

## The British School at Rome

**Bob Allies, Marco Iuliano** and **MaryAnne Stevens** describe the centrality of architecture to the work of the British School at Rome and set out its ambitions for the future

**The British School at Rome** was founded in 1901, but it was only after the *Esposizione Internazionale di Belle Arti* (International Exhibition of Fine Arts), held in 1911 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Italian Unification, that it was able to acquire a permanent home. The temporary British pavilion, with its main façade envisaged by its architect Sir Edwin Lutyens as a 'replica' of the west front of St Paul's Cathedral, was translated into a permanent edifice, the land having been donated by the City of Rome.

The Royal Institute of British Architects and the Royal College of Art started to award scholarships in 1907, but it was the creation of the Faculty of Architecture at the BSR in 1912 that brought with it the establishment of the Rome Scholarship in Architecture, funded by the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851. It was one of three scholarships supported by the 1851 Commission, the others being awarded to Sculptors and Painters, and all of which could be held for two years (extendable to a third). The first winner of the award in Architecture, selected through a lengthy process of drawing-based competition, was H. Charlton Bradshaw (1893–1943).

Bradshaw came to Rome as a graduate of the University of Liverpool, one of the three leading 'day' schools of architecture in the UK at the beginning of the twentieth century – Liverpool, Glasgow and the Architectural Association – all of which based their teaching on the model of the French *École des Beaux-Arts*.

In establishing an architecture scholarship at the new British School at Rome, it is hardly surprising that those responsible drew their rationale from the internationally respected Prix de Rome, awarded by the Académie de France, and in existence since 1720. Unlike the clarity of purpose which underpinned the Prix de Rome, preparing scholars for public

careers, the Rome Scholarship had neither a specific agenda nor a prescribed outcome. The years following the establishment of the Faculty of Architecture, initially chaired by Reginald Blomfield (until 1942), saw the growth of several other prestigious scholarships which ran alongside the Rome Scholarship, including the Herbert Baker, the Henry Jarvis, and the Bernard Webb. Their beneficiaries, who included Louis de Soissons, Amyas Connell, Basil Ward, and William Holford amongst others, oscillated between surveying and reimagining the archaeological heritage, physically and theoretically.

The different approaches to the complex legacy of the past seems to have represented the *trait d'union* of the scholars in Rome as evidenced in the 1982 exhibition mounted by the Faculty of Architecture. Representing a survey of the work of Rome Scholars in Architecture from 1912 to 1982, it bore the title: *The Classical Tradition in British Architecture*. What would today seem an inappropriately narrow scope for such a retrospective did not seem entirely out of place at the time. For concurrent with the work of historicist architects such as Quinlan Terry there was a wider reappraisal taking place in the United States as well as in Europe, of the virtues of the traditional city and of classical architecture. This was a movement that encompassed figures as diverse as Robert Venturi, Colin Rowe, Aldo Rossi, Michael Graves, Charles Moore, Leon Krier, Alan Colquhoun, John Miller and, of course James Stirling – who was architect-in-residence at the American Academy in Rome in 1982, and for whom both Terry and Krier worked at the outset of their careers. Nevertheless, this limited representation of the British School as some kind of classical academy did run counter both to the diversity of interests of those who had studied there – Will Alsop one year, Robert Adam the next –

and to the work the majority of scholars would undertake in their subsequent careers. And it still does.

The Rome Scholarship in Architecture has survived several shocks during its history. The withdrawal of support from the Royal Commission for the 1851 Exhibition denied dedicated funding for architecture in the 1990s. This has meant that what was originally a long, pluriennial award, is now limited to three months – still a productive period of time, but perhaps less career-changing in its effect. Currently there are two BSR Architecture awards, the Scholars' Prize in Architecture and the Giles Worsley Fellowship, the latter specifically conceived for architectural history.

To attempt to characterise the work of scholars today would perhaps be as unwise as it was in 1982, but certain phases are apparent. For a period in the late 1980s and 1990s, for example, the School attracted a succession of Cambridge graduates for whom the experience of the city in the form of a first-year study trip to Rome led by Peter Carl proved enormously influential in shaping their subsequent interests. Unsurprisingly, many Rome Scholars have gone on to pursue significant academic careers – writing and teaching – but many have continued in practice. And if there is a trend in their output it is perhaps a move towards the consideration of housing and urbanism, to how cities work, and how architects can contribute at this wider scale. And for this, the palimpsest that is Rome, will always provide an extraordinary source of inspiration. More recently, while the projects of Scholars have been more various, their approach has been informed by recognition of the use of the past as the springboard for work which addresses the present.

Architecture remains central to the BSR's programme. This is reflected in the School

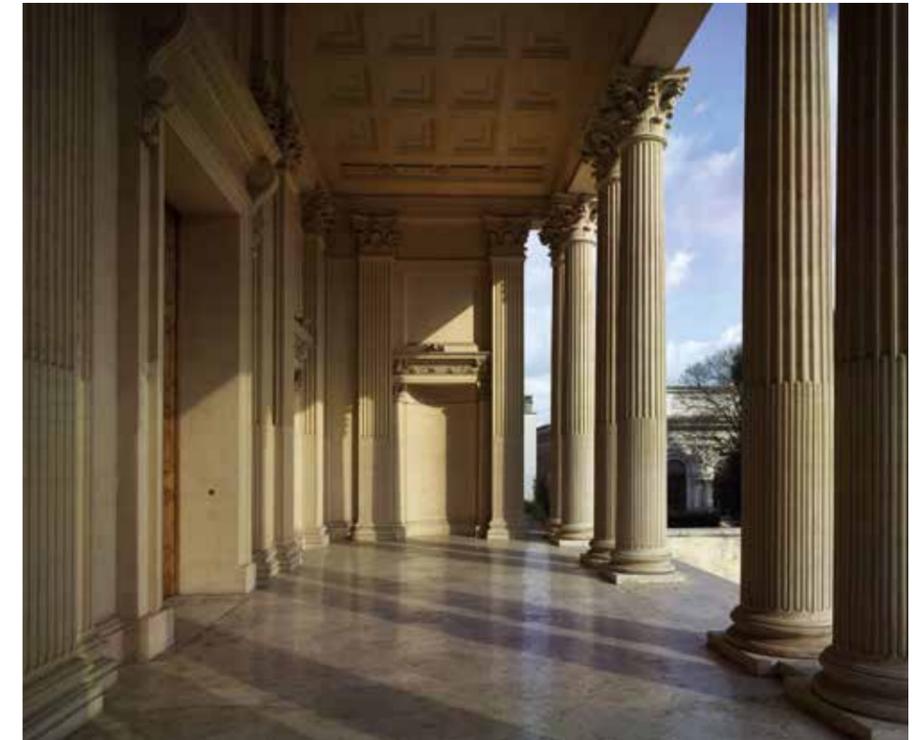
continuing to host architects, architectural historians and scholars working in related disciplines, providing them with a platform for research and intellectual discussion. The aim now is to extend its scope, recognising it as an art which, straddling the fine arts and technology, is lived in and experienced, and hence exists within the wider social, economic, political and cultural domains that include urban planning and environmental sustainability.

The BSR has recently identified several ambitious initiatives which promise substantially to raise the profile of architecture both within and beyond the institution. It has established an Architecture Advisory Committee as part of its governance. It is looking to establish further awards for the subject, and to re-instate the Rome Scholarship in Architecture as a nine-month residency. The Scholarship would offer the recipient the opportunity to undertake independent research which would benefit from the rich heritage, research resources and agencies in Rome while also contributing to shape the BSR's Architecture events programme and exhibitions. Finally, looking outward to Rome, Italy and the BSR's more extensive geographical reach, the award-holder will be encouraged to form collaborations with academic and research institutions, museums and government agencies to create rich and dynamic joint programmes.

The journey for the discipline of Architecture at the BSR from 1912 has been varied and at times arduous. However, by being positioned within an internationally acclaimed research institute it is able to fulfil its positive contribution to a community of scholars and practitioners, and equally to assert its capacity to speak of the significance of the past for the future to local, national and international communities. ■

**Below** Paired Corinthian columns frame the portico of the British School at Rome. Photo: Paul Barker; image courtesy and copyright Country Life, 2014

**Overleaf** Sir Edwin Lutyens, South Elevation and Plan of the British School at Rome, Drawing 2, 1912. Photo: Giorgio Benni; image courtesy and copyright British School at Rome



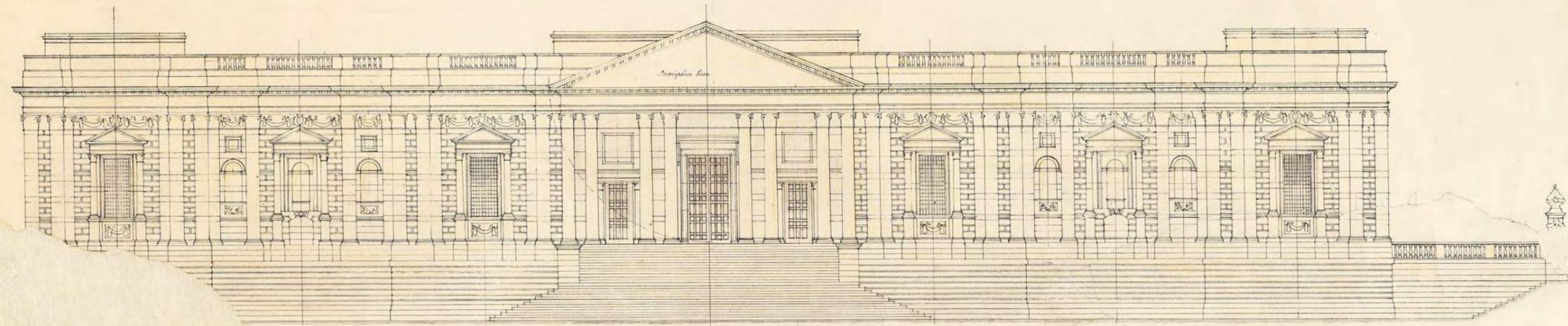
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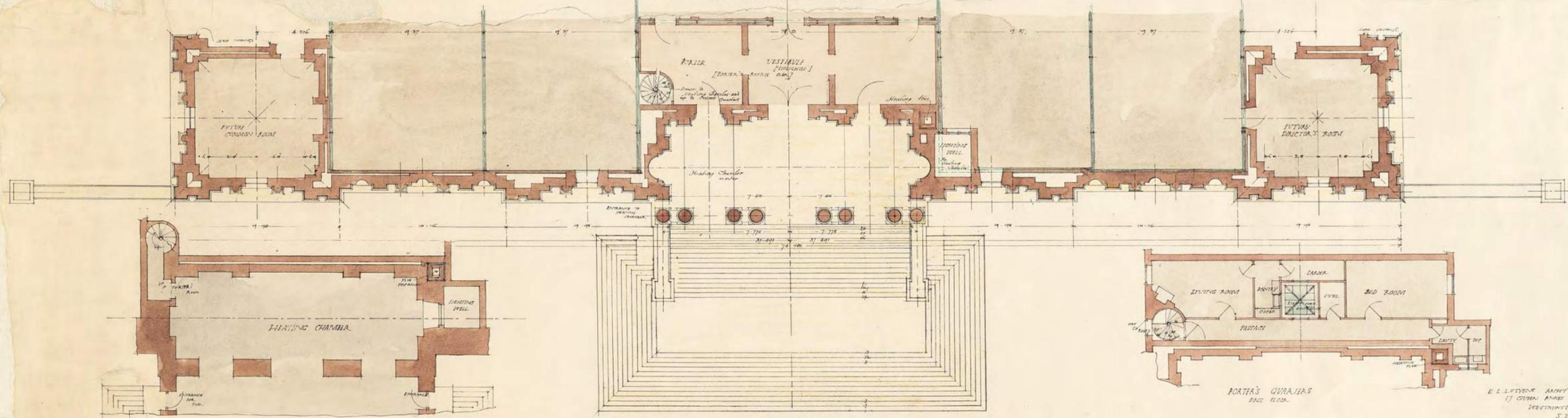
**The Scholars' Prize in Architecture** is awarded annually to a recently qualified architect (post RIBA Part II).  
**The Giles Worsley Rome Fellowship** is a research award given for the study of architectural history. It is open to both architectural historians and architects. The closing date for both awards is **Friday 28 May 2021**.  
 See: [www.bsr.ac.uk/awards/architecture-awards-ii](http://www.bsr.ac.uk/awards/architecture-awards-ii)

**The BSR Architecture Advisory Committee** comprises **Bob Allies (chair), Tim Bell, Denise Bennetts, Eliza Bonham-Carter, Marco Iuliano, Rosamond McKitterick, Niall McLaughlin and MaryAnne Stevens**

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