

Glasgow, Liverpool had tended to be a city of objects rather than streets; and for all the Greek influence, there was no local equivalent to Glasgow's Thomson. This helps explain the confusions that blew up around the '4th Grade'. American writer Stanley Reynolds, who lived some years there, called Liverpool 'a Contrary Mary of a city'. Contrary, surely, was to wish for an 'inn' which would be to someone else to someone else to someone else onto the 'iconicity' of the great trio. Contrary too, was to object to a '4th' because it would block a view of the trio from the south docks which, as nobody could enter there until recently, had never been intended; and which, in the Edwardian boom, was anticipated to be soon occluded by another massive business block. In fact, the last scheme that grasped the logic of the Pier Head was proposed in the 1940s by Alderman Alfred Sheenan, a political and architectural conservative. His ambition to replace most of the city with grand Beaux-Arts blocks looks mad – the effluence of an architect who had been to the Continent.

Yet not all crazy, was Sheenan's insight that the Pier Head trio are not quite aligned, but in fact tangents on a subtle curve that imply extrapolation. He thus proposed to extend the Pier Head with four more Liver Building-size edifices, so as to create an arc of seven monumental island-blocks centred on the Docks Headquarters. A case, in Rowe's terms, of 'local megalomania'? But it was also, and characteristically, a Liverpool myth of its unfulfilled conjectural identity as 'some kind of palace', as 'a contender' – as Markon Brandao said he could be to Rod Seiger in *On the Wingspan*.<sup>15</sup>

### Paragon and paradigm

Whether or not Sheenan's plan was a contender, it was the last gap of a grand formalism that had recurred in Liverpool since Foster's time. Of this propensity, St George's Hall remains the opulent paragon that confronts all who step out from Lime Street Station. It is entirely apposite then, that the Hall stands for the city on the cover of Joseph Sharpley's *Passer Guide*. By a typically local stroke of opportunistic opportunism, the Hall in fact combined two entirely different programmes. There were two competitions, one for concert halls, another for law courts. When it was found that the same 22-year-old, Lonsdale Elmes, had won both, the city decided to unite them in a single grandiose monument. To help Elmes in this vast undertaking, which included a pioneer air-conditioning system, C. R. Cockerell was appointed advisor, and after Elmes's death in 1847, chief architect. The rich interiors of the concert halls are largely Cockerell's. The exterior, however, is Elmes's own synthesis of programme, formal composition, and sublime manner. Most remarkable is that its principal address is not the conventional portico at its south end, but the 'long colonnade which flanks the dining saloon, the staircase, the vestibule and surrounds the arriving visitor, who, on approaching its portals, finds them inscribed with the imperial capitals SPQL – The Senate and People of Liverpool'.<sup>16</sup> And if, to a visitor, this unPalladian mass<sup>17</sup> recalls the extended frontality of Berlin's Altes Museum, then the square columns that articulate its wall may surpass them in the name of Schinkel. Did Elmes, who visited Berlin only in 1842, draw from Schinkel? Certainly, Alexander Thomson, who not only drew, but developed on Schinkel, was in no doubt as to Elmes's achievement. St George's Hall, he declared, was one of what were 'unquestionably the two finest buildings in the kingdom'.<sup>18</sup>

Elmes completed a couple of other Liverpool buildings,<sup>19</sup> but his early death denied him the range of Thomson's urban work in Glasgow. So while he created a paragon, he produced no paradigm. A paragon is a star of excellence, but a paradigm sets a pattern for reiteration; it is an example to topology. Their difference may parallel Giedion's distinction in *Space, Time and Architecture* between 'constitutive' and 'transient' phenomena in nineteenth-century architecture. 'Transient' were styles and fashions; 'constitutive' were those industrial and commercial programmes where efficient deployment of new techniques engineered model spaces for the future. 'Constitutive' and 'paradigmatic' in Modernist eyes, were a few office buildings erected but shortly after St George's Hall by an obscure Liverpool builder Peter Ellis: Cook Street, and Oriel Chambers, which took the logic of commercial space to luminous conclusion by hanging

continuously glazed walls across an iron frame. Glasgow also had iron-frame pioneers, including Thomson; but as Francis Duffy noted, 'What is remarkable about Oriel Chambers is that the architect... wanted neither the Georgian domestic-cum-college solution of the Inns of Court nor the normal sal-palazzo facade with its implication of one organisation standing alone. Oriel Chambers, in both plan and elevation, is almost programmatically modular – a neat aggregation of small undifferentiated units, which is exactly what it is. This is the novelty of Oriel Chambers – not only is the plan a succession of small office suites, which are highly adapted to the needs of small businesses, but the facade also carries the same message. Neither palace nor college, Oriel Chambers created a stylistic precedent for countless office buildings'.<sup>20</sup>

A precedent and a paradigm – but not one that was immediately appreciated. For *Building News* it was 'a kind of greenhouse architecture since made', and the local *Paragon* called it 'hard, busy, and messy'.<sup>21</sup> Looking back now on those radical cast-iron frames that, ahead of the Americans, Glasgow and Liverpool produced in the 1860s, and noting the absence in Britain of their further development, we might trace there, around 1870, the discrete inception of that slow falling-away from industrial innovation and that shifting back of wealth to London that not only led to the decline of the North, but British near-absence from the Modern Movement in twentieth-century architecture. When, in the 1930s, wondering what became of early British Modernism, Pevsner wrote 'Nice Swallows, No Summer', Oriel was surely one of the 'swallows' in mind.

But perhaps Oriel displaced locally because it abstracted from a Gothic model in a city that remained mostly Classical – as on the 'scrotopoli' opposite St George's Hall, 'that superb stretch of smutted greek', as Dixon Scott called it, of the Art Gallery, Museum, and Library. And indeed, to eyes now less Modern than Post-Modern, what may strike from the Oriel is less a paradigm of rationality than something both more abstract and more wifful. So that when, in the 1960s, James Stirling drew from Oriel in his Leicester Engineering Laboratory, his model was neither its chamfered details nor even its functionalism, but the geometric glass cascade of its atrium walk.<sup>22</sup>

Giedion's Modernist animosity between 'constitutive' and 'transient' might now be disputed. In St George's, was not the 'sublimation' of programmes, literally into the 'hybrid sublime', of abstract massing implicit of another kind of modern, that 'great botomy' which Koolhaas found between floors of dissociated programmes contained within the ecstatic figure of the skyscraper? With its perverse programme of trial-concert-trial-concert, St George's Hall may be seen as an horizontal skyscraper quite as 'delicious' as any New York tower; or, viewed as a Landlocked liner, a Foucauldian 'heterotopia' as odd as a floating airport.<sup>23</sup>

Such imaginings, Aldo Rossi might have described as 'analogical'. The 'permanence', which constituted, for Rossi, 'The Architecture Of The City', are typologies and monuments, beneath or among which drifts or haunts an 'Analogical City'; a psychic double more metaphorically 'true' than the actual. In this onerous museum, St George's 'scrotopoli' and Oriel Chambers are joined by objects, places, zones, tunnels, beliefs that are architecturally neither paragon nor paradigm. As George Meryly, locally-born *blues singer* and surrealist 'agent' observed to me, Liverpool is strewn with such analogical traps, few of which correspond to any usual sense of architectural 'quality'.<sup>24</sup>

### The Liverpool School

Quality, nevertheless, was the ideal of those patrician philanthropists – 'Liverpool Gentlemen, not Manchester Men' – who in 1883 founded the Roscoe Professorship of Art, and in 1895, the first university school of architecture. They aspired to raise the standard not just of design in Liverpool, but of civic culture altogether. Indeed, in its first decade the school ran a remarkable integrated course which, inspired by the Arts & Crafts movement, taught art, design, and trades within a single, municipally funded 'School of Architecture and Applied Arts'. Quentin Hughes described this bold experiment, which saw artists and tradesmen

