

Traditional Buildings of Britain – an introduction to Vernacular Architecture and its Revival by R.W. Brunskill.

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The key to the intention and content of this excellent book is in the sub-title, 'an introduction to Vernacular Architecture'.

Given that architecture is 'the art of enclosing space for the activities of our contemporaries', then vernacular architecture enclosed the every day activities of ordinary people who are our ancestors. As the author emphasises in his introduction 'The book is not about the great and imposing buildings which we usually call works of architecture'.

Rather, it deals with the design of simple buildings to be seen throughout our countryside, villages and towns. They include family homes for a range of social classes as well as churches, chapels, schools, cowhouses, stables, barns, windmills, watermills and kilns for social, agricultural and industrial activities. Simple, annotated drawings by the author are a delight and a model of clarity, occupying some fifty pages backed up by ninety photographs and some seventy pages of text.

Although the book is a successful introduction to and an appreciation of vernacular architecture to be seen throughout Britain, the author clearly hopes that some readers will be encouraged to make their own observations, to discover what research is being done and to become aware of the more specialised books now being published. He points out that serious studies of the subject have been carried out only in comparatively recent years, nearly all by amateurs but working at a professional rather than an amateur level. Such an approach would be natural to members of the British Masonry Society.

A chapter on the materials and methods commonly used in walls and roofs includes timber framing, cruck frames and trusses as well as walls of stone, flint, cobble and of course brick. Regarding bricks, it observes that although uniformity of size provides the basis for the economy of brickwork, the vernacular builders have shown that the resulting architecture can be greatly varied and far from uniform.

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