



Critic's Choice
Wrest Park is to benefit from a well-deserved restoration, says Andrew Mead

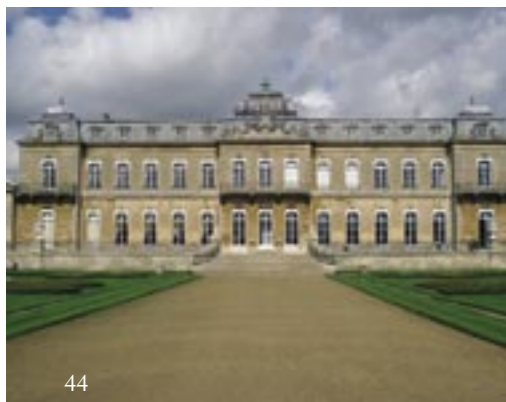
The very first president of the Institute of British Architects in London (later the RIBA) was a Tory politician, the 2nd Earl de Grey. He was a keen amateur architect who, in the 1830s, designed Wrest Park near Silsoe in Bedfordshire (pictured below) as his family home.

One of the very few houses in the UK that are thoroughly French in conception, Wrest Park was acquired two years ago by English Heritage, which already managed the grounds. A first phase of conservation is now complete but ambitious plans for the future have just been announced: a 20-year restoration of the extensive landscape.

Intriguing though the house is (with a fine staircase hall), it's the landscape that really matters at Wrest Park, reflecting as it does two centuries of changing tastes. De Grey's parterre and lawns fuse with earlier schemes which had grown around the building he'd demolished for his own. At the end of a long, oblong, 18th-century lake sits a Baroque brick pavilion by Thomas Archer – a perfect eye-catcher even though it's 800m from the house.

Water plays quite a part here and in the 1760s landscape architect 'Capability' Brown softened some of its edges, but he left earlier formal elements intact, such as the woods criss-crossed by beckoning paths.

English Heritage has published a new guidebook (£3.50) and the grounds are open at weekends until the end of October (www.english-heritage.org.uk). I wish this restoration project well – it's a beguiling place.



View from a car park: taking in the sights on one of Croydon's seven 'hills'

WALK

The seven hills of Croydon offer idiosyncratic views, says Richard Marks of DRDH Architects

Welcome to SuperCroydon tour, Sunday 21 September (part of London Open House weekend). www.londonopenhouse.org

Like many Londoners, all I knew of Croydon was what I'd seen from the train to Brighton – a glimpse of Richard Seifert's No.1 Croydon tower, and a light sense of relief as we pulled away again. This year, as a tutor at Kingston University, I'll need to pay more attention. Under new head of school Daniel Rosbottom (see *News*, page 9), every Kingston architecture student will be studying the commercial centre

of this large town in south London this year.

To this end, I met Vincent Lacovara, co-founder of architecture practice AOC and senior urban designer at Croydon Council, along with some local residents and Kingston tutors, for a tour of Croydon's 'seven hills'. Put on as part of London's Open House weekend, the hills in question were, in fact, seven multi-storey car parks across the urban centre.

Sparing no thought for our feeble legs, Vincent set a ripping pace up each of the seven- or eight-storey monoliths. A fine view emerged from the desolate upper decks – empty and redundant, we were told, due to a massive overprovision of parking. Seven car parks were built because Birmingham had six, and Croydon was not to be outdone.

The tour focused on Croydon's oddities and failures. The building boom of the 1960s left the borough with an excess of office space (a problem exacerbated by the success of Canary Wharf), while only 4,000 people actually live

in the urban centre. Bisected by impressive hunks of infrastructure, Croydon is also cut in two by four-lane highways, though these connect to mere two-lane roads on its outskirts.

With its three giant malls, Croydon is marketed as a shopper's Shangri-La, but once these blocks close, they form an impassable barrier from one side of town to the other. Lacovara is working to re-address some of these imbalances. His knowledge of Croydon is impressive and through his tour, I gained a strange affection for the idiosyncratic borough. I look forward to an interesting year ahead.

Resume: Rome if you want to: a tour of Croydon's seven hills

5 THINGS TO DO THIS WEEK

1 Cartoons and Coronets: The Genius of Osbert Lancaster

Discover the architectural satirist's doodlings (pictured right) at The Wallace Collection. Until 11 January. Hertford House, Manchester Sq, London W1U 3BN. www.wallacecollection.org

2 Le Corbusier: The Art of Architecture

See next week's issue for coverage of this Corb blockbuster and the opening of the Lutyens-designed crypt. Until 18 January. Metropolitan Cathedral, Brownlow Hill, Liverpool L3 5TQ. www.architecture.com

3 Line by Line: 250 years of drawing Cheltenham

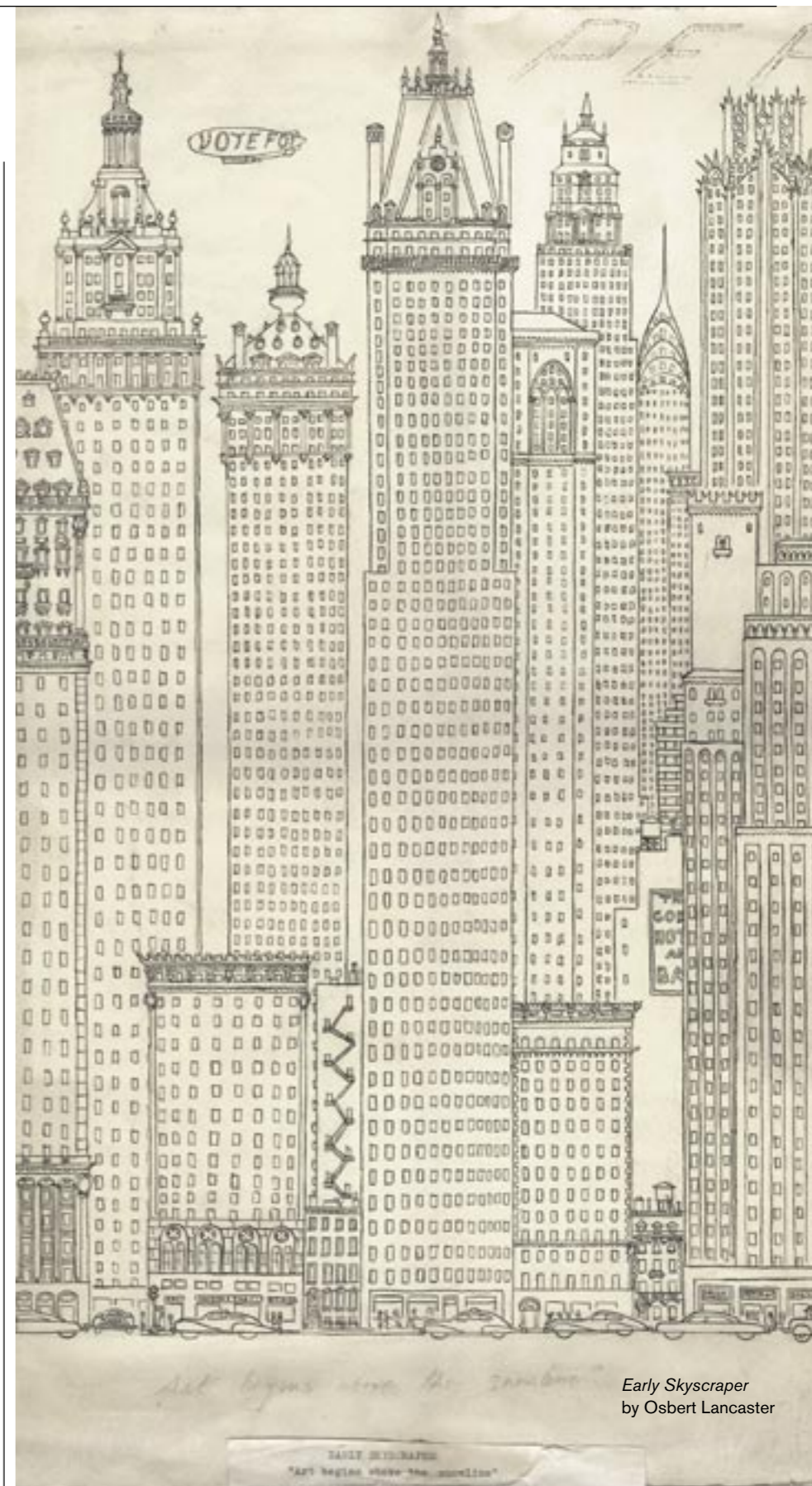
Follow the changing face of Cheltenham through these scribbles. Until 7 December. Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum, Clarence Street, Cheltenham GL50 3JT. www.cheltenhamartgallery.org.uk

4 Almut Rink: Foamywater

Investigate how we represent landscape at this exhibition. Until 14 November. Austrian Cultural Forum London, 28 Rutland Gate, London SW7 1PQ. www.austria.org.uk/culture

5 Oskar Kokoschka: Exile & New Home 1938-1980

Enjoy this Viennese artist in a country setting. Until 14 December. Compton Verney, Warwickshire CV35 9HZ. www.comptonverney.org.uk



Early Skyscraper by Osbert Lancaster