

as well as undertaking the huge task of updating them to take account of modern construction methods and metric measurements.

His obituary in *The Builder* magazine describes him as being an excellent and gifted teacher, but also hot-headed and impetuous, and goes on to say that 'no story about him is incredible and most are probably true'.

*Building Construction* was one of the last of the traditional textbooks to be published before the building design and construction process became industrialised. The urge towards fast-track building processes has led to the design process of many buildings being driven by the technology, and this in turn has led to a reduction in the craft skills available. Those of us who work with traditional building materials often seek in vain to find modern textbooks to explain details of joinery, stonemasonry or leadwork. It is all here in McKay, brilliantly illustrated by his drawings, which are second to none in their quality.

McKay was part of a tradition of works such as Jaggard and Drury's *Architectural Building Construction* and *The Architects Library: Building Construction*. Both books have very good illustrations, but none surpasses the quality of those by McKay. But all three show building as a craft. Portland cement was becoming much more common in use for mortars and renders, but there is full discussion of the limes: fat lime, poor lime and the hydraulic limes. The construction textbooks of the first half of the twentieth century remain true to the pattern of those of the late nineteenth century, such as John Parnell Allen's *Practical Building Construction* of 1893.

The value of old construction books is in informing us of methods of construction which are no longer current in modern construction. For instance, pre-war building construction textbooks have detailed information on traditional carpentry and joinery. We erroneously tend to think that timber-framed partitions have no structural role in a building. Up until the 1930s, trussed partitions were still being described – and presumably still constructed. They were built to carry floor or roof loads, and a misunderstanding of their role and purpose may well have catastrophic results.