

Brick Gothic

Recovering atmospheric versatility

The contemporary dilemma of uniting building character with energy and efficiency considerations has often led to isolated specialist approaches that overlook synergies in the inherent properties of common construction materials. A study of building traditions before the introduction of large-scale metal components and conditioning systems, however, reveals a tectonic richness stemming from culturally self-aware and inherently economical approaches to structural and climatic challenges. In the case of the brick gothic architecture of the former Hanseatic League cities, this awareness manifested in muscular buildings with polychrome patterns and bas-relief complexity, assembled from simple brick masonry units. Of many subsequent pan-European interpretations, one British architect devoted to the neo-Gothic - Professor Alan Short - has exhibited particular virtuosity in adapting this subtle form of exuberance to his very different and highly specific environmental requirements. His work demonstrates the enduring versatility of this lineage of architectural expression in creating atmospheric depth with tectonic sophistication but material economy.

The backsteingotik, 'brick gothic' in German, partly evolved from a desire to reinforce continental culture along the shipping routes of the Hanseatic League of allied trading port-cities in the 12th - 15th centuries. With political and religious tensions as present as the harsh maritime conditions, important commercial and public projects tended to be durable and aesthetically confident structures, but due to the lack of stone resources, were often built using clay masonry. Consequently, the newly arrived gothic language was recast in brick, a malleable module allowing for easy aesthetic improvisation. The early backsteingotik churches of the competing Catholic and Teutonic interests were followed by warehouses of the Hanseatic League, and by town halls in certain cities emancipated *Lubeck Law*. The structural elements in these buildings were built with the same brick as their articulated and colorful exteriors; the thermal massiveness of these masonry agglomerations ensured not only their physical longevity but also their continued use as functional enclosures; their tall ceilings and high-level openings afforded a basic level of ventilation.

In his numerous buildings, Professor Alan Short celebrates the synergy of polychromy and thermal massiveness of the brick, showcasing its malleability as an environmental mediating element, in the form of shading protrusions and ventilation openings. In his simultaneous pursuits of aesthetic depth and interior climate regulation, he has instrumentalized the various forms of the backsteingotik vocabulary, re-purposing them as highly expressive chimneys, rooflines and façade protrusions that work together to enable naturally ventilated building interiors. Paraphrasing his own descriptions of the possibility of such work in the 20th century, he has consciously saddled the simple brick with structural, aesthetic and thermal roles, thereby redirecting project budgets from mechanical machinery to the visible, and commonly appreciable, building body.

In this light, the purpose of this study is to witness the virtuosic multivalence of the brick gothic in its different iterations in key Hanseatic cities and at the hands of Alan Short, with the goal of producing a taxonomy of comparative diagrams, making visible the many aesthetic, structural and climatic roles assumed by its basic masonry modules. The underlying belief of this proposal is that a corporeal exposure to the cultural and climatic situation of each building can lead to a more holistic understanding of the potential of a traditional and potentially beautiful building material.

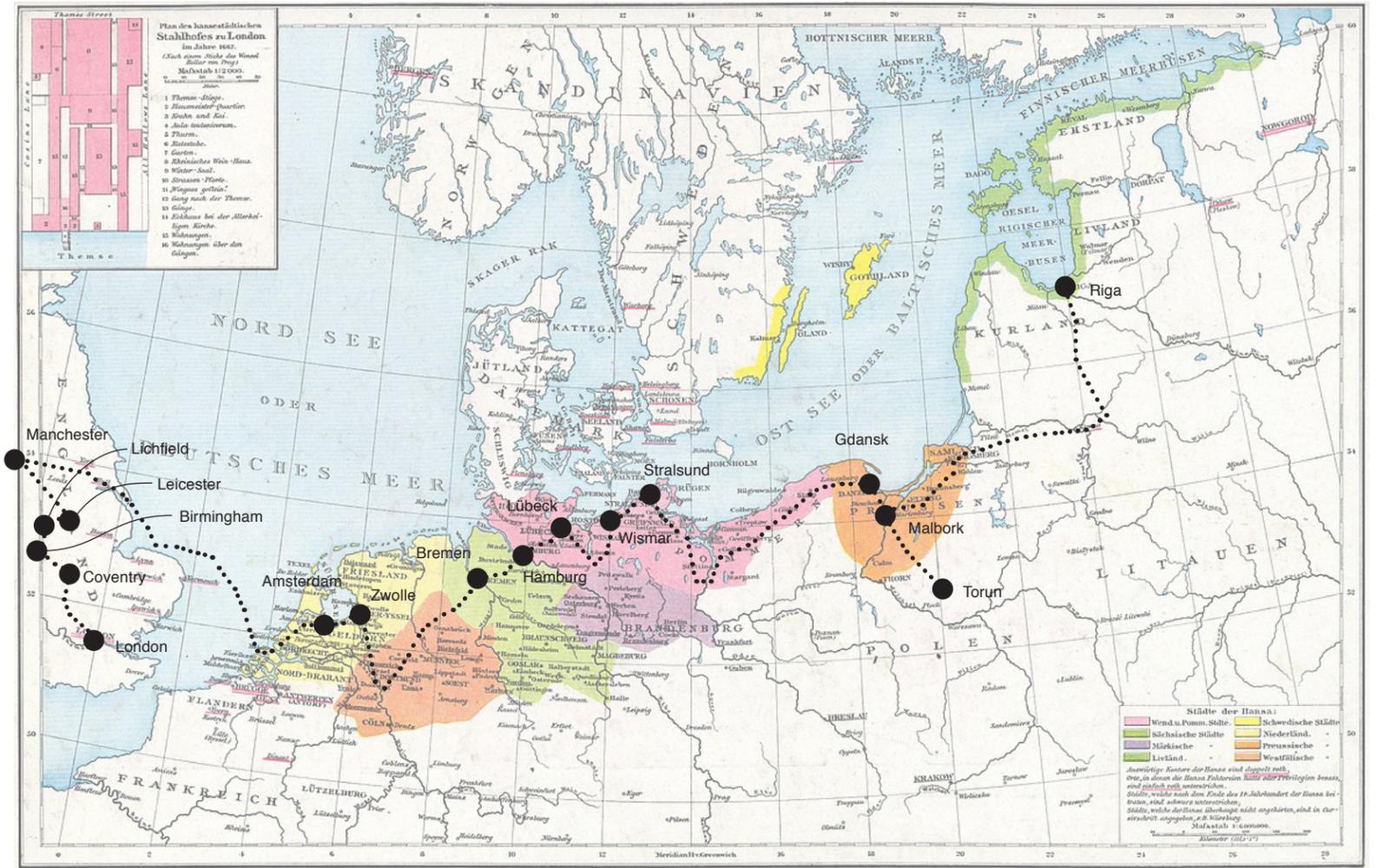
Itinerary

- Latvia** Day 1-2
Riga
- Poland** Day 3-7
Gdansk
Malbork
Torun
- Germany** Day 8-18
Stralsund
Wismar
Lübeck
Hamburg
Bremen
- Netherlands** Day 19-21
Zwolle
Amsterdam
- England** Day 22-32
Manchester
Lichfield
Birmingham
Coventry
Leicester
London

Budget

Airfare	\$ 1 700
Train + ferry	\$ 1 200
Lodging	\$ 3 840
120\$ / day	
Food	\$ 1 120
35\$ / day	
Admission	\$ 500
Misc. fees	\$ 200
Contingency	\$ 1100
Total	\$ 9 660

Route



Points of interest

