

Commission's judgements is reached by a combination of experienced designers and informed laymen who have first-hand information on each case. Therefore the consensus, even if flawed from time to time, has a degree of authority.

In its assessment of a scheme the Royal Fine Art Commission looks for quality and not for a particular style, which is a matter of taste. It is possible to be objective about quality; taste, on the other hand, remains largely subjective – a matter of personal feelings or opinions. Quality is also enduring, while taste and fashion change. Though undefinable, quality is immediately recognisable.

Wholesale demolition and comprehensive redevelopment was a fashion of the 'sixties and' seventies just as contextualism and façadism are fashionable today. The practice of façadism has developed under commercial pressure from developers who want to build as much floor space as possible behind the façades of listed buildings. Unless there are overriding reasons for retaining the external fabric, it may be preferable to replace the listed building by a first-rate piece of new architecture. But the argument that a good design for a new building helps to justify the demolition of the existing building on the site requires making a judgement about the quality of a new design. It is an argument which is not admitted in official circles, yet making judgements about existing buildings which are going to be listed is accepted practice.

What makes a good building is, quite simply, a good brief, a good client and a good architect – in other words, enlightened architectural patronage. The public – the man in the street – sometimes frustrates enlightened patronage by denying approval and putting pressure on the local authority to refuse planning permission. The public awakening which has taken place over the last twenty-five years, and the public participation which has followed, demand a sense of responsibility which cannot be acquired without an adequate education in visual and environmental matters. While patronage will always remain the privilege of the few, it can no longer operate without support from the man in the street. A better educated public, therefore, becomes a prerequisite of enlightened patronage.

To achieve a good building by means of a good brief, a good client and a good architect is not a

simple matter, and requires great effort and passionate commitment. The answer, in the end, must be in the quality of the architecture and in the patron who is prepared to search for quality and take risks.

Notes

1. Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, Bk I, chap iii
2. Sir Henry Wotton, *Elements of Architecture*
3. *Sixth Report of the Royal Fine Art Commission, 1937*, page 8
4. Coventry Patmore, 'Street Architecture', *National Review* 5 (1987), page 61
5. For a full discussion of Palladio's church façades see Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural principles in the Age of Humanism*, London 1949, pages 80 to 87
6. Minutes of the 731st meeting of the Royal Fine Art Commission, 5 June 1991
7. *Eleventh Report of the Royal Fine Art Commission, 1952*, page 4
8. *Ibid.*, page 5
9. *Eighth Report of the Royal Fine Art Commission, 1946–47*, page 13
10. *Sixteenth Report of the Royal Fine Art Commission, 1958–59*, page 8
Fifteenth Report of the Royal Fine Art Commission, 1957, page 5
11. *Ninth Report of the Royal Fine Art Commission, 1948–49*, page 8
12. For example in the *Eleventh Report of the Royal Fine Art Commission, 1952*, page 4
13. *Fourteenth Report of the Royal Fine Art Commission, 1955–56*, page 11
14. *Seventeenth Report of the Royal Fine Art Commission, 1959–60*, page 12
15. To the architect John Winter while on a Royal Institute of British Architects Jury
16. Reported in *Building Design*, 2 April 1993, page 3
17. *Fourteenth Report of the Royal Fine Art Commission, 1955–56*, page 6

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