

Lucinda Lambton, *Vanishing Victoriana*. Oxford, Phaidon, 1976. 141 pp., 128 illus., \$14.95

John M. Robson

Volume 5, numéro 2, 1978–1979

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1077031ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1077031ar>

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Éditeur(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (imprimé)

1918-4778 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Robson, J. M. (1978). Compte rendu de [Lucinda Lambton, *Vanishing Victoriana*. Oxford, Phaidon, 1976. 141 pp., 128 illus., \$14.95]. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 5(2), 148–149.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1077031ar>

LUCINDA LAMBTON *Vanishing Victoriana*. Oxford, Phaidon, 1976. 141 pp., 128 illus., \$14.95.

Given certain (or even uncertain) British accents, the 'vanishing' in *Vanishing Victoriana* might be heard as 'varnishing,' a sin both literal and metaphorical, but one for which Lucinda Lambton cannot be stoned. While demonstrating on every page her passion for preservation, she implies that – where possible – it should be preservation in use and *in situ*. Unfortunately her polemic, for such it properly is, will be seen and read by, and give pleasure and sorrow to, only the converted, for vandals are not likely to take thought or time for a tomorrow that includes our yesterdays. Hear the familiar words that accompany all too often the illustrations: disappeared since photographed, knocked down by mistake, allowed to decay, ruined through neglect, destroyed by fire, spoiled by ill-matched intrusions or thoughtless renovation, modernized, taken down for roadwidening, smashed, and viciously and unnecessarily demolished. Here sorrow at the unavoidable ravages of time and chance is mixed with anger at the mindless destruction of the mercenaries.

Through the volume runs a celebration of Victorian materials: brick (coloured, patterned, and carved), terra cotta, plaster, ceramics (hand-painted, transfer printed, majolica), marble, stone (sometimes also carved), brass and copper, and especially cast iron, stained glass, and paint. With these are occasionally contrasted the vile modern chromium, plastic, linoleum, vinyl, concrete, steel, fibreboard, and tin. The attack on modernism is carried on also through an explicit but not detailed adherence to Ruskin: 'Architecture proposes an effect on the human mind, not merely a service to the human frame'; it seeks to serve 'mental health, power and pleasure.'

Just here one must pause. 'The Victorians,' says Lambton not unreasonably but certainly uncritical-

ly, 'proclaimed through their buildings the solidity of their new-found wealth, their technical prowess, their new materials, and above all their high ideals.' Here one detects more enthusiasm than thought, and can sense the revisionist historians gravely turning. Their rate of rotation will increase rapidly, because Lambton virtually ignores those Victorian practices that embodied the most heartless of commercial impulses, producing the back-to-backs of industrial towns out of cheap-and-nasty common materials. And of course modernists will say that their ideals, however misunderstood, are just as 'high' and humane as the Victorians'.

Perhaps more damaging to the argument is another flaw that stems from the impulse to compare Victorian with modern rather than simply looking to value within the Victorian: the flaw is exposed in a quotation from Dickens (in part a previsionist revisionist) in which he splendidly complains about ridiculous embellishment and alterations by shop-keepers; in the passage (which, incidentally, is technically pre-Victorian) he also indicates the obvious truth that nineteenth-century change was change (demolition, smashing, etc.) of its past. Allowing for the differences in technology and demographic pressures, the Victorians were in general, like most of us, more likely to see the inconveniences than the glories of their heritage. And some of them, again like some of us, complained. An example is A. J. Munby's lament in his diary in 1859: 'After standing more than two hundred years, these old houses [in Figtree Court] are coming down at last, to be replaced no doubt by some wretched modern improvement.' *Autre temps, mêmes mœurs!*

Lambton's book, however, is more a celebration than a lamentation, and indeed there is much to celebrate. She gives us forty colour plates and eighty-eight black-and-whites, many full-page, which remind and also surprise. (They were evidently taken by the author, and do her much credit.) They are well

integrated into the text, which includes chapters on decorative detail, street furniture, railway stations, graves, public houses, restaurants, hotels, and shops. Those on decorative detail and railway stations are (predictably) the longest; that on graves (regrettably) the shortest. There is also a useful, though far from exhaustive, bibliography for each chapter, listing recent as well as contemporary works valuable to the enthusiast, whether amateur or professional.

The most exciting chapter, giving a lively sense of the surround of urban life, is that on street furniture: such items as lampposts, bollards, railings, drainpipe heads, gutters, roof terminals, fountains, footscrapers, public conveniences (Fig. 1; let modernists beware comparisons here!), etc., etc. Variety, extravagance, eccentricity, colour: in short, delight. Letterboxes (all green until 1874) came in twenty designs, and exuded (as did ours within living memory) confidence, not a desperate transience. There were (are?) some two thousand lions on house gables in Fulham. Middleton-in-Teesdale boasts a fountain with four crocodiles snapping at a baby sitting under an ornate arch. Apart from these details, lines of inquiry are prompted, though not followed: was the abundant naturalism an attempt to bring the emptying countryside to the city, or (and?) did it reflect a belief in the perfection of natural forms? How significant was the attempt to introduce 'home' elements into the workplace? Were attempts at visual metonymy, the whole modelled on a functional



FIGURE 1. Gentlemen's lavatory from the Philharmonic, Liverpool. From Lambton.

part, merely playful? How widespread was the impulse to match form to the existing cityscape and to habitual use? What possible meaning does the internal clutter have? Lambton does not wrestle with these matters, resting content with vague assertions that whatever answers there may be – and we do not have them – Victorian values were healthier than ours. But enough of this: regardless of one's views, the present has a crushing way of defending itself through its uniquely insistent presence.

JOHN M. ROBSON
University of Toronto

AMBROISE VOLLARD *Recollections of a Picture Dealer*. New York, Hacker Art Books, 1978. 326 pp. 33 illus., \$30.00.

The photocopying of the printed word has had both bad and good consequences in the intellectual world. The copying of books and magazine articles of living authors by academics has enriched the manufacturers of photocopying machines at the expense of authors and publishers. The reissuing of older books (especially art books, which often appeared originally in very small editions), on the other hand, has made such volumes broadly available in a very welcome way.

An example of the interesting reprint is Vollard's *Recollections*. As the title indicates, this is a series of reminiscences of the author's experiences as an art dealer. Vollard deliberately avoided criticism or analysis of the work of the artists he sold, and the value of the book lies in the picture he recreates of the Paris art scene before World War I, particularly of the less familiar traditional art world. Vollard loved good stories and the book is packed with anecdotes about artists, dealers and collectors, many of them no doubt true. Nevertheless, there are some illuminating passages on the painters, notably Manet. Vollard presents himself in a modest, self-

deprecating way that reveals little of how the young provincial from La Réunion in the Indian Ocean came to appreciating the best artists of his time, and especially his brilliance in giving Cézanne his first one-man show in 1895. Even at that late date, it was a bold venture.

Vollard's vanity, commented on by Picasso, is indicated more openly in his account of how he became a publisher of *livres d'artiste*. He claims that it was seeing by chance a fine title page with 'Ambroise Firmin-Didot, éditeur' beautifully printed on it, that inspired him to think that 'Ambroise Vollard, éditeur' would look rather fine too. By becoming a publisher, Vollard found a way to stamp his name on his artists' work. He thus achieved recognition as a creative force rather than simply as a middle man of art.

The present book is well produced and does not have the seedy look of some reissues, though it suffers from the inevitable greyness of photo reprints. This might not have pleased Vollard, who is praised in the new foreword for tirelessly seeking skilled printers and demanding their best efforts. One drawback is the price, which may discourage many potential buyers. At this price a critical edition is to be expected, rather than the simple reprint with a brief biographical foreword by Una E. Johnson. When so many books of this kind are being cheaply reprinted by paperback publishers, the volume under review seems to fall between two stools. We hope that Hacker finds a way to make its books more accessible, as it is a worthwhile enterprise.

GERALD NEEDHAM
York University
Toronto

YIGAL YADIN, ed. *Jerusalem Revealed: Archaeology in the Holy City 1968-1974*. New Haven, Yale University Press, and Jerusalem, The Israel Exploration Society, 1975. 139+ viii pp., illus., \$12.95.

This volume, the first of a planned series, is clearly described in the foreword as a reply to the criticism levelled at Israel by UNESCO for extensive archaeological investigation of the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. The text consists of thirty-two articles by a total of twenty-seven contributors. It is divided into three sections: The Ancient City (twenty-one articles), The Mediaeval City (seven articles), and The Modern City (four articles), and within each section there are studies on secular as well as on religious sites. Although the vast majority of topics deal with specifically Jewish subjects, Christian and Islamic themes are also represented and in fact together make up the entire mediaeval section.

An anthology of this nature, covering many different topics and a vast chronological span, is extremely difficult to review in any detail. The following remarks therefore, of necessity, will be confined to fairly general considerations.

The first question arises within the first article and remains unanswered throughout the remaining thirty-one: what is the intended audience? The foreword states that the content consists of abridged translations of material published in the Hebrew quarterly *Qadmoniot*, but the end result seems too detailed for the lay reader yet not detailed enough for the professional archaeologist. Many of the articles assume a degree of background knowledge beyond what might be expected of the general public; at the same time, the lack of an extensive bibliography or of any footnotes whatsoever suggests that the publication is not geared towards the scholar.

The articles are presented chronologically, beginning with 'Jerusalem in the Biblical Period.' This adherence to chronology