

## 8. Read All About It

### Aesthetic Appeal & Refined Tastes

By now in his twilight years as an architect, Alfred Waterhouse had enormous influence on building design. He won a competition to build Manchester Town Hall, a Gothic masterpiece with an imposing clock tower which was the envy of municipal authorities. He designed the elegant Natural History Museum in Kensington as well additions to Balliol College, Oxford and Girton and Pembroke Colleges, Cambridge, and The National Liberal Club in Whitehall Place. An accomplished artist, both architectural and landscape, he designed furniture as did Giles Gilbert Scott, the renowned Victorian architect. Waterhouse, who died in 1905, founded an architectural dynasty. His son Paul entered the profession as did his own son Michael. All three served as the President of RIBA, the Royal Institute of British Architects.

The Glasgow School of Art, completed in 1909 by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, exemplified art nouveau architecture in Britain. Most eye-catching was the interior design of the library, a complex space of timber posts and beams, that owed much to Japanese domestic interiors and other influences to afford an eclectic mix of styles. Partly destroyed by fire in 2014, a major restoration was nearing completion in June 2018 when a huge blaze gutted most of the Art School. The sadness is especially poignant, being the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth.

Mackintosh was also famed for the nearby Willow Tea Rooms (1904) and for Scotland Street School (1906). These and various other design projects revealed a mind of exceptional inventiveness and aesthetic perception. Mackintosh began to experiment with a range of decorative forms and produced many designs for furniture, metalwork and graphic arts that included highly stylised posters and watercolours. By 1914 he despaired of ever receiving the recognition in Glasgow he felt he deserved.

William Morris was the dominant figure in late 19<sup>th</sup> century design with an immense influence on the Arts & Crafts Movement. In the Edwardian era so was Edward Lutyens who designed the third phase of Great Dixter in Sussex and Munstead Wood in Godalming, decorated by Gertrude Jekyll for whom the house was built. Together, they formed a close partnership designing dozens of properties including Hestercombe Garden near Taunton, Castle Drago in Devon, Renishaw Hall, Sheffield, redesign of the interior of Knebworth House, Hertfordshire and the garden at Lindisfarne in Northumberland.

In 1907 Lutyens became adviser to the Hampstead Garden Trust which had just bought 243 acres of land from Eton College with the intention of creating a garden suburb. The flood of humanity into London had for Lord Rosebery become "a tumour, an elephantiasis, sucking into its gorged system half the life, and blood and the bone, of the rural districts." The Garden City Limited, founded in 1903, led the way through its influential directors that included the Cadbury, Rowntree and Lever families. They echoed Ruskin's ideal of clusters of houses with beautiful and walled gardens in proximity to the countryside.

A Cheap Cities Exhibition was held in 1905 with the Great Northern Railway organising day excursions for prospective owner-occupiers and tenants of larger houses. Three categories of property were on display: the £150 cottage, a five-room semi-detached cottage at £300 a pair, and larger houses with rooms priced at no more than £35 each. Hampstead reflected the aspiration and respectability of middle classes.

Everywoman's Encyclopaedia, published in 1912, had much to say about property and more especially people. "When, owing to the smallness of household or slenderness of means,

one has to seek a house of moderate rental, a difficulty will be found in regard to the class of people who may be one's neighbours. In towns and suburban districts, the street takes a character from the majority of its occupants, and persons of refined tastes would find it impossible to live up to their usual standards of comfort in a district inspired by a different set of ideals." Horrors of choosing the wrong district were starkly revealed. Beware the close proximity of raucous children, strident and uncouth voices, disturbance from early risers and latecomers too, whether revellers coming home after a night out, or shift workers, whose last thought returning home would be to approach the front door in silence and not slam it shut.

Housing of the working classes was given a boost by an Act of that name in 1884, and by the Education Act of 1902, with county boroughs responsible for schools and therefore school building. In contrast, the Aesthetic Movement was for the educated and those with cultured tastes and greater means too as reflected in music, literature, art and debate that defined the Bloomsbury Group, and the area around Gordon Square in particular.

### **A Pioneer of Popular Journalism**

Alfred Harmsworth acquired the Evening News in 1894 before starting the Daily Mail in 1896, "written by office boys for office boys," Lord Salisbury sniffily said. Harmsworth was ecstatic as sales reached 397,000. The journalistic message was to explain, simplify and clarify. His recipe was choice, variety, short snappy stories, a serial and women's section. Unlike stodgy broadsheets, the Daily Mail had plenty of accounts of murders, divorces, crimes and missing children. Readership doubled between 1896 and 1906, doubling again by 1914. The Daily Mail, Daily Express, Daily Chronicle and Daily News all had a minimum circulation of 300,000 each. The combined output of The Times, Telegraph and Morning Post was less. Working classes were fast becoming more articulate. Army recruitment showed that 97% could read.

For his pioneering efforts Alfred Harmsworth was created a baronet in June 1904. The Daily Telegraph acidly reported it was unusual for a man "to win so much success in so limited a time" but Harmsworth had loftier ambitions. In December he was awarded a peerage on the recommendation of the outgoing Balfour, taking the title of Lord Northcliffe. It was a highly controversial decision with murmurs of a cash payment, but the Lords had other reasons for objecting. Northcliffe had climbed his way up by his bootlaces. A man of his type "had to be harder, tougher, more openly brutal, or else he would perish." Northcliffe was a survivor.

By 1905, before its takeover, The Times struggled financially but general manager, Moberley Bell, insisted it "ought never to be trampled in the dirt by the men of the Tit-Bits school." But money talks and Bell's reluctance was greatly soothed by a deposit of £320,000 into his bank account to convince owner, Arthur Walter, to accept the bid of a mystery buyer in 1908. He thought this to be C Arthur Pearson but it was Lord Northcliffe, whom he disliked even more intensely. He had little choice to accept as circulation was only 35,000. Northcliffe did not alter editorial policy or standards of reporting. Rivals ridiculed him for creating an "edition de luxe of the Daily Mail" but Northcliffe had principles. "Popularisation would be like putting Punch & Judy into Westminster Abbey," but circulation continued struggle and reached only 47,000 three years later.

Northcliffe also rescued the Observer and was undisputed king of popular journalism, taking over from George Newnes and William T. Stead. Pearson, a protégé of Newnes, emerged as a competitor. He launched Find the Missing Word and similar competitions, offering prizes to increase circulation. Pearson then hit on an ingenious idea to spray the magazine with

eucalyptus to ward off influenza sweeping the nation. In 1906 Pearson launched the Daily Express using the front page for news, not adverts unlike the higher circulation Daily Mail.

Campaigns were Northcliffe's forte for respectable and patriotic readers of The Times but his Sunday paper was not a success. The solution was simple - stick to jingoism and better still recruit Rudyard Kipling to write verses. Northcliffe took exception to the reporting of Emily Hobhouse in the Boer War and, when challenged, sent for the circulation ledger. Running his finger down the sales column he announced, "You see, we were right." Sales were his proof.

On 18 October 1906 Northcliffe wrote to William Lever MP in protest of his using underhand marketing tactics in keeping the price of soap the same, whilst reducing the size. He spoke of a Liverpool woman, who taking in washing to support her children, paid the same for a much smaller bar of soap, implying she had to buy more. He exclaimed, Lever had cost the widow 1/6d per week! Eminent barrister, Sir Edward Carson, acting for the family, had done his maths. If so, this meant her using 96 lbs of soap a week, a tad excessive one might feel. Damages were set at £50,000.

By 1914, in an attempt to boost circulation, Northcliffe halved the price of The Times to one penny. This had an immediate effect as circulation rose above 165,000, helped by a need for reliable news as war seemed inevitable. Northcliffe was a weathervane, pointing in whatever direction the wind blew. His natural instinct was to support Asquith in opposing House of Lords reform but he was impressed by the Limehouse speech of Lloyd George, and told him so. Northcliffe resisted an invitation to Downing Street, saying, "Journalists should be read and not seen." The friendship didn't last as Northcliffe foresaw a protracted struggle in Lloyd George getting his budget approved.

Northcliffe sensed as early as 1902 the unpredictable Kaiser was plotting. "This is our hour of preparation; tomorrow may be a world conflict. Germany will go slowly and surely; she is not in a hurry; her preparations are quietly and systematically made; it is no part of her object to cause general alarm which she might be fatal in her designs." The literal headlines might have read, 'Don't Rock The Boat Of War.' In 1909, worried by the build-up of the German navy, he sent the socialist Robert Blatchford, author of *Merrie England* and editor of the *Clarion*, to Germany to compile a series on "the secret and insidious enemy."

The concerns of Northcliffe were borne out. Blatchford justified his alarming pieces for the Daily Mail, believing "Germany is deliberately preparing to destroy the British Empire." Asked to respond Northcliffe said, "because I know we are not able or ready to defend ourselves." With newspaper correspondents in Hamburg and Stettin, Northcliffe reported to the Cabinet that all German ships carrying merchandise were built under the supervision of the Admiralty in Berlin. He was informed all fast German liners had concealed gun platforms that could be uncovered and mounted quickly. Northcliffe even drove 300-400 miles into Germany with his wife, "amazed at the vast industrial strides made in practically every town we came to. Every one of these new factory chimneys is a gun pointing at England, and in many cases a very powerful one. We have not seen one tramp on the roads, or been asked for a single penny anywhere."

Richard Haldane, Minister for War, was unimpressed, and annoyed at what he regarded as exaggerated claims. As with many others he took a dislike to Northcliffe, not slow in offering his own opinions. Readers enjoyed his angry editorials and fearless exposures, but rarely does journalism change public minds. It follows the public mood. Northcliffe had learned

quickly this was the route to making money. He also realised that prophesying the future attracted reader attention. He predicted accurately the use of telephones in police boxes, the petrol-driven omnibus rather than electric, longer ladders for the London fire brigade, and what he termed the 'motor car of the air.' Thinking of likely war he insisted, "aerial power will be an even more important thing than sea power."

### **Dealing With Unfinished Business**

During his speech on the People's Budget, Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George, pointed out that Germany had a compulsory national insurance against sickness since 1884. He commented, "We should not emulate them, only in armaments." In December 1910 Lloyd George sent a Treasury civil servant, William J. Braithwaite, to Germany to make a study, and on his return, he argued strongly the scheme should be paid for by the individual, state and employer: "Working people ought to pay something. It gives them a feeling of self respect, and what costs nothing is not valued."

One question was whether British national insurance should work like the German system on the "dividing-out" principle, or resemble private insurance in accumulating a reserve. Lloyd George favoured the first method and Braithwaite the latter. Lloyd George argued that, "The State could not manage property or invest with wisdom. It would be very bad for politics if the State owned a huge fund. The proper course for the Chancellor of the Exchequer was to let money fructify in the pockets of the people, and take it only when he wanted it."

Eventually, in March, 1911, Braithwaite produced a detailed paper on the subject, where he explained that the advantage of a state system was the effect of interest on accumulative insurance. Later that night Lloyd George told Braithwaite that he was now convinced by his proposals. "Dividing-out was dead!"

Braithwaite explained that the advantage of an accumulative state fund was the ability to use the insurance reserve to underwrite other social programmes. Lloyd George presented his innovative national insurance proposal to the Cabinet in early April. Insurance was to be compulsory for all regularly employed workers over the age of sixteen with incomes below £160 a year. The tripartite system of contributions was novel, sending a clear message to society with the employee, employer and state all contributing and sharing responsibility.

In return for a payment, which covered less than half the cost, contributors were entitled to free medical attention, including the cost of medicine. Workers who contributed were also guaranteed 10s. a week for thirteen weeks of sickness and 5s a week indefinitely for those assessed as chronically sick. Braithwaite said later "Looking back on these three and a half months I am more and more impressed with the Chancellor's curious genius, his capacity to listen, judge if a thing is practicable, deal with the immediate point, deferring all unnecessary decisions and keeping every road open till he sees which is really the best."

Large insurance companies were worried that this measure would reduce the popularity of their own private health schemes. Lloyd George arranged a meeting with representatives of the twelve largest companies. Chief negotiator, Kingsley Wood, told Lloyd George he had in the past mustered support in the Commons to defeat attempts to introduce a state system of widows and orphans benefits, suggesting the government "would be wise to abandon the scheme at once."

The National Insurance Bill was presented to the House of Commons on 4 May 1911. Lloyd George argued: "It is no use shirking the fact that a proportion of workmen with good wages

spend them in other ways." Often a wife was unable to pay premiums to a friendly societies "out of the very wretched allowance given them to keep the household together."

Lloyd George explained: "When a workman falls ill, if he has no provision made for him, he hangs on as long as he can, and until he gets very much worse. Then he goes to another doctor, not a Poor Law doctor, and runs up a bill, and when he gets well he does his very best to pay that and the other bills. He very often fails to do so."

I have met many doctors who have told me they have hundreds of pounds of bad debts of this kind which they could not think of pressing for payment of, and what really is done now is that hundreds of thousands - I am not sure that I am not right in saying millions - of men, women and children get the services of such doctors." The sting was in the tail. "The heads of families get those services at the expense of the food of their children, or at the expense of good-natured doctors."

"I do not pretend that this is a complete remedy. This scheme does alleviate an immense mass of human suffering." The Observer welcomed the legislation as "by far the largest and best project of social reform ever yet proposed by a nation. It is magnificent in temper and design." The British Medical Journal described the bill as "one of the greatest attempts at social legislation which the present generation has known" and it was "destined to have a profound influence on social welfare."

Ramsay MacDonald promised the support of the Labour Party in passing the legislation but some MPs, including Fred Jowett, George Lansbury and Philip Snowden, denounced it as a poll tax on the poor. Along with Keir Hardie, they wanted free sickness and unemployment benefit to be paid for by progressive taxation. Hardie commented that the attitude of the government was "we shall not uproot the cause of poverty, but we will give you a porous plaster to cover the disease that poverty causes."

There was no doubt that Lloyd George was influenced by Fabian Society pamphlets on social reform written by Beatrice Webb, Sidney Webb and George Bernard Shaw, noting that the German trade union movement had initially opposed national insurance: "In Germany, the trade union movement was a poor, miserable, wretched thing some years ago. Insurance has done more to teach the working class the virtue of organisation than any single thing. You cannot get a socialist leader in Germany today to do anything to get rid of that Bill. Many socialist leaders in Germany will say that they would rather have our Bill than their own."

Lord Northcliffe launched a propaganda campaign against the Bill, contending the scheme would be too expensive for small employers. The climax was a rally in the Albert Hall on 29 November 1911. At the time, Northcliffe controlled 40% of morning newspaper circulation in Britain, 45% of the evening and 15% of the Sunday circulation. The National Insurance Bill spent 29 long days in committee, growing in length and complexity from 87 to 115 clauses. Finally on 16 December 1911 it became law. Despite continued opposition by newspapers, and The British Medical Association, contributions commenced in July 1912 and the payment of benefits on 15 January 1913.

### **Courage, Endurance & Tragedy**

What was known as The Discovery Expedition of 1901-1904, under the leadership of Robert Falcon Scott, was organised by the Royal Society and Royal Geographic Society. The third officer was Ernest Shackleton in charge of holds, stores, provisions and entertainment. After

leaving the Isle of Wight on 6 August 1901 the Discovery finally arrived in New Zealand on 29 November. The ship headed south to newly named King Edward VII Land, then to McMurdo Sound to quarter.

Of the party, none was a skilled skier and only two had experience of dog-sledges. Scott, Wilson and Shackleton departed on 2 November 1902, with the intent of going as far south as possible. Progress was painfully slow as the dogs grew weaker, due to a poor diet and lack of dog-handling skills. It was an ominous omen. Snow blindness, frostbite and signs of scurvy added to their woes. On 30 December they reached their furthest point south but, on the return, their remaining dogs died, and Scott contracted scurvy. Their worries intensified as The Discovery became ice-bound, and would remain so, consigning the party to months of little activity.

A small party set out on the second leg on 26 October 1903 reaching the Polar Plateau, the first party to do so. Navigational tables were lost in a gale and, without guiding landmarks and relying on rule of thumb navigation, their speed dropped markedly, depleting supplies. Of even greater concern, Scott and Evans almost perished after falling into a crevasse. They reached the Discovery on 24 December, having covered 700 miles in 59 days, convincing Scott that man-hauling was preferable to dogs.

With the Discovery still trapped in ice, a relief vessel Terra Nova arrived on 5 January 1904. A series of explosive charges did the trick and the Discovery was freed on 16 February. Back home, Scott was promoted to captain and was invited to Balmoral, the guest of Edward VII. Mutual mistrust erupted when Scott learned that Shackleton's 1907 expedition went south of the McMurdo Sound which he agreed not to do. An ecstatic public hailed the achievement of Shackleton, just 100 nautical miles from the South Pole.

Tragic and heroic human loss gripped the press headlines in March 1912, and the attention of the whole nation, reeling in shock at the dreadful news. Famous explorer Captain Robert Falcon Scott and four companions Wilson, Oates, Bowers and Evans had all perished in the freezing and vast ice landscape of Antarctica.

Writing in his diary, knowing the end was near, Captain Scott could not be sure of the date, believing correctly it was 17 March. They had finally made it to the South Pole but the price was high. Bearing intense suffering, and hoping never to wake again, Titus Oates staggered into the unrelenting blizzard, to a certain death, quietly remarking, "I am going outside and may be some time." Evans, incoherent and starving, didn't have long to wait for merciful release. His three remaining companions remained cheery, in spite of developing frostbite. They too knew their fate, with precious little hope of making it back to the return depot.

Yet more drifting snow, and a steady force four wind, meant progress was agonizingly slow. Each hour drained their meagre rations. The raw, unrelenting, cold was taking its toll. Two days later Scott's diary showed they were down to two days food supply, and barely a day's fuel. Frostbite was now spreading rapidly with amputation likely. By Friday 23 March the blizzard had still not abated. The decision was made to march for the depot the next day but the blizzard and exhaustion kept the group huddled in their hut.

The last but one entry was made on Thursday 29 March. The swirling, drifting snow outside the hut door was a forewarning of impending doom. Scott's diary read, "We shall stick it out to the end, but we are getting weaker of course and the end cannot be far." Another diary entry later was reflective, "We took risks; we knew we took them; things have come out against us, and therefore we have no cause for complaint, but bow to the will of Providence,

determined still to do our best to the last." Dogged determination and courage typified the British spirit.

The prophetic words of Captain Scott stayed in the minds of the British public, spellbound by this brave and epic struggle against the harshest of elements, and full of admiration for the stoicism, courage and resilience in the face of adversity, and inevitable death. The final entry of Scott touched the hearts of the population. "It seems a pity but I do not think I can write more." He added a postscript, "for God's sake look after our people."

The British reaction was one of huge admiration for heroic and glorious failure in a desolate, inhospitable and windswept vast expanse of wilderness of snow and ice. Only later did they realise Roald Amundsen had beaten Scott to the South Pole first, arriving on 14 December 1911, almost five weeks before. The British public was to discover that Amundsen started out several weeks later than Scott with 97 sledge-dogs, plus skis. He had felt this was an infinitely superior means of travel rather than a combination of ponies, dogs and hand-pulled sledges. Amundsen set out with one aim: to beat Scott's party in a race to the South Pole, though the objective of Scott was to carry out scientific investigations as well.

### **Invincible and Unsinkable**

Still in mourning, the nation experienced further tragedy on a massive scale two weeks later. Almost unbelievable news came through of the sinking of the Titanic on its maiden voyage from Southampton in a blaze of publicity on 10 April 1912. The largest and most luxurious liner ever built had sunk in the early hours of 15 April 1912 when the unthinkable happened. The ship hit an iceberg and sunk. In total 1,497 men, women and children, comprising two thirds of all passengers and crew, perished in the icy waters. Amongst those who drowned was one William T. Stead, proprietor of the Pall Mall Gazette who, in 1886, foresaw tragedy as he had a premonition of violent death. Survivors said he made no attempt to save his own life, instead helping women and children into lifeboats. Stead's prophecy had come true.

Rivalry was intense between the ship's owners, the White Star Line, and Cunard that proudly boasted the size and speed of the Mauretania and Lusitania. Retaliation was swift. The White Star Line then built the impressive and successful liner Olympic. Its only flaw was lack of first-class accommodation for wealthy American tourists desperate to book but this was remedied with the most magnificent and impressive liner ever built.

The Olympic was the hors d'oeuvres. The hypnotic and immensely powerful Titanic eclipsed other liners in the extent of opulence with luxurious suites for millionaires, a swimming pool, squash court, gymnasium, Turkish bath, a children's playroom, Café Parisien and not least a dog kennel for what were classified as first class dogs. This floating Ritz Hotel stopped at Queenstown in Ireland to pick up more passengers before steaming hell for leather across the Atlantic at 24mph, seemingly immune to risk.

When the collision occurred, the ship's speed had reduced slightly to 22mph as if sensing possible danger ahead. The British Wreck Commissioner's Inquiry commenced proceedings on 2 May 1912 at the Scottish Hall, Buckingham Gate with two later sessions at Caxton Street, Westminster. Almost three months later, the report of 30 July established the cause was due to collision with an iceberg, brought about by excessive speed. The inquiry was critical of the lookout arrangements, given the low swell and proximity of growlers, smaller pieces of broken ice about the size of a grand piano.

Of concern too was the inadequacy of lifeboat provision with enough boats for just over half the passengers only. The inquiry would want to probe why not all lifeboats were full, and to question uncertainty about their strength and capacity, raising issues about the specification, technical details and training of crew members in the event of an emergency. Quite apart from reasons for causation of this dreadful accident, why did so many passengers perish?

At issue too was whether firm, yet affable, Captain F. E. Smith was placed under pressure to maintain a high speed, since this was the maiden voyage. Impressive standards had been set in design and service, but the Titanic was not built for speed. The question of any speed imperative focused the minds of the Inquiry. Technical construction of the Titanic's engines differed from the slightly faster Mauretania and Lusitania of the Cunard Line. Bruce Ismay, the president of White Star, and Managing Director of the International Mercantile Marine Company, was on this inaugural voyage. The question was what instructions were passed to Captain Smith on the speed of the ship, if any. We are unlikely ever to know for sure.

In sifting through documentation of the official British Inquiry, there does appear more than a degree of hubris, amounting to self-delusion and arrogance, in believing the Titanic was invincible and practically unsinkable, without any robust attempt to assess fully the risks and consequences. The tragedy was a timely reminder to a nation well used to supremacy at sea and to carrying out successful but costly military campaigns. The disastrous Boer War was a wake-up call as was Isandhlwana and prior to that the Crimean War.

Lessons needed to be learned and quickly, not just on the battlefield but rethinking strategy, tactics and weaponry, and the dangers of over-reaching technical ability at the expense of safety, in the pursuit of vanity. Much like Redvers Buller, in failing to adapt to the battlefield situation in facing the Boers, Captain Smith was negligent in not heeding ice warnings, failing to instigate regular lookout procedures, not providing binoculars to crew and not ensuring all lifeboats were full. The disaster smacked, not just of incompetence, but complacency.

A captivated British public seized on media reports of the heroic efforts of Captain Scott and bravery of those on the Titanic, especially the many who lost their lives. The British were used to turning failure and defeat into victory, as not only these events but experiences in South Africa amply demonstrated. Anticipation and planning were deficient in all these situations or, if in place, were not followed through.

Neither was what we call today best practice adopted, pooling what works well and learning from other situations and nations. In hindsight, the loss of Captain Robert Falcon Scott and his party could have been avoided with better and more focused planning and learning from previous mistakes. The same applied to the Titanic disaster with greater attention to detail, clear instructions, better training and much greater thought given to the safety of the vessel and passengers, instead of speed. In both tragedies there was a failure of leadership. The question was, if Britain was faced with an apocalyptic and possibly predictable event, would it be in a position to respond effectively.