

The Seven Lamps of Architecture

And their possible influence on William Butterfield

St Denis' church is relatively unusual in being an empty building – all the normal furniture found in a church was removed in the 1960s. There are no plans to bring in any replacements.

Being empty gives one the opportunity to look at the church in purely architectural terms.

When William Butterfield restored St Denis' in 1874, he left the nave as found – medieval and constructed of fieldstones; yes he re-roofed (using the old timbers as floor supports) and plastered the walls (fresh plastering in 2022 uncovered the north door and the putlogs). He did, though, enlarge the chancel arch and the chancel, using brick as the main construction material.

Butterfield was a 'go-to' church architect, apparently, influenced by John Ruskin's book *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, first published in May 1849. The 'lamps' of the title are Ruskin's principles of architecture, representing the demands good architecture must meet. Can you see them in St Denis'?

Sacrifice Dedication of man's craft to God, as visible proofs of man's love and obedience.

Truth Handcrafted and honest display of materials and structure. Truth to materials and honest display of construction were bywords since the serious Gothic Revival had distanced itself from the whimsical "Gothick" of the 18th century; it had been often elaborated by Pugin and others.

Power Buildings should be thought of in terms of their massing and reach towards the sublimity of nature by the action of the human mind upon them and the organization of physical effort in constructing buildings.

Beauty Aspiration towards God expressed in ornamentation drawn from nature, his creation.

Life Buildings should be made by human hands, so that the joy of masons and stone carvers is associated with the expressive freedom given them.

Memory Buildings should respect the culture from which they have developed.

Obedience No originality for its own sake, but conforming to the finest among existing English values, in particular expressed through the "English Early Decorated" Gothic as the safest choice of style.



From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Seven_Lamps_of_Architecture
Introduction and photograph: Peter Mann



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St Denis' church



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