



**Space And Light Revisited**

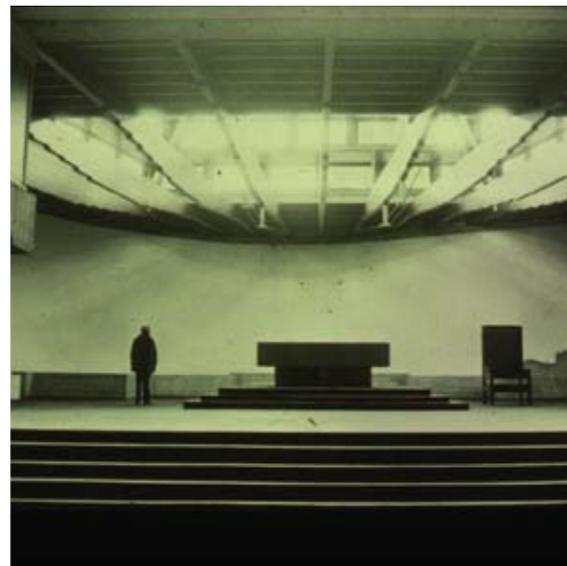
## St. Peter's Seminary 1966-1980

St. Peter's Seminary was the culminating masterpiece in a remarkable series of ecclesiastical buildings for the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland by Gillespie, Kidd & Coia. Jack Coia had established the practice's reputation for churches in the early 1930s. When building was resumed after the war Coia hired as his apprentice the 17 year-old Berlin refugee Isi Metzstein, a student at the Glasgow School of Art. Andy MacMillan, a colleague from Isi's student days, joined the firm at Isi's instigation in 1954. When these two young architects, who were already looking to contemporary Europe for inspiration, built their first church in the New Town of Glenrothes in 1956, it was the beginning of one of the most creative programmes in British post war architecture.

*The church and campanile of East Kilbride was of its time without rival in Great Britain and was a match, dare one say, even for Le Corbusier himself at Ronchamp... Much later, the same quality of carved mass and ebulliently unpredictable detail is present in the seminary at Cardross... Their buildings were serious, passionate and utterly memorable.*

Colin St. John (Sandy) Wilson, architect of the British Library.

As secular architects, Isi and Andy's challenge at St. Peter's was how to create 'sacred space' – how to translate the ecclesiastical traditions of a thousand years into a modern language. What they built was not only inspired by Le Corbusier but also by Mackintosh's Glasgow School of Art, which helped to release them from the constraints of mainstream dogmatic Modernism by steering them towards more expressive forms.



## Space and Light 1972

Jack Coia was awarded the RIBA Gold Medal in 1969, an event which the Scottish Arts Council wished to celebrate with a film. In the sixties the SAC saw itself as a leading force in promoting the arts in Scotland and had jump-started my film on the architecture of Charles Rennie Mackintosh. At that time Mackintosh was generally seen in Glasgow as a disgraceful character, 'a long haired architect,' one councillor told me, 'who had hit the bottle.' A few of us, in defiance of this appalling attitude, formed a small ginger group called The Friends of Toshie, only to be ridiculed by the Glasgow Herald, whose journalists seemed to hate the Mackintosh building that they all were forced to work in.

At the time I worked for BBC Scotland, where the attitude was hardly better. Tragically the BBC had already half demolished Mackintosh's Queen Margaret College, cruelly imprisoning its carcass in studios of metropolitan brick. Although James Millar, the Head of Programmes, was keen to promote my film to mark the 1968 Mackintosh centenary, no one else at the BBC in Queen Margaret Drive seemed to care a damn. It was time to resign. Fortunately for me Stephen Hearst, Head of Arts in London, knew Mackintosh from growing up in Vienna, and matched my SAC grant for two BBC2 transmissions. My Mackintosh film was finally shown by BBC Scotland later that year during the Edinburgh Festival exhibition.

Jack Coia appreciated my Mackintosh film, but did not want the same biographical approach for his own. 'Why don't you just explore the architecture of St Peter's?' he asked, as he shuffled in his carpet slippers along the marble colonnades of the Casa d'Italia, a building which he had recently remodeled, next door to his office in Glasgow's Park Circus.

So with Mark Littlewood as cinematographer, camera moves steered by Tony Cridlin, fresh from Stanley Kubrick's *Clockwork Orange*, editing by Patrick Higson, and Frank Spedding's incomparable score conducted by Marcus Dods, *Space and Light* was born.

At the Union of International Architects Festival in Madrid in 1975, *Space and Light* won the Medalla de Bronce in second place to Corbusier's *Villa Savoie*, with the Festival's Medalla de Oro awarded to my film, *The Hand of Adam* on the architecture of Robert Adam. What linked those two award winners was the emotional charge delivered by Frank Spedding's music, which he would cap a few years later with his highly acclaimed score of symphonic length for my film on Frank Lloyd Wright.



## Space and Light Revisited 2009

Tonight's performance will unfold on two screens. The re-mastered film of 1972, and a shot-by-shot recreation filmed early this year, will play on either side of young musicians playing Frank Spedding's original score. The new version was filmed in winter light in the now derelict rubble-strewn husk that was once St Peter's, as the Academy Nominated cinematographer, Seamus McGarvey explains.

### Filming in the wake of vandals by Seamus McGarvey

Shooting *Space and Light Revisited* for Murray Grigor presented a unique photographic challenge for me. Because we had to match precisely the camera positions and movements so beautifully executed by his camera team in 1972, the whole film felt to me like cinematographic archaeology. Achieving the many angles and the crane shots was made very difficult because of the ruinous and dangerous state of the building. We had to clear away much fallen debris and charred beams to position our tracks in the right spots. It required a real physical effort to reach the building in the first place, negotiating a weakened bridge with a van full of heavy equipment and cutting through briars and overgrown bushes to find the spectral echoes of the original material. Tracking and panning through the vacant vandalised spaces, following the air where priests and seminarians once lived and prayed, left us all in the crew feeling true sadness about the neglect of this beautiful building. As my camera drifted over the altar on my remote electronically steered camera head, some flurries of snow started falling, a beautiful, operatic allegory and elegy. A sign of the cross, a sign of the times.

Although visually the original *Space and Light* was remarkably restored from a print in the Scottish Screen Archive, now part of the National Library of Scotland, the optical sound track fared less well. The opening music was unacceptably scratchy and, worse still, this section was missing from Frank's surviving manuscript. But through Bob Whitney's technical wizardry at the RSAMD a cleaner more audible transfer was eventually re-mastered, enabling the more accurate transcription to be annotated by Rory Boyle.



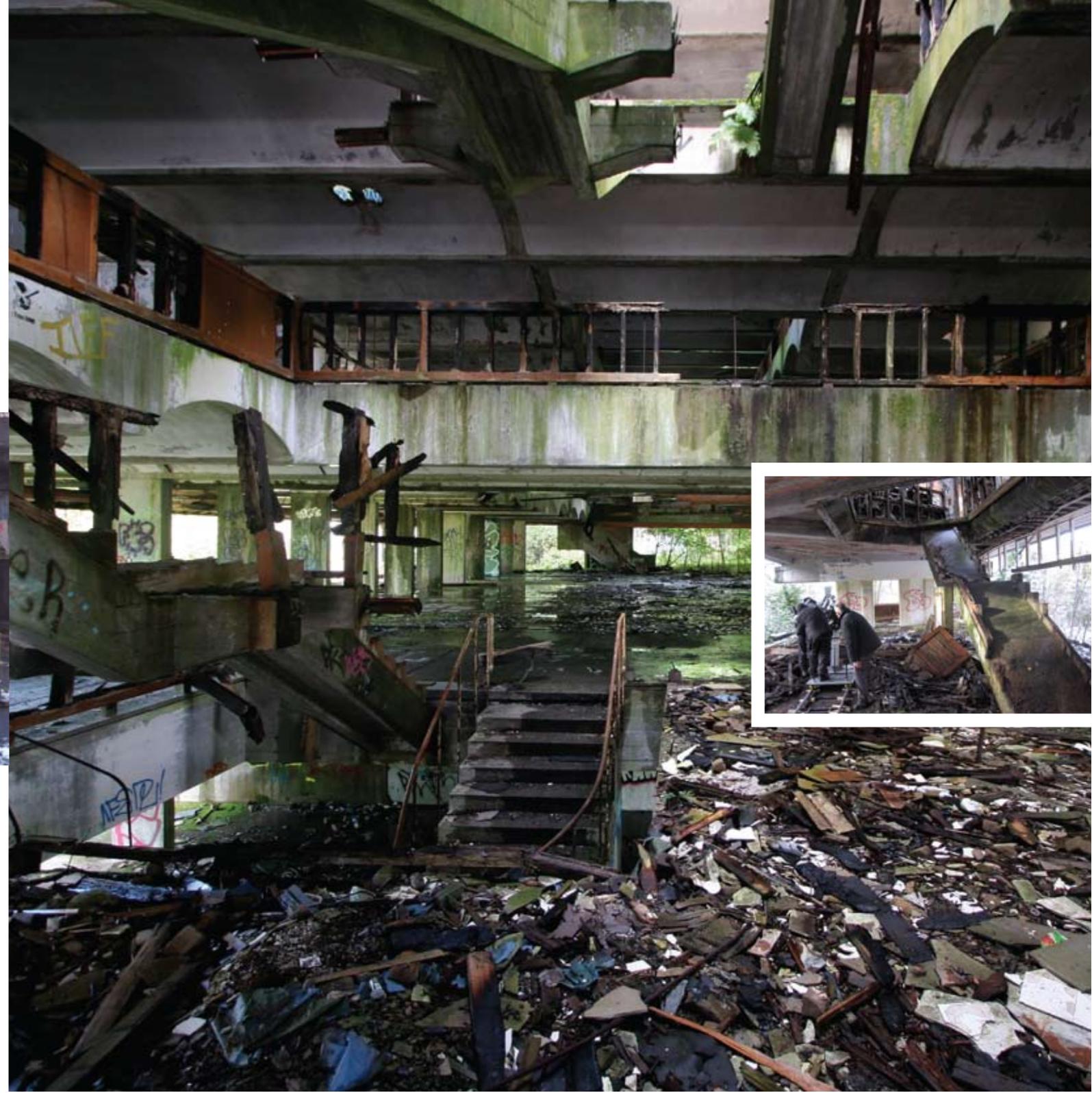
## Frank Spedding & Space And Light

### A Little Reflection By Rory Boyle

Frank was a remarkable man: a fantastic teacher for me at the RSAMD, a wonderful friend, bon viveur and wit, but, above all, a superb composer in all genres of music. His score for Murray Grigor's *Space and Light* is typical of his individual and idiosyncratic thought process in that it weaves two ideas, the plainsong chant *Veni Creator Spiritus* to represent the sacred, and a passage from Beethoven's *Pathétique Sonata* (marked when it first appears as "Beethovenisch") to endorse the secular. How he employs these ideas in a seamless flow of absorbing and pertinent music whilst encompassing the visual imagery of Murray's remarkable wordless film so perfectly is a testament to his skill. What I have found most astonishing however, whilst working on the incomplete manuscript (the first three and last pages were missing), is that the music fits the newly made film so completely, underscoring as it does the utter waste and vandalism of the building that have occurred in the intervening 29 years. Beauty, anger, pathos and reluctant acceptance are the most prominent features of the score – it is almost as if Frank saw the future before the rest of us woke up.



P.S. I tried hard, Frank, to find some missing details in your original score but my search proved pointless since you never did leave anything to chance. I should have known better after all you taught me – thank you and apologies if I didn't quite get every note of those two harps from the original sound track.



## Can the rise and fall of St Peter's not rise again?

St Peter's was inaugurated in 1966 but closed in 1980. Whether this was caused by decisions taken in the wake of Vatican II, the oil crisis, or because of the decline in the intake for the priesthood, the Modernist masterpiece only lasted 14 years. Today St Peter's is a derelict wreck, a vandalised ruin which should never have been permitted. The Scottish Baronial mansion of J.J. Burnett's Kilmahew House for John William Burns, the son of the founder of the Cunard Line, around which the college pivoted, was burnt down and demolished in 1995.

At last some hope of rescue is in the air. The ruined seminary is now listed as one of the 100 Most Endangered Sites by the World Monuments Fund. Urban Splash, the innovative developers, who have given new life to so many threatened buildings of architectural distinction, is close to concluding negotiations with the Archdiocese of the West of Scotland. Gareth Hoskins, who studied architecture under Andy MacMillan at the Glasgow School of Art, is discussing ways in which the ruined seminary can be given a productive new life. A generous Scottish Arts Council National Lottery Public Art Fund development grant has now been awarded to NVA, Angus Farquhar's imaginative art in the landscape organisation, with the aim of creating artworks in the woodlands surrounding St Peter's and exploring public uses for parts of the seminary. It is my hope that our modest presentation can help spur on these ends. If it all comes true perhaps a third film could be on the cards. Then we could welcome you all back to see the Cardross Triptych.

*Space and Light Revisited* was made possible by Murray Grigor's Lighthouse Achievement Award in 2005 and a Scottish Arts Council Creative Scotland Award in 2006, with additional support from the Scottish Screen Archive of the National Library of Scotland and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. With special thanks to Janet McBain of the Scottish Screen Archive, Brian Suttie of Arc and Ken Robertson of MCL for all their help.

Murray Grigor, September 2009

