Figure 1.1 Decorative railings, Nancy

landmark and the district. The legible city, that is, the city easily visualized in the 'minds eye' has, according to Lynch, a clearly defined, easily recognized and distinctive perceptual structure. To a certain degree the reading or understanding of a city is personal but with a clearly structured city, the result, it is argued, is a city population with a shared set of images. It is this shared image which is one of the concerns of urban design. This book explores the possibility for ornament and decoration to emphasize and clarify the five components and so strengthen the city's image and enhance its attraction for citizen and visitor.

The two words 'decoration' and 'ornament' appear in the title of this book. According to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, both words have a similar meaning: embellishment. Decoration, however, has everyday associations: one decorates the home, the living room, the Christmas tree, or the wedding cake. Ornament, on the other hand, has more formal overtones: the ornamental work associated with certain architectural styles or the work of individual architects. This book accepts this subtle difference in meaning and uses ornament to mean the installation of sculpture, fountains, obelisks and similar features into the urban scene. Decoration is used to describe populist activities such as the placing of gnomes in the front garden, topiary work or decorating the city for festivals such as Christmas and Diwali. Obviously there are large areas of overlap: a precise boundary between formal ornamentation and informal decoration is not possible, nor indeed, would it be desirable.

Camillo Sitte, a Viennese architect writing in the 1890s, argued that the main ornaments of a city are its streets and squares (Sitte, 1901). Others would no doubt, add to Sitte's list of city ornaments and include, for example, parks, waterways and its main civic buildings. Even within his apparently limited palette Sitte was deeply concerned with the embellishment of streets and squares. He made an exhaustive analysis of the location of sculpture and fountains in urban spaces. He was equally concerned with the badly sited public building which, in his view, debased the urban scene. The great piece of sculpture or elaborate fountain are not the only features that decorate the city streets and squares. More mundanely, but of great importance for the quality of the urban scene, are items of street furniture such as telephone boxes, railings, signs and seats, or soft landscape features such as trees and shrubs. Adshead writing in 1911 made this important point about the furnishing of the street: 'We must bear in mind that all objects in the street – utilitarian or otherwise – are things to be seen – parts of an organic whole, each having their respective part and place. Olympus, Athens and Rome were each crowded with such objects, arranged for the most part in picturesque association' (Adshead, 1911a).

DECORATION FOR VISUAL PLEASURE

The most obvious, and perhaps the most important, dimension of decoration is its contribution to formal qualities, such as visual order or unity, proportion, scale, contrast, balance and rhythm. Ornament and decoration also have the capacity to unleash feelings, trigger reactions, feed the memory and stimulate the imagination. Decoration at one level is an activity giving visual pleasure, a formal physical process for visual delight; an activity for its own sake requiring no outside or higher authority to justify its existence.

Attitudes to the embellishment of cities with ornament and decoration range from a puritanical iconoclasm which sees such embellishment as decadent and pernicious, to one of joyous pleasure in the experience of complex, intricate and extravagant patterning. The Modern Movement (or movements) in architecture, epitomized by the writings of Le Corbusier, the pronouncements of CIAM, the work of the Bauhaus together with the much criticized post-Second World War city developments in Europe, collectively reflect a time when ornament and decoration in architecture was eschewed. In Britain, the Modern Movement in architecture can be seen as a reaction to the over-elaborate, and some would say debased, work of the nineteenth-century architects and their twentieth-century followers. Pugin writing in the mid-nineteenth century attacked much that he saw as vulgar in works of his own day, describing them as 'those inexhaustible mines of bad taste' (Pugin, 1841b). There may be a need for periods of puritanical zeal to rid city architecture of self-indulgent excess in decorative effects. Such periods allow time to reassess the value and role of decoration and ornament in the city.

This book, therefore, rejects the notion that there is something inherently immoral in decoration. Furthermore, it affirms with Scruton (1979) that there is no place in aesthetic debate for the 'moral argument'. Decoration and ornament on buildings is properly enjoyed for its own sake whether it is the intricate black and white patterns of the half timbered village, such as Weobley, or the traceried cast-iron arcades of Lord Street, Southport. A saturation of complex decoration stimulates primitive pleasure in the viewer. This book seeks to bring order where possible to this primitive activity. It is argued that from the theoretical and philosophical perspective so established it is possible to appreciate more fully the aesthetic experience of city ornament, supplementing with thought and judgement the undoubted sensuous and immediate pleasure of visual complexity. Such appreciation may then provide the basis for the organized use of ornament and decoration in future developments.