X

Dust in the Air Suspended

Inside the Alcázar of Toledo, once a palace of the kings of Spain, is a small room which is as frozen in time as Miss Havisham's house. The study of Colonel Moscardo is preserved at the moment tragedy struck, on 23 July 1936. Wallpaper hangs in shreds from the ceiling, and the walls are riddled with bullet-holes dribbling plaster. In the centre is the colonel's desk, and on the desk a black telephone filmy with dust. When the visitor pushes a button the telephone rings three times.

LUIS MOSCARDO Papa!

COLONEL MOSCARDO What's happening, son?

LUIS They say they're going to shoot me if you don't surrender.

MOSCARDO Then commend your soul to God, shout *Viva España!* and *Viva Cristo El Rey!* And die like a hero.

Luis was sixteen years old, and the Colonel's only son. 'Adiós, Papa, un bacio muy fuerte' – 'a big kiss', he said – and seconds later was shot by the Republican militia.

The four-square mass of the Alcázar crowns the hill on which Toledo is built, and shares with the Gothic spire of the cathedral a skyline made famous by El Greco. By the end

of the Civil War siege the cathedral was still intact but there was no Alcázar: it had been battered to the ground. The Renaissance fortress was serving as a barracks for trainee cadets when in the summer of 1936 the Nationalists rebelled against the elected Socialist government. Toledo was loyal, and Colonel Moscardo found himself inside the fortress with twelve hundred teenage soldiers surrounded by several thousand militia, who were shooting nuns and priests in the streets. On the third day of the siege the militia found Luis. It was then that their commander telephoned the Alcázar.

The colonel's sacrifice of his only son gave the cadets the resolve to survive shelling and starvation, retreating deeper into the cellars as each day another Renaissance arcade fell to shell-fire. The battle in Spain's archbishopric became so significant a symbol to Franco's 'crusade' that he diverted his armies from the advance on Madrid. Toledo was recaptured after sixty days of the siege, and his troops shot or stabbed any man suspected of bearing a rifle for the militia. The steps of the steep, narrow streets ran with waterfalls of blood. It is hard to imagine the brutality of civil war in the tranquil city today. The square in which Luis was executed has stalls selling the nuttiest marzipan in Spain, and the streets are crowded with tourists on the El Greco pilgrimage.

After the war the Alcázar was rebuilt as an exact facsimile. Franco's obsession was the appearance of unity, and this reconstruction symbolised that of Spain. In the courtyard the bronze statue of the Emperor Charles V crushing heresy in the form of a serpent was put back on the plinth from which it had been toppled. Spain stood four-square to the

world again, having withstood the disloyalty of a minority of Communists. The cracks were invisible: as invisible as the tens of thousands of Republicans in prison camps, or toiling underground to construct the vast chamber inside the mountains west of Madrid which commemorated the Nationalist martyrs of the conflict.

Moscardo's sacrifice of his only son was central to this myth. His study had been on the one side of the courtyard which survived, and it was preserved as a bullet-riddled shrine. The only insertions are full-length portraits of the father and son, and a frieze of marble plaques on which the conversation is transcribed in twenty languages. English fathers and sons do not kiss each other, however, so in this translation the boy held at gunpoint sounds a little as if it is the first day of term at prep school: 'All my fondest love, Father.' 'All of mine to you.'

Tourists unaware of the politics see only a father and son, and leave the room with moist eyes. For Spaniards the room is a problem, however, a time-capsule of their Civil War. It is impossible to gauge as to where the sympathies of the elderly visitors lie but those brought up after Franco's death in 1975 avoid the room: it is *macabro*, 'creepy'. The return of democracy to Spain was based upon a *pacto de olvido*, 'a pact of forgetting', which meant drawing a curtain over the past by mutual agreement. Francoist monuments were not toppled, and Moscardo's study was left in peace. It would be too controversial to restore such a room, however, so the ruin is lightly cleaned once a week but never repaired. Wallpaper peels, and plaster crumbles. The fossilised memories of Moscardo's sacrifice will disappear into the cleaning lady's vacuum cleaner.

Colonel Moscardo's study raises the two problems of the ruins of wartime. First, how to preserve in perpetuity a moment of destruction: the tragic purity of the flames, the hushed silence and rubble of a bomb site, and the cloud of the fine debris that hung in the air before gently settling on your clothes. 'Dust in the air suspended / Marks the place where the story ended', wrote T. S. Eliot in *Little Gidding*, having served as an air-raid warden in the Second World War.

Second, who decides the moral of the story? The seductiveness of the shrine in Toledo led an English socialist named Herbert Rutledge Southworth to investigate further, and in 1964 he published *The Myth of the Crusade of Franco*. Moscardo had another son killed in the war, Southworth argued, but not in these circumstances. Luis Moscardo, he claimed, was alive and well and living in Madrid. His address was No. 48 Calle de Castellón. Monuments of military victory are particularly deceptive. In Cuba, for example, the prelude to Fidel Castro's uprising was an assault in 1953 on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago. It was a fiasco, and he and his guerrillas were imprisoned for the next five years. The military government filled the bullet-holes in the façade with cement, to erase the memory. After Castro returned to seize power, however, the wall was machine-gunned a second time and preserved as one of the holy shrines of the revolution.

After the two world wars in Europe there was a much bigger problem. First and foremost, what was to be done with the rubble caused by high-explosive bombs and shells? It is a society's aspirations for peacetime that determine whether a ruin is rebuilt, replaced, or preserved – or, rather,

the rulers' interpretations of society's wishes. After the First World War Winston Churchill proposed that the town of Ypres should be preserved as a blackened skeleton, an open-air monument to the British dead. It was rebuilt, however, and the facsimile of the great medieval Cloth Hall was an assertion of the triumph of an older culture over a recent barbarism. Einstein toured the battlefields of northern France in order to publicise the cause of peace, and was photographed in the ruins declaring that all the young men in the world should visit the rubble to be cured for ever of the romantic approach to war inspired by literature: 'If only they could see what I see,' he declared.

After the Second World War, of course, the problem was increased by the same factor as was the power of high explosive. Hiroshima was rebuilt, but the monument to the nuclear explosion was designed to appear as if its domed ceiling was suspended at the point of collapse. In Poland historic palaces and churches were rebuilt as defiant, perfect replicas because the dynamiting of the nation's architectural heritage had been one of the Nazis' weapons in a systematic programme to obliterate Polish culture. The Russians, by contrast, were the only Allied victors to glorify the ruins of their enemies. The official artist Deinecka painted a bomber of inviolable glassiness flying over the blackened shell of the Reichstag in 1945, from the windows of which fluttered a red flag. In Berlin, the new Communist government demolished the Schluler Schloss, a residence of the Prussian monarchy and thus a symbol of imperialist aggression. They preserved, however, a slender vertical section of wall that supported the balcony from which Rosa Luxemburg had proclaimed the short-lived Socialist Republic of Germany in

1917. There are a hundred more examples in Europe alone but although each human tragedy is unique, the architectural expression is a variation upon a familiar dialogue of fragmentation versus wholeness.

Perhaps the most instructive example is the Frauenkirche, or Church of Our Lady, in Dresden. Goethe climbed inside the dome of this Baroque masterpiece to view a city which claimed to be the most beautiful in Germany. On the nights of 13 and 14 February 1945 Dresden was bombed by Allied aeroplanes and its citizens died in the storm of fire. The city was as burned out as a photographic negative. It was rebuilt, with the exception of the Frauenkirche. When the western Allies became the enemies of Soviet Russia, the Communist authorities decided to preserve its ruins as a reminder of 'capitalist warmongering'. The dome which had been so admired by Goethe, so glorious and uplifting in its height and glittering transparency, was left as a slag-heap of blackened stones. But the people of Dresden placed lit candles in the rubble as a spontaneous protest year after year: they did not want their children's growth – or their own old age – to be stunted by the dark shadow of history. As soon as the Berlin Wall came down they began to rebuild the Frauenkirche to its original design and once again it stands in beautiful, intact solemnity; a spontaneous resurrection. The original stones were reused wherever possible, and as Britain's millennium gift to Germany a London blacksmith whose father had flown a bomber in the raids was commissioned to make the golden ball and cross which crown the dome. And inside Russia itself the German government is now rebuilding several of the churches they destroyed in the invasion of 1941 as a form of diplomatic penance.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are the ruins of Oradour-sur-Glane, a deserted village near Limoges in the south-west of France. In the hedgerows at the entrance to the village – where in England you would read PLEASE DRIVE CAREFULLY – signs have been placed instructing SILENCE and REMEMBER.

On 10 June 1944 Oradour had a population of 650 men, women and children. Between four and five-thirty p.m., soldiers of an SS Panzer division machine-gunned the men in rows and locked the women and children inside the church, where they were burned alive. Today a bird's nest perches on the parapet of its ruined shell and placed on the altar is the twisted metal skeleton of a child's pram. In the crypt below are displayed the relics of ordinary lives: charred banknotes, saucepans whose handles have drooped with the heat, wrist-watches with their hands stopped at the moment when their wearers were shot. Outside in the market-place is the oxidised husk of the saloon car driven by the local doctor and a postcard is available labelled '*Voiture du Docteur Dessourteaux*'.

In an article about these ruins, published on 28 November 1998, the journalist Michael McMahon admits to an uncomfortable sense of intruding upon a tragedy that is incomprehensible to us. More disturbingly, friends who visited recently described how a man was walking through the church in football shorts with his eye pressed to the viewfinder of a video camera. Oradour has become a tourist attraction, and it will never again be as silent as the morning after 10 June. No artistic intervention could create such images as the doctor's rusted car or the melted pram, but would Oradour have been more poignant if it was allowed

to slowly crumble into oblivion? Perhaps in this case a stark, frozen, lifeless memorial is indeed more useful than a ruin with a deceptively gentle promise of transition.

Britain is the one country in Europe whose response was not a variation upon the theme above. At the height of the Blitz Kenneth Clark declared that 'Bomb damage is in itself Picturesque'. This could only have been said in Britain. As chairman of the War Artists Advisory Committee (WAAC) – and director of the National Gallery, and also the guiding intellect of contemporary art – Clark commissioned artists such as John Piper and Graham Sutherland to paint the glowing embers of the bomb sites in which more than 13,000 people died in the five months from September 1940 alone.

Clark's first book had been *The Gothic Revival*, in which he had dubbed follies in landscape gardens as 'monuments to a mood'. Together with cultural luminaries, including T. S. Eliot and John Maynard Keynes, he signed a letter to *The Times* on 15 August 1944 proposing that a number of bombed churches should be preserved in ruins as war memorials. They would be monuments to the mood of the Blitz, and would stand to remind a new generation of 'the sacrifice on which [their] apparent security has been built'. The project was elaborated in a book with drawings by Barbara Jones and detailed designs by architects such as Hugh Casson. *Bombed Churches as War Memorials* is the last great fling of the British Picturesque, summoning the spirit of Stourhead and Stowe to soothe the trauma of high-explosive bombs. These churches would not be cold, black slag-heaps of unforgiving bitterness, as at Dresden, but garden ruins haunted by birds and soft with greenery, places

that children would be thrilled to explore. Stone colonnades truncated by the blast would continue as rows of trees, and roofless crypts become sunken, sheltered gardens.

The authors accepted that the great majority of churches would be rebuilt or demolished, but they suggested six

Bombed Churches as War Memorials: St Alban's, Wood Street. In 1945 artists proposed to preserve a number of bombed churches in the city as memorials to the Blitz – and as places to assemble for open-air service.

whose ruins would be of particular potency. In the first place, they would continue as sanctuaries for midday prayer in the open air. In a drawing of St Alban's, Wood Street, we see Londoners in light jackets listen to a preacher who stands on a plinth, dressed in a surplice. Secondly, these garden ruins would be open spaces, 'glimpses of green against the livid grey of pavement and buildings'. Thirdly, they would be memorials:

> It will not be many years before all traces of war damage will have gone, & its strange beauty vanished from our streets. No longer will the evening sky be reflected in the water-pools which today lie dark and quiet between torn and gaping walls. Soon a pockmarked parapet or a broken cornice will be to future generations the only sign of former shock and flame. The shabby heap of stones, flowering with willow-herbs as pink and lively as the flames which earlier sprouted from their crevices, will disappear, and with their going the ordeal which we passed will seem remote, unreal, perhaps forgotten. Save us, then, some of our ruins.

The proposal is 'Picturesque' because it recognises that the creation of a meditative atmosphere requires an artist's eye:

> Preservation is not wholly the archaeologist's job: it involves an understanding of the ruin as a ruin, and its re-creation as a work of art in its own right. . . . A ruin is more than a collection of debris. It is a place with its own individuality, charged with its own emotion and atmosphere and drama, of grandeur, of nobility, or of charm. These qualities must be preserved as carefully as the broken stones which are their physical embodiment.

The designs were not followed, however, and the ruins which were preserved seem to be tidy, accidental leftovers with all those features of the corporation aesthetic – mown grass, KEEP OFF signs and trim shrubberies – which the writers had specifically opposed. Christ Church in Newgate Street in the City was preserved as two walls of a nave open to a dual carriageway. Gravel paths delineate the missing walls, rose bushes record the columns of the nave. In 1958, John Betjeman, who remembered worshipping in the church, paused at the scene in his 'Monody on the Death of Aldersgate Street Station':

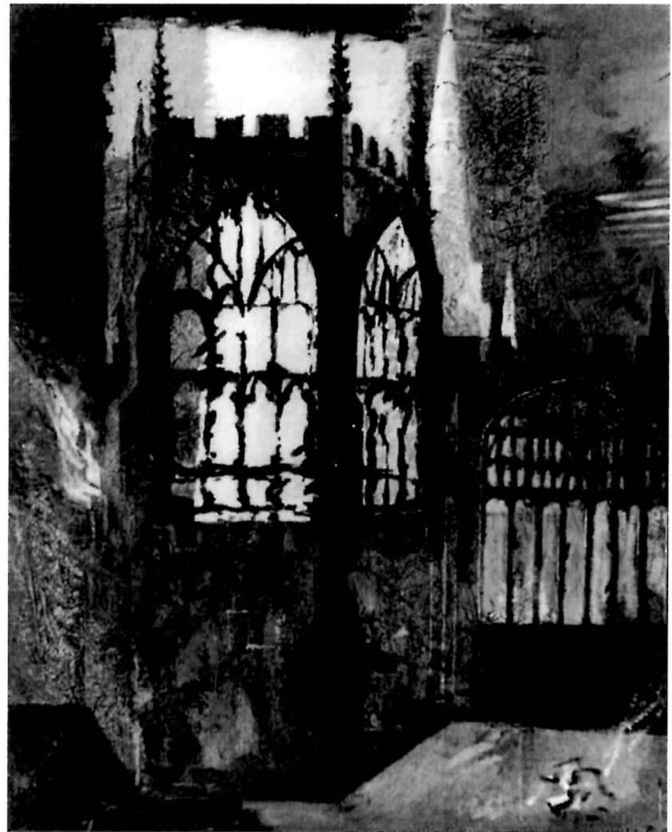
> Last of the east sculpture, a cherub gazes
> On broken arches, rosebays, bracken and dock
> Where once I heard the roll of the Prayer Book phrases
> And the sumptuous tick of the old west gallery clock.

On sunny days Christ Church is now a pleasant green oasis, and when there is a pause in the noise of the traffic there are few places in London which are closer to the reverential silence of 1945: many have found lessons here of survival and regeneration. But in the cold and rain, contemplation is harder – and perhaps the ruins should be left a little wilder. A recent television programme filmed two street cleaners working in the City of London. 'What the Corporation hates', said one, spraying weed-killer into cracks in an old wall, 'is *grass.*'

'No longer will the evening sky be reflected in the water-

pools which today lie dark and quiet between torn and gaping walls. Soon a pockmarked parapet or a broken cornice will be to future generations the only sign of former shock and flame': the 'strange beauty' which the authors of *Bombed Churches as War Memorials* wished to preserve was better captured in the paintings of John Piper. He painted Christ Church hours after its bombing in December 1940. It is a painting liquid with heat, the sacredness of the church somehow intensified in its destruction. To the lover of ruins Piper's paintings are the greatest works inspired by the events of the war. He did not choose to depict bomb sites, but was dispatched to them by order of the Ministry of Information, through the WAAC, which commissioned more than 4,000 pictures during the course of the war, the majority depicting dog-fights, brave firemen, and sailors on the shimmering decks of battleships. The pictures were to be a record, and a boost to morale. Clark admitted later that a third, undisclosed aim of the programme was to prevent artists being killed.

Piper's first painting of a bomb site was made in Coventry. The city was flattened by four hundred German bombers on 15 November 1940 and the next day fires were still burning and bodies being stretchered from the rubble. Piper was at a loss what to do, embarrassed at the sense of intruding upon such tragedy with a sketching pad. Then he noticed a brass plate on a door which stood intact beside the cathedral. He recognised this as a solicitor's office; his father had been a solicitor. 'It was a port in a storm', he was later to recall. At a window inside a secretary was typing away 'as if nothing had happened'. 'I said "Good morning. It's a beastly time, isn't it?" And she explained that she had only



Coventry Cathedral, 15 November 1940 by John Piper. Piper was one of the artists commissioned by the British government to depict bomb damage. The morning after the Germans raided Coventry he painted the ruins of St Michael's in an image which became 'Britain's Guernica'.

just come on duty. I told her I had been ordered to do some drawings. She said "Of course, you can have my place". She

moved her typewriter to the other side of the room and I started drawing the Cathedral.'

Her window faced the east end of the Gothic structure. In the painting we seem to see the apse through a shimmering haze of heat, the stone tracery – which remained intact in reality – dissolving like wood-ash. The cathedral still burns in this canvas, and through the tracery we see white light, as if the high altar is radiating spirituality. Piper did not invent the colours in his paintings, explains David Fraser Jenkins, the only writer to illuminate their relationship to the author's enigmatic personality. Studying a scene he chose from its spectrum of colours those which seemed to represent its inner spirit, and intensified them. The pictures are as empty of figures as designs for stage-sets, but he succeeded in projecting a human agony in that intensity of colour, and in the scratching of the knife on the canvas. Their conviction can only be explained by the pain he felt.

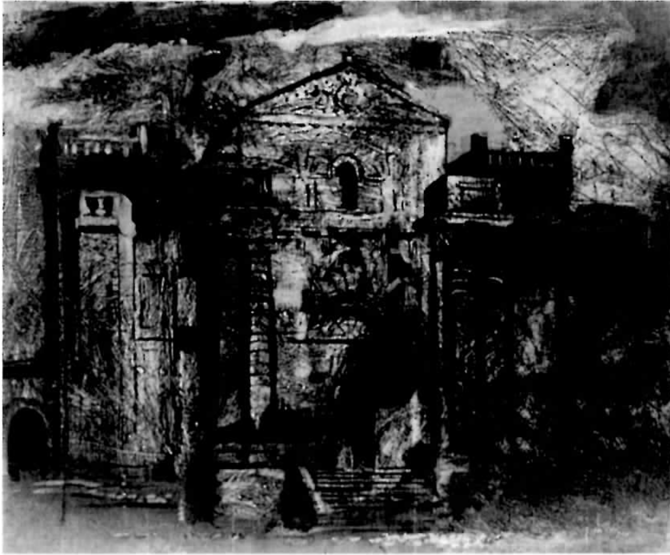
The Coventry picture was exhibited at the National Gallery in an exhibition of WAAC work later that year and this small painting, Jenkins explains, became for Britons what Picasso's *Guernica* had been for loyalist Spaniards: an expression of British resilience. Piper was suddenly popular with the general public, although his style was highly avant-garde. Bath, his favourite city, was bombed in April 1942 precisely because of its architectural beauty: in retaliation for Britain's destruction of the medieval quarter of Bremen, the Luftwaffe chose new targets from their Baedeker guides. 'I went to Bath to paint bomb damage', Piper wrote to John Betjeman, his close friend, on 15 May 1942:

> I never was sent to do anything so sad before. I was miserable there indeed to see that haunt of ancient water-drinkers besmirched with dust and blast. 3 houses burnt out in Royal Crescent, bomb in middle of Circus, and 2 burnt out there; Lansdown Chapel direct hit, 10 bombs in front of Lansdown Crescent, Somerset Place almost completely burnt out; a shell . . . 326 killed, 1800 houses made uninhabitable. . . . My God I did hate that week.

It is because of this anguish that these water-colours were Piper's finest works of the war, argued Betjeman.

When he was not working for the Ministry of Information, Piper chose older ruins to paint. Seaton Delaval was a country house near Newcastle which had been built in 1718 to the designs of Sir John Vanbrugh and lain derelict since a fire in 1822. As the artist described in an article he wrote for *Orion* magazine in 1945 the house was surrounded by colliery tips, and miners with lamps on their hats walked home down the long avenue. A farmer grew hay in the forecourt, and troops were quartered in its 'boarded-up, floorless saloons':

> Ochre and flame-licked red, pock-marked and stained in purplish umber and black, the colour is extremely up-to-date: very much of our times. And not the colour only. House and landscape are seared by the east wind, and riven with fretting industrialism, but they still withstand the noise and neglect, the fires and hauntings of twentieth-century life. Its main block an untenanted stone shell, the Hall is somehow alive, unlike many stately homes.



Seaton Delaval by John Piper, 1941. Left to his own devices, Piper chose older ruins – such as the gutted shell of this mansion in Northumberland – to symbolise the resilience of the British character.

Seaton Delaval should remain a stubborn, unpolished ruin, and be enjoyed by rowdy Bank Holiday crowds rather than National Trust members, he concluded. He painted how the fire of 1822 'leapt in tongues of flame affectionately round Vanbrugh's mouldings, staining the stone permanently red and purple'. The canvas, in the Tate, is as knobbly in relief as a surface of cork, so globby is the oil paint – black for the charred mouldings, a shapeless red flickering across the surface – and so deep the gouges made by the palette knife. This was a 'magnificent modern ruin', which seemed to prophesy the new beauty of post-war Britain.

In an article of 1948 entitled 'Pleasing Decay' he wrote of 'the recent ascendancy of the archaeologist's influence, and the diminishing figure of the artist [in ruins] . . . the artist and the archaeologist with an eye must regain influence or all will be lost'. He continued by saying that Picasso and Max Ernst 'prophesied the beauty as well as the horror of bomb damage, and as visual planners they are at the moment unrivalled. Bomb damage has revealed new beauties in unexpected appositions.' The words conjure up an architecture of transparency, of fractured colliding perspectives, but it was not until the 1990s that architects such as Frank Gehry and Daniel Libeskind showed that architecture could achieve such excitement of form. In Coventry the architects of the 1950s built a new cathedral adjacent to the old, and the ruined apse painted by Piper was preserved as a fire-blackened memento. Round it is a new city centre. But the architects failed to translate the vivacity of paint into concrete and glass; Piper's painting – even if just a postcard reproduction in your pocket – is more alive and warm than the cold, grey, inhabited blocks of concrete.

Is it ever possible to preserve the 'strange beauty' of war, to capture the moment of 'dust in the air suspended'? Yes, as demonstrated by the ruins of Orford Ness on the Suffolk coast. Until the 1970s this was a secret weapons testing centre of the Ministry of Defence (MoD). The site faces the village of Orford, with the rock-like keep of the castle built by Henry II in 1152. The Ness is not an island, in fact, but the head of a long neck of shingle which for 12 miles runs parallel to the marshy coast south of Aldeburgh, preventing the River Ade from turning out to sea like a left-back jostling a winger down the touchline. This spit is a geological

phenomenon, formed by the wind and tide in the course of thousands of years.

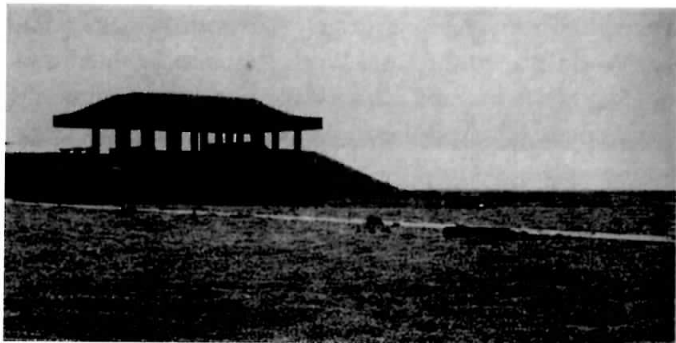
In the First World War the RAF tested the accuracy of aerial bombing on the deserted beaches of the Ness, its shingle ideal for deadening the impact of the explosions. In the 1930s some of the earliest experiments into radar were conducted here, and during the Second World War British firepower was tested on the fuselages of captured enemy aircraft. In the 1950s the MoD began to test explosive triggers for nuclear bombs and constructed massive chambers on the seashore, upturned concrete hulls whose flanks were heaped with hundreds of tons of shingle as extra protection. The Ness became one of the most secret places in Britain, inaccessible to villagers, the jaunty young boffins in shirt-sleeves who had played at radar in the open air replaced by the sinister, silent bunkers on the grey horizon. Labs 4 and 5 were dubbed the 'Pagodas' because of their silhouette, as if they were follies in a garden. Each Pagoda's roof is raised on slender piers, like a rowing eight carrying their boat above their heads. No one knew the purpose of the design: that if there was an accidental detonation, the legs would fall away and the roof would slam down as a colossal lid capping the blast.

In the 1970s the MoD departed, leaving the Ness to the local fishermen and the few walkers who were not unsettled by the bunkers' menacing lethality. The site was acquired by the National Trust in 1993 for its value to Britain's coastline and the immediate thought was to demolish the bunkers. It was Jeremy Musson, an architectural historian working for the Trust at that time, who first argued their value as ruins. The Ness of shifting shingle, he said, was a palimpsest of

twentieth-century history, from the wooden huts of the First World War to the Cold War's Pagodas. In a new and hopefully more peaceful century the ruins would crumble into extinction in exposure to the wind and waves, as if the earth was being purified by Nature.

The National Trust adopted this approach, a brave decision when one considers the regulations on health and safety, and the expectations of members accustomed to tea-rooms, and upholstery, and precisely placed furniture. I hope they remain as brave, because there is only a handful of examples in Europe – Orford Ness is one, Ninfa another – of sites which demonstrate that if a ruin's owner is guided by an artistic vision then it can be opened to the public with its strange magic undiluted. Here too the approach was that of the eighteenth-century Picturesque: that is to say, a perspective which 'framed' the experience of visiting but also involved a moral narrative, and a meditation on time, transience and humanity. As in an eighteenth-century landscape garden, a painter was involved at the conceptual stage. Dennis Creffield, an admirer of Turner – who had painted the medieval castle – camped in a wooden hut and rose at dawn to depict an island in which distance and scale were impossible to estimate, the air unnaturally thin and luminous, and on days of sunshine the shingle shimmering and rippling as if the Ness were a transient mirage. Musson notes that Creffield's pictures influenced the Trust in its presentation of the site, the management team soon recognising that the painter understood better than anyone the 'mood, moment and the unexpected music of the island which hangs between the calling gulls and the endless wind'.

Visit today, and you take a boat across the muddy,



Orford Ness, photograph by W. G. Sebald, in *The Rings of Saturn*. Inside the 'pagodas' on the shingle at Orford Ness, Suffolk, scientists of the Cold War tested the triggers of nuclear bombs.

sluggish River Ade at high tide. Few plants can take root here, and the life of Nature is represented by the wind whipping the grey sea on to the shore, flinging the shingle at the concrete walls, and oxidising the rusty coils of wire, jagged metal and snapped railway-lines. Or by the rabbits and hares, and the flocks of gulls with windy cries which nest on the laboratories. Half-buried by shingle, the labs seem half-man, half-Nature. The interiors of these shells are as banal as any industrial desolation, with scaffolds, ramps, channels of slimy, green water, and the rusty metal plates on which charges were detonated. The Cold War is over.

Orford Ness still lives up to the description of a great writer who discovered the site in its neglected loneliness. *The Rings of Saturn* by W. G. Sebald (1995) describes the author's walk along the coasts of Norfolk and Suffolk, meditating on the transience of man's imposition on the landscape and observing the inhabitants with the bemused

clarity of an alien. Sebald described his reverie in haunting, pebble-smooth prose. The walker pays a villager to ferry him across to an island 'which resembled a penal colony in the Far East':

> From a distance, the concrete shells, shored up with stones, in which for most of my lifetime hundreds of boffins had been at work devising new weapons systems, looked (probably because of their odd conical shape) like the tumuli in which the mighty and powerful were buried in prehistoric times with all their tools and utensils, silver and gold. My sense of being on ground intended for purposes transcending the profane was heightened by a number of buildings that resembled temples or pagodas, which seemed quite out of place in these military installations. But the closer I came to these ruins, the more any notion of a mysterious isle of the dead receded, and the more I imagined myself amidst the remains of our own civilisation after its extinction in some future catastrophe. To me too, as for some latter-day stranger ignorant of the nature of our society wandering about among heaps of scrap metal and defunct machinery, the beings who had once lived and worked here were an enigma, as was the purpose of the primitive contraptions and fittings inside the bunkers, the iron rails under the ceilings, the hooks on the still partially tiled walls, the showerheads the size of plates, the ramps and soakaways. Where and in what time I truly was that day at Orfordness I cannot say, even now as I write these words. All I do know is that I finally walked along the raised embankment from the Chinese Wall Bridge past the old pumphouse towards the landing stage, to my left in the fading fields a

collection of black Nissen huts, and to my right, across the river, the mainland. As I was sitting on the breakwater waiting for the ferryman, the evening sun emerged from behind the clouds, bathing in its light the far-reaching arc of the seashore. The tide was advancing up the river, the water was shining like tinplate, and from the radio masts high above the marshes came an even, scarcely audible hum. The roofs and towers of Orford showed among the tree tops, seeming so close that I could touch them. There, I thought, I was once at home. And then, through the growing dazzle of the light in my eyes, I suddenly saw, amidst the darkening colours, the sails of the long-vanished windmills turning heavily in the wind.

X *Dust in the Air Suspended*

The story of the Millennium Cross for Dresden was told by Christopher Kenworthy in the *Telegraph*, 28 November 1998. Michael McMahon's visit to Oradour is in the *Telegraph*, 3 June 2000.

David Fraser Jenkins explains Piper's war in his superb catalogue to the exhibition at the Imperial War Museum: *John Piper: The Forties* (2000). Fraser Jenkins also wrote the catalogue to the 1984 exhibition on Piper at the Tate. Piper's essay 'Pleasing Decay' was in *Buildings and Prospects* (1948).

The final chapter of *Ruins* by Michael Felmingham and Rigby Graham (1972) has very good material on the wartime and post-war period.

Dennis Creffield's paintings of Orford Ness were published in a catalogue to the Connaught Brown exhibition in 1995, with an introduction by Jeremy Musson.

XI *The Novelist, the Fisherman and the Prince*

There are two biographies of Rose Macaulay, by her relation Constance Babington Smith (1972) and by Jane Emery (1991). Babington Smith printed the short story 'Miss Anstruther's Letters' for the first time, and chose extracts from *Pleasure of Ruins* for a book of photographs by Roloff Beny (1964).

David Gilmour has written a biography of Lampedusa which is intelligent, witty, and quite perfect (*The Last Leopard*, 1988). *The Siren* and *Places of My Infancy*, translated by Archibald Colquhoun, were published in *Two Stories and a Memory* (1962).

For Michael and Isabel Briggs

In Ruins

Christopher Woodward

Pantheon Books, New York

SIENA COLLEGE LIBRARY

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For I know some will say, why does he treat us
to descriptions of weeds, and make us hobble
after him over broken stones, decayed buildings,
and old rubbish?

Preface to *A Journey into Greece*
by George Wheeler (1682)

In Ruins