

Llandrindod Wells & District U3A Lecture Meeting July 2018

Vanity Architecture - David Mitchell

Report by Clive Barrett

Chairman Berwyn Woolnough welcomed everyone, and gave news of a UK U3A event in Cardiff in October at the National Museum. He explained about a proposed display by Llandrindod U3A interest groups locally on September 24th. He also mentioned that our Website Manager Nick Talbott had been nominated for Volunteer of the Year, he did excellently well to finish in the last 6, and deservedly received a certificate, finally Berwyn mentioned the Abbeycwmhir Study Group.

The Chairman then introduced the speaker for the morning David Mitchell, who is a member of Brecon U3A, and his lecture was entitled “Vanity Architecture”. The speaker started firstly by stating how people lived centuries ago when a shelter over their heads was regarded as essential providing warmth, dryness, and security, later progressing to stone walls e.g. crofters. Then he spoke of various vanity buildings such as the Tower of Babel and the Colossus of Rhodes, and he included domestic vanity e.g. a grand front door, and going on to say that the bourgeoisie middle class own property. Throughout history in all forms of life architecture has been a major factor in the control and fear of the masses. I thought that David Mitchell was quite humorous at times thus making the talk more entertaining. He also mentioned symbols of global power, the Barclay Brothers and Nicholas Van Hoogstraten.

In India the grandeur of the Viceroy's House and the Red Fort, whilst the power of Rome and the Romans became a model for later regimes. The speaker then explained different aspects of architecture on life and the world. Further the Normans brought power in the form of religion. Under the heading “Princess of the Church” he mentioned Pope Julius II regarding power and glory or political control. With reference to “Evil and Holiness” he stated Ivan the Terrible, mosques, Mormon Temples (religious power) Louis XIV and Versailles, the Duke of Marlborough and Blenheim. Modern examples of architectural power such as Dodington Park, Gloucestershire, the home of inventor and tycoon Sir James Dyson also came into the equation. He also spoke of the “Architecture of Fear” namely architecture of and for the people e.g. Hitler and Stalin, and the importance of the design of a Square for example Red (Russia) and Tiananmen (China). Different buildings, Pavilions and arenas as shown above plus high rise buildings and flats. Presidents build big houses, whilst Municipal Pride includes Birmingham Town Hall, Leeds Town Hall, Guild Hall, Swansea, and Civic Centre, Newport.

The speaker ended by picturing the architectural future as a young child surrounded by “building blocks”. He then answered some questions from an audience of appreciative members ending by saying “I don't agree totally with everything I said during my talk”. David Mitchell was duly thanked by U3A Chairman Berwyn Woolnough. Following the summer vacation the next U3A lecture will be on Monday September 10th and looks very interesting, the talk is entitled the “History of the BBC” by Professor Jean Seaton.