

Acknowledgements

I must thank all the owners of ruins who did not set their dogs on me when I trespassed – and, in particular, the unknown owner of the Priory at Winchelsea in Sussex. On a downcast spring day I walked over the marshes from Rye and stumbled across this roofless church. Its arches were full of marigolds, and a child's swing creaked under an adjacent apple tree.

In writing this book my inspiration was Charles Sprawson's book on the exhilaration of swimming in rivers and lakes, *The Haunts of the Black Masseur*. Charles's masterly study of swimmers in history reminds modern society of a pleasure it has lost; it is not a manual on 'how to swim' or how to manage modern leisure centres. Similarly, my book is not intended to address the practical issues of how to open archaeological sites to the public but, rather, to show what a source of inspiration ruins have been in earlier centuries. Whether or not readers agree with my views is less important than if this book reminds them of their own enjoyment of ruins.

Jenny Uglow of Chatto & Windus suggested I write the book, and the most rewarding aspect has been to discover writers whom I might otherwise have never read: John Dyer, John Clare, Ferdinand Gregorovius, Giorgio Bassani, and others. The greatest treat has been an excuse to read the

ten volumes of Chateaubriand's *Mémoires de l'outre-tombe*, which is in my view – a view founded on no authority whatsoever – the greatest autobiography ever written. Its 1902 translation by Alexander Teixeira de Mattos is an irreplaceable work of scholarship; we can survive without the passages he omitted as containing 'a little too much of the *esprit gaulois* to English taste'.

I began the book as a straightforward architectural historian but soon realised that architects were twenty years behind painters in their thinking – and that painters in turn took their ideas from writers. I finished, therefore, as an enthusiastic but sophomoric student of English Literature, and am particularly grateful to David Skilton, Professor at Cardiff, and Andrew Sanders, at Durham, for their guidance.

Among my friends who are architectural historians, the two to whom I am deeply indebted are Roger Bowdler and Jeremy Musson – each of whom could have written this book if they had not been busy fathering children. Roger and I met at the National Gallery one evening and he suggested we choose 'ruins in paintings' as the theme for our stroll around; he explained to me the relationship of stone, flesh, and moss; later, he introduced me to grisly but wonderful peculiarities such as the Tradescants' tomb in the churchyard at Lambeth. Jeremy Musson at *Country Life* gave me a stream of ideas scribbled on postcards, a treasured first edition of Rose Macaulay's *The World My Wilderness* and, above all, the assurance that he would be interested in what I discovered. Jenifer Cargill-Thompson suggested Wheeler's lines, used as the epigraph. Of course, I would never have had the privilege of being an architectural

historian if David Watkin had not gracefully accepted me on to his course at Cambridge after I stumbled into the History of Art Faculty during one dishevelled May Week.

Finally, I must thank my wife Anna, who married me on the Campidoglio last summer: the Registry office is in Michelangelo's piazza on the Capitoline Hill, overlooking the Forum. A Roman of slender, perfect and timeless symmetry, she rescued me from libraries, graveyards, 'dead stones'. *Sono molto fiero che mio figlio sarà mezzo-Romano.*



For Michael and Isabel Briggs

In Ruins

Christopher Woodward



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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)

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