

OWEN HATHERLEY

A GUIDE TO THE NEW RUINS OF GREAT BRITAIN

A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain, by Owen Hatherley (Verso, £9.99)

Why is British architecture of recent years “so very bad”, asks Hatherley. Inspired by JB Priestley’s *English Journey* (1934), he travels to 12 cities to find the answer. His wanderings begin where he grew up, in Southampton (“a thousand-year-old nowheresville”), and include visits to Milton Keynes (“Alphaville in Buckinghamshire”), Glasgow and “gentrified-out-of-recognition Manchester”, before ending in Liverpool, where he is unexpectedly impressed by the “brilliance” of the Liverpool One shopping complex. Although New Labour promised us an urban renaissance, Hatherley shows that what we got instead was “a Modernism without the politics, without the utopianism, or without any conception of the polis”. Politicians and town planners alike now seem incapable of imagining the design of British cities as anything other than “provincial and backward-looking”. Hatherley’s footloose narrative is driven by a heartfelt anger at this missed opportunity, as well as a laudable desire to open people’s eyes to the true value of their cities.

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