relation to the dissemination of knowledge about modern architecture in inter-war Britain. However, exhibition design, although not a mass medium in the strictest sense of the word, has attracted far less attention, despite the fact it brought many and various forms of modernist design into the lives of large sections of the British public, and the fact that it was increasingly used to gauge public response to such innovative languages.

²² Saler (2001, p.VIII) goes on to say: ‘This is all the more interesting as, since the Reformation, Britain started to privilege the word over the image’.

However much displaying things was always an age-old part of our culture it certainly became very important in the early twentieth century. Not only did exhibitions act as a shop front for the latest architectural design and thinking, they also helped the organisers to influence their visitors and wider public opinion.

'The act of exhibiting', as it is often defined, became an art, be it in exhibitions, expositions, festivals or fairs. It was seen as a new medium of communication that could be experimented with. It is therefore not surprising that most innovative exhibition designs were first seen by the public during the twenties and the thirties. People like Frederick Kiesler, Herbert Bayer and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy devised new forms of display which, as Mary Anne Staniszewski (2001, p.27) has pointed out, not only 'revolutionised the rigid constraints of traditional exhibition conventions' but they 'were all intended to reject idealist aesthetics and cultural autonomy and to treat an exhibition as a historically bound experience whose meaning is shaped by its reception'.

However, our understanding of exhibiting as a medium of communication should not only be interpreted through its modes of display, it should also be analysed through the objects on display. Exhibitions always have a message to convey and modern design was to become the perfect vehicle for communicating this message. Indeed, I agree with Penny Sparke (2004, p.4) in her introduction to twentieth century design and culture when she 'credits design with having a formative function within society and culture, believing that, through its visual and material language and the ideological values and messages it carries within it, it can communicate complex messages'.

The consumption of modern design was also complex and complicated and we need to be careful in analysing consumption solely in relation to production. The sophistication of the consumer (and shifts in consumer demand) actively contributed to the development of this effective visual modernism. Moreover underlying the appeals of consumerism, there were other issues such as pleasure, taste, aesthetics, lifestyle, gender and individuality²³. I will argue that this modernist practice is shaped by a variety of factors that should not be viewed alongside modernity as either/or but rather as key integral components

²³ For a more detailed analysis of these themes in relation to gender and sociology see Felski (1995) and Campbell (2005).

of modernist practice in design and architecture during the interwar period in Britain.

Scholars such as Paul Greenhalgh (1988) have put the 1851 Great Exhibition forward as the wakeup call for Britain to reform its design culture in order to produce goods that would stand up to its foreign competitors. However, as Lara Kriegel (2007) and Deborah Cohen (2006, p.14) have pointed out, design reform was an issue for Victorians well before the Crystal Palace exhibition. They point out that the poor taste in design was already a point on the parliamentary agenda two decades before the 1851 exhibition with members of Parliament such as James Morrison pointing out that the lamentable state of British design was due to the lack of drawing schools, museum culture, and copyright protection (Kriegel, 2007, p.2). The Victoria and Albert Museum (together with its educational design institute) would be the starting point of a movement towards elevating the level of design in manufacture which would find its way into the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society²⁴.

Throughout the early nineteenth century several exhibitions were held in order to reinforce the attempts to improve design. The biggest event was the International Exhibition of Art and Industry in Hyde Park of 1851. This exhibition proved to be a public hit. It showed that Britain was strong when it came to industrial progress but still lagging behind when it came to design. It is all too easy to dismiss the Great Exhibition as a monstrous failure. It played, however, a crucial part in British design reform as it concluded that priorities needed to change towards educating the consumer in order to improve Victorian design, instead of placing all the attention on production. The education of the consumer would become a mantra well into the 1930s and hence proves the importance of the marketplace in any investigation of British exhibition design, as Lara Kriegel (2007, p. 8) states 'Because nineteenth century design reform in Britain operated at the crossroad of aesthetics and economics, and at the interstices of production and pleasure, it offers an intriguing and fruitful opportunity to engage with market culture'.

²⁴ For a detailed analysis of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society see Hart (2001)

This shift in focus of design reform through exhibitions would be fine-tuned by the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society and eventually, as I will argue, play a significant role in the developing career of Oliver Hill as exhibition designer.

The 'Arts and Crafts movement' is often portrayed as a group of socialist and utopian thinkers. It is, however, the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society (ACES) with its basis in the commercial world that is of interest for this particular narrative; more particularly the ACES' effort as demonstrated through their exhibition catalogues. Not only, as Imogen Hart (2010, p.153) has pointed out, did the catalogue acknowledge 'each individual contributor's name. Wherever possible, the designer, the executants and the exhibitor were identified, a move that was intended to bring the status of the craftsperson in line with that of fine artists', a strategy which would prove successful in bringing customers in looking for articles by famous names. The ACES also proved influential in changing their policy in regards to the selling of goods as by 1893 'the secretary would take the purchaser's details and accept a 25 per cent deposit' (Hart, 2010, p.166). By acknowledging the sale of signed goods, the ACES understood the role the consumer had in relation to the producer. This interaction with the marketplace and consumerism, I argue, can be seen as the continuing thread throughout Hill's career during the interwar period.

The importance of commercial marketing mixed with national prestige and fine art became an important aspect of international exhibition culture after 1851 and proved to be hugely popular with the public. Although, this can be seen as marking out progress in the standards of taste and improving the relationship between art and industry, the sense of dissatisfaction would continue within responses to the series of international industrial exhibitions that followed. The exhibitions that were staged between 1900 and WWI were dismissed as "old fashioned" and as exhibiting cultural isolation. The 1900 British pavilion at the Paris exhibition has been described by Greenhalgh (1988, p.122) as an architectural example of a 'period that was marked by a widespread insistence that English power derived not from the success of industry but from innate English characteristics forged in pre-Enlightenment days'. This viewpoint dismisses the broad international impact of the Arts and Crafts and its legacies. Using the Arts and Crafts for the interior of the pavilion should not be dismissed as out of touch but as rather signalling the importance that Arts and Crafts

thinking played for the American, Imperial and Eastern European intelligentsia. The first part of the twentieth century saw an active dissemination of Arts and Crafts texts in Scandinavia, Russia and Eastern Europe therefore as Andrew Stephenson (2010) has pointed out, the journals who translated these texts into German:

[...] were significant in promoting common British, Austrian and German interests in the Arts and Crafts movement and in promulgating a distinctive, shared modernism in architecture, design, and the decorative arts, notably through the advocacy of German writers such as Muthesius and Meier-Graefe. (Stephenson, 2010, p.263)

This interaction between Britain and these various corners of the world meant that their thinking and its interpretations had an impact on its international consumers; one that was especially prevalent within the empire as it can be argued that the British Empire meant that the UK had privileged and protected access to imperial markets. So instead perhaps of seeing British pavilions as 'projecting an image of the indigenous English populations' (Greenhalgh, 1988, p.123), it would be more fruitful to situate them within a framework of "Edwardian Cosmopolitanism" during which:

[...] the legacies of the English Arts and Crafts ideology, with the movements desire to improve decorative taste, engage new materials, and reform art education, had influenced aesthetic debates and design reforms across continental Europe, North America, and throughout the British Empire. (Stephenson, 2010, p.264)

Hill's first steps into the world of exhibition design came in 1924 when he was given the opportunity by Sir Lawrence Weaver²⁵ to design the pottery section at the British Empire exhibition, which included a triumphal arch with Wedgwood motifs. The fact that this exhibition doesn't play a significant role in Hill's archival material does not make this any less important in evaluating Hill's position on the direction design should follow. Firstly, the fact that Weaver chose Hill for this

²⁵ Sir Lawrence Weaver (1876 – 1930): Director of the British exhibits at the British Empire Exhibition and chair of the DIA 1926-1928.

section can be interpreted as a belief in Hill's ability to make a difference to the 'Exhibition and the Arts of Display', and Weaver's attempt towards a coherent philosophy of exhibition making was published in *Country Life*. The purpose of the exhibition, Weaver stated was: 'to enlarge trade and increase prosperity' and in order to achieve this, artistic quality in display was essential. He believed that the gap between Arts and Commerce was fatal to good exhibition design, and stressed that there was 'no kind of art which is too good to be used in the service of industry and commerce'. (Weaver, 1925 cited in Suga, 2006, p.141)

Secondly, displaying pottery by Wedgwood and William Moorcroft highlights a link in ideology with the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. Moorcroft, more particularly, was known to personalise each piece of pottery with his own signature. Objects such as these can be interpreted as luxury objects whilst at the same time being fashionable. Not only were displays such as this pottery section part of an overall desire to make the exhibition seem like an escapist retreat from post war gloom, they were also the ideal opportunity for people to purchase reproducible objects which, in the usual Arts and Crafts vein, would normally be expensive.

The signed art objects that Hill displayed in the exhibitions he designed can also be seen as a response to the fear of a particular elite audience that valued individualism over the anonymity inherent in mass production and hence signalled an opposition to commercialism. The fact that these objects were signed went a long way in bringing back the individualism that was easily lost in mass production. The identification that consumers developed through identification with a commodity associated with a named designer that possessed good taste and social standing – as Sparke asserted – would become increasingly important during the interwar period. She rightly goes on to say that this kind of identification:

also recalled the individualism of custom-made artefacts, which had guaranteed the upper classes their social status in the years before industrialisation and the rupture between production and consumption. (Sparke, 2004, p.69)

This kind of individualism is certainly a key factor in Hill's designs, be it exhibition designs or interior designs; be they pre- or post- depression. In

relation to two advertisements that were to appear in *Country Life* for the promotion of the Frinton Park Estate, Hill wrote to the editor stating that: '[...] I believe that the simple statement of the name of the architect is more direct than any superlative reference to an undisclosed personality' (Hill, 1935a, HiO 12/2 (1), RIBA)

The understanding of the fact that names sell can be seen as the deployment of a marketing strategy that emphasises the relationship between the supplier and customer. This marketing strategy also goes a long way to explaining why the ACES and designers like Hill were criticised for not providing objects for the masses and instead pitching goods at the rich upper middle classes and upper class liberal consumers. This approach can be seen as contradictory to the wider social issues relating to the socialist principles of Morris and Ruskin (and therefore dismissed as secondary). They were however widely adhered to not only by the ACES, but also by many consumers during the interwar period (Harrod, 1999, p.123).

These contradictory elements, I believe, are key ingredients of the artistic debates of the period. It is within this context that the work of Oliver Hill as an exhibition designer should be contextualised and interpreted. Rondo, a private decorating company set up by Hill in 1930, proves to be a case in point, showing how he positioned himself between some of the more extreme ideas on either side of the spectrum of the Arts and Crafts movement. Modern Lighting and Decorations Ltd. – as the company was first called – was pitched by Hill as follows:

Briefly, the aims and objects of the venture will be to assemble, display, and market only the best in the modern arts that come within the scope of decoration.

To show modernist interiors, complete with examples of the best modern furniture, textiles, lighting, heating, decorative painting, and sculpture. To collect and show in suitable environment, the best work of this kind that had been done on the continent and in this country, and to encourage the “ensemblier” system that works so well in France, where architect, painter, sculptor, textile and furniture designers,

work sympathetically together, to produce individual and harmonious results (Hill, 1930)

Hill who had already promoted this idea for a long time (as mentioned in a letter to the muralist Clara Fargo Thomas), believed that a modern *gallery* was needed to 'display and market only modern things, paintings and sculpture' (Hill, 1929). His brainchild received financial backing from Sir and Lady Egerton Hamond-Graeme (it was hoped that they, together with Sir Arthur Leatham and Mr Noel Hammersley, would become directors) and was to find life in premises he found on 14 Grosvenor Street, Mayfair, London.

The choice of premises can be seen as quite significant. Throughout the interwar period numerous showrooms and workshops were set up in order to showcase the latest crafts, as craft was deemed to be good design by the DIA and the British Institute of Industrial Art (Harrod, 1999, p.127). Many of these galleries (as *RONDO* would be) were based around Mayfair or the Oxford Street area. Friends and colleagues of Hill were located here, such as Marion Dorn with her outlet in Lancashire Court off New Bond Street (Marion Dorn, Ltd., 1934), and Prudence Maufe, as early as 1917, who ran the Mansard Gallery at Heal's in the vein of Hill's idea to show a mix of art, craft and design. These locations show that these craft societies were depended on the wealth of the middle-upper and upper classes who, unlike the lower classes, enjoyed a rise in their standard of living (Harrod, 1999, p.131). It is, however, important to note that Hill set up 14 Grosvenor Street as a 'gallery' and not a 'shop'. A gallery provided Hill with a permanent location where he could showcase 'all that is newest and most up-to-date in modern interior; the latest development in indirect lighting; modern textiles and especially designed modern furniture and colour schemes' (Hill, 1930a, HiO 37/1, RIBA). In order to display *RONDO*'s avant-garde tastes, the premises were to be gutted and reconstructed in glass and steel. This rebuilding of the inside would seem to pose a contradiction, as the modern interior would have been at odds with the building's grey brick Italianate front. However, this choice of premises can be interpreted as a visualisation of *RONDO*'s open-mindedness towards classical design, or more broadly speaking, to establish a history in connection with its own tastes. Such a connection had also been made previously by Morris & Co's shop front on Oxford Street [44], which provided costumers with Arts and Crafts objects

behind a classical exterior, indicating, as Hart points out, Morris' tolerance for the classical style (Hart, 2010, p.129).



Fig. 44 Morris & Co., 449 Oxford Street, London c.1880. [online]

For reasons unknown, the above premises could not be secured and Hill's gallery was never to be realised. Although impossible to speculate on the possible success of the gallery, I would like to point out that RONDO might have had a better fighting chance than most other galleries started at the time. Most of these proved to have short lived existences due to their highly individual avant- garde tastes and more importantly, due to their resistance towards commercial retailing. Most of these galleries also exhibited goods without responding to consumer demand, which made ventures such as these suffer from high rental and running costs that would soon lead them into trouble. Nevertheless, RONDO, although running a gallery, was set up as a company and hence had a steady commercial footing. The company was formed with a nominal capital of £35,000 consisting of 35,000 shares of £1 each, there being no debentures, preference or founder shares so that the holders of the ordinary shares would be entitled to receive the whole of the profits earned. This was in line with the objectives of the company being: 'to prove to the public that decorative art is not dead in England; that on the contrary it is very much alive, and that a beautiful and harmonious interior with well designed and well made furniture can be brought within the reach of people of moderate means' (Hill,

1930a, HiO 37/1, RIBA). The company's ambition did not stop at the private home. It also claimed to be: 'available for decoration and furnishing in exclusive modern style of hotels, restaurants and ships' and in order to keep overhead expenses to a minimum, RONDO would not carry out the work but 'advise and submit estimates and then to sub-contract' (Hill, 1930a, HiO 37/1, RIBA)²⁶. The positioning of this venture between a gallery with primarily aesthetic interests and a more commercial venture would have perhaps proven more successful than the *Omega workshops* due to its lack of commercial viability (Stephenson, 2011, p.172).

The only display Hill was able to set up during *RONDO's* short existence was 'Ariadne's bath (1930-32)' a set design for the Ideal Home exhibition. His display was part of the 'Pavilion of Light' organised by the *Daily Mail* and the General Electric Co. According to the leaflet accompanying the exhibit, Rondo sought to 'express the epitome of bath... the essential bathiness of bathroom' (Hill, 1930-1932a, HiO 47/4 (1/2), RIBA). It was called Ariadne's bath as a pleasant classical allusion to the sunlight and warmth of the South. The bath was faced with fluted Botticino marble whilst the walls surrounding the bath were made of onyx. The bath was backed with golden mirror glass whilst the woodwork of the floor was made of Syrian Sycamore. Artificial water, in the shape of glass rods, came out of a lead fountain mask made by Phoebe Stabler. This luxurious design went hand in hand with Hill's zest for dramatic effect. The arrangement of mirrors served as a general diffusion of golden light that was to be reflected and multiplied. Lance Sieveking, who wrote the text for a publicity leaflet that was to be distributed at the stand, went on to say: 'It is interesting to think that while you spend half your life in bed in a state of unconsciousness, you spend every year approximately fifteen days in your bathroom, in a highly conscious condition. How carefully then should its character be considered!' (Hill, 1930-1932a, HiO 47/4 (1/2), RIBA)

Luxury and dramatic effect were also to be found in the display's furnishings. Hill put in a glass peacock, dumb-bells, skipping rope, cushions and vases of lilies. Perhaps even more eye catching than its furnishings, was Hill's use of live

²⁶ Wells Coates offered his services as consultant and would be willing to draw up plans, prepare estimates and supervising the construction of interiors and furniture or (as he mentioned) he would be able to send Hill as selected range of actual furniture models etc. which would be for sale on commission through RONDO (Hill, 1930b, HiO 37/1, RIBA)

models [45]. The *Architectural Review* photographed two nude models in soft focus (they were dressed in Greek tunics for the public), whilst the *Daily Mirror* photograph showed a live baby leopard²⁷. Hill went even so far as to ask a theatre managers' agent for a 'coloured boy' as a model to pose for publicity photographs. Although the latter is now read as politically incorrect the contemporary audience at which these publicity photographs were aimed would have read this in the same way as they would have interpreted the posters of the Empire Marketing Board, i.e. exotic.



Fig. 45 'Ariadne's Bath', Ideal Home exhibition, 1930 (n.d. Architectural Press)

Against the other designs of the 'Pavilion of Light' designed by Raymond McGrath and Oliver Bernard, Hill's bathroom was described by one newspaper as the 'piece de resistance' as it seems to have been designed for a beautiful princess or a very famous film star: it is luxury itself and every detail is designed with precision and charm. Hill's focus on luxury for this display was thought extravagant by the Hamond Greame's, who financed his display, as they claimed that Hill took all the credit and left them to pay all the bills²⁸.

Although the spats that resulted from RONDO's display, as well as its short lived life, can easily be used to demonstrate that Hill was merely a fashionable society figure, I would argue that RONDO should be interpreted as influenced by the exhibition design at the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industrielles Modernes* of 1925. It was at this exhibition (visited by Hill) that for

²⁷ This image was published in the *Daily Mirror* on 8th April 1930 but was unable to be located in the *Daily Mirror* photograph archives. A copy of the original page has been added to this thesis as appendix A

²⁸ This comment referred to Hill charging several of the display items to Lady Hammond Greame's account at Fortnum and Mason. Hill replied by saying that he thought: 'these comments were completely unwarranted, ungracious and unworthy as Sir Egerton Hamond Greame agreed to all the items in the shops' (Hill, 1930-1932b, HiO 47/4 (2/2), RIBA).

the first time the visitor was confronted with ‘the presentation of objects in the context in which they were to be consumed (Dell, 1999, p.311). Indeed, this international exhibition was made up of ‘the display of coordinated ensembles’ and must have inspired Hill, as he was an avid believer in the *ensemblier* system. Sievekings’ later publicity leaflet confirmed this indebtedness stating that:

The following people are concerned with the muddle in most houses: The architect, the painter, the furniture designer, the textile manufacturer, the sculptor and designer of the “electric fittings”.... The reason for the muddle is that none of these people ever meet; nor does their work, until it finds itself in the quarrelsome confusion of the ordinary room. Rondo aims at avoiding this. Following the “ensemblier” system (which works so well in France) Rondo will show at 14 Grosvenor Street, W1, modern interiors, in which are displayed examples of the best modern furniture, textiles, decorative painting and sculpture, in conjunction with the latest developments in lighting, heating and ventilation. Rondo feels that by collecting and showing these things harmoniously together in suitable settings, the client will at last be enabled to achieve unity and personality in utili-decorative schemes (Hill, 1930-32a, HiO 47/4 (1/2), RIBA, London)

Indeed, the *ensemblier* system as it was used in France enabled the consumer to see the goods in the context of domestic life, instead of the usual context of production. But this was not the only positive aspect of the ensemble approach. The *ensembliers* worked according to the fashions of the marketplace (Dell, 1999, p.316)²⁹. What strikes me as particularly important in this context is that the manufacturers did not work with artists to modernise their work ready for mass production. Rather, as Simon Dell (1999, p.316) has pointed out: ‘The manufacturers now wished simply to secure the upper end of the market, and thus became engaged with designs of a modern appearance rather than with a renewal of production methods’. It was believed that only the upper classes

²⁹ This was deemed as negative before WWI only to be praised as positive after the war in the context of manufacturers embracing modern forms.

were open to the new designs that were on offer and, perhaps most importantly, able to buy them. As Dell (1999) goes on to say: 'an emphasis was now placed on the simplicity of modern designs that might appeal to an elite eschewing mere ostentation. This implied a redefinition of the ensemble system to one that was no longer explicitly shaped by the *ensemblier* but rather by the consumer's identity and 'assisted by the redefinition of fashion in the post-war period' (Dell, 1999, pp.316 - 317).

So, the overall resistance to the mass market and the renewal of production methods that was the underlying theme of the Art Deco exhibition of 1925 and the *ensemblier* system was not an attitude to be found in the organisation of this exhibition alone. The interest in mass produced goods and luxurious handcraft went hand in hand during the interwar period. Such a cultural schizophrenia, as Harrod (1999, p.124) mentions, is symptomatic of an anti-industrial spirit that was to be found throughout the middle and upper class society and was in part a legacy of the Arts and Crafts ethic.

Consequently, RONDO should not be seen as a mere footnote in Hill's career but rather as an example of the difficulties artists, architects and designers faced in successfully marrying art with industry. Hill's venture, one could argue, can be interpreted in broader terms as mirroring the position that Britain took midway between France and the United States. France, by using the '*ensemblier*' way of display focussed more on an aesthetic brand of modernism, whilst the United States were concentrating on developing modern merchandising that was more attractive to the younger consumer, who were usually purchasers of moderate means. Although Hill's designs, such as these for RONDO, are easily dismissed as merely extravagant, it needs to be emphasised that such an evaluation completely dismisses Hill's understanding of the fashionability of the market and its essential role within his designs. Hill's exploitation of Britain's distinctive position negotiating aesthetic, national and commercial concerns becomes clearer when taking a closer look at the British role in the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industrielles Modernes*, the legacies of the Paris exhibition, and the work Hill undertook for the Dorland Hall exhibition of 1933.

The influence of the international exhibition of 1925 in Paris cannot be understood only through the shift in definition towards the *ensemblier* since it

also highlighted a peak in dissatisfaction with post-war British design. The British contribution to the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industrielles Modernes* was deemed old fashioned, dull, aloof and lacking in any spirit of adventure. It was believed that Britain was not only out of touch with the modern post-war consumer's lifestyle (Great Britain. Commercial relations and export department, 1927, p.37) but that Britain also displayed a reticence to foreign (i.e. Continental) influences. As Sir H. Llewellyn Smith pointed out in his introductory survey of the 1925 exhibition:

Our own position, so far as disclosed by the British Exhibits, and still more by the abstention of leading British manufacturers and craftsmen from exhibiting, was one of continued aloofness from foreign influences and apparent indifference to foreign art movements. It is evident not only that this country has been comparatively immune from the direct operation of the post-war forces which have so powerfully affected Continental Europe, but also that the cross-influences of recent art movements arising in Europe have found but a relatively slight response in this country (Great Britain. Commercial relations and export department, 1927, p.31)

This lack of receptivity was also displayed in the house of nations at the *International Press exhibition* in Cologne in 1928 where, in comparison to 1925, many exhibits embraced mass production. The English Pavilion, as Jeremy Anysley (1994, p.19) showed, was organised to illustrate the tradition of the "English" art of printing and the newspaper trades where designs for a mechanical setting used typefaces such as Baskerville and Calson. One reviewer described England as 'pious, aristocratic, historically reverent, at peace in its confidence; so it was and so it will be to all eternity... (Anysley, 1994, p.20). This was not the image the Board of Overseas Trade or the government as a whole wanted to portray as a national image. As Llewellyn Smith (Great Britain. Commercial relations and export department, 1927, p.38) pondered 'how far again is the British reluctance to break with past practice a sign of vigorous persistence of living tradition, or how far is it the mere clinging of a parasitic plant which has lost the power of independent growth and life?'

Action needed to be taken if design standards were to be improved in line with the demands for market fashions. Hill's work as architect, or perhaps more accurately as 'curator of display' for the Dorland Hall exhibition in 1933, would prove hugely successful as this exhibition pitched itself as a moderate educator situated between the more hard lined aesthetic, commercial and national positions that were encountered or exhibited in previous international displays. The education of the consumer approached within a commercial context, I argue, should be seen as the underlying context against which Hill's designs should be interpreted.

Elevating taste through consumerism has always been a daunting task. As early as 1835/36, the government set up a select committee on Arts and Manufacturers in order to debate art and design education. It is therefore wrong to claim that an interest in industrial design and the notion of a 'national taste' only emerged in Britain in the years following the economic depression of 1930. An important aspect that was insisted on by this select committee was that 'national taste' was to be achieved through the closer involvement with the national schools of design, museums and exhibitions (Romans, 2005, p.51). Equally important was that this committee, as outlined by Mervyn Romans (2005, p.52), linked taste with consumerism, morality and manufacturing as: "Taste was an all-embracing term that took in moral imperatives, civic behaviour, good judgement in consumer choices, and the promotion of economic interests". These conclusions certainly found sympathy in the government and among privately organised bodies that were set up in the early twentieth century to pursue such policies.

One such body was the *Design and Industries Association* (DIA) founded in 1915. The organisation was modelled on the *Deutscher Werkbund* and wanted to rekindle closer links between the designer and the producer, and hence between art and industry by incorporating the 'machine'. This resulted in the DIA's mantra: 'fitness for purpose'. It is important to note that influential exhibitions set up by the Werkbund, such as the one at Cologne in 1914, were visited by the founding members of the DIA (such as Ambrose Heal and Frank Pick) and proved to be the boost they needed in their campaign for design reform.

As Hill was never a member of the DIA, it can be argued that the association and their ideas were of little importance to him. This viewpoint completely ignores the fact that several of the DIA members such as Ambrose Heal, Lawrence Weaver, Raymond McGrath, Wells Coates and Frank Pick knew Hill, and that they had worked together. His non-membership could be attributed to the fact that he was exploring Germany and Scandinavia with the AA at the same time that the DIA was visiting these places³⁰. Nevertheless, the DIA's 'highly developed command of the techniques of communication and persuasion, as Elizabeth Darling (2007, pp.14-15) has pointed out, proved to be an all encompassing factor in translating their 'fitness for purpose' credo into an everyday language that would be understood by consumer, manufacturer and government alike. Hill's correspondence with Prudence Maufe, who ran the Mansard Gallery in Heal's (a shop which was to become a showcase for the DIA), shows that Hill must have approved of the DIA's principles aimed at elevating 'taste' through exhibitions, their catalogues and associated lectures. The fact that Ambrose Heal ran his furniture design department as a business must also have proved influential for Hill in his desire to link good design with consumerism³¹.



Fig. 46-47 Swedish Exhibition of Industrial Art, Dorland Hall, London 1931 (1931, Dell & Wainwright / RIBA Library Photographs Collection)

The importance and necessity of exhibition design in the attempt to improve taste and design came to a head with the 'Swedish Exhibition of Industrial Art'

³⁰ Also mentioned Holland, J. (2011).

³¹ For a historic overview of Heal's see S. Goodden (1984).

held at the Dorland Hall in 1931 [46-47]. As Noel Carrington (1976, p.136) described it: 'There was something like indignation in the world of business that the Swedes should steal the limelight'. This exhibition proved once again that a closer unity between art and industry would improve British manufacturing. Although Carrington (1976, p.137) goes on to say that: 'even the government felt something should be done and therefore adopted the usual course of appointing a Committee', it would be this committee (under Lord Gorell) and its report which would prove one of the key influential factors in setting up the first Dorland Hall exhibition in 1933.

It was the UK Board of Trade who appointed the Committee on Art and Industry led by Lord Gorell to discuss the production and exhibition of articles of good design and everyday use. The committee held thirteen meetings from 21st July 1932 onwards. The fact that these meetings were instigated almost exactly a month after the conclusion of the Swedish Exhibition of Industrial Art in London (March 17 – April 22) shows that the government also felt the need for action. The Committee was made up of figures such as Roger Fry (artist, art critic and member of the Bloomsbury group), Margaret Bulley (writer and art historian), Major A.A. Longden, Howard Robertson, Sir H. Llewellyn Smith, Professor E.W. Tristram and Clough William-Ellis. They were asked to investigate and advise on (Great Britain. Department of trade (1932) *Art and Industry (The Gorell Report)*, H.M.S.O, p. 4.):

- The desirability of forming in London a standing exhibition of articles of everyday use and good design of current manufacture, and of forming temporary exhibitions of the same kind
- The desirability of organizing local or travelling exhibitions of the same kind both at home and abroad
- The constitution of the central body which should be charged with the work of co-ordinating the above activities
- The amount of expenditure involved and the sources from which it should be provided.

Readers of the subsequent Gorell report can follow a historical narrative on how exhibitions had been used in Britain to promote better design. The narrative starts with the establishment of a School of Design in 1841 at Somerset House

coinciding with three exhibitions organised by the Royal Society of Arts followed by the Great Exhibition of 1851. It is important to note that the report acknowledges the importance of the Victoria and Albert Museum set up in 1899. This museum's travelling exhibitions were deemed especially crucial in order to 'educate public taste outside London' (Great Britain. Department of trade (1932) *Art and Industry (The Gorell Report)*, H.M.S.O, p. 24.). The Victoria and Albert Museum would also play a crucial role in eventually absorbing successful exhibition items within the national collections. The next stop on this historical narrative was the formation of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1887 concluding with the establishment of the DIA in 1915. Although the remit of the committee was set out in the above mentioned four points, it clearly didn't limit itself to these aims as several observations were made on the standards of the exhibits and how they were displayed. As paragraph 76 explains (Great Britain. Department of trade (1932) *Art and Industry (The Gorell Report)*, H.M.S.O, pp.32-33.):

[...] special attention must be devoted to methods of display to secure that the most favourable impression should be created on visitors; this applies to general layout and planning, as well as to arrangement of separate items of each exhibit. We lay particular stress upon this side of exhibition work

Overall, the report envisioned exhibitions that would (Great Britain. Department of trade (1932) *Art and Industry (The Gorell Report)*, H.M.S.O, p. 18-19.): 'serve a specially valuable purpose, in view of their appeal to the public and their consequent influence upon the discriminating purchaser. A comprehensive exhibition scheme will stimulate both supply and demand, with resulting profit to the whole country'. The Gorell Committee (Great Britain. Department of trade (1932) *Art and Industry (The Gorell Report)*, H.M.S.O, pp.27-28) suggested (together with setting up a new design body which would result in the Council for Art and Industry being established in 1934) renting a building somewhere in the West End for the display of an exhibition of industrial art of which, it was calculated, would cost to £10 000.

The committee's proposals regarding a permanent exhibition and the financing of this new design body were rejected by the government. Instead, temporary

exhibitions were suggested (Powers, 1989, p.29). It seems that Parliament was content to follow the cautious voice of the Design and Industries Association who believed in 'patient progress' (Pevsner, 1968, cited in Kinross, 1988, p.36). Whilst not everybody agreed with the report's findings, there were, however, individuals, such as Hill, who took the report as their 'guide and inspiration' in their battle to improve British design through education (Harrod, 1999, p.120).³²

Hill believed in the necessity of working together with museums stating that: 'I have for long urged the necessity for exhibiting contemporary design in our museums, but there is no support so far' (Hill, 1934, HiO 30/3 (1/2), RIBA). He also proposed to establish a centre where the best modern British furniture and textiles would be on permanent display at 74 South Audley Street, London.³³

Here Hill (1933-34, HiO 49/8, RIBA) wanted to:

- To form a guild of artists who will apply themselves to industrial design, and to link up with designers who, in co operation will produce goods worthy of a place in the collection
- The whole plan comprise everything to do with home decoration besides furniture and textiles, carpets, pottery, glass, metalwork, electrical fittings, contemporary fresco painting and sculpture
- A carefully defined policy to be adopted and strictly adhered to

This proposal was never realised (perhaps due to the failure of securing a lease on the above premises) (Hill, 1933). It is interesting to note that these premises were, as with RONDO, located in Mayfair, which again illustrates that Hill was aiming his displays at the upper end of the market. It is also important to note that, unlike RONDO's Grosvenor Street premises, Hill not only wanted to gut these premises but he also proposed a new marble facade for the pilastered Edwardian stone front (Hill, 1930c, HiO 36/3, RIBA). This move which suggests a shift in his attitude towards modernism during the thirties, most likely influenced by his trips to Germany, Austria, Sweden and Denmark led by Frank Yerbury with the AA during the late twenties and early thirties.

³² Herbert Read saw the report as "essentially flawed in its conception of the artist as external to industry" (Kinross, 1988, p.39)

³³ The upper floors would later be decorated by Syrie Maugham after her daughter, Liza Paravicini, moved in 1946 see Metcalf (2010).

The unsuccessful attempt at setting up a permanent exhibition centre in South Audley Street didn't waver Hill's determination to 'bring this country out of its apathy' (Hill, 1927, HiO 27/3 (1/2), RIBA) even though the economic situation in the early thirties wasn't conducive to major building commissions. It was, as LeMahieu (1988, p.266) argues, a perfect period for the wider acceptance of the commercial and the industrial arts as architects and artists alike needed to adapt their practice in order to keep commissions coming in. It also engendered, according to Lemahieu: 'a sense of social responsibility that made commercial art and industrial design attractively democratic'. As Stephenson (2011, p. 187) points out, the ideal playing field for promoting modernism would now be found in: 'smaller scale interior renovations and the design of temporary exhibition stands'.

The second key factor that proved important for Hill in setting up the first Dorland Hall exhibition was his acquaintance with Christopher Hussey. The two men became close friends and Hussey was to share Hill's weekend house, with him Valewood Farm in Sussex, with him from 1931 to 1936. It was probably during these weekends that Hill's ideas regarding art and industry found a willing ear.³⁴ A writer for *Country Life*, Hussey proved influential in the magazine, writing articles on modern architecture. *Country Life*, like the *Architectural Review*, seemed to have been enthusiastic about the increasing vogue for design and interior decoration (a trend which would last throughout the interwar period). Hence, as John Cornforth observed, the magazine would devote an increasing amount of space to the subject which also proved to be lucrative in terms of the advertising revenue it attracted (Cornforth, 1981, p. 1468). It was this shift in focus that would see many pages of the magazine devoted to the architecture and interior decorations of Hill under Hussey's then editorship. The importance of these articles was certainly not underestimated by Hill, as he was later to write an article on his debt as an architect to *Country Life* (Hill, 1967, pp.70-2).³⁵ The influence of *Country Life*, together with their growing interest in the architectural developments on the continent, in particular Sweden, must have inspired both men to set up an exhibition on British

³⁴ Although both men shared an interest in the seventeenth century and a love for materials and tradition they also developed an admiration for new architecture developed during the 1920s (especially Sweden) which led to their conversion to Modernism.

³⁵ Hill was not alone as the magazine proved influential in offering in a platform for young architects to establish themselves. For further details see Cornforth (1981, pp. 1468-70)

Industrial Art in Relation to the Home. Although the idea for such an exhibition was not new, to Hussey's mind it became more pressing after visiting the Swedish Exhibition of Industrial Art in London in 1931, after which many felt that Britain was completely surpassed in matters of design. I also want to point out that this was probably not the only factor, since 1932 saw a selective exhibition of British industrial goods exhibited in Copenhagen. Although it is not clear if Hussey and Hill saw this exhibition first-hand, they certainly must have been aware of it. Carrington describes this exhibition as an eye opener for DIA members, as the Danes chose the exhibits themselves. The result was interesting, as they selected objects in which, according to them, the Brits excelled, showing the public: boats, tennis rackets and sports clothing; all elements which would be found in Hill's later exhibition designs (Carrington, 1976, p.137).

Hill drew up his first plan for the Dorland Hall exhibition as early as 1932 [48]. Although to a certain extent the displays were more Fine Arts orientated than industrial production, it would be wrong to describe this plan as being completely in the same vein as those of the ACES. I would argue that this plan already shows Hill's enthusiasm and ability to create a dynamic exhibition experience. Unlike the ACES exhibitions, the objects were not displayed within glass cases. Instead they were displayed on shelves which made them easier to look at. Acknowledging the viewer's comfort by not putting them inside glass cases, this gives the visitor the impression of dealing with objects that can be used in everyday life instead of being presented as 'precious' (Hart, 2010, p.198).

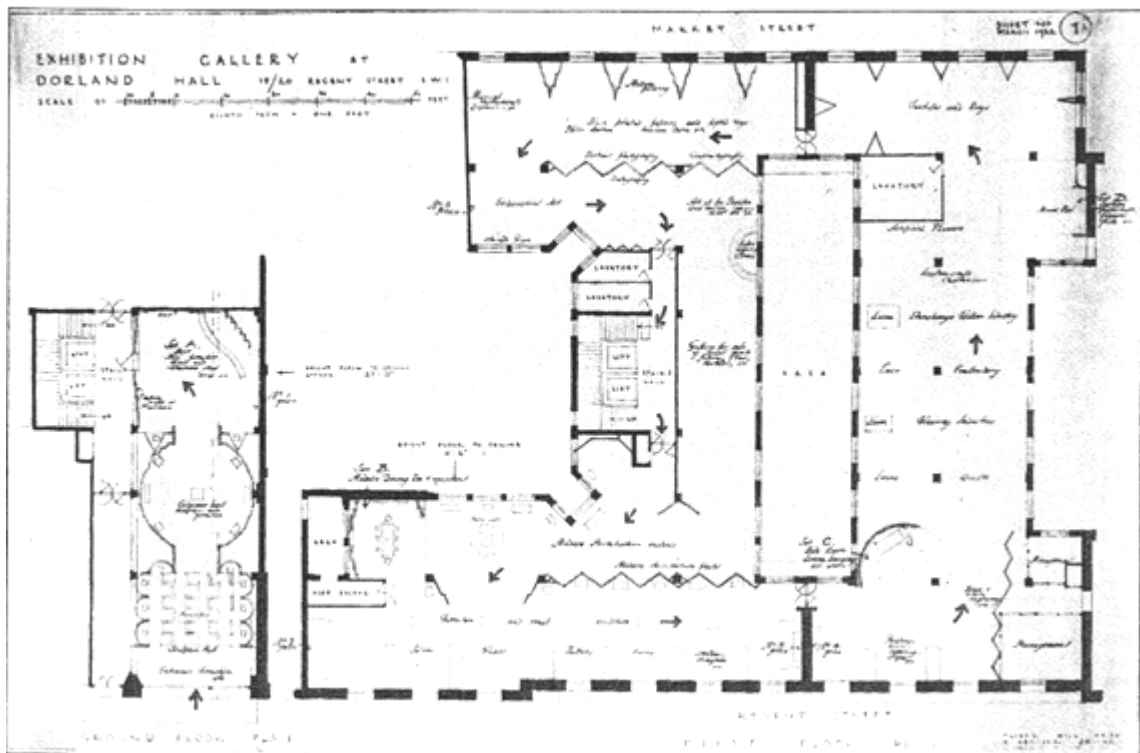


Fig. 48 First plan for layout of Dorland Hall Exhibition, Oliver Hill, 1931 (1931, RIBA)

The angled screens which Hill put in various places on the first floor are described by Powers as 'conventional'. However, I want to argue that these angled screens reveal an American influence mirroring how leading American department stores and museums used exhibition design to elevate the public's taste. Although there is no evidence of Hill having been in New York for Macy's 'Exposition of Art in Trade' in 1927, it is more than likely that Hill came across this exhibition either through his American connections (such as Elizabeth Arden and the various rich Americans living in and around Mayfair) or in various magazines on the subject. In the Macy's show, the designer Lee Simonson used what he called 'pockets' (Simonson, 1916 cited in Friedman, p.23).

remaining funds were provided by a variety of industrialists and philanthropists who supported the arts, such as Sir Phillip Sassoon, C.H. St John Hornby, Samuel Courtald and Lord Aberconway. This list of businessmen shows that the desire for a connection between art and industry was sought after not only from a business perspective but also encouraged by the arts, showing a turnaround from the earlier attitude towards people like Heal who had successfully worked with the arts within a commercial setting.

The general and executive committee of the exhibition was made up of an impressive list of figures. Howard Robertson, Major A.A. Longden and Clough William-Ellis were all part of the Gorell committee. The list also included members of the DIA such as Edward McKnight Kauffer, Noel Carrington, Paul Nash and Frank Pick (as vice chairman). It is also interesting to note that the members list also included several strong-willed, politically active women, such as Lady Melchett, Viscountess Snowden and Hill's close friend, Lady Mount Temple. These women, together with Carrington and William-Ellis, had been involved in the Swedish Exhibition of Industrial Art in London of 1932 as members of the British honorary committee.

It is important to note, as Powers (1989, pp.28) has rightly pointed out that the role of the DIA should not be overplayed. The DIA felt uneasy about not having full control over the selections of exhibits and decided not to raise any funds. This anxiety is also reinforced by the fact that they asked the organising committee to organise a party in order to meet the executive committee and members of the press (AAD, Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home, 1933, MSL/1975/378). Carrington mentions that the DIA felt uncomfortable working alongside *Country Life*, a magazine usually associated with an interest in country homes and antiques. So, although Pick was selected as Vice chairman, and several other DIA members were on the committee, the role of the DIA should merely be seen as that of encouraging support for this alliance of art and industry. Consequently it would be wrong to describe the Exhibition of Industrial Art as exclusively organised by Pick and the DIA (as Saler, 1999 has done).

Concern was also felt by Wells Coates (Hill, 1932, HiO 28/3 (2/2, RIBA) who wrote to Hill in 1932 possibly commenting on the original plan:

I assume as indeed I intimated during our conversation that you and your co-organisers would not object to an exhibit which would demonstrate the economic possibilities of an orderly use of modern materials and methods, for as you know, I am chiefly interested in this aspect of design and certainly not in a purely decorative, or shall I say purely imaginative use of the modern materials which we all use and want to use these days.

Both Coates' and Hill's vision of the exhibits highlights seemingly competing attitudes towards modern architecture and its public. As Coates was to be the chairman of the newly founded M.A.R.S group in 1933, it is fair to say that he adhered to their belief that once modern architecture got the support it needed it would be able to: 'make the transition from its adolescent stage as the conscious cult of an intelligentsia to its mature stage as the unconscious expression of a culture' (J.M.R. 1937, p.203). According to them, there was a bogus modernism (more than likely a reference to the work of people such as Hill) which: 'assumes the transitory or accidental characteristics of the real thing and exploits its fashion value, without possessing either its rational justification or its artistic integrity' (J.M.R. 1937, p.203). The 'real thing' that was referred to was design that insisted on simplicity and viewed decoration as desecration (Darling, 2012, p.21). Bogus modernism on the other hand embraced and responded to various changes in architecture and society and was therefore deemed as superficial and therefore unable to educate the public in matters of good design as this kind of modernism demonstrated luxury and glamour instead of the sober functionalism of the 'real thing'.

These ideas were to be exemplified by the 'Minimum flat' by Wells Coates [50] and the 'Weekend House' by Serge Chermayeff [51]. Although these exhibits are usually described as examples that promote the social role of architecture, which seemed to be lacking in the original plan, I want to argue that all of the exhibits can be interpreted in this way. The exhibitors have one goal in mind namely: "elevating the consumers taste". Both viewpoints were incorporated within the exhibition manifesto as the section on the selection of the exhibits states (AAD, Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home, 1933, MSL/1975/378):

The principles that the committee will have before them are:

1. Sound and economical design (i.e. suitability for industrial production)
2. Fitness for purpose.
3. The imaginative use of materials.



Fig. 50 Isokon Minimum Flat exhibited at the Exhibition of British Industrial Art In Relation to the Home, Dorland Hall, London, Wells Coates, 1933 (1933, University of east Anglia)

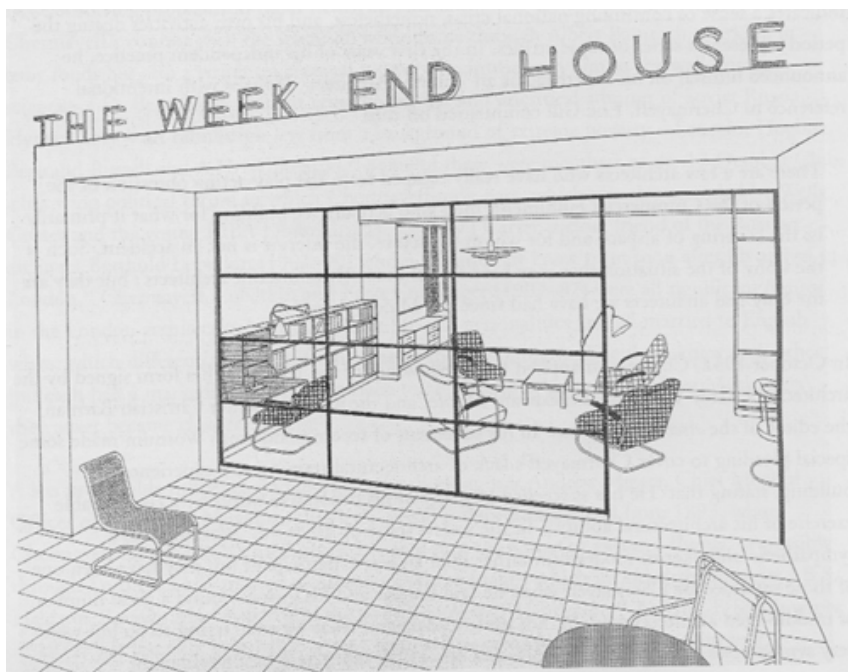


Fig. 51 Chermayeff, S. (1933) 'Week End House', display for Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home, Dorland Hall. Powers, A. (2001)

The difference expressed in these viewpoints is primarily in how they approached the role of the consumer. Coates and Chermayeff seemed convinced that the public would automatically absorb modern architecture through the encounter with public buildings funded by enlightened patrons. As stated in a M.A.R.S manifesto on modern architecture: 'It is these whose patronage the modern architect needs, and who represent the public whom he must educate to serve as his patrons' (J.M.R. 1937, p.204). Patronage in the mind of people like Hill and Pick, on the other hand, could be improved through teaching in schools. Although this sentiment was supported by the younger M.A.R.S members, it is necessary to point out that Hill saw the patron more as a consumer who needed to be educated. This ideology would be further developed and explored by the newly formed Council for Art and Industry (CAI) in 1934. In their report: 'Education for the Consumer', they argued that the development of design and industry was dependent firstly: 'to a large extent upon the choice exercised by the purchasing public' and secondly: 'upon the consumer's demand and criticism: his choice must represent an effective criticism; and his education will direct his choice' (CAI, 1936, cited in Grosvenor, pp.516-517).

These different views towards the role of education show how the exhibitors defined their target audience. The organisers of the Dorland Hall exhibition clearly aimed at a popular exhibition in a similar vein to the *Daily Mail* 'Ideal Home' Exhibitions. As well as addressing the upper end of the market, they also targeted the Ideal Home Exhibitions' audiences, aiming at, as Deborah S. Ryan (1997, p.19) pointed out: 'the hopes, dreams and aspirations of the respectable working classes and middle classes, of conservative and ordinary people'. Targeting this wider audience would become a contentious point in how ideas were to be communicated. Maxwell Fry for instance claimed that popular exhibitions were the wrong way to promote modernism. As he recalled from a meeting prior to the M.A.R.S exhibition of 1938:

Some of the group wanted a popular exhibition and thought in terms of the *Daily Mail* (Ideal Homes Exhibition) and so on. I was violently opposed to that and so was Tolek (Lubetkin)...We argued that if you wanted to disseminate information, you had to disseminate it at the highest level and

let it disseminate downwards and through the schools. To go direct to the public would have been a pure disaster [...].
(Gold, 2007, p. 360)

The importance that Hill attached to consumer taste can be seen as evidence of him balancing a position between a more socialist European position on the role of the public (as adhered to by people such as Fry) and that of the dominant sector in the US which gave the modern movement commercial credibility.

The latter becomes especially apparent in the importance Hill attached to the role of department stores as an educational tool. As he wrote in a letter to Mr Kettle (Hill, 1935b, HiO 30/5):

My visit to New York and the big stores there, convinced me on the importance of this matter. The stores are the only shop window the general public have, and their standard of taste is determined by the goods they see there displayed. In New York I found that these periodic exhibitions in the big stores are arranged by outside people, whose individual taste sets a standard above the ordinary, and it would be a great thing if the London stores would follow the same procedure and provide periodical exhibitions in their stores, using equipment already stocked in the various departments, and selected, arranged and set by acknowledged authorities in the matters of taste.

In New York *Macy's* was breaking ground as early as 1927 by organising exhibitions in co operation with the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The objective was to join commerce and culture in order to educate the public in good design. This partnership proved to be hugely successful in that it reached large sections of the American public which the museum would not have otherwise reached. For its part, the museum gave the department store enhanced artistic credibility (Friedman, 2003, p.7). Pushing the educational factor beyond mere display, lectures were organised that attracted people and extended press coverage. A similar idea was discussed in the Dorland Hall minutes, as it was suggested that lectures relating to the exhibition should be arranged by the DIA (AAD, Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home, 1933,

MSL/1975/378). Hill took further inspiration from the department stores in the way that he put the various objects on display, with their retail prices prominent. The display of prices put the exhibition within the visitor's ideological framework, as most of them would have been very familiar with the various successful department stores such as Selfridges. By displaying objects in this way, Hill saw the visiting public as consumers. By acknowledging that this consumer had a choice (as stated in the CAI report) Hill as an exhibition designer seems to have already understood that a marketing orientation would become popular in the latter part of the twentieth century, as he acknowledged the needs and desires of costumers. This approach would become key in making profits, and this strategy seems to have been clearly understood by the department stores on either side of the Atlantic.

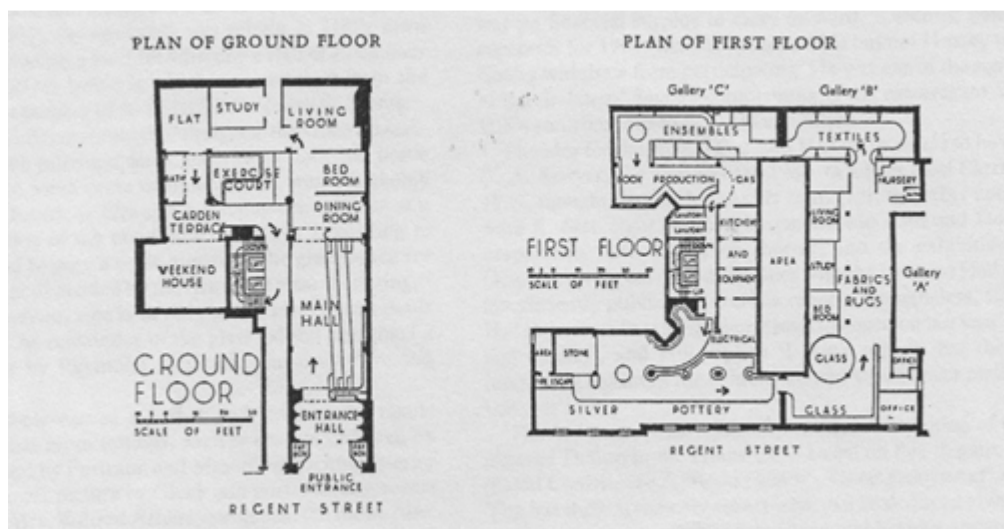


Fig. 52 Final plans of the Dorland Hall exhibition, Oliver Hill, 1933 (1933, RIBA)

The final exhibition plan [52] seems to have been influenced by the free flow interiors that were used in department stores. Free flow and curvilinear display promoted interaction between the viewer and the objects, as Staniszewski (2001, pp. 25- 27) has pointed out, but it also makes the flow of visitors through the exhibition/ store much easier. The public entered Dorland Hall from Regent Street where they were greeted by three niches on either side that went from floor to ceiling [53]. The centre niche on the right hand side contained '*Man and Woman*' (1933) by Charles Wheeler and Eric Gill whilst the flanking niches showed implements and tools by Nettlefold. The central niche opposite showed industrial stoneware by Doulton and the wall nearby displayed masks by Lawrence Bradshaw. All the walls in this entrance vestibule were executed in

Marplax, whilst the floors were made from Biancola with silver red-glass inlays and mosaic.



Fig. 53 Entrance vestibule, Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home, Dorland Hall, Regent Street, London, Oliver Hill, Charles Wheeler, Eric Gill and Nettlefold, 1933 (1933, Dell & Wainwright / RIBA)

All these displays were backlit by Mazda lamps demonstrating how Hill showed his genius for lighting to create effect; a skill used in many of his domestic interiors (such as North House and Gayfere House). From the entrance vestibule, people entered the Main Hall (also designed by Hill) where they found wall panelling on either end, and at the back of the stage, a range of Empire Timber Veneers. All these displays were indirectly lit with added decorative lighting in the corner pillars and curtain lighting effects. The rest of the ground

floor was made up of a range of furnished rooms where visitors could see objects intended for use. The back hall showed a dining room designed by Sir Ambrose Heal, a bedroom designed by Raymond McGrath, a living room designed by R.W. Symonds, a study designed by R.D. Russel, the minimum flat by Wells Coates, a bathroom designed by Hill, a weekend house by Serge Chermayeff, an exercise court by Hill and a display of 'plan' furniture and chairs together with an exhibit of photographs by *Country Life* of the contemporary home [54].

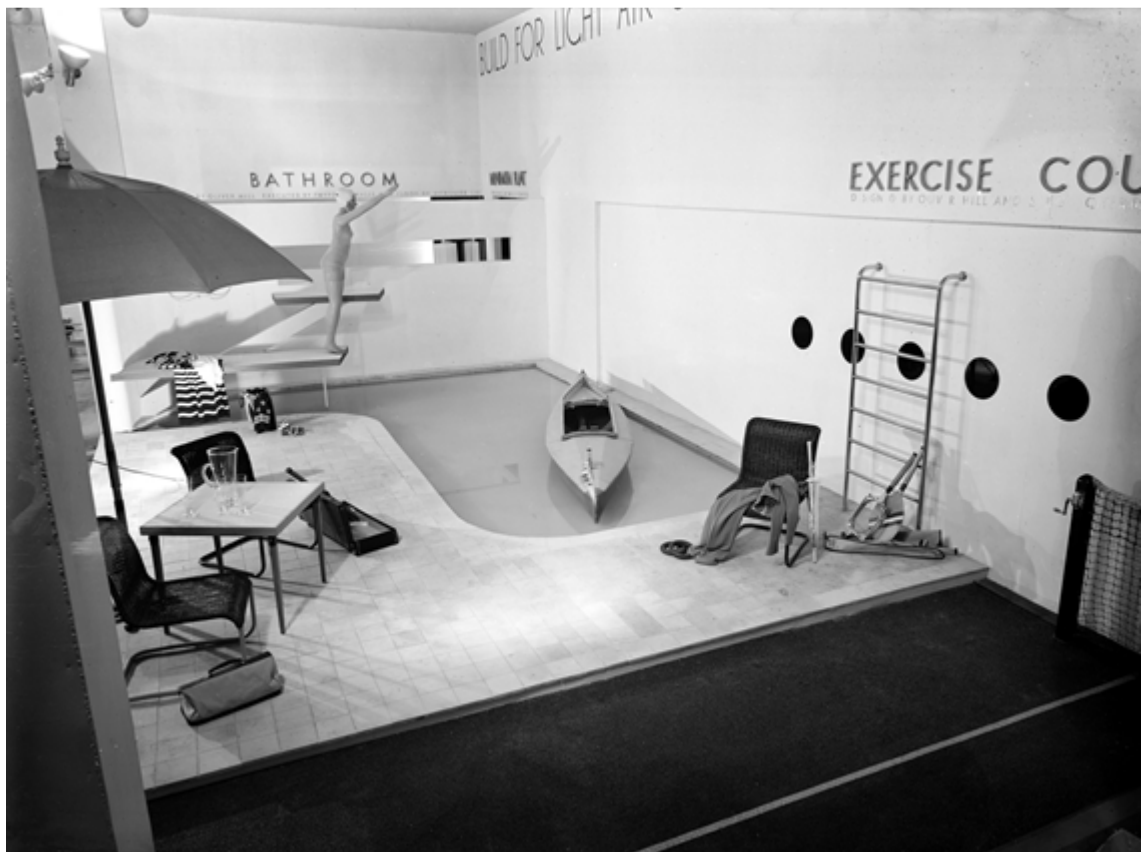


Fig. 54 Exercise Court, Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home, Dorland Hall, Regent Street, London, Oliver Hill and Serge Chermayeff, 1933 (1933, Dell & Wainwright / RIBA)

The free flow plan was continued on the first floor. Here the visitor first saw the kitchens and their equipment section. The catalogue (1933, p.25) explained that these kitchens showed: '[...] equipment sensibly placed for normal usage and in the right relationship one piece to another. These layouts are therefore something of a compromise between an actual kitchen and a display stand [...]'].

Past the electrical section one could find ensemble rooms largely designed by Hill [55]. The stone exhibit incorporated a dining room complete with walls,

floor, table and chairs made of polished Perrycot Portland Stone. Hill wanted to show the possibilities of the stone 'hitherto unused because of its coarseness. Now, however, the stone was electrically carborundum polished for the first time in England.



Fig. 55 Stone dining room, Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home, Dorland Hall, Regent Street, London, Oliver Hill and Eric Gill, 1933 (1933, Dell & Wainwright / RIBA)

The walls of this room were engraved by Hill with a design symbolising hospitality. Hill's enthusiasm for this method went as far as including cups, plates and dishes made entirely out of stone. A similar approach was to be seen in the glass display showing a boudoir made out of glass. The floor was made out of three inch glass cubes (which in some parts were left clear and in others silvered on the underside). The walls consisting of curved sheets of plate glass from floor to ceiling with a stippled face, displayed an engraved figure cut with a carborundum wheel whilst the white opaque glass pilasters were sandblasted. Hill also used the latest techniques as this was the first time furniture had been produced entirely out of glass. The glass couch resting on solid glass balls was selected by H.G. Wells for his film *Things to Come* (based on his novel 'the

shape of things to come) [56]. Although Hill's involvement in the set design is largely unknown in comparison to Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's involvement, neither of them are credited as such. This could be interpreted as a reflection on Hill as an undervalued Modernist, as Holland (2011, p.316) puts it, but rather as Moholy-Nagy put it: 'a hard resistance to basic functional design' (Senter, 2006, p.90).



Fig. 56 H.G. Wells with actors on the set of 'Things to Come' sitting on Oliver Hill's glass couch, William Cameron Menzies and Alexander Korda, 1936.

The remaining sections of the first floor were divided into galleries A, B and C. The catalogue announced that the contents of these galleries was selected by a committee of experts and that the objects they included had to be expressions of the twentieth century spirit, and to conform to internationally accepted standards of good taste. It was explained to the visitor that here he/she would only find the best modern types available in England today. The exhibits in these galleries included textiles (furnishing and dress fabrics), leather, oil-silk and linoleum, carpets, rugs, wallpapers and ensembles or furnished rooms (Catalogue of the exhibition of contemporary industrial design in the home, 1933, p.103). These rooms demonstrated, and inadvertently educated visitors/consumers, about what the modern home should look like. Hill displayed a bedroom, and Arundel Clarke designed 'the study for a ruling prince', the living room was by the bath cabinet makers and a there was nursery ensemble also designed by Hill.

The whole exhibition was a huge public hit as in three and a half weeks the attendance was 30 000; a number as Hussey claimed, 'far exceeding the

liveliest hopes of the committee' (Hill, 1932-1933a, HiO 28/2 (1/2), RIBA). This success was also echoed in the letters Hill received. Percy H. Wells finished by saying: '[...] I have nothing but praise and congratulations to all concerned in the lay out and showmanship' (Hill, 1933b, HiO 28/2 (1/2), RIBA). 'The first foolproof exhibition' wrote Athony Blunt, whilst Lawrence Bradshaw praised the exhibition in both conception and execution; especially Hill's glass room and nursery (Hill, 1933b, HiO 28/2 (1/2), RIBA). G.M. Boumphrey, a journalist for *The Spectator* congratulated Hill on the lay-out of the whole, which he said: 'could hardly have been bettered' (Hill, 1933c, HiO 28/3 (2/2), RIBA, London). This sentiment was shared by Hudson who claimed that this was: 'by far the best small exhibition that has ever been done'. Marion Dorn wrote: 'Everybody is raving about the exhibition and I think it's going to be a wonderful help to everyone' (Hill, 1932-1933b, HiO 28/4 (2/2), RIBA). Overall, Hill was mostly praised for making a visit to the Dorland Hall an experience that, as one journalist put it was: 'the clearest, most intelligible and most generally attractive that we have ever seen' (AAD, Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home, 1933, MSL/1975/378).

However, not all comments were as positive. A recurring opinion among several critics was the fact that many of the exhibits showcased a 'Bond Street Flavour'. W.G. Thorpe (who worked on the pottery and glass section) went to considerable lengths in making comments on the organisation of the exhibition. In his twenty five page letter he mentions in dismay that: 'the glass room and the stone room were of no practical utility to any sane man; sitting on stone benches is not only uncomfortable, but may have disastrous physical consequences' (AAD, Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home, 1933, MSL/1975/378). He goes onto mention that there was: '[...] nothing for the clerk or the artisan who makes £4 a week. There might be in a future exhibition two rooms for the man at £4 a week to show how good colour and design may be available in quite inexpensive materials' (AAD, Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home, 1933, MSL/1975/378). Both of Hill's ensembles seemed to have suffered from misunderstandings, as the stone and glass room were never meant to be taken at face value. As Hill wrote to Constance Spry: 'The room has no other purpose than to demonstrate the beauty and the use of English Portland stone' (Hill, 1932-1933c, HiO 28/4 (2/2), RIBA). However, comments regarding the exclusivity of certain exhibits indicated a more deeply

rooted problem with how the masses were to be 'educated'. As previously mentioned, Hill's imaginative and enjoyable displays and their use of materials were viewed with suspicion by Chermayeff and Pevsner, who in their eyes were working tirelessly to civilise the working class' taste. Chermayeff was to say later that: 'Unfortunately, decorative mountains have been made out of Oliver Hills [sic], which loom large in the public eye but do not represent the industrial machine age at all.' (Chermayeff, 1935, cited in Powers, 2001, p.58).

The exhibition organisers argued that the success of the consumer's education was dependent on the public's successful appreciation of good design. I would argue that Hill not only saw this happening through a reform of art education in schools but also by giving the visitors to exhibitions, as Powers (1991, p.32) pointed out, a stimulating and enjoyable experience. On the other hand, Pevsner and the 'younger' generation saw the improvement of industrial design as a moral duty, in which the simple pleasures of some 'shoddy design' must be eliminated, or, as he would say, in his *Inquiry into Industrial Art in England* (Pevsner, 1937, p.11):

A splendour which reality does not concede is brought into our humble surroundings by meretricious industrial products, which achieve in permanence some of the elating effect that for a few hours is bestowed upon us by the Hollywood heroes' fantastic mode of life in the pictures.

As Christine Atha (2012, pp.207-226) has rightfully pointed out, such comments point towards established British social mores. The moral duty that Pevsner was referring to was specifically aimed at reforming the British working classes, as it was deemed by him that their homes and tastes were deplorable. He believed that design reform would ameliorate this situation. Such an idea would increasingly become part of the political agenda after the Second World War. Showy and pompous design (which more than likely referred to design by architects such as Hill) would not help in elevating the taste of the masses but would just add to the distance between the wealthy and the poor which, according to Pevsner, was larger in England than in central Europe. It was therefore: 'one of the reasons why England has been late in adopting this international style'. Pevsner suggested that: '[...] a style of our age must be an unexclusive style, and its merits must be collective merits not distinguishing one

individual or one class' (Pevsner, 1937, p.201). Hill's designs, accused by some reviewers of having a 'Bond Street Flavour', were deemed socially unaware, undoubtedly, as they were unable to reflect the Modern Movement in a manner that Pevsner would have wanted.

Nevertheless, Hill's designs for the Dorland Hall proved nevertheless to be huge hits which showed that they provided pleasure and joy. Hill's particular way of marketing his work was disliked by Wells Coates who withdrew from the second Dorland Hall exhibition a year later. Against this view I want to argue that Hill's designs proved valuable to visitors, as the visual imagery was helpful in educating the consumer by showing the public what was possible and acceptable. The financial success of the exhibition also showed that Hill was fully aware of what commercial forces drove the mass market.

In my opinion it was this understanding of the mass market which made this exhibition such a success. As the Dorland Hall exhibition was organised on a shoestring budget, it was imperative that the exhibitors didn't go home with any financial burden. Instead, it was paramount that the focus was upon the consumer of moderate means as well as attracting the higher end of the market; the people that would be able to buy the goods on display. The consumer was therefore seen as an active participant in the exhibition's overall success instead of merely being passive.³⁶ What was also important was that all the exhibits spoke a language that could be understood and assimilated by the visiting general public. This key factor was overlooked in later exhibition by the M.A.R.S group in 1938, as students from the Architectural Association complained, the organisers: 'were speaking in a visual language amongst themselves and seemed to have forgotten that what they were trying to say had to be made intelligible to the public' (as cited in Gold, 1993, p.361). There is an irony here in that the M.A.R.S group would refuse membership to people like Hill on grounds that he produced overly exclusive designs.

The role of the press also needs to be acknowledged as another important factor in the success of the Dorland Hall exhibition. The extensive press coverage played a very big part in the success, or lack of it, of both exhibitions. The committee decided to pay for advertising in newspapers such as *The*

³⁶ For a similar approach to the consumer in the UK see: Sugg Ryan, D. (1997, p.19).

Times, the *Observer*, *The Morning Post*, the *Daily Telegraph* etc., as well as weeklies such as *The Listener* and the *New Statesman*. It was further suggested that sandwich men might be useful and if funds became available later on, it was decided to approach more specialist magazines such as the *Architectural Review*, the *Architects' Journal* and *Design for Today*. The committee also prioritised the publicity committee as first in line to receive the 'gate money for re-investment in advertising propaganda' (AAD, Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home, 1933, MSL/1975/378). The wide range of magazines and newspapers evidences that the organisers were keen to communicate their ideas to a very broad public, thereby giving the impression that not attending would be the equivalent to missing out on an event of great importance (Friedman, 2003, p.19). Following Macy's successful example they realised that: '[...] good design was consistently being associated with modernism, and modernism would sell, if it was perceived as being in vogue [...]' (Friedman, 2003, p.21). To ensure such success, the organising committee decided on a 'behind the scenes' party called 'cocktails and confusion' **[57]** (a title more telling of its organiser than the exhibition itself) held at the Dorland Hall on June 15th. Hosted by Lady Mount Temple, it was agreed that: 'various gossip writers attached to the daily press should be invited' and it was deemed beneficial that this party should be held on a Thursday or Friday 'in order to enable the Sunday papers to benefit' AAD, Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home, 1933, MSL/1975/378). Exhibitors were also involved as: 'Exhibitors who are in the habit of advertising should be persuaded to tie-up their advertising with the exhibition' (AAD, Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home, 1933, MSL/1975/378).

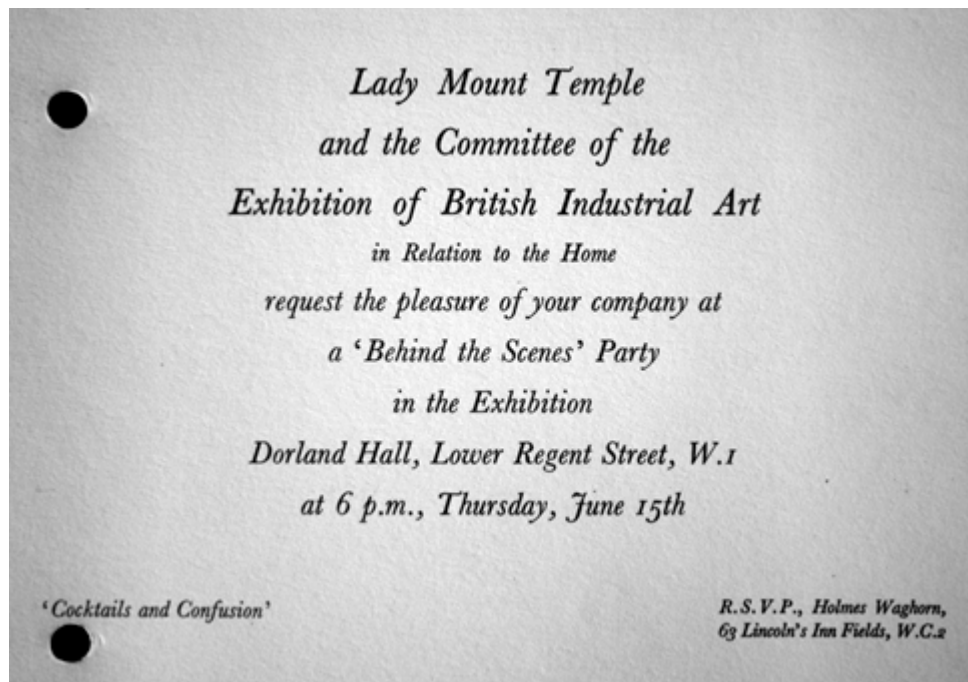


Fig. 57 Invitation to a 'behind the Scenes' party: 'cocktails and confusion'.

My analysis of the 'Industrial Art in Relation to the Home' exhibition [58] shows the importance of exhibitions during the interwar period as barometers for gauging the public response to various forms of modernist design, it also proves instructive in understanding the various ideas and competing ideologies that were at work during this period. Hill's designs for the exhibition showed how various ideas on design reform were in play and how exhibition design formed a navigational tool not only for the visitor, but also for the exhibitor. Hill clearly took it as an opportunity to engage with market forces and he successfully created a visual language aimed at educating the consumer in good design. As a marketing strategy, his approach emphasised the important relationship between the supplier and the customer. Although visual imagery is important in exhibition design, it is its anatomy which proves crucial in unearthing complex messages that were communicated through this visual imagery and which should be seen as a barometer of various ideologies (mostly comprising contradictory elements) that were part and parcel of design strategies before the Second World War. By analysing Hill's exhibition designs as a key aspect of architectural research into British modernism, rather than as a marginal concern, I have shed new light on the appeal that alternative expressions of modernism had within inter-war Britain. Moreover, my research signals how

such mass marketing practices were vital in encouraging more discriminating consumer attitudes towards modern architecture and design.



Fig. 58 Poster, Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home, Dorland Hall, Regent Street, London, Austin Cooper, 1933 (1933, NAL)

Conclusion

In this thesis I have attempted to examine many of the connections that can be discerned between Hill's work produced during the interwar period with the wider impact of the period's economic, cultural and social changes. To this end, several of Hill's houses, interior and exhibition designs have been examined as case studies in order to reveal their interconnections with regionalism, nostalgia and commercialism. The fifteen year period considered by this thesis marks the most productive phase in Hill's *oeuvre* and it formed a major contribution to the architectural design activity of Britain in the twenties and thirties.

This thesis has, therefore, not presented a straightforward architectural analysis of Hill's buildings but, rather it has involved looking at what has usually been left out of the historiographical picture encompassing Hill's work. By taking this approach, this research has concentrated its attention on Hill's response to modernity through the impact of his education, travels and personal interests.

Using several of the mansions built early on in his career, Hill's approach to regionalism as an adaptation strategy to tone down extreme forms of modernity have been traced (Meganck, Van Santvoort and De Maeyer, 2013, p.11). Hill's specific contribution, in terms of alternative expressions of modernism, has also been investigated through the analysis of several domestic interiors. Interrogating these modern environments has highlighted how the nostalgic is often located through its relationship with the 'feminine' and how this carries implications for particular forms of gendered architectural practice.

Finally, Hill's interest in consumption and the commercial role of the public sphere was investigated through the design for the Dorland Hall exhibition in 1933 in order to offer an alternative understanding of the significance of mass consumption in disseminating modernist ideas into and beyond any limited national tradition, thereby revealing Hill's work as making a valuable contribution to the wider project of architectural modernism in Britain during the interwar period.

Hill's privileged Edwardian upbringing not only opened doors to major architectural commissions, but it also created the possibility of experiencing art and architecture at first hand. The family's country house – Tofte Manor – with

its drawing room decorated by James McNeill Whistler would continue to provide Hill with a source of inspiration throughout his career. Indeed, the experience of the Whistlerian interior and his parents' antiques collections awakened Hill's interest in colour and its importance to interior decoration. The recent formation of the Victoria and Albert Museum in his own neighbourhood gave Hill a perfect opportunity to investigate the colour used in Near and Far Eastern pottery at first hand. Clearly the family's interest in collecting old furniture and Eastern objects goes hand in hand with the interest of Victorian Britain in exotic motifs made more available by its rapidly changing economic, social and cultural trade routes.

This changing environment provided larger segments of the population with the financial ability and time to travel, and many middle class consumers journeyed to the Near East to experience Islamic art themselves. At the same time, Hill's father, took Hill on more traditional trips to the European continent, which would prove equally influential in that they made Hill familiar with the various architectural heritages of Germany, Belgium and France. Similar to many English travellers before him, William Neave Hill wanted his son to experience the gothic in architecture at first hand. As I have shown, it was an etching by Ernest George which reinforced Hill's commitment 'to the pursuit of the picturesque' (Hill, 1949, p.289) and accentuated the picturesque qualities of many towns and cities that he visited, much to the consternation of his father. These intercultural experiences emphasized Hill's understanding of the picturesque and tradition and its fusion with modernity; themes that allow us to understand how Hill navigated his way and dealt with all the contradictions that were an inherent part of the architectural attitudes of the interwar period.

The country cottage would prove a successful domestic setting for Hill providing him with the means to experiment with the *genius loci*. In villas such as Woodhouse Copse, Hill brought together his knowledge of local building materials that he had accrued when working in a builder's yard and this understanding of the vernacular was enhanced by his employment of local craftsmen. However, a closer look at Hill's use of regionalism has revealed further clues as to Hill's understanding of modernism, as he developed a particular flair for assimilating the vernacular and country crafts with the latest trends in domestic architecture and the decorative arts. This fusion of the arts

and crafts led Hill to create highly individualistic interiors in which he coordinated the skills of painters, sculptors, and furniture and textile designers in a manner similar to the mechanisms of the *ensemblier* system. Hill's love for the 'ensemble' interior (most probably encountered on a visit to the 1925 Art Deco exhibition in Paris) would prove to be a perfect vehicle for Hill in his fight against the muddled interiors that he saw as blighting British interior design.

This thesis has demonstrated that whatever approach Hill took to a project, the individuality of the client was always taken into consideration. Looking closely at houses such as Cock Rock, Gayfere House and North House, this thesis has highlighted a fascinating connection between the nostalgic and the 'feminine' in Hill's work. Although the interiors for these houses were readily dubbed as 'Hollywood Moderne' by Osbert Lancaster, they served as excellent examples for showing the female client as an active participant in the creation of a modernised domestic environment. These houses not only highlighted the tension that existed between a masculine, rational and authentic Modernism, and its tarnished 'other' which has been linked to the 'feminine', the decorative and the commercial/ fashionable, but also signalled how Hill fused these dualisms into interiors that successfully met the client's needs and desires. These interiors embraced decoration and delighted in using artwork, exquisite materials and commissioned furniture and furnishings to create a *gesamtkunstwerk* much loved by his clients and applauded by the press. Indeed, Hill's work was extensively published in many leading magazines of the times such as the *Architectural Review*, *The Studio* and *Country Life*. By embracing fashionable interior design (such as the glamorous Hollywood bathrooms created for films by Cecil B. DeMille), Hill fashioned a particular look of modernity that tempered the machine-made aesthetic by creating interiors that embraced the clients demands and gender.

Given the expansion of the illustrated press in the inter-war years, Hill was acutely aware of the potential the press had in the promotion of his interiors and he became highly involved in marketing his interior designs. As this thesis has shown, Hill was fully committed to the education of the consumer, and exhibition designs such as the Dorland Hall proved a perfect vehicle for Hill's educational imperatives in order to educate this consumer in good design. It is clear that Hill fully embraced fashionability both in terms of market consumerism and the

power that fashion had in improving taste and standards of design. Hill used the 'ensemblier' system to penetrate a sophisticated consumer market which attracted young female consumers who were increasingly exposed to the choices advertised in the mass media. Consequently, Hill's designs were able to speak to a wide range of consumers with different needs and concerns. The success of the Dorland Hall exhibition not only showed that consumers felt connected with what was on display but it forcefully highlighted Hill's understanding of the public's civic purpose and hence its usefulness in the fight against apathy in matters of good design. Moreover, it signalled that Hill was attuned to the ways in which and how various forms of modernism were being disseminated and introduced into the lives of large sections of the British middle class public.

Analysing the work of Hill within such a broader cultural context and one that has engaged with commercialism and consumption has established a basis for further research. It has also demonstrated how figures like Hill, who have been marginalised from architectural history, can now be understood as more significant. Although inter-war British Modernism is perhaps less of an 'enigma' than when this research was started, more investigation is still needed into the many guises of British architectural Modernism and its various practitioners. Such research would not involve a rewriting of the architectural history of the inter-war period in Britain, but it would focus its attention, as I have tried to do, on analysing its underlying subtexts that suggest a more complex field of study, and on what has been left out of the picture to date. Indeed, such a change in focus challenges views such as the most recent referral to Oliver Hill in the *Architectural Review* (Wilkinson, 2013, p.20) which continues to (mis)portray him as: 'a monkey loving nudist creator of Art Deco mansions'.

SEEN AND HEARD AT OLYMPIA YESTERDAY

HOME-CRAFT GOSSIP FROM THE HEART OF HOMELAND

THE acres of light and colour and animation. Ten acres of thrills, fascinations and surprises. Ten acres of practical hints for beautifying your home. Ten acres of new ideas for making life easier and providing more leisure. Ten acres of paradise for every woman who takes a proper pride in her home.

What wonder that yesterday again the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition was thronged with bright-eyed visitors, eager to see and admire its 600 features and exhibits?

ILLUSTRATIONS

"The House That J.H. Built" at the Ideal Home Exhibition is exercising an attraction which completely eclipses that of any previous feature of the famous exhibition.

Every woman wants to see what one of her own sex has done in a challenge to domestic architecture and builders.

Some come to criticise, but most remain to praise this unusual house, which is unique in appearance, but so meticulously finished and efficient in its equipment and appointments.

The building plays an small part in the beautification of the house, and much credit is due to the Inter-Furnishing Company for the elaborate detailing and finish work displayed in the furniture chosen by J.H. and supplied by this firm.

WOODS AND WOODWORK

What is the most beautiful thing in the world? That is a question for which it is difficult to find an answer. But, before you raise up your mind, see the standards in the Woods Ark at the Ideal Home Exhibition.

Those fine leather-bound bookcases, ornamented with various bases, make excellent practical companions with their contents.

The Woods Ark indeed provides a feast of delight for the eye, for its rare occupants, ranging from the most playful baby to the most scholarly scholar, are in perfect harmony.

A most striking alphabet name guide is set for sale at the Woods Ark, and all child lovers should see it.

OLYMPIA FASHIONS

Visitors to the Exhibition "Halls of Ideas" at the Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia, W., have been attracted by the dresses worn by the demonstrators. It is interesting to note that these costumes were designed by Miss M. Gilbert, daughter of the well-known sculptor.

The dresses, which are of broad proportions with a cascade of pale green satin, have sweeping lines and graceful proportions. A lace waist and handkerchief pockets are a touch of the laudable, which the fashion of black silk stockings and black shoes are worn.

Against the very neutral background forming the interior of the "Halls of Ideas," with its soft shades of green and yellow, the dresses and smart lighting, these dresses bear the impression that one is attending a demonstration by mannequins in a fashion-plate shop.

DOG CHAMPIONS

"Deep and all about them" were no mere display which is being made by Spillers at the Ideal Home Exhibition.

Championship dogs of the value of £2,000 to £2,500 are being shown daily, and the total value of the various prizes to be won during the exhibition will reach £60,000.

Such celebrated animals as Ch. Lady Star of Wace, the supreme champion of this year's Crufts Show, the well-known greyhound Bill Hien are among the stars of this well-arranged display.

M.H. The Metropolitan of Details is among the best-regarded breeds exhibiting.

GARDENERS' ART

Those in seeking which were hurriedly called to the hard to the effect that the creation of a formal garden, to achieve order with reference to a task for the talent of the architect.

Mr. George Whittidge has another to add to this record in the garden which he has built to harmonise with the picture "The



The lady depicted from the book "The Art of the Garden" is shown in the picture "The Garden" at the G.E.C. Exhibition in Olympia.

THE HOUSE LAUNDRY

The lessons of yesterday, with all its A-Z, are rapidly being obliterated by the application of the genius of electricity to the laundry industry.

The "Electric" House Laundry, exhibited in the Small Hall Gallery at the Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia, W., is a remarkable example of simplicity, working and saving.

Plugged in to an ordinary light socket it costs less to run than a clothes iron and will do an average family wash in one hour without boiling, soaking, wringing or scrubbing.

FRY'S TABLES

To see one of the most fascinating exhibits of the Ideal Home Exhibition is that of the Royal Copenhagen Porcelain Manufactory in the Main Hall.

Mr. Wittidage's garden is an interesting feature, the higher level forming a terrace surrounded on three sides by a high stone wall with a wrought-iron gate. There is a lovely lawn upon which flowering shrubs, in full bloom and mixed.

It is difficult to tear oneself away from the charm of the exquisite furniture and artistic carpeted work in upholstery and woodwork (painted panels).

There is a series of seven and large decorated with reproductions of scenes from Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales by the artist Wilhelm Peterson, which should be seen as soon as possible.

The series was specially made in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the birth of the great children's monarch.

BALLET GIRL TABLEAU

The imitation of light as the outdoor of beauty has never been more strikingly demonstrated than in the wonderful tableaux on the Main Stand at the Ideal Home Exhibition.

Imagine the graceful figure of a ballet girl, pressed on her toes in front of a blue-wooded curtain. In the foreground's transparent floor is suffused with soft light which constantly changes in colour and intensity. On either side beautiful, ornate, hand-painted galleons of intricate design glow in the rays of light of an intense sunset. Silhouetted mountains project their indolent forms into the light-stained air.

The figure, intensely lighted by a concealed projector, turns slowly, slowly, then turns again. The exactness behind her and flowers a bright handiwork against which the ballerina stands out in delicate relief.

AN INTERLUDE

A visit to Olympia nowadays provides many pleasant interludes. Yesterday I was an uninvited listener to an animated conversation in Danish which took place between the 10 in Denmark who took the trouble to do the Danish nursery and a company among the visitors. How pleasant it must have been for her to hear the Danish tongue!

The Nursery of the Nations are proving a great attraction, and Mr. Charles Atteridge, of Art Craft, Limited, who was responsible for their erection, is to be congratulated on this excellent and interesting series of rooms.

REFLECTIONS

Everyone who sees the wonderful glass display case in the H.C. Pavilion of Light at the Ideal Home Exhibition is told in praise of the ingenious effects achieved by the combination of glass in many forms to reduce and reflect the soft beauty of electric illumination.

The working of glass for enlightenment in modern decoration is shown in a fine form, and the examples of form, finished, sil-

NEWS OF BRITAIN'S BIGGEST AND BRIGHTEST EXHIBITION

A PROBLEM SOLVED

Everyone who has ever tried to keep hot tea in a tumbler glass knows the utility of doing so without spoiling its flavour.

A special new Tumbler glass which solves the problem is being shown by the makers of the "The Home" glass at its exhibit in the Small Hall Gallery at the Ideal Home Exhibition.

The glass is filled with boiling water and the infuser can be used for making tea even as long as eight hours afterwards.

THE BARDIAN BARK

One of the most popular exhibits of the Ideal Home Exhibition is that of Mrs. Lamson from who has made up a wonderfully attractive cabinet of their wares of the value of three shillings and are selling it for eightpence.

The cabinet includes tea, wood, crockery, cheese, preserves, mustard, powder, catsup, chocolate, salt-sticks, flour, salt, mixed fruits, the trade names of which are household words. The exhibit is on the first floor of the new Empire Hall.

MUSIC CABINETS

Casual visitors have a choice which the artist would not have made, and possess the cabinet from which they might choose to purchase as a matter of course.

Many styles are to be seen in the lounge and longways in the "Halls of Ideas" at Olympia.

Hope's musical cabinets used for the last long time provide an excellent example of the adaptability of the type of music to all styles of domestic architecture.

SULTAN IN PARVO

A writing bureau of comfortable capacity which, when closed, is only 18 inches from back to front and takes up no more space is an achievement which many drawers in bars and small houses will warmly welcome.

It can be seen at the exhibit of the Havelly Gallery of Decorative Art at the Ideal Home Exhibition.

The bureau is carried out in oak, finished clear lacquer and Russian red-stained oak.

ALWAYS EXTERNAL TIME

Hundreds of stands at the Ideal Home Exhibition are making use of the famous Bulls Clock for their time-keeping.

This device is becoming a feature of the accuracy and reliability.

The Bulls Clock with its ingenious coil and magnet mechanism is one of the most famous sights of Olympia.

CORNER OF HOME

Here are the Greek Goddesses of Home, and one exhibit of the Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia, W., has apparently enough been named for many of our electric washing machines.

Locally work is done at the turn of a switch with the "Ward's" machines, which is being adapted as a standard appliance for many homes of modern homes.

THE HOME LAUNDRY

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The "Electric" House Laundry, exhibited in the Small Hall Gallery at the Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia, W., is a remarkable example of simplicity, working and saving.

Plugged in to an ordinary light socket it costs less to run than a clothes iron and will do an average family wash in one hour without boiling, soaking, wringing or scrubbing.

ART AND ANTIQUES

To transcend part of the gallery of Olympia is an imposing Gallery of Art and Antiques, in which everything is in harmony with the dignity of the Old Masters here shown by the leading art dealers, in an achievement of which one may be proud.

The result of this transformation goes on, however, limited, who have created a gallery of the most imposing proportions and richest atmosphere.

Many are also showing some beautiful reproductions of fine antiques and painting to surprisingly modest prices.

THE ROUND TABLE

A newogue is spreading for the decoration of windows with roundels, those quaint painted panels of stained or painted glass with their primitive 16th century "gates."

Roundels of various sizes, made by a photo-mechanical process and without any lead, are obtainable in great variety at an exhibit in the corner of the Main Hall at the Ideal Home Exhibition at Olympia. One of them will give you a very successful method of decorating a window pane and make most effective window decorations.

DAILY MAIL

IDEAL HOME

EXHIBITION

OLYMPIA · LONDON · W.

10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Daily

UNTIL APRIL 17.

ADMISSION 2/- Inc. Tax.

(1/- After 6 p.m.)

Admission to Gardens 6d. Extra.

BEGIN YOUR EASTER HOLIDAY WITH A VISIT TO OLYMPIA.

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Notes

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