

PAUL CROSSLEY

Bernard Paul Crossley

19 July 1945–12 December 2019

elected Fellow of the British Academy 2016

by

TIM AYERS

Summary. Paul Crossley was a leading architectural historian of the Gothic period, with a particular specialism in Poland and Central Europe. In his published work and teaching, he brought Gothic architecture as a European phenomenon into the mainstream of study in British universities. He was also the leading scholar of his generation on the historiography of Gothic architecture. Books include a monograph on *Gothic Architecture in the Reign of Kasimir the Great, Church Architecture in Lesser Poland, 1320–1380* (1985), and a new edition of Paul Frankl's *Gothic Architecture* (2003). A charismatic lecturer and teacher, he worked at the University of Manchester and the Courtauld Institute in London.

Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy, 23, 253–270

<https://doi.org/10.5871/mem/023.253>

Posted 19 June 2026. © British Academy 2026.



PAUL CROSSLEY
with a bust of Emperor Charles IV, in the triforium gallery of Prague Cathedral.
Photo courtesy of Zoë Opačić.

The son of a convert to Roman Catholicism, Paul Crossley was educated at the English Benedictine schools of Worth Priory and Downside Abbey.¹ His later interests in church architecture and its uses were probably nourished by immersion in the Catholic beliefs and institutions of which Gothic buildings are such a powerful expression.² More directly, he was inspired by his father, who took him as a child around the churches of northern France on his motorcycle, in a sidecar.³ All his life, Crossley would be in his element on the road, looking at buildings. He went up to Trinity College, Cambridge as a senior scholar in 1963 to study Law. His rhetorical skills, already developing at Downside in the school debating society, were honed further as President of the Cambridge Union. But he decided to abandon a potentially lucrative legal career. Instead, it was at Cambridge that his long association with the Courtauld Institute began, when he undertook a course on Gothic art with Peter Kidson, who was then Conway Librarian there; Kidson had been brought in to teach it, at the very beginning of the Cambridge tripos in history of art.⁴ Crossley graduated with a first class degree in 1967. Kidson (or PK, as he was called by Crossley and many others) then co-supervised his doctoral thesis on ‘Gothic Architecture in Lesser Poland under Casimir the Great’ (1969–73). The unusual choice of topic would shape Crossley’s future career in many ways.

His working life was spent at leading institutions nationally for the study of medieval art. He was quickly employed in 1971 by the History of Art department at the University of Manchester, where he joined Jonathan Alexander and Reginald Dodwell.⁵ Here too he met his future wife, the art historian Joany Crossley. Then, in 1990, he succeeded Kidson as a specialist in medieval architecture at the Courtauld Institute, where medievalist colleagues would include Joanna Cannon, Robin Cormack, Eric Fernie, Michael Kauffmann and John Lowden. Of Crossley’s appointment, director Michael Kauffmann commented, ‘The Institute had clearly acquired a star performer.’⁶ He was appointed Professor in 2002, and retired in 2011. Previously, he had been invited to spend time as visiting professor at the University of Leipzig (2000). In 2012, he delivered the Slade Lectures in Fine Art at Cambridge, from his *alma mater* Trinity College. He was elected a fellow of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1999, and of the British Academy in 2016. He also sat on the national committee of the Corpus Vitrearum, a British Academy Research Project, and was an elected vice president of the British Archaeological Association. Throughout his career, he dedicated much time to fostering scholarship, sitting on the advisory boards of leading journals and series internationally, including

¹For obituaries, see Milner (2020); Nickson (2020); Walczak (2020); Wilson (2020).

²Kidson (2011), xii.

³I am grateful to Joany Crossley for this story.

⁴Kidson (2011), xii.

⁵Alexander (2011).

⁶Kauffmann (2011), xiv.

The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, *The Burlington Magazine*, *Umění* (published by the Institute of History of Art at the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague), and the Brepols series *Architectura Medii Aevi*.

Crossley's approach to architectural history was shaped by that of his doctoral supervisor, like many others in his generation. Peter Kidson's *Festschrift*, published in 1990, was edited by Crossley and Eric Fernie. Their introduction conveys the importance of Kidson for Crossley's own intellectual formation, and helps to explain why they became lifelong friends.⁷ Buildings should not be anatomised as collections of 'antiquarian details' or 'interior spaces', but understood rather as the solution to architectural problems, which help ultimately to explain the central question of change in architectural style. Kidson's grasp of detail was combined with 'an extraordinary gift for connection and synthesis', and applied to ambitious surveys of medieval architecture across a long chronology. Furthermore, Kidson applied other disciplines to the study of buildings – theology, history and mathematics. His elegant prose emanated 'not from some rhetorical formula but from the strength and clarity of the thought itself'. In all of this, it was concluded, Kidson brought a new intellectual seriousness and sophistication to the study of architectural history. These qualities were models for and hallmarks of Crossley's own career, in his capacity to apply the close analysis of buildings to lucid explanations of their widest significance, within a variety of methodological perspectives. Crossley had other distinctive qualities, which his supervisor recognised in turn. In the *Festschrift* of his former student, Kidson noted playfully Crossley's 'debonair charisma' and the 'lethal fluency of his Ciceronian rhetoric'.⁸ They also shared a philosophical outlook that would feed continually Crossley's thinking about art, architecture and life. On a visit to the pub with me in retirement, he was eagerly pondering the works of Schopenhauer, and Hanna Arendt on the 'life of the mind'.

Crossley's and Fernie's introduction to Kidson's *Festschrift* closes with a quotation from Immanuel Kant, 'Das Gefühl für Humanität hat mich noch nicht verlassen', in praise of their mentor's 'courtesy, warmth and civilised intelligence'.⁹ These, too, distinguished Crossley's engagement with the world, and his capacity for friendship. As Kauffmann put it, he had the gift of making you feel 'that you were the one person he was most delighted to meet'.¹⁰ At Crossley's funeral service, the small parish church at Bletsoe in Bedfordshire was filled not only with academic colleagues and former students, but also with friends and neighbours, keen to recall a life well lived, with them. To this he brought interests and talents of many kinds, and tremendous energy. He had taken up the painting of watercolours at school; the watercolours of John Cotman, showing

⁷Fernie & Crossley (1990).

⁸Kidson (2011), xii.

⁹Fernie & Crossley (1990), xv–xvi.

¹⁰Kauffmann (2011), xv.

antiquities, had also fed his interest in medieval architecture.¹¹ His father had been a music teacher, and Crossley was an accomplished pianist, who liked to play duets. Jonathan Alexander recalls his enthusiasm for cricket when he lived in Manchester, the ‘magical sound of bat on ball’, which he would extol in fits of self-deprecatory laughter.¹² He also had a gift for languages, and a love of poetry, which he could cite readily. He was a brilliant mimic of those in authority, in affectionate but subversive imitations that often reduced him again to helpless mirth. He was a master of bathos, switching easily from the most serious matters to a delight in the ridiculous. In architecture, Crossley’s taste in buildings was broad, in spite of his research specialism, including the German baroque that had been a favourite of his father.¹³ Zoe Opačić recalls that the building he most wanted to visit again in later life was Balthasar Neumann’s abbey church at Neresheim (Baden-Württemberg, begun 1750).¹⁴ These talents, interests and energies were deployed throughout his career, as colleague, teacher and friend.

Crossley was an articulate exponent of his chosen discipline, treading the academic stage in the age of the ‘new art history’. At the end of a volume of collected essays relating to the exhibition *Gothic, Art for England, 1400–1540*, he evaluated the three great exhibitions of English high and late medieval art in relation to the changing intellectual environments from the 1980s to 2000s.¹⁵ Taking a detached critical position, Crossley characterised for readers the exponents of ‘theory’ in university departments, and more connoisseurial approaches in museums. He found value in both camps potentially, but dismissed what he perceived as sometimes sterile arguments between them, ‘where ignorant armies clash by night’ (quoting Matthew Arnold).¹⁶ His understanding of his own position was expressed in an undergraduate lecture on the new art history in a historiographical series at the Courtauld Institute.¹⁷ The first half set out the character of neo-Marxist, structuralist and post-structuralist thinking, developed in other disciplines, which have transformed art history. He led his young audience expertly through the shapes of ideas, from Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes (*Mythologies* was a particular favourite), to Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. The second half explored their strengths and limitations for the study of art and architecture, returning especially to the object and experience of it. Here the subjectivity foregrounded by new approaches that interpreted art in the light of reception and use, resonated with his own commitment to the study of aesthetics, which he set out for his audience particularly in the work of

¹¹ Wilson (2020), 365.

¹² Alexander (2011), xv.

¹³ Wilson (2020), 365.

¹⁴ Opačić, Z., ‘Axes of Meaning: Paul Crossley and Gothic Bohemia’, in *Mod Gothic?* (2021), *Day Two*.

¹⁵ Crossley (2007).

¹⁶ Crossley (2007), 140.

¹⁷ Typescript, supplied by its author.

Kant, Artur Schopenhauer and Martin Heidegger – to explore ‘the vital triangle between “self”, “object”, and “presence”’. For Crossley, art and architecture, and experience of them, were central to his understanding of values, the human condition and himself. He concluded his lecture with rousing quotations from William Wordsworth’s ‘A Few Lines Composed above Tintern Abbey’ and T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*. Crossley paused – ‘Don’t worry. This lectern is not about to become a pulpit.’ But he communicated a deep personal engagement, and the burning importance of art for him and for humanity.

His work engaged with new intellectual turns and opportunities increasingly through his career, as we shall see, but the experience and analysis of buildings themselves lay at the heart of everything, beginning with his doctoral project and culminating in his first book.¹⁸ His doctorate was conducted under unpromising circumstances, behind the Iron Curtain and in a field of study that had languished under communist rule. As his friend Tomasz Węclawowicz recalled, it was rather the Romanesque that had been favoured previously for study by Polish scholars.¹⁹ The new project rested on solid foundations, however, in a partnership between the Courtauld Institute and the Jagiellonian Institute in Krakow, brokered by George Zarnecki at the Courtauld. Crossley’s supervisors were Kidson in London and Lech Kalinowski in Poland. He began work in autumn 1969, and with an enviable facility taught himself both to read and speak Polish (without an accent, Węclawowicz noted admiringly). The thesis focused on the cathedral and the city church of St Mary in Krakow, and a group of distinctive double-naved churches in Lesser Poland, which required him to travel. Węclawowicz described driving Crossley repeatedly to the small 14th-century church of Wislica, with its triradial vaults in a two-aisled nave and a long choir. In this small building of integrated design and accomplished execution, under royal patronage, Crossley pondered the creation of architectural forms, their meanings, and relationship to liturgical performance and other art. His thesis addressed issues of architectural meaning, with special reference to the changing spiritual climate and to the reigning dynasty, in which he was responding like many other scholars to Robert Branner’s recent work on French 13th-century art and architecture. Crossley’s monograph was published by the Polish ministry of culture and art in 1985, and remains a landmark in the study of Polish Gothic architecture. A recent monograph on Krakow Cathedral and its place in European architecture around 1300 is dedicated to him, for pioneering new ways of thinking about Polish architecture across national boundaries.²⁰ His own assessment of subsequent Polish scholarship was published in a searching review of the two-volume *Architektura gotycka w Polsce* (1995).²¹ In 2014,

¹⁸ Crossley (1985).

¹⁹ Węclawowicz, T., ‘Paul Crossley’s Fascinations: Gothic in Lesser Poland’, in *Mod Gothic?* (2021), *Day Two*.

²⁰ Adamski & Pajor (2026), 13, 25.

²¹ Crossley (1997).

Crossley was also instrumental in leading the British Archaeological Association to Krakow for its annual conference.²²

In the previous generation, scholars of continental origin like Nikolaus Pevsner, Henning Bock and Jean Bony had brought European perspectives to bear upon English architecture of the 14th century, to argue that English Gothic played an important part in the development of late medieval architecture in Europe. Through a Polish lens, Crossley's doctoral project also pioneered an international perspective on the study of architectural history, spanning geographies and cultures, seeking out and developing tools for interpretation. Subsequently, he brought the Gothic architecture of Central Europe and increasingly of Europe as a whole to English audiences, both in his published work and in his teaching. If Bock, Bony and Pevsner had set English architecture in a European context, Crossley raised a new awareness of this continental context in England. One reviewer of his *Festschrift* considered that Crossley was 'a dominant influence in the creation of a tradition of studying Gothic art as a pan-European phenomenon in Britain'.²³ This was made possible partly by his prodigious appetite and capacity for reading work in foreign languages, allowing him to offer up and engage with the fruits of European scholarship. Crossley was acutely sensitive to the intellectual landscape, as well as to the buildings themselves, and this would be central to his second book.

Crossley worked for fifteen years on the re-edition of Paul Frankl's *Gothic Architecture*, which was published by Yale University Press in 2003.²⁴ First appearing in 1962, Frankl's ambitious study belonged to an earlier generation of overarching surveys that aimed to interpret medieval architecture within a broadly Hegelian framework.²⁵ In a first part, Frankl's text presented the history of Gothic according to an immanent development of forms, from the 12th to the 16th century. The second part explored the question of architecture and meaning, through the lens of the *Zeitgeist*. Crossley revised the original text to take into account the proliferation of subsequent scholarship, to bring Frankl up to date. In the footnotes, he distilled the findings of these studies in many languages on Gothic architecture across Europe during the following forty years. The resulting biographies of Gothic buildings have proved an indispensable mine of information and interpretation for architectural historians. His complementary introduction was even more important. This engaged first with Frankl's theories, setting them in relation to earlier German scholarship on art and architectural history. There followed a survey of the many and diverse approaches to architectural history in the second half of the 20th century. In Crossley's nuanced and compelling prose, the currents, cross-currents

²² Roznowska-Sadraei & Węclawowicz (2014).

²³ Reeve (2014), 812.

²⁴ Frankl/Crossley (2003).

²⁵ Elsner (2011).

and complexities are succinctly set out and evaluated. For two decades, his introduction has been the place to go for an orientation in the historiography of Gothic architecture. In this, he was the leading scholar of his time.

These interests pervaded much of Crossley's other work, beginning previously with a major article on the art-historical interpretation of architectural meaning in the middle ages, published in 1988 to coincide with the *Age of Chivalry* exhibition, with which he had been involved.²⁶ He challenged the thinking of great predecessors, Günter Bandmann, Erwin Panofsky, Hans Sedlmayer and Otto von Simson, setting their views within traditions of German scholarship. He found their approaches to the identification of symbolic and aesthetic styles (Bandmann), for example, or the imposition of medieval scholastic patterns of thought (Panofsky), inadequate; they prioritised the intention of patrons at the expense of master masons. Instead, he reasserted the actuality of the building itself, as a necessary point of departure. In assessing medieval ways of thinking about buildings symbolically, he preferred Richard Krautheimer's influential 'Introduction to an "Iconography of Medieval Architecture"', in which symbolic meanings are inherently multiple and imprecise.²⁷ Crossley concluded that 'great cathedrals, heaped up from untidy masses of stone [...] speak to us of truths ramified, disruptive and many layered.'²⁸ It is not surprising that he should also have evaluated the landscape closer to home, at a time when the Englishness of English architecture was becoming again a focus of study.²⁹ He published both on Nikolaus Pevsner, the internationalist, and the place of English medieval architecture in the neo-Romanticism of John Betjeman and John Harvey.³⁰ In spite of an early interest in cricket and watercolours, Crossley had no time for Little England (or latterly Brexit). By temperament and intellectual formation, his interests were international, boundary crossing and open. Ironically, the over-lifesize bronze statue of Betjeman at St Pancras Station in London would become a favourite meeting place on visits from his Bedfordshire home, in later years.

Crossley's voracious reading led him also to write dozens of book reviews, again surveying literature in many languages.³¹ These were often published in *The Burlington Magazine*, but also in *The Art Bulletin*, *Hungarian Quarterly*, *The Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, *Kunstchronik*, *Renaissance Studies*, and others. Taken together, they are a striking monument to the many conversations that Crossley conducted on paper and in person with his peers. His assessments were typically closely engaged, critical and balanced –

²⁶ Crossley (1988).

²⁷ Krautheimer (1942).

²⁸ Crossley (1988), 121.

²⁹ Crossley (2006b), 471–2.

³⁰ Crossley (2004); Crossley (2006b); Crossley (2008b).

³¹ For a list, see Opačić & Timmermann (2011), vol. 1, 4–5.

ideal contributions to scholarly debate, but he could sometimes be very frank. In later life, he recalled remorsefully his embarrassment upon encountering Jean Bony, whose work he admired, after publishing a trenchant review of his book on *English Decorated Architecture* in *The Journal of the British Archaeological Association*.³² If that was the work of a young Turk, as he reflected, he could be no less critical in his prime: ‘If anything can be rescued from this book [...] it should serve as a warning of how not to approach the challenges of cultural history in the 1990s.’³³ The strength of his response was a measure of the seriousness with which he approached these challenges in his own work, ‘to illuminate the complex and specific historic threads that link form to meaning, motif to milieu’. For all of the personal warmth, Crossley was a perfectionist and could be a stern critic – of his own work above all.

This is demonstrated most clearly, perhaps, by the history of a favourite theme, the transmission of architectural ideas. This was pursued partly through evaluation of the role of architects or master masons, and especially Peter Parler, the master mason from Schwäbisch-Gmünd (Baden-Württemberg) who was summoned by the Holy Roman Emperor in 1356 to travel eastwards, to work on Prague Cathedral. In 1978, Parler was the focus of a challenging lecture by the young Crossley, delivered at Wells Cathedral in Somerset.³⁴ Previously continental scholars had argued that this master mason had travelled widely, not only in his homeland, but also to England and specifically to Wells, bringing that experience to bear afterwards upon his designs in Prague, in decorative freedom and spatial ingenuity, from flowing tracery to net vault designs. As summarised memorably by Crossley, ‘If Peter Parler was the father of German *Sondergotik*, English Decorated was its grandparent.’³⁵ In 1978, Crossley’s revisionist assessment was that many features of the Prague design were an autonomous development, responding to architecture closer to home, to internal processes of design and/or to transfer by drawings. But it is typical of his self-critical outlook that, after decades of looking hard at the English monuments, he should revisit what he called this *Glaubensfrage*, so central to his interests, in the 2000s.³⁶ Engaging closely with scholarship of the previous thirty years, and applying a new density of visual analysis to the monuments, he reinstated Parler’s *Wanderjahr* in England in an article for the *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* (2003), where it would reach a wide European readership.

By this time, the Berlin Wall had come down, opening a new and fruitful chapter in Crossley’s engagement with Central Europe.³⁷ In 2000, he was a visiting professor at the

³² Crossley (1981b), 132–7.

³³ Crossley (1994).

³⁴ Crossley (1981a).

³⁵ Crossley (2003), 53.

³⁶ Crossley (2003).

³⁷ Opačić, Z., ‘Axes of Meaning: Paul Crossley and Gothic Bohemia’, in *Mod Gothic?* (2021), *Day Two*.

Geisteswissenschaftliches Zentrum Geschichte und Kultur Ostmitteleuropas at the University of Leipzig. Here he returned to thinking about the nature of royal patronage, and ventured beyond ecclesiastical architecture into imperial town planning. This was presented in a magisterial article, ‘The Politics of Presentation: The Architecture of Charles IV of Bohemia’.³⁸ Working with Jiří Fajt at the National Gallery in Prague and Robert Suckale at the Technische Universität Berlin, he also contributed to the great Charles IV exhibition, shown in New York and Prague (2005–6). Extending his geographical range, in 2006 he gave the opening address at the exhibition *Sigismundus rex et imperator: Art and Culture in the Age of Sigismund of Luxembourg, 1387–1437*, at the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest.³⁹ He set the exhibition in relation to four other major recent shows on rulers of this period, including those in Dijon, London and Paris, on Burgundian, English and French rulers. With a rhetorical flourish, he recalled how Hungary had featured in his early awareness: ‘When I was a student in Cracow, many years ago, my Polish Professor, when asked about a particularly exquisite late medieval or early Renaissance object in Poland, would reply, with hushed wonder: “Ah, that is Hungarian”. But how, or why, or when it was Hungarian always remained a mystery.’ The exhibition revealed all! Crossley’s address brought him back again to court culture, and here especially to the transmission of ideas between northern Europe and Italy. His command of the latter question was harnessed also in a chapter on architecture and painting for the *New Cambridge Medieval History, c.1415–c.1500*.⁴⁰

Court culture was explored from other angles, too, inspired by new developments in the field of art history and engagement with scholars in other disciplines. This included an article on the importance of female patrons in a multi-disciplinary volume on *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, within the feminist turn in medieval studies from the 1990s.⁴¹ In a long exploration of ‘The Architecture of Queenship: Royal Saints, Female Dynasties and the Spread of Gothic Architecture in Central Europe’, Crossley separated St Elizabeth of Marburg from the powerful men of her own time who had promoted her cult, and challenged the scholars who had studied it. Instead, he showed that the forms of her shrine church in Marburg (Hesse), begun in 1235, could be explained in part by Elizabeth’s own cultural interests and patronage. More than that, her royal and aristocratic relatives (she was the daughter of a king of Hungary), especially female relatives, then turned to the new church as an inspiration for their own foundations in Lower Silesia, Moravia and Prague, paying homage to her memory. The Marburg church was the most important early response in German-speaking lands to the new Gothic

³⁸ Crossley (2000).

³⁹ Crossley (2006a).

⁴⁰ Crossley (1998b).

⁴¹ Crossley (2002).

architecture of northern France. Crossley could conclude that the ‘inspiration of no other queen or royal princess had done so much for Gothic architecture.’⁴²

Other major developments shaped Crossley’s prolific output of articles in the 1990s and 2000s, including the performative turn, generally, and the holistic study of medieval buildings.⁴³ The most fertile of these contributions was perhaps an article on the usefulness of the idea of *ductus* to the interpretation of Gothic churches. This was part of a wider enterprise, led by literary scholar Mary Carruthers; Crossley’s essay appeared in a collection entitled *Rhetoric beyond Words*, edited by Carruthers, with contributions from many different disciplines.⁴⁴ Carruthers showed that the idea of *ductus*, or movement through an argument, originating in classical rhetoric, was alive in the thinking of medieval monks and secular clergy, by means of the writings of the church fathers, for example. Crossley tested out the value of applying this idea to Chartres Cathedral, across the vast array of its surviving sculpture and stained glass.⁴⁵ He showed how the repetition of certain images, or progressions of images, distributed outside and inside the building could have been informed by thinking about liturgical movement, and less specifically by the movement of pilgrims, but not in a single rigid ‘programme’ of the kind proposed by earlier scholarship. Rather, clerics and visitors could make their own *ductus*, to ‘meditate on the combinations of *locus* and framework in their *memoria*’.⁴⁶ Planning was loose and open, and the relationship between rhetoric and cathedral was ‘in that sense creative’. Crossley described this as a shift in thinking, ‘from the cathedral as text to the cathedral as experience’. It was also a return to his truths ‘ramified, disruptive and many layered’. The case study remains a useful way to open up the interpretation of medieval buildings and their furnishings.

In spite of many wider interests, Crossley remained fundamentally an architectural historian. His remarkable capacity for the reading of buildings (aptly described by Jeffrey Hamburger as ‘close, even exquisite’) was no less central to work in his later career, including the study of individual churches.⁴⁷ Among these were buildings as different as the 13th-century parish church at Stone in Kent, and the 14th-century pilgrimage church at Bacharach (Rhineland Palatinate).⁴⁸ His article on the Wernerkapelle, perched dramatically above the town of Bacharach and the Rhine, combines close analysis of the structure with a reading of documentary sources for the creation of the related cult of the murdered local boy Werner, a confluence of antisemitic lay enthusiasm and the interests

⁴² Crossley (2002), 287.

⁴³ Crossley (1998a); Crossley (1999); Crossley (2009).

⁴⁴ Carruthers (2010).

⁴⁵ Crossley (2010).

⁴⁶ Crossley (2010), 242.

⁴⁷ Hamburger (2011), 1.

⁴⁸ Crossley (2001); Crossley (2008a).

of clerical institutions (especially the patronal church of St Andrew in Cologne), within a wider survey of the geography of power, and the manipulation of a stunning landscape setting. Crossley revised the interpretation of German scholars, who had eliminated the importance of Cologne for the building, by looking closely at the microarchitectural baldachins in the choir of Cologne Cathedral. Here again, he moved easily between architectural details and broader questions of cultural history, to unravel the many threads ‘that link form to meaning, motif to milieu’.

Armed with an encyclopaedic knowledge, Crossley was well prepared to set out his own understanding of Gothic architecture, and an opportunity arose to do so in 2012, as Slade Professor of Fine Art at the University of Cambridge. His lecture series, entitled ‘The Gothic Cathedral: A New Heaven and a New Earth’, charted the rise and decline of the Gothic cathedral, by way of his many intellectual interests. The lecture titles are an index of directions that he had explored in his writing and teaching, and his wife Joany recalls how hard he worked on them, as a culmination to his career. They included the development of styles (‘An Architecture of Reason?’), architecture and the other arts (‘Stained Glass: From Narrative to Moral Meaning’; ‘From Judgement to Atonement: Sculpture at Strasbourg, Lincoln and Naumburg’), and his new thinking about memory, movement and liturgical performance (‘*Ductus* and *memoria* at Chartres Cathedral’). Here too was the fruit of his work on patrons and the urban environment. In retirement, Crossley was considering their publication. It is a pity that declining health made it impossible to fulfil this culmination to many intellectual journeys. Apart from his monograph and the edition of Frankl’s volume, Crossley’s published work is distinguished by a rich series of brilliantly polished articles, stepping stones in the development of his thought.⁴⁹

Crossley considered that the training of young scholars was among his most important contributions to the study of art history, and medieval art and architecture in particular. He invested very considerable energy in it, at every level. Graduate and undergraduate courses were scrupulously prepared, with enormous reading lists – sometimes handwritten in his distinctive italic script, and photocopied. In an age of rapidly changing delivery in higher education, his methods remained traditional, with much complaining about the digital revolution. His lectures attracted rave reviews in later life, but his skills were honed over time. At the beginning of his career as a lecturer in Manchester, he addressed an audience of undergraduates, as he recalled to me. Upon finishing, he looked out across a sea of blank faces; dissatisfied with his performance, he gave the whole lecture again. At the Courtauld, his masters courses, especially ‘The Gothic Cathedral’ and the ‘Spectacle of Romance: Architecture and Representation in England, France and Germany in the Later Middle Ages’, grew directly out of his broadening research

⁴⁹For a list, see Opačić & Timmermann (2011), 1–4.

interests. In seminars, he nurtured an open and inclusive approach. Presentations made use of slides, but tables in the classroom would also be piled high with the distinctive red boxes of black and white photographs of art and architecture from the outstanding collections of the Conway Library at the Courtauld. These were raw materials for discussion, allowing movement around a building and multiple points of view. It seems an age ago, before the ubiquitous PowerPoint presentation. The international reputation of his teaching ensured that his research areas flourished.

This was most evident in the doctoral students (some twenty of them), who came to study with him from across Europe and the United States. Their doctoral projects ranged appropriately across architectural history, other monumental media (especially wall painting and stained glass), and patronage. Sometimes he worked with a co-supervisor; projects were undertaken with Lindy Grant, Richard Marks and David Park, for example. Geographically, subjects included a concentration on Central Europe, notably medieval Bohemia, but also English, French, German and Spanish art and architecture. He dedicated a vast amount of time to the lavish annotation of student work, ‘right at the top end of what a busy university teacher can feasibly provide’, as Christopher Wilson has observed.⁵⁰ Supervisions were friendly, often accompanied by a trip to the local cafe or pub, but no weakness in argument was spared. Lesley Milner reported: ‘I left his one-to-one discussions of my work feeling happy and confident. This was surprising because with his acute eye for unscholarly assumptions and unsubstantiated speculation he had often demolished the entire argument.’⁵¹ You always felt that he was on your side. He also invited his students to visit his home in Bedfordshire, sometimes *en masse*; his wife Joany, and children Nick and Kate, generously allowed us to feel part of the family for a day. Crossley’s students have found employment in art history departments across the world, in universities from Ann Arbor to Cyprus and York, and at Birkbeck College and the Courtauld Institute in London. Many graduates and doctoral students have also made careers in related fields, in publishing, for example, or play leading roles in the running of learned societies. His son Nick recalled Crossley’s pride in these achievements, after the funeral service. It would be a mistake to regard employment as his measure of success, however. As for Peter Kidson before him, it was a categorical imperative that education should be an end in itself.

As many have attested, it was a special privilege to take to the road with Paul Crossley, to look at the buildings themselves. Throughout his career, these were memorable occasions for students and scholars of all ages. Jonathan Alexander has described the trips that Crossley led from Manchester.⁵² Scrupulous preparation and rhetorical flair

⁵⁰ Wilson (2020), 366.

⁵¹ Milner (2020), 13.

⁵² Alexander (2011), xiii–xiv.

brought the churches to life in his story telling, carrying students into his own intellectual and experiential dialogue with architecture. Of Crossley's time at the Courtauld, Tom Nickson recalls how he would appear with a heavy leather bag, bulging with books and annotated photocopies.⁵³ As he and others have observed, the effortlessness of Crossley's performances, both in teaching and on site, were the result of much hard work and preparation, bent over those works and his notes. In retirement, research trips became occasions for further scholarly sociability internationally, in the company of Jeffrey Hamburger, Robert Suckale, Courtauld colleagues and former students.⁵⁴ As Hamburger has described them, these trips were not for the faint hearted, but rather forced marches, and took in the very guts of buildings, from triforium galleries to roof spaces, confronting their material stuff and structure. For those who attended them, and surely for Crossley too, such visits modelled an ideal intellectual community, occasions for shared insight and camaraderie.

To all academic activities, Crossley brought his own brand of warm collegiality — generous, kind and disarmingly funny. His closest collaborators at the Courtauld, Joanna Cannon and John Lowden, described him in his *Festschrift* as 'a cherished scholar and colleague' and 'the best of colleagues', ever ready to share a burden.⁵⁵ His networks and friendships were international, as in the latter-day trips, sustained by long working relationships in central Europe with Klára Benešová at the Institute of Art History, Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague, and Tomasz Węclawowicz at the Andrzej Frycza Modrzewskiego University in Krakow, and latterly with Fajt and Suckale. The introduction to a recent study of Krakow Cathedral recalls characteristic exchanges with younger scholars too, who were returning to Crossley's early research in a new publication.⁵⁶ An offer was made to dedicate the book to him, which he gladly accepted, and a copy (in Polish) was sent. Within a few days he had replied, with a long letter of thanks and a detailed review, which engaged with their revisionist arguments in a typically polite and humorous way. Crossley sat on many committees and editorial boards, but he was completely uninterested in academic politics. After one tricky meeting, I recall him laughing: 'I just say whatever comes into my head.' Nor did he welcome the changing research environment of funding streams and assessment exercises. He had a particular dislike for what he described as 'initiatives' of the research councils; in spite of that, he agreed cheerfully to front successful projects for the creation of digital resources for the Corpus Vitrearum, at the dawn of the digital age, because it helped a postdoctoral student. Fundamentally, however, Crossley was an old-school advocate for the funding of individual scholars to do good work.

⁵³Nickson (2020), 220.

⁵⁴Hamburger, J.F., 'Paul on the Road', in *Mod Gothic?* (2021), Day 2.

⁵⁵Cannon (2011), 157; Lowden (2011), 35.

⁵⁶Adamski & Pajor (2026), 13.

The ultimate expression of the high and affectionate regard in which Crossley was held by both his peers and students can be found in the two volumes of the *Liber Amicorum*, or *Festschrift*, published in honour of his retirement in 2011.⁵⁷ A volume had already been dedicated to him on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, *The Year 1300 and the Creation of a New European Architecture* (with an introduction by Crossley himself), published in 2008.⁵⁸ The extent of the *Liber Amicorum* tells its own story. It includes over fifty contributors in academic institutions from the Universities of California and Iowa, to Krakow and Vienna, paying tribute to academic inspiration, collegiality and fun. The first volume was dedicated to architecture and liturgy, and the second to images and medieval devotion, covering monuments and subjects from Oxford to Prague, and from Rome to Częstochowa. They spanned again, therefore, the geographical reach, range of materials and diversity of methodological approaches to be found in Crossley's own work, teaching and supervision. It is not surprising to learn that, at home, he would sometimes take down these volumes and pet them affectionately. He also presided over another monument to the breadth of his intellectual interests. His substantial library of over 1500 books on medieval art and architecture, philosophy and music, has found a new home at the Stelios Ioannou Learning Resource Centre and Library of the University of Cyprus.

Paul Crossley is survived by his wife Joany, and their two children Nick and Kate.

References

- Adamski, J. & Pajor, P. (2026), *The Gothic Cathedral in Cracow and the European Architecture around the Year 1300* (Architectura Medii Aevi, 15; Turnhout, Brepols). <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.AMA-EB.5.143935>
- Alexander, J.J.G. (2011), 'Paul Crossley in Manchester: An Appreciation', in Opačić & Timmermann (2011), vol. 1, xiii-xiv. <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.SGA-EB.5.140627>
- Cannon, J. (2011), 'An Enigmatic Italian Panel Painting of the Crucifixion in the Národní Galerie, Prague', in Opačić & Timmermann (2011), vol. 2, 157–80. <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.SGA-EB.1.100582>
- Carruthers, M. (ed.) (2010), *Rhetoric Beyond Words, Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature; Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- Crossley, P. (1981a), 'Wells, the West Country, and Central European Late Gothic', in Coldstream, N. & Draper, P. (eds), *Medieval Art and Architecture at Wells and Glastonbury* (British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions, for 1978), 81–109.
- Crossley, P. (1981b), review of Bony, J., *The English Decorated Style: Gothic Architecture Transformed, 1250–1350* (Oxford, Phaidon, 1979), in *The Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 134: 132–7.
- Crossley, P. (1985), *Gothic Architecture in the Reign of Kasimir the Great, Church Architecture in Lesser Poland, 1320–1380* (Krakow, Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki, Zarząd Muzeów i Ochrony Zabytków).

⁵⁷ Opačić & Timmermann (2011).

⁵⁸ Gajewski & Opačić (2008), 7.

- Crossley, P. (1988), 'Medieval Architecture and Meaning: The Limits of Iconography', *The Burlington Magazine*, 130(1019): 116–21. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/883315>. Accessed 24 May 2026
- Crossley, P. (1994), review of Radding, C.M. & Clark, W.W., *Medieval Architecture, Medieval Learning, Builders and Masters in the Age of Romanesque and Gothic* (New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1992), *The Burlington Magazine*, 136(1092): 172–3. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/885998>. Accessed 24 May 2026
- Crossley, P. (1997), review of Mroczo, T. & Arsyński, M. (eds), *Architektura gotycka w Polsce*, vol. 2 (Warsaw, Dzieje Sztuki Polskiej, Instytut Sztuki PAN, 1995), *Kunstchronik*, 50(7): 352–68. <https://doi.org/10.11588/kc.1997.7.99663>
- Crossley, P. (1998a), 'The Man from Inner Space: Architecture and Meditation in the Choir of St Laurence in Nuremberg', in Owen-Crocker, G.R. & Graham, T. (eds), *Medieval Art, Recent Perspectives: A Memorial Tribute to C.R. Dodwell* (Manchester/New York, Manchester University Press), 165–82.
- Crossley, P. (1998b), 'Architecture and Painting', in Allmand, C. (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 7, c.1415–c.1500 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), ch. 15. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521382960.016>
- Crossley, P. (1999), 'Bohemia Sacra: Liturgy and History in Prague Cathedral', in Joubert, F. & Sandron, D. (eds), *Pierre, lumière, couleur: Études d'histoire de l'art du Moyen Age en l'honneur d'Anne Prache* (Cultures et Civilisations Médiévales, 20; Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne), 341–65.
- Crossley, P. (2000), 'The Politics of Presentation: The Architecture of Charles IV of Bohemia', in Rees Jones, S., Marks, R. & Minnis, A. (eds), *Courts and Regions in Medieval Europe* (York, York Medieval Press), 99–172.
- Crossley, P. (2001), 'The Nave of Stone Church in Kent', in *Essays in Architectural History Presented to John Newman*, *Architectural History*, 44: 195–211. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1568748>
- Crossley, P. (2002), 'The Architecture of Queenship: Royal Saints, Female Dynasties and the Spread of Gothic Architecture in Central Europe', in Duggan, A.J. (ed.), *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge, Boydell), 263–99.
- Crossley, P. (2003), 'Peter Parler and England, A Problem Revisited', *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch*, 64: 53–82. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24665809>. Accessed 24 May 2026
- Crossley, P. (2004), 'Introduction', in Draper, P. (ed.), *Reassessing Nikolaus Pevsner* (Aldershot, Ashgate), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315089096-1>
- Crossley, P. (2006a), 'Emperor on the World Stage', *Hungarian Quarterly*, 47(182): 3–5. https://real-j.mtak.hu/12068/1/HungarianQuarterly_182_2006.pdf. Accessed 5 May 2026
- Crossley, P. (2006b), 'Anglia Perdita. English Medieval Architecture and Neo-Romanticism', in L'Engle, S. & Guest, G.B. (eds), *Tributes to Jonathan J.G. Alexander: The Making and Meaning of Illuminated Medieval & Renaissance Manuscripts, Art & Architecture* (London, Harvey Miller), 471–85.
- Crossley, P. (2007), 'Between Spectacle and History, Art History and the Medieval Exhibitions', in Marks, R. (ed.), *Late Gothic England, Art and Display* (Donnington, Shaun Tyas/Victoria & Albert Museum), 138–53.
- Crossley, P. (2008a), 'The Wernerkapelle in Bacharach', in Engel, U. & Gajewski, A. (eds), *Mainz and the Middle Rhine Valley, Medieval Art, Architecture and Archaeology* (British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions, for 2003), 167–92. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003580263>
- Crossley, P. (2008b), 'England trifft auf Deutschland: Der Fall Nikolaus Pevsner', *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft*, 62: 247–56.
- Crossley, P. (2009), 'The Integrated Cathedral: Thoughts on "Holism" and Gothic Architecture', in Lane, E.S., Pastan, E.C. & Shortell, E.M. (eds), *The Four Modes of Seeing, Approaches to Medieval Imagery in Honor of Madeline Harrison Caviness* (Farnham/Burlington VT, Ashgate), 157–73. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315086576-11>
- Crossley, P. (2010), 'Ductus and memoria: Chartres Cathedral and the Workings of Rhetoric', in Carruthers (2010), 214–49.

- Elsner, J. (2011), 'A Golden Age of Gothic', in Opačić & Timmermann (2011), vol. 1, 7–16. <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.SGA-EB.1.100126>
- Fernie, E. & Crossley, P. (1990), 'Introduction', in Fernie, E. & Crossley, P. (eds), *Medieval Architecture and its Intellectual Context, Studies in Honour of Peter Kidson* (London/Ronceverte, Hambledon Press), xiii–xvi.
- Frankl, P., revised and intro. by Crossley, P. (2003), *Gothic Architecture* (New Haven/London, Yale University Press).
- Gajewski, A. & Opačić, Z. (eds) (2008), *The Year 1300 and the Creation of a New European Architecture* (Architectura Medii Aevi, 1; Turnhout, Brepols). <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.AMA-EB.6.09070802050003050202080609>
- Hamburger, J.F. (2011), 'Bloody Mary: Traces of the *peplum cruentatum* in Prague – and in Strasbourg?', in Opačić & Timmermann (2011), vol. 2, 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.SGA-EB.1.100569>
- Kauffmann, M. (2011), 'Paul Crossley at the Courtauld Institute', in Opačić & Timmermann (2011), vol. 1, xiv–xv. <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.SGA-EB.5.140627>
- Kidson, P. (2011), 'Paul Crossley as a Student', in Opačić & Timmermann (2011), vol. 1, xii–xiii. <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.SGA-EB.5.140627>
- Krautheimer, R. (1942), 'Introduction to an "Iconography of Medieval Architecture"', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 5: 1–33. <https://doi.org/10.2307/750446>
- Lowden, J. (2011), 'Inventing Biblical Narrative: The Kiss of Cain in the *Bibles moralisées*', in Opačić & Timmermann (2011), vol. 2, 35–53. <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.SGA-EB.1.100570>
- Milner, L. (2020), 'In Memoriam: Paul Crossley, 1945–2019', *International Center of Medieval Art (ICMA) News*, Summer 2020(2): 12–14. <https://www.medievalart.org/icma-news/2020/4/30>. Accessed 24 May 2026
- Mod Gothic? Medieval Architecture in the Modern Ages: Day One and Day Two* (2021), YouTube videos, added by Courtauld [Online]. Available at (1) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IjwwWJgEop8>; (2) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEv1BNtD24o>. Accessed 24 May 2026
- Nickson, T. (2020), 'Professor Paul Crossley (19 July 1945–12 December 2019)', *The Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 173: 218–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00681288.2020.1792061>
- Opačić, Z. & Timmermann, A. (eds) (2011), *Liber Amicorum Paul Crossley: Architecture, Liturgy and Identity and Image, Memory and Devotion*, 2 vols (Studies in Gothic Art, 1–2; Turnhout, Brepols). (1) <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.SGA-EB.6.09070802050003050301060700>; (2) <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.SGA-EB.6.09070802050003050301060807>
- Reeve, M. (2003), review of Frankl/Crossley (2003), *Religion and the Arts*, 7(1-2): 197–204. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852903765453272>
- Reeve, M. (2014), review of Opačić & Timmermann (2011), *Speculum*, 89(3): 812–14. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0038713414001341>
- Roznowska-Sadraei, A. & Węclawowicz, T. (eds) (2014), *Medieval Art, Architecture and Archaeology in Cracow and Lesser Poland* (British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions, for 2011). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003580362>
- Walczak, M. (2020), 'Paul Crossley (1945–2019)', *Folia Historiae Artium*, ns 18: 105–9. <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.54670.12>
- Wilson, C. (2020), 'Obituaries: Paul Crossley (1945–2019)', *The Burlington Magazine*, 162(1405): 365–6. <https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.york.ac.uk/stable/26997493>. Accessed 24 May 2026

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Jakub Adamski, Joany Crossley, Alexandra Gajewski, Zoë Opačić, Sethina Watson and Christopher Wilson, for their help in the writing of this essay.

Note on the author: Tim Ayers is Professor Emeritus of the History of Art at the University of York.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy (ISSN 2753–6777) are published by The British Academy, 10–11 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5AH
www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk