

Format de citation

Fox, Tony : recension de : David Lascelles, Horace Jones. Architect of Tower Bridge, London : Profile Editions, 2024, dans : Reviews in History, 2025, September, <https://recensio-stag.lorax.syslab.com/r/89d95b8c0c954667aba5bbc6b2f02ca3>



copyright

Cet article peut être téléchargé et/ou imprimé à des fins privées.
Toute autre reproduction ou représentation, intégrale ou substantielle de son contenu, doit faire l'objet d'une autorisation (§§ 44a-63a UrhG / German Copyright Act).

Horace Jones: Architect of Tower Bridge

Sir Horace Jones PRIBA (1819-1887) was the appointed (salaried) Architect and Surveyor to the City of London for 23 years and is responsible for many of the City's extant civic buildings. Hitherto, Jones has been largely unrecognised and absent from the pantheon of Victorian architects and civil engineers.

David Lascelles has now filled that gap. Rather than having expertise in the building professions, the author has been inspired by living and working in two of Jones's buildings, and his aesthetic appreciation of many others. Here is not only a biography of an unsung Victorian architect, but also we are shown the vicissitudes attending that profession in that era. Moreover, this book adds to the history of the London food markets. Contrary to its title, this book is about much more than Tower Bridge.

The author starts out with a chronological approach: Horace Jones the student. After a 'grand tour' of Europe, studies with Sir William Tite PRIBA gave Jones his initial experience in designing public buildings—railway stations strewn between Carlisle and Rouen. Jones then took articles with John Wallen, an architect and quantity surveyor. Wallen's practice was in larger utilitarian buildings such as warehouses, as well as in planning and surveying, and he was principal quantity surveyor to the City of London. This was doubtless a formative experience for Jones, and his professional relationships in the City might well have germinated as an apprentice. On becoming a journeyman architect, Jones won some small commissions and formed a brief partnership with A.E. Johnson—much of this early work was residential and outside central London. As for public buildings, Jones began 'flying solo' with his own series of railway stations, between Frome and Weymouth (p.25). A major step up was in 1847 when Jones won the anonymised competition to rebuild the Cardiff Town Hall. In 1856, Jones designed a new wing for London's Royal Free Hospital (then in Gray's Inn Road) and appears to have done so without fee. This may have dovetailed with the fact that Jones clearly had designs on the City of London—he would likely have made useful contacts with the Freemasons who were supporting the Royal Free Hospital project. Eager to further cement his relationship with the City, Jones became a liveryman at both the Fishmongers' and Turners' Guilds, and he established his own drawing office at Furnival's Inn (close to where his Holborn Bar obelisks stand today). Regular, if monotonous, work came with an appointment as the architect to several of the new residential estates under construction outside of the City (such as at Bethnal Green, p.30). With his brother, Jones also engaged in an early, side-line occupation, in what we would now call mortgage funding.

Lascelles sets aside his chronological approach as we reach 1864, when, at the age of 45 years, Jones is appointed as Architect and Surveyor to the City of London. The later chapters of this book then explore Jones's largest projects in the City. The chapter dealing with the design and building of Billingsgate, Leadenhall, and Smithfield Markets is entitled '*Market Maker*', possibly a pun relating to the author's own background in finance! Then it is on to the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, and a new roof and library for the Guildhall itself. After that, deservedly, Tower Bridge has two chapters of its own, one on planning and the other on construction. Meanwhile, Jones had risen through the ranks of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA; Fellow 1858, Council Member 1860, Vice-President 1878, and President in 1882). The final chapter discusses Jones's legacy.

Helpfully, the author includes a comprehensive linear timeline on pp.162-163; this helps to navigate the later chapters, where the building projects were often concurrent. There is a catalogue of buildings (both extant and now gone), and the illustrations are plentiful, with 26 colour plates used for the more spectacular works.

In general, while concentrating on the aesthetics of the buildings, Chapter 7 presents an interesting analysis of the design constraints encountered with Tower Bridge. Lascelles also discusses the superiority of steel compared with cast iron, and it is a happy coincidence that Jones designed a London house for Sir Henry Bessemer (pp.61-63 and plate 4). But

otherwise, not being an architect or engineer himself, the author wisely avoids the technological aspects of Jones's practice.

This book has broader attraction beyond the strictly biographical aspects of a previously obscure architect. Firstly, Lascelles gives us insights into the preoccupations and business management problems that accompanied practicing as an architect in the 19th century. These are contributions to the wider history of that profession because those vicissitudes were surely not unique to Horace Jones. Secondly, the 19th century social and political *milieu* that demanded new buildings in the City of London is addressed—this book adds to the histories of Victorian retail commerce in Oxford Street and the formerly decrepit London food markets. Thirdly, this cohort of new, secular buildings within the densely occupied Square Mile was an entirely new enterprise, and Jones was revising the London cityscape. This was a period of renewal and expansion in The City, which mirrored the Victorian expansionist imperative.

The middle two quarters of the 19th century were characterised by two contested architectural styles. There was an Italianate school which could probably trace its origins to Soane (1753-1837) and the Palladian. That school's arch-rivals were promoting Gothic revival, with champions such as Pugin (the Houses of Parliament, 1852) and Gilbert Scott (e.g., the Midland Hotel at St. Pancras Station, 1865; see pp.34-35). Jones had trained on both types of design and his practice was in both sub-disciplines. It was the clients who decided which they wanted, including which contexts might take priority when making their choice. Lascelles demonstrates soundly that Horace Jones trained to be a versatile architect.

Thus, Jones's Guildhall School of Music & Drama was Italianate, reflecting its artistic purposes, and which refined people of taste associated with the 'Grand Tour'. Meanwhile, Jones's designs were neo-gothic when attached to a mediaeval building (as with the new Guildhall roof) and, later, it was Parliament that dictated the neo-gothic style for Tower Bridge, supposedly respecting the context of the nearby Tower of London. Gentlemen's houses could take either style (plates 3 – 6), and the doric columns at Billingsgate are neither. Jones was no dyed-in-the-wool, Sir-Gilbert-Scott-like, Victorian neo-Gothicist!

While this versatility was unusual, it was not unique. Sir Charles Barry is known for being of the Italianate school, and for his numerous Italianate designs (not least the Manchester Art Gallery and the Royal College of Surgeons in Lincoln's Inn Fields, London). Nonetheless, Barry was also the architect of the Islington 'triplets' (Holy Trinity, St. John's and St. Paul's) as well as several other churches further north—all for the Church Building Commissioners and all neo-gothic. Ironically, while the Houses of Parliament are Barry's most famous building, he employed Pugin to create its neo-gothic appearance, inside and out. The big difference, however, is that Jones, unlike both Barry and Pugin, was not primarily associated with one or other of the stylistic schools. Lascelles believes that this non-alignment is a fundamental reason why Jones was relatively inconspicuous.

Amongst his contemporaries in the high-Victorian era, Jones became liable to two major architectural criticisms. The first was an accusation of dishonesty in his *façades*—masking steel-framed buildings with masonry and brick was appreciated by neither RIBA nor the architectural press of the day (pp.144-145). The author defends Jones by pointing out that concealing a brick cone with a pastiche dome at St. Paul's never led to any criticism of Wren. The second criticism (*passim*) was that Jones tended more to the utilitarian than the artistic. Again, the author stoutly defends his subject—successful public buildings are obligatorily more utilitarian than private commissions. Moreover, the food markets that Jones designed were far more ornate than was required to protect people from the weather while buying and selling foodstuffs. On this point, Lascelles might have found extra ammunition in Jones's defence—his bestiary includes the heraldic fish on the weathervane at Billingsgate, a leopard finial at the Guildhall Library (frontispiece), and splendid dragons at Leadenhall Market (p. 99), Smithfield Market (plates 16 and 19), and Temple Bar (plate 15).

Architects', engineers' and surveyors' practices overlapped in the 19th century, and were not as discrete as they are today. Within RIBA, Jones was in favour of reform and improvement across its remit. Jones felt that time in the office was indispensable for training, and that buildings themselves should be studied, not models in museums. In particular, he thought that RIBA examinations should '*take a scientific and practical rather than an aesthetic tendency*' while the latter could be recognised by competitions for medals and prizes (p.114). Jones also argued that, by enforcing scientific and practical standards by examination RIBA could increase its influence and grow a larger membership with tangible, objective evidence of their capability. This did not please those who believed in the *status quo*, and in RIBA membership merely by election. If relationships between RIBA, the City and Guilds college, and the Royal Academy could be forged, this would also reduce elitism within the profession. Clearly, this harked back to Jones's own career path and was a long-term remedy to some of the antagonism he had himself experienced as an employed, rather than free-lance, architect. As to the private and domestic aspects of Jones's life, the author can only present the limited evidence that is available. The reason such material is limited may be that Jones worked very long and very hard, and that he married late. Jones's parents, birthplace, and all of his residences are identified. His wife was Anne Elizabeth Patch, the daughter of a barrister—on their wedding day in 1875, Anne was 36-years old, and Horace was 20 years her senior. Their only child, Annie Horatia, arrived a year after the marriage and there is a marvellous family photograph from the City of London Archive (p.109). Horace died when Annie was ten years old, but he made good provision not only for his widow and daughter, but also for three unmarried sisters (p.149). The author refrains from speculation beyond these basic facts. From a purely biographical point of view, the personality of Horace Jones is not convincingly portrayed. In one or two places, Lascelles describes Jones as having a '*strong personality*', a '*brusque manner*' (p.148), and lacking in skills such as diplomacy and public relations. Certainly, there were one or two professional situations when Jones was frank and forthright in his views. For example, he recommended (authoritatively) that architects should be candid, and not contrive attractive, low-cost building estimates (so as to get the commission) only for the client to find those estimates wanting after construction had begun (p.40)—his early training in quantity surveying meant that he could recognize this abuse when he saw it. Jones was also forthright about discrimination by RIBA in favour of freelancers and against its salaried members (something which he had experienced himself). But witnesses are also quoted, describing Jones as having '*tact and eminently conciliatory qualities*', and as being '*diligent, earnest and attentive*' (p.57). It is true that there had been conflict with William Haywood (the City Engineer) over Holborn Viaduct (pp.64-65). However, Jones worked for years in harmony with John Wolfe Barry (one of Haywood's successors) '*and all his [Barry's] references to Horace are generous*' (p.144). Thus, it is hard to understand why the author prefers a less favourable assessment of Jones's personality, which seems not to fairly balance all the available evidence. Among middle-aged, wealthy, male, Victorian, public *personae*, and that is certainly the impression one gets from a portrait of 1886 (plate 26), one suspects that Jones's behaviour and speech might not have differed very much from the norm. In his final chapter, Lascelles conducts a posthumous consideration of Jones's architectural legacy. Only a fraction of his work is extant today, and Lascelles points out that the last century or more has often been unkind to high-Victorian architecture, whether accidentally or deliberately (*pace* occasional enthusiasts such as Sir John Betjeman). Fire took care of the Royal Surrey Music Hall as early as 1861, and the Poultry and Provisions Market (near Smithfields) burned down in 1958. Jones's ornate, neo-gothic, hammerbeam roof at The Guildhall was a victim of the London Blitz. Elsewhere his buildings have been demolished simply in favour of modernity: an early casualty was the Cardiff County Hall in 1914, and, in London (a city that is in constant regeneration), all four of his City Police stations and several commercial properties had gone by 1950. The author proffers these losses as further contributing to Jones's obscurity (pp.150, 153). However, on that point, one would have

thought that the extant *corpus*, including an iconic bridge with longstanding global recognition and Leadenhall Market (*alias* Diagon Alley in the Harry Potter movies, p.97), would have been more than enough to compensate.

A further place to look for Jones's legacy might have been in the Victorian empire for which London was the political centre. For example, one of the engineers on the Tower Bridge team was K.S.Budhbhatti, who had been a student at the Royal Indian Engineering College in Egham (Surrey). Budhbhatti subsequently returned to his native Bhuj (Gujarat), took up civic architecture and engineering appointments, and produced numerous public buildings and several bridges. In an era when architecture and engineering were not as clearly separated as they are now, it is not impossible that some part of Sir Horace Jones's legacy might yet be found in India.[1]

Pedants and aficionados of the City of London will find one or two minor inaccuracies. For example, Furnival's was an Inn of Chancery, not an Inn of Court (p.20). Tower Bridge is actually just outside The City, although it certainly contributes to the management of its traffic (p.143). But these do not detract from the book at all.

This book can also be used to augment the 'Layers of London' project created by the Institute of Historical Research (www.layersoflondon.org). This is an open access website, which is searchable and map-based. It allows historical research into The City of London by documenting buildings marked upon superimposable maps of different eras. Thus far, 'Layers of London' finds Horace Jones only at Billingsgate Market, the Guildhall School of Music, and Tower Bridge. That can now be taken further, putting Sir Horace Jones on the map, literally.

This book should also put Sir Horace Jones on the map, figuratively speaking. There are no other biographies for comparison. It is an easy read, and it provides access to the life of a hardworking practitioner who made a large and important impression upon the architecture of Victorian London. The daily business of the Victorian architect, the planning and management problems encountered, and the relationship between the practitioner and RIBA, do not always appear in biographies of Jones's more famous colleagues and are under-reported aspects of the more general history of architecture in the Victorian era. The causes for the demand of new buildings, and comparisons of human activity on their sites before and after rebuilding, are much better integrated here than in many books on London architecture. This book fills an important lacuna for everyone interested in the Victorian built environment, the Victorian history of the City of London (and its food markets), and the history of the architectural professions. We may seek blue plaques in vain, but Sir Horace Jones did not deserve such a lengthy wait for his biographer.