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978-0-521-81186-6 - Architects and the “Building World” from Chambers to Ruskin: Constructing Authority

Brian Hanson

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ARCHITECTS AND THE “BUILDING WORLD” FROM CHAMBERS TO RUSKIN

Constructing Authority

This study peers behind the veil of architectural styles to the underlying social microcosm of the “building world” of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to examine how the fragile authority of the architect took root there. Bringing to architectural history methods more familiar from studies of the social content of poetry and painting, Brian Hanson is able to establish new, and often surprising, relationships between many of the key figures of the period – including Chambers, Soane, Barry, Pugin, Scott and Street – shedding new light also on lesser figures, and on agencies as diverse as Freemasonry and magazine publishing. John Ruskin in particular emerges here in an entirely new light, as do his arguments concerning “The Nature of Gothic”. In line with recent rethinking of the pace of industrialisation, and the dynamic between the metropolitan centres and the more slowly evolving “fringes”, Hanson concludes that in some respects Ruskin was closer to William Chambers than to William Morris.

Brian Hanson is an architectural historian, who has also been deeply involved in contemporary architectural and urban practice. He has written on various aspects of nineteenth- and twentieth-century architecture and urban design, and has taught in the UK, the US, Europe and the Middle East. For more than a decade he advised the Prince of Wales on architectural and planning matters, and edited the Prince’s influential *A Vision of Britain* (1989). From 1994 to 1998 Dr. Hanson was Director of the Urban Design Task Force, which *The Times* called “one of the Prince’s most effective initiatives”. He is currently researching the significance of new scientific concepts for architectural and urban theory, and is writing an “intellectual biography” of the architect Christopher Alexander, entitled *Theory and Design in the ‘Gene Age’*.

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To Poo, Dinky, and Fluffy



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