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**GUILD OF ST GEORGE**

**RUSKIN & THE CRAFTS, Reading IV, 10 March 2023**

**Ruskin's Travels, from Dunblane to Venice**

**INTRODUCTION**

**[PETER]**

Welcome to the fourth of the Ruskin Readings under the overall heading of ‘Ruskin & the Crafts’.

Our galaxy of readers today consists of:

1. Déirdre Kelly lives and works as an artist in Venice; her studio is at the Scuola Internazionale di Grafica where she is curator of SG Gallery. An exhibition of her work entitled ‘Tracery – Venice and the Lakes Interlaced’ will open on 20th April at Brantwood in the Blue Gallery.
2. Marcus Waithe is a University Associate Professor in English at the University of Cambridge, and a Fellow of Magdalene College; within the past few weeks Marcus has published two new books – one is a dialogue with the famous letter-cutter Lida Lopes Cardozo Kindersley and the other is an intellectual tour de force entitled *The Work of Words – Literature, Craft, and the Labour of Mind in Britain, 1830-1940.* Marcus also has the distinction of having written the Brief and guided many aspects of the new Library for the students of Magdalene College, Cambridge, which has been awarded the Stirling Prize for being the best new building in Britain.
3. Ross Burgess is a graduate of the University of Oxford in Philosophy Politics and Economics and the Open University in Pure and Applied Mathematics. For many years he was an IT consultant but in retirement he has turned to book editing and web design. He is currently researching and writing about the use of the classical orders in Scottish architecture and is a keen student of Ruskin’s writings.
4. I came to live in Scotland to be Director of Conservation & Property Services of The National Trust for Scotland. I have always been conscious of Ruskin’s guiding influence on the evolution of the National Trust movement, which now extends to more than 60 countries. I work as an Arts & Heritage Consultant and am a Board member of the Guild of St George with portfolios for our International Relationships and for Craftspeople and Craftsmanship.

All four of us are Companions of the Guild of St George. Marcus is also Chair of the Ruskin Society. We wish to dedicate this reading to the memory of sculptor and building artificer, Rory Young, who read and spoke so memorably at the first session last December. He died of an inoperable cancer on 23 February and his funeral was yesterday. I will say more about him at the end.

Today’s session focuses on what we can glean of Ruskin’s passionate interest in the skills of craftspeople, including painters and sculptors, their materials and their methods through his extensive travels in Europe and indeed throughout his native land.

What was Ruskin’s native land? True, he was born in Hunter Square, Bloomsbury, London, in a house that was pulled down within living memory, though numerous small artefacts were rescued from it before the demolition began. But I always bear in mind that in Ruskin’s first biography, *The Life and Work of John Ruskin*, by his close friend and secretary William Gershom Collingwood, 1893, the first words of the first chapter, headed ‘The Ruskin Family’, read as follows:

**[Fig. 1, John Ruskin - self portrait, about 1864-65]**

**[DÉIRDRE]**

If origin, if early training and habits of life, if tastes, and character, and associations, fix a man’s nationality, then John Ruskin is a Scotsman. He was born in London, but his family was from Scotland. He was brought up in Surrey, but the friends and teachers, the standards and influences of his early life, were chiefly Scottish. The writers who directed him into the main lines of his thought and work, not so much because he chose them as leaders, as because he was naturally brought under the spell of their inspiration, were Scotsmen – from Sir Walter Scott and Lord Lindsay and Principal Forbes to the master of his later studies of men and the means of life, Thomas Carlyle. The religious instinct so conspicuous in him is a heritage from Scotland; so is his conscience and code of morality, part emotional, part logical, and often unlike an Englishman’s in the points that satisfy or shock it. The combination of shrewd common sense and romantic sentiment; the oscillation between levity and dignity, from caustic jest to tender earnest; the restlessness, the fervour, the impetuosity,- all these are characteristics of a Scotsman of parts, and highly developed in Ruskin. (Collingwood, pp. 3–4)

**[PETER]**

Our first reading is from *The Poetry of Architecture; or, the Architecture of the Nations of Europe considered in its association with Natural Scenery and National Character*, written while he was an undergraduate at Oxford. It seems appropriate to introduce the reading with further helpful words from Collingwood’s biography:

**[DÉIRDRE]**

This piece of work, buried in a rarely seen periodical, is a valuable link in the development of his *Seven Lamps*; anticipating many of his conclusions of later days, and exhibiting his literary style as very near maturity. It deals with the countries he had visited – the English Lakeland, France, Switzerland and North Italy; but some little notice of Spain suggests occasional collaboration with his father. (Collingwood, p. 70)

**[PETER]**

Our reading shows that Ruskin was one of the earliest writers to speak of the special qualities of vernacular buildings, built of local and natural materials, especially stone and timber, designed not by architects or building surveyors but chiefly by the men and women who were to live in them. The designers were most often also the builders, probably with help from their neighbours including those with special skills. Here is his first encounter in Switzerland:

**[Fig. 2. Swiss Cottage near Altdorf - drawing by John Ruskin (1. p. 35)]**

**[MARCUS]**

Well do I remember the thrilling and exquisite moment when first, first in my life (which had not been over long), I encountered, in a calm and shadowy dingle, darkened with the thick spreading of tall pines, and voiceful with the singing of a rock-encumbered stream, and passing up towards the flank of a smooth green mountain, whose swarded summit shone in the summer snow like an emerald set in silver; when, I say, I first encountered in this calm defile of the Jura, the unobtrusive, yet beautiful, front of the Swiss cottage. I thought it the loveliest piece of architecture I had ever the felicity of contemplating; yet it was nothing in itself, nothing but a few mossy fir trunks, loosely nailed together, with one or two grey stones on the roof: but its power was the power of association; its beauty, that of fitness and humility. (1, p. 31)

**[PETER]**

Ruskin paid his first visit to the Jura on the Continental tour he made with his parents in 1835. Fifty years later he recalled, in *Praeterita*:

**[ROSS]**

All Switzerland was there in hope and sensation, and what was less than Switzerland was in some sort better, in its meek simplicity and healthy purity. The Jura cottage is not carved with the stately richness of the Bernese, nor set together with the antique strength of Uri. It is covered with thin slit pine shingles, side roofed as it were to the ground for mere dryness’ sake, a little crossing of laths here and there under the window its only ornament. It has no daintiness of garden nor wealth of farm about it,– is indeed little more than a delicately built chalet, yet trim and domestic, mildly intelligent of things other than pastoral, watch-making and the like, though set in the midst of the meadows, the gentian at its door, the lily of the valley wild in the copses hard by. (35, pp. 164–5)

**[Fig. 3. Chimneys - drawing by John Ruskin (1. p. 58)]**

**[PETER]**

In the cottage section of *The Poetry of Architecture*, there is ‘A Chapter on Chimneys’ dated 10 February 1838, Oxford. The chapter contains a half-page of drawings of 18 different types of chimney, as good as any architectural historian or building archaeologist of today might do. The text analyses the different types, drawing attention to Fig. 9, *c* which is the chimney of a Westmoreland house discussed elsewhere in the text.

**[Fig. 4a. Coniston Hall- drawing by John Ruskin (1. p. 60)***alongside* **Fig 4b. Coniston Hall - photograph by Peter Burman]**

**[DÉIRDRE]**

The good taste which prevailed in the rest of the building is not so conspicuous here, because the architect has begun to consider effect instead of utility, and has put a diamond-shaped piece of ornament on the front (usually containing the date of the building), which was not necessary, and looks out of place. He has endeavoured to build neatly too, and has bestowed a good deal of plaster on the outside, by all which circumstances the work is infinitely deteriorated. We have always disliked cylindrical chimneys, probably because they put us in mind of glasshouses and manufactories, for we are aware of no more definite reason; yet this example is endurable, and has a character about it which it would be a pity to lose. Sometimes when the square part is carried down the whole front of the cottage, it looks like the remains of some grey tower, and is not felt to be a chimney at all. Such deceptions are always very dangerous, though in this case sometimes attended with good effect, as in the old building called Coniston Hall, on the shores of Coniston Water, whose distant outline is rendered light and picturesque, by the size and shape of its chimneys, which are the same in character as Fig. 9, c. (1, p. 59, para 69)

**[Fig. 5. Brantwood - sketch by John Ruskin on first visiting his new house, 1871]**

**[PETER]**

Ruskin would have known Coniston Hall from his extensive travels round England with his parents. Looking across from it to the west bank of Lake Coniston he may well have glimpsed the Regency cottage which, gradually extended, became his home from 1872 to 1900, Brantwood.

**[Fig. 6. Ruskin lace - photograph by Peter Burman]**

During those later decades of his life he became a passionate defender of the character of the Lake District, its buildings and landscapes, and the way of life of its inhabitants including the craftspeople who built and maintained its drystone walls, those who spun and wove its wool, those who made the characteristic vernacular furniture of the Lake District, and all the skills that were necessary to maintain rural life.

**[Fig. 7a. Dunblane Cathedral by J. M. W. Turner (sketch)***alongside* **Fig 7b, Dunblane Cathedral by J. M. W. Turner (painting)]**

Returning to Scotland, it is time to recount the story of Ruskin’s involvement with Dunblane Cathedral.

In June 1853 Ruskin set off for a holiday in Scotland accompanied by Effie, his wife; a friend of hers called Miss McKenzie; John Everett Millais, the leading painter of the Pre-Raphaelite movement so admired by Ruskin for their craftsman-like painterly skills; and Millais’ brother William. Their journey is well recorded in letters from Ruskin to his father.

**[Fig. 8a. Wallington Hall - photograph by Peter Burman***alongside* **Fig 8b. Pauline, Lady Trevelyan, by William Bell Scott (National Trust) )**

The holiday began with staying at Wallington Hall, as the guests of Ruskin’s friends, Sir Walter Trevelyan and his wife Pauline, who was a particular friend of Ruskin. Ruskin wrote to his father on 23 June 1853:

**[MARCUS]**

This is the most beautiful place possible – a large old seventeenth-century stone house in an old English terraced garden, beautifully kept, all the hawthorns still in full blossom; terrace opening on a sloping, wild park, down to the brook, about the half a mile fair slope; and woods on the other side, and undulating country with a peculiar *Northumberlandishness* about it – a far-away look which Millais enjoys intensely. We are all very happy, and going this afternoon over the moors to a little tarn where the sea-gulls come to breed. (12, xix)

**[Fig. 9. Sir Walter Scott’s Abbotsford - photograph by Peter Burman]**

**[PETER]**

After some days, the party set out for the Trossachs, made popular by Sir Walter Scott and by numerous paintings of their Picturesqueness. They visited many romantic places on the way, such as Melrose, Stirling and Dunblane.

Ruskin was to use his drawings of Dunblane to illustrate the lectures which he was preparing to give in Edinburgh in the autumn of the same year. He wrote enthusiastically to his father from Doune on 2 July 1853:

**[Fig. 10. Dunblane Cathedral before re-roofing, showing small upper window]**

**[ROSS]**

We have just dined at Stirling; drove on to Dunblane and saw the most lovely abbey there – far the finest thing I have seen in Scotland … Dunblane is exquisitely beautiful in its simplicity: grand concentric arches, and the oval window in the centre of the west end set with two leaves alternately sloping as in the margin [Ruskin has drawn the window on the margin of the letter], and the proportion of the whole quite heavenly. It is a lovely afternoon, and William Millais is half beside himself with delight, and all of us very happy. (12, xx)

**[PETER]**

During the weeks following, Ruskin was contentedly drawing and writing his lectures while Millais began his famous portrait of Ruskin which is now in the Ashmolean Museum, in Oxford.

**[Fig. 11. John Ruskin, by John Everett Millais (Ashmolean Museum)]**

Ruskin wrote to his father on 6 July:

**[DÉIRDRE]**

Millais has fixed on his place, a lovely piece of worn rock, with foaming water and weeds and moss, and a noble overhanging bank of dark crag; and I am to be standing looking quietly down the stream; just the sort of thing I used to do for hours together. He is very happy at the idea of doing it, and I think you will be proud of the picture, and we shall have the two most wonderful torrents in the world, Turner’s ‘St Gotthard’ and Millais’s ‘Glenfinlas’.

**[Fig. 12. The Pass of St Gotthard, Switzerland, by J. M. W. Turner]**

He is going to take the utmost possible pains with it, and says he can paint rocks and water better than anything else. I am sure the foam of the torrent will be something quite new in art. (12, xxiv)

**[Fig. 13. The Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh, engraving of 1829]**

**[PETER]**

Ruskin’s *Lectures on Architecture & Painting* were delivered at Edinburgh in November 1853 and published in 1854. In the first lecture, on ‘Architecture’, Ruskin gives one of his famous passages on looking to nature for inspiration:

**[Fig. 14. Window in Dunblane Cathedral, drawing by John Ruskin]**

**[MARCUS]**

Do you recollect the west window of your own Dunblane Abbey? If you look in any common guide-book, you will find it pointed out as peculiarly beautiful,- it is acknowledged to be beautiful by the most careless observer. And why beautiful? Look at it. Simply because in its great contours it has the form of a forest leaf, and because in its decoration it has used nothing but forest leaves. The sharp and expressive moulding which surrounds it is a very interesting example of one used to an enormous extent by the builders of the early English Gothic … composed of clusters of four sharp leaves each, originally produced by sculpturing the sides of a four-sided pyramid, and afterwards brought more or less into a true image of leaves, but deriving all its beauty from the botanical form. In the present instance only two leaves are set in each cluster; and the architect has been determined that the naturalism should be perfect. For he was no common man who designed that cathedral at Dunblane. I know not anything so perfect in its simplicity, and so beautiful, as far as it reaches, in all the Gothic with which I am acquainted. And just in proportion to his power of mind, that man was content to work under Nature’s teaching; and instead of putting a merely formal dogtooth, as everybody else did at the time, he went down to the woody bank beneath the rocks on which he was building, and he took up a few of the fallen leaves that lay by it, and he set them in his arch, side by side, for ever. (12, pp 31-2)

**[ROSS]**

And, look – that he might show you he had done this, - he has made them all of different sizes, just as they lay; and that you might not by any chance miss noticing the variety, he has put a great broad one at the top, and then a little one turned the wrong way, next to it, so that you must be blind indeed if you do not understand his meaning. And the healthy change and playfulness of this just does in the stone-work what it does on the tree boughs, and is a perpetual refreshment and invigoration; so that, however long you gaze at this simple ornament – and none can be simpler, a village mason could carve it all round the window in a few hours – you are never weary of it, it seems always new.

It is true that oval windows of this form are comparatively rare in Gothic work, but, as you well know, circular or wheel windows are used constantly, and in most traceries the apertures are curved and pointed as much at the bottom as the top. So that I believe you will now allow me to proceed upon the assumption, that the pointed arch is indeed the best form into which the head either of door or window can be thrown, considered as a means of sustaining weight above it. How these pointed arches ought to be grouped and decorated, I shall endeavour to show you in my next lecture … (12, p 32)

**[Fig. 15a. Dunblane Cathedral, interior of nave, before re-roofing***alongside* **Fig. 15b. Dunblane Cathedral, re-roofed nave]**

**[PETER]**

More than thirty years later Ruskin and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings were to campaign unsuccessfully for the roofless nave to remain roofless. By 1886 the capacity of the chancel, which had remained in use after the Reformation, was deemed to be inadequate and, after exploring alternatives, it was decided to bring the nave back into use.

**[Fig. 16a. SPAB Annual Report 1889***alongside* **Fig 16b. SPAB AR 1889 - article against re-roofing Cathedral]**

The architect was Robert Rowand Anderson, responsible for training a number of the outstanding Arts & Crafts architects of the next generation. But he had been trained in the office of Sir George Gilbert Scott and was therefore somewhat suspect in the eyes of Ruskin, who spoke of the ‘vulgar brutality’ of his proposals: and of the SPAB who considered that ‘the scheme must necessarily be of a destructive character’.

**[Fig. 17. Dunblane Cathedral choir roof structure]**

Photographs of the 1880s show that the nave, which had been unroofed in 1622, had survived remarkably well. In the event, the work was carried out to a high standard of craftsmanship, for example the superb new roofs of nave and chancel.

**[Fig. 18. Dunblane Cathedral west doorway]**

The three monumental doorways were well and properly conserved. There was much gain as well as loss, but to weigh them in the balance could only be a matter of judgment not of dogma.

**[Fig. 19. Dunblane Cathedral screen and organ]**

Moreover, Robert Rowand Anderson was succeeded as architect in the early 20th century by Robert Lorimer, the outstanding architect of the Scottish Arts & Crafts Movement, and Anderson’s disciple, who designed canopied stalls, the communion table, a reredos-like screen behind the communion table and a superb organ case. These were all carved by the outstanding Clow brothers, William and Alexander Clow, between 1912 and 1914. For Lorimer they also did much other work including the stalls of the Knights of the Thistle attached to the High Kirk of St Giles.

**[Fig. 20a. Dunblane Cathedral High Altar ensemble***alongside* **Fig 20b. Dunblane Cathedral choir stalls]**

The high level of fine craftsmanship in the cathedral has led to it being often described as ‘the Scottish cathedral of the Arts & Crafts Movement’.

There is an irony here in that if Ruskin’s plea not to re-roof the nave had been heeded there would not have been the opportunity for all this superb craftsmanship in wood, stained glass and metal.

**[Fig. 21a. Dunblane Cathedral lectern***alongside* **Fig. 21b. Dunblane Cathedral lectern (detail)]**

We have abundant evidence of Ruskin’s deep knowledge and love of the cathedrals of those European countries to which he was a frequent visitor. A passage in *Modern Painters IV*, in the chapter entitled ‘The Mountain Glory’,mentions a good many of them:

**[Fig. 22a. Lincoln Cathedral , central tower***alongside* **Fig. 22b. Sainte Chapelle, Paris]**

**[DÉIRDRE]**

The only art work that France and England have done nobly is that which is centralized by the Cathedral of Lincoln, and the Sainte Chapelle. We had at that time (we—French and English—but the French first) the incontestable lead among European nations; no thirteenth-century work in Italy is comparable for majesty of conception, or wealth of imaginative detail, to the Cathedrals of Chartres, Rheims, Rouen, Amiens, Lincoln, Peterborough, Wells, or Lichfield. But every hour of the fourteenth century saw French and English art in precipitate decline, Italian in steady ascent; and by the time that painting and sculpture had developed themselves in an approximated perfection, in the work of Ghirlandajo and Mino of Fésole, we had in France and England no workman, in any art, deserving a workman’s name: nothing but skilful masons, with more or less love of the picturesque, and redundance of undisciplined imagination, flaming itself away in wild and rich traceries, and crowded bosses of grotesque figure sculpture, and expiring at last in barbarous imitation of the perfected skill and erring choice of Renaissance Italy. Painting could not decline, for it had not reached any eminence; the exquisite arts of illumination and glass design had led to no effective results in other materials; they themselves, incapable of any higher perfection than they had reached in the thirteenth century, perished in the vain endeavour to emulate pictorial excellence, bad drawing being substituted, in books, for lovely writing, and opaque precision, in glass, for transparent power; nor in any single department of exertion did artists arise of such calibre or class as any of the great Italians; and yet all the while, in literature, we were gradually and steadily advancing in power up to the time of Shakespeare; the Italians, on the contrary, not advancing after the time of Dante. (6, pp. 436-7, § 23)

**[PETER]**

In the preface to the 1855 second edition of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* Ruskin was to write:

**[Fig. 23. West Front of Wells Cathedral]**

**[MARCUS]**

I have now no doubt that the only style proper for modern Northern work, is the Northern Gothic of the thirteenth century, as exemplified, in England, pre-eminently by the cathedrals of Lincoln and Wells, and, in France, by those of Paris, Amiens, Chartres, Rheims, and Bourges, and by the transepts of that of Rouen. (8, p.12, § 8)

**[PETER]**

The architect and first Principal of the Central School of Arts & Crafts, William Richard Lethaby, described the panoply of sculpture on the West Front of Wells Cathedral as being ‘one half of our noblest art’.

**[Fig. 24. West Front of Lincoln Cathedral]**

A footnote on the same page quotes from a letter of 10 April 1851 to his father, saying of Lincoln:

**[Fig. 25. South Portal at Lincoln Cathedral]**

**[ROSS]**

This is to my mind worth all the English cathedrals I have ever seen put together – far beyond my highest expectations. The Galilee – so called – and porch of the small transept on the south side are quite unique, I think, as examples of pure English Gothic in its richest form; and the façade is noble – so thoroughly fine in *colour* as well as in design – and no small hill neither which it is set upon; and a delightful old town. [Reference to be added]

**[PETER]**

Later he wrote:

**[ROSS]**

I have always held, and am prepared against all comers to maintain, that the Cathedral of Lincoln is out-and-out the most precious piece of architecture in the British Islands, and roughly speaking, worth any two other cathedrals we have got. [Reference to be added]

**[PETER]**

This second quotation gave me infinite pleasure during the years when I was the Chair of the Fabric Committee of Lincoln Cathedral, and I often quoted what Ruskin had said. But Ruskin here emphasises that it is the *architecture* that he is praising so highly. It always surprises me that he does not remark specifically on the *sculpture*, both Romanesque and Gothic, which has survived on the west fronts of both Lincoln and Wells cathedrals.

**[Fig. 26. Romanesque sculpture conserved at Lincoln Cathedral]**

The Wells West Front sculpture was conserved 1974-86 and that of Lincoln has recently emerged from a long programme of conservation and interpretation. It is interesting that he remarks upon the *colour* of the west front. Indeed, the limestone of which the cathedral is built has a most beautiful tonality. It comes from a quarry just one mile north of the cathedral which still belongs to the Chapter of the cathedral. It is not clear whether Ruskin was aware that all ancient architecture and sculpture was originally decorated with painted colours and gilding. Abundant evidence survives but is not immediately obvious except at close quarters.

The next reading introduces us to an important aspect of Ruskin’s thinking, which was to blossom in Venice, and that is the importance of *recording* our historic buildings heritage:

**[Fig. 27. Notre Dame de Paris]**

**[DÉIRDRE]**

I must here also deprecate an idea which is often taken up by hasty readers of the *Stones of Venice*; namely, that I suppose Venetian architecture the most noble of the schools of Gothic. I have great respect for Venetian Gothic, but only as one among many early schools. My reason for devoting so much time to Venice, was not that her architecture is the best in existence, but that it exemplifies, in the smallest compass, the most interesting facts of architectural history. The Gothic of Verona is far nobler than that of Venice; and that of Florence nobler than that of Verona. For our own immediate purposes that of Notre-Dame of Paris is noblest of all; and the greatest service which can at present be rendered to architecture, is the careful delineation of the details of the cathedrals above named, by means of photography. I would particularly desire to direct the attention of amateur photographers to this task; earnestly requesting them to bear in mind that while a photograph of landscape is merely an amusing toy, one of early architecture is a precious historical document; and that this architecture should be taken, not merely when it presents itself under picturesque general forms, but stone by stone, and sculpture by sculpture; seizing every opportunity afforded by scaffolding to approach it closely, and putting the camera in any position that will command the sculpture, wholly without regard to the resultant distortions of the vertical lines; such distortion can always be allowed for, if once the details are completely obtained.

It would be still more patriotic in lovers of architecture to obtain casts of the sculptures of the thirteenth century, wherever an opportunity occurs, and to place them where they would be easily accessible to the ordinary workman. The Architectural Museum at Westminster is one of the institutions which it appears to me most desirable to enrich in this manner. (8, pp. 12-14, § 9)

**[Fig. 28. Amiens Cathedral, Three West Portals - drawing by John Ruskin]**

**[PETER]**

Ruskin naturally followed his own advice. For example, detailed photographs of the cathedral at Amiens were taken, on Ruskin’s instructions, for *The Bible of Amiens* published between 1880 and 1885*.* Some of these superb photographs are reproduced in Volume 33 of the Library Edition where the editors E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn describe that work as ‘one of the central books in Ruskin’s gospel’. Intriguingly, in the introduction to that volume, the editors tell us that in 1879–1880 a welter of Ruskin Societies began to be founded (for example in Manchester, Glasgow and London). Some were specifically called ‘Ruskin Reading Guilds’, with a realisation – such as we have in our own day – that to read Ruskin aloud is a particular kind of pleasure, challenging, informative and pleasing to the ear when performed successfully.

In the chapter called ‘Interpretations’, Ruskin tumbles over himself with excitement about the wood carving in Amiens cathedral, and it is no accident that Plate VII is of the choir stalls. He tells us:

**[Fig. 29. Amiens Cathedral, Choir Stalls - drawing by John Ruskin]**

**[MARCUS]**

Whatever you wish to see, or are forced to leave unseen, at Amiens, if the overwhelming responsibilities of your existence, and the inevitable necessities of precipitate locomotion in their fulfilment, have left you so much as one quarter of an hour, not out of breath—for the contemplation of the capital of Picardy, give it wholly to the cathedral choir. Aisles and porches, lancet windows and roses, you can see elsewhere as well as here—but such carpenter’s work, you cannot. It is late,—fully developed flamboyant just past the fifteenth century—and has some Flemish stolidity mixed with the playing French fire of it; but wood-carving was the Picard’s joy from his youth up, and, so far as I know, there is nothing else so beautiful cut out of the goodly trees of the world.

Sweet and young-grained wood it is: oak, trained and chosen for such work, sound now as four hundred years since. Under the carver’s hand it seems to cut like clay, to fold like silk, to grow like living branches, to leap like living flame. Canopy crowning canopy, pinnacle piercing pinnacle—it shoots and wreathes itself into an enchanted glade, inextricable, imperishable, fuller of leafage than any forest, and fuller of story than any book. (33, p.125, paragraph 5)

**[Fig. 30. Eugène Viollet-le-Duc]**

**[PETER]**

In this chapter Ruskin writes with particular appreciation of Viollet-le-Duc and especially of his *Dictionary of French Architecture from 11th to 16th Century* (1854–1868). Viollet-le-Duc had described the cathedral of Amiens as ‘The Parthenon of Gothic Architecture’. It is clear that Ruskin has made scrupulous and exhaustive use of Viollet-le-Duc’s *Dictionary* to give us authoritative account of the sculpture on the west front. In this respect Ruskin’s work functions as a guide-book.

Since Ruskin’s day the identities of more and more of the master craftspeople who built Europe’s cathedrals have come to light, through greater access to cathedral and other private and public archives. But Ruskin engagingly introduces us to Robert the Builder:

**[DÉIRDRE]**

The actual Man who built it scarcely cared to tell you he did so; nor do the historians brag of him. Any quantity of heraldries of knaves and *fainéants* you may find in what they call their “history”: but this is probably the first time you ever read the name of Robert of Luzarches. I say he “scarcely cared”—we are not sure that he cared at all. He signed his name nowhere, that I can hear of. You may perhaps find some recent initials cut by English remarkable visitors desirous of immortality, here and there about the edifice, but Robert the builder—or at least the Master of building, cut his on no stone of it. (33, p.132)

**[Fig. 31. West Front of Amiens Cathedral]**

**[PETER]**

There follows an exhaustive account of the iconography of the sculpture of the cathedral, and especially of the West Front, with due appreciation of Viollet-le-Duc. The following passage exhibits a remarkable softening of Ruskin’s formerly rigidly Protestant stance:

**[Fig. 32. Nurse Madonna, Queen Madonna, by John Ruskin after Viollet-le-Duc]**

**[MARCUS]**

And now, last of all, if you care to see it, we will go into the Madonna’s porch—only, if you come at all, good Protestant feminine reader—come civilly: and be pleased to recollect, if you have, in known history, material for recollection, this (or if you cannot recollect—be you very solemnly assured of this): that neither Madonna-worship, nor Lady-worship of any sort, whether of dead ladies or living ones, ever did any human creature any harm,—but that Money worship, Wig worship, Cocked-Hat-and- Feather worship, Plate worship, Pot worship and Pipe worship, have done, and are doing, a great deal,—and that any of these, and all, are quite million-fold more offensive to the God of Heaven and Earth and the Stars, than all the absurdest and lovingest mistakes made by any generations of His simple children, about what the Virgin-mother could, or would, or might do, or feel for them. (33, pp.164-5, paragraph 48)

**[Fig. 33a. York Minster, West Front***alongside* **Fig 33b. Detail of new carving designed by Rory Young]**

**[PETER]**

In trying to understand the relationship between the craftsman and the theologian in the Middle Ages we may recall what we learned in our first session about the spectacular new west doorway of York Minster completed in the year 2000. One of the York Minster clergy, Canon John Toy, who was Canon Theologian, drew up the programme for the iconography. He discussed it in depth and over a period of thoughtful reflection with the designer, who was our dear friend Rory Young; Rory then created the maquettes for the approval process; the maquettes were then copied in the Minster Stone-yard by the very capable stone-carvers there. The result was a triumph, rich in both beauty and meaning. We have to imagine something very similar happening in the Middle Ages.

Our journey is due to end in Venice and so it is time to move on from France to Italy, beginning in Lucca. Lucca is a city which drew a very rich and complex response from Ruskin of which it is only possible to touch the surface here. In the ‘Epilogue’ to *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin says:

**[Fig 34. Tomb of Ilaria di Caretto - drawing by John Ruskin]**

**[ROSS]**

From Genoa I went on in that spring of 1845, to Lucca, where the tomb of Ilaria di Caretto at once altered the course of my life for me and from that day I left the upholsterer’s business in art to those who trade in it, and have guided my work, and limited my teaching, only by the sacred laws of truth and devotion which created the perfect schools of Christian art in Florence and Venice. (11, p.239)

**[PETER]**

Ruskin’s editors guide us immediately to *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 45, where we find the following:

**[ROSS]**

Thirty years ago, I began my true study of Italian, and all other art,—here, beside the statue of Ilaria di Caretto, recumbent on her tomb. It turned me from the study of landscape to that of life, being then myself in the fullest strength of labour, and joy of hope.

And I was thinking, last night, that the drawing which I am now trying to make of it, in the weakness and despair of declining age, might possibly be the last I should make before quitting the study of Italian, and even all other, art, for ever. (28, p.146, paragraph 2)

**[DÉIRDRE]**

In *Modern Painters II* there is an extensive passage in which Ruskin describes the tomb but in a footnote is the letter which Ruskin wrote to his father on 6 May 1845, and is even more moving in its freshness of response:

**[Fig. 35. Head of the effigy of Ilaria di Caretto - drawing by W. G. Collingwood]**

**[MARCUS]**

When the rose tints leave the clouds I go and spend a quarter of an hour beside the tomb of Ilaria di Caretto. It is in the Cathedral. She was the second wife of Paolo Guinigi, Signore of Lucca in 1430. He left the Lucchese several good laws which they have still, but in a war with the Florentines he was betrayed by his allies, and died in a prison at Pavia. The tower of his palace fortress is overgrown with copse-wood, but the iron rings, to which his horses used to be fastened, still are seen along the length of the street before it; and the hooks by which the silken draperies were suspended on festa days.

This, his second wife, died young, and her monument is by Jacopo della Quercia, erected soon after her death. She is lying on a simple pillow, with a hound at her feet. Her dress is of the simplest middle age character, folding closely over the bosom and tight to the arms, clasped about the neck. Round her head is a circular fillet with three star-shaped flowers. From under this the hair falls like that of the Magdalene, its undulation just felt as it touches the cheek, and no more. The arms are not folded, nor the hands clasped nor raised. Her arms are laid softly at length upon her body, and her hands cross as they fall. The drapery flows over the feet and half hides the hound. It is impossible to tell you the perfect sweetness of the lips and closed eyes, nor the solemnity of the seal of death which is set upon the whole figure. The sculpture—as art—is in every way perfect: truth itself, but truth selected with inconceivable refinement of feeling. The cast of the drapery, for severe natural simplicity and perfect grace, I never saw equalled, nor the fall of the hands; you expect every instant, nay rather you seem to see every instant, the last sinking into death. There is no decoration nor work about it; not even enough for protection; you may stand beside it leaning on the pillow, and watching the twilight fade off the sweet dead lips and arched eyes in their sealed close. (4, p.122)

**[Fig. 36. Santa Maria della Spina, Pisa - watercolour by John Ruskin]**

**[PETER]**

In the Guild’s collection of paintings is a watercolour by Ruskin of exquisite quality of the church of *Santa Maria della Spina, Pisa, Italy*, dated 1845, which was shown in the 2019 bi-centenary exhibition, a collaboration with Two Temple Place, entitled *John Ruskin, The Power of Seeing*. As its name suggests, the church contained what legend had it was a thorn from the Crown of Thorns with which Jesus was crowned for mockery on the day of his crucifixion, as did the *Sainte Chapelle* in Paris and many other shrine-like churches.

**[Fig. 37. Santa Maria della Spina south side - daguerrotype, c. 1846]**

There also exist two daguerreotypes, a medium in which Ruskin took a great deal of interest, and practised himself. Having first drawn, and been drawn to, Santa Maria della Spina in 1840 he now heard with alarm on his 1845 visit that the church had been proposed for demolition ‘to widen the quay’, on which it stood. Pisa was still at that point a considerable port.

In the event, the solution was for the church to be taken down and re-erected further from the quay, in some respects with remarkable skill. Ruskin himself witnessed a barbaric act of destruction so great that it was still rankling in his mind as a terrible act of vandalism when he came to write Letter No. 20 of *Fors Clavigera* in August 1872, the year in which he took up residence in Brantwood:

**[ROSS]**

It was some comfort to me, that second of May last, at Pisa, to watch the workman’s ashamed face, as he struck the old marble cross to pieces. Stolidly and languidly he dealt the blows,—down-looking,—so far as in anywise sensitive, ashamed,—and well he might be.

It was a wonderful thing to see done. This Pisan chapel, first built in 1230, then called the Oracle, or Oratory,— ‘Oraculum, vel Oratorium’—of the Blessed Mary of the New Bridge, afterwards called the Sea-bridge (Ponte-a-Mare), was a shrine like that of ours on the Bridge of Wakefield; a boatman’s praying-place: you may still see, or might, ten years since, have seen, the use of such a thing at the mouth of Boulogne Harbour, when the mackerel boats went out in a fleet at early dawn. There used to be a little shrine at the end of the longest pier; and as the Bonne Espérance, or Grâce-de-Dieu or Vierge Marie, or Notre Dame des Dunes, or Reine des Anges, rose on the first surge of the open sea, their crews bared their heads, and prayed for a few seconds. So also the Pisan oarsmen looked back to their shrine, many-pinnacled, standing out from the quay above the river, as they dropped down Arno under their sea-bridge, bound for the Isles of Greece. Later, in the fifteenth century, ‘there was laid up in it a little branch of the Crown of Thorns of the Redeemer, which a merchant had brought home, enclosed in a little urn of Beyond-sea’ (ultramarine), and its name was changed to ‘St. Mary’s of the Thorn.’ (27, pp. 348–349)

**[PETER]**

Ruskin had already referred to the incident in *Fors Clavigera*, Letter No. 18 of June 1872:

**[MARCUS]**

Before we put aside Dante for to-day, just note farther this, that while he has sharp punishment for thieves, forgers, and peculators,—the thieves being changed into serpents, the forgers covered with leprosy, and the peculators boiled in pitch, —he has no punishment for bad workmen; no Tuscan mind at that day being able to conceive such a ghastly sin as a man’s doing bad work wilfully; and, indeed, I think the Tuscan mind, and in some degree the Piedmontese, retain some vestige of this old temper; for though, not a fortnight since (on 3rd May), the cross of marble in the arch-spandril next the east end of the Chapel of the Thorn at Pisa was dashed to pieces before my eyes, as I was drawing it for my class in heraldry at Oxford, by a stone-mason, that his master might be paid for making a new one, I have no doubt the new one will be as honestly like the old as master and man can make it; and Mr. Murray’s Guide will call it a “judicious restoration.” (27, pp.314-315)

**[Fig. 38a. Santa Maria della Spina, exterior***alongside* **Fig. 38b) Santa Maria della Spina, interior (38b)]**

**[PETER]**

I cannot resist showing images of Santa Maria della Spina which I took myself. It is famously difficult to disassemble a building and put it back together again Humpty-Dumpty fashion. It can only be done through the agency of highly skilled and well-directed craftsmanship, which – clearly – was available in 1840s Pisa.

**[Fig. 39. Lucca from the Ramparts 1845 - drawing by John Ruskin]**

Before leaving Pisa and Lucca, both cities which had a special resonance for Ruskin, we may contemplate the beautiful drawing of *Lucca, from the ramparts* dating from the same 1845 visits. It is a remarkably affectionate drawing, graphite and ink on grey-brown paper, of the sort of vernacular building which Ruskin plainly loved: and which is a significant aspect of his love of the *hand-made*. It is not only the work of ingenious and highly skilled craftspeople that he admires, but the work of untrained or semi-trained people using their local materials, probably gathered from a few metres away, local-ness being a key element in vernacular building construction.

**[Fig. 40. View of Venice]**

Between his first visit in 1835 and his last visit in 1888 Ruskin visited Venice a number of times including 1841 (when he declared the city to be ‘the Paradise of cities’), then 1845 when he spent 7 months based in Venice; then his second long stay [when] with his wife of 6 years, Effie Gray, during which he was working with incredible commitment on the recording of Venice’s endangered monuments and writing the second and third volumes of *The Stones of Venice*.

In the second volume of *The Stones of Venice*, in the chapter on St Mark’s, Ruskin takes us on a walk towards the basilica to the point where:

**[Fig. 41. Campanile of St Mark's Venice, before its collapse and rebuilding]**

**[DÉIRDRE]**

… the vast tower of St Mark – that is, the campanile – seems to lift itself visibly forth from the level field of chequered stones; and, on each side, the countless arches prolong themselves into ranged symmetry, as if the rugged and irregular houses that pressed together above us in the dark alley had been struck back into sudden obedience and lovely order, and all their rude casements and broken walls had been transformed into arches charged with goodly sculpture, and fluted shafts of delicate stone.

**[Fig. 42. St Mark’s West Front]**

**[MARCUS]**

§ 14. And well may they fall back, for beyond those troops of ordered arches there rises a vision out of the earth, and all the great square seems to have opened from it in a kind of awe, that we may see it far away;—a multitude of pillars and white domes, clustered into a long low pyramid of coloured light; a treasure-heap, it seems, partly of gold, and partly of opal and mother-of-pearl, hollowed beneath into five great vaulted porches, ceiled with fair mosaic, and beset with sculpture of alabaster, clear as amber and delicate as ivory,—sculpture fantastic and involved, of palm leaves and lilies, and grapes and pomegranates, and birds clinging and fluttering among the branches, all twined together into an endless network of buds and plumes; and in the midst of it, the solemn forms of angels, sceptred, and robed to the feet, and leaning to each other across the gates, their figures indistinct among the gleaming of the golden ground through the leaves beside them, interrupted and dim, like the morning light as it faded back among the branches of Eden, when first its gates were angel-guarded long ago. And round the walls of the porches there are set pillars of variegated stones, jasper and porphyry, and deep-green serpentine spotted with flakes of snow, and marbles, that half refuse and half yield to the sunshine, Cleopatra-like, “their bluest veins to kiss” —the shadow, as it steals back from them, revealing line after line of azure undulation, as a receding tide leaves the waved sand; their capitals rich with interwoven tracery, rooted knots of herbage, and drifting leaves of acanthus and vine, and mystical signs, all beginning and ending in the Cross; and above them, in the broad archivolts, a continuous chain of language and of life—angels, and the signs of heaven, and the labours of men, each in its appointed season upon the earth; and above these, another range of glittering pinnacles, mixed with white arches edged with scarlet flowers,—a confusion of delight, amidst which the breasts of the Greek horses are seen blazing in their breadth of golden strength, and the St. Mark’s lion, lifted on a blue field covered with stars, until at last, as if in ecstasy, the crests of the arches break into a marble foam, and toss themselves far into the blue sky in flashes and wreaths of sculptured spray, as if the breakers on the Lido shore had been frost-bound before they fell, and the sea-nymphs had inlaid them with coral and amethyst. (10, pp. 82–83, paras 13, 14)

**[PETER]**

This is surely one of the most beautiful passages in *The Stones of Venice* and in it Ruskin invokes the richness of the materials and the intricacy of the delicate carvings on the west front of St Mark’s.

**[Fig. 43. Doge's Palace, Venice]**

In the first session on ‘Ruskin and the Crafts’ we registered the importance of that chapter of *The Stones of Venice* called ‘The Nature of Gothic’ and in particular what Ruskin says about the craftsman and the attitude he should have towards his work. In the passage which follows Ruskin articulates another of his constant teachings which is that we should ‘go to nature’ for inspiration:

**[DÉIRDRE]**

I say first, that the Gothic builders were of that central class which unites fact with design; but that the part of the work which was more especially their own was the truthfulness. Their power of artistical invention or arrangement was not greater than that of Romanesque and Byzantine workmen: by those workmen they were taught the principles, and from them received their models, of design; but to the ornamental feeling and rich fancy of the Byzantine the Gothic builder added a love of fact which is never found in the South. Both Greek and Roman used conventional foliage in their ornament, passing into something that was not foliage at all, knotting itself into strange cup-like buds or clusters, and growing out of lifeless rods instead of stems; the Gothic sculptor received these types, at first, as things that ought to be just as we have a second time received them; but he could not rest in them. He saw there was no veracity in them, no knowledge, no vitality. Do what he would, he could not help liking the true leaves better; and cautiously, a little at a time, he put more of nature into his work, until at last it was all true, retaining, nevertheless, every valuable character of the original well-disciplined and designed arrangement. (10, pp.231-2, §64)

**[PETER]**

So ends the fourth and, for the time being, the final exploration of the theme of ‘Ruskin & the Crafts’. It is a rich theme and, one way or another, I hope that as a Guild we shall take it further. The survival of traditional craft skills was an issue in Ruskin’s day and, as we have seen in the second of our readings, he took steps to ensure the survival of certain traditional crafts in the English Lake District where he lived: spinning and weaving, wood carving, lace-making.

I want to thank all those who, in all four sessions, have given time to the careful preparation of their readings. It has been a delight for me to be the enabler of these sessions, and so I have been conscious of the effort that everyone has put into it.

**[Fig. 44. Rory Young]**

I want to conclude by referring once more to Rory Young, who achieved so much as a master craftsperson, conservator and sculptor. He was a dear friend of mine for exactly forty years and I shall miss him very much. In December those of us who were taking part in the reading session knew that he was dying, but he was determined – with his usual courage – to take part. The result was ‘vintage Rory’, beautifully spoken and with points eloquently made. Also participating in that session was Tracey Sheppard, who has just demitted office as Master of the Art Workers’ Guild. She has beautifully expressed what so many of us feel about Rory:

He was a truly delightful man. Gentle, caring, highly intelligent, immensely talented. The world has lost a treasure, but he has left us all so much treasure here on earth. His spirit will live on amongst all who knew and loved him, and many will come to admire him in the coming years through all the wonderful work he has done.

Thank you all for participating!

PETER BURMAN, 8 March 2023