Architecture in Victorian London and the Question of Style

Max Herford

Introduction

The early Victorian period was an era of architectural eclecticism in which different styles were being considered in the search for a new 'English' style.[1] In this quest the association value of each style became decisive, as the built expression of a new national identity was being sought, largely by trial and error. England was in a state of transition from being considered a secondary European power to the centre of what became an immense empire, and traditional values were being questioned at every turn.[2] The Industrial Revolution had altered patterns of population and wealth distribution. The factories of the midlands and the north attracted thousands of agricultural workers from all the rural counties. The underlying question was: 'Who are we? What do we stand for?'

This article is an account of three significant buildings constructed in London in the phase of mid-Victorian eclecticism. It is also a story about the architects and key figures in the impassioned debates around the classic question: "In which style shall we build?" It provides a speculative map of the associations and cultural meaning which guided decision making at a critical time of transition. It presents an example of the early days of conservation and the awakening of interest in the better examples of Victorian architecture. As a moment of architectural history this sequence of events amounts to one of the most memorable and instructive narratives possible. At a time, the present day, when the appeal of the Classical and the Gothic is greatly diminished it is salutary to pause and reconsider these issues. We now live in an age of International Modernism when these questions are no longer being raised.

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[1] Joseph Mordaunt Crook, *The Dilemma of Style* (London: John Murray, 1989), pp. 13, 29.

[2] Walter Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 3.

"Associationism" as a theory started with John Locke (1632-1704) who wrote about ideas produced by the senses.[3] This theory ascribed particular values to such phenomena as architectural styles and included consideration of feelings experienced by encounters with objects and structures. For example, a visit to a Gothic church could create intimations of mystery, holiness and links to an ancient tradition. Eminent architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner speculated that the English were drawn to buildings that tell a story and this created a host of associations to validate the architectural idea or the story behind it.[4] This was a way of finding comparisons to enable the mind to arrive at a more complete degree of meaning.

The next person to develop this was Joseph Addison (1672-1719), writing in the eighteenth-century *Spectator*.[5] From here a radical aesthetic theory started to come together within the Romantic movement. The most important text was written by Edmund Burke (1729-1787): *A Philosophical Enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*.[6] Later Uvedale Price (1747-1829) and Richard Payne Knight (1751-1824), in lengthy correspondence with Humphrey Repton, produced what became known as the Theory of the Picturesque. Payne Knight stated that landscaping was greatly improved by the addition of built elements of historical interest similar to those seen in landscape paintings by painters like Claude Lorrain, Salvator Rosa, and Nicolas Poussin. These elements could be Greek temples, preferably in decayed state, ruined abbeys or castles. In fact, Payne Knight was to mix a castellated medieval exterior with a formal Greek interior at Downton Castle in 1778.[7]

There was no single valid architectural style in this period: all styles could be appropriate depending on what they could add to a landscaping concept. Thomas Hope (1769-1831) is now seen as one instigator of the "mixed style." To him either classical or Gothic or a mixture of both was acceptable. In 1835 Hope wrote,

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[3] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (New York: Dover, 1950), p. 529.
[4] Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art* (London: Penguin, 1956), pp. 48-50.
[5] Joseph Addison, *The Spectator* (London: George Routledge, 1868), p. 594.
[6] Edmund Burke, 'A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful', in *The Works of Edmund Burke*, *Vol. 1* (London: G. Bell, 1913), p. 118.
[7] Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (London: Luke Hansard, 1805), p. 220.

> Thus has arisen at least that species of variety in building which proceeds from an entire and general ignorance of what is suitable and appropriate to the age nation and localities. Some, still reviving the name of the antique but only acquainted with its nature in public edifices those which alone have, in some degree, survived the wreck of the ages, by building houses in the shape of temples have contrived themselves most inappropriate and uncomfortable dwellings. Some reverting to the pointed style, as more indigenous, more national, but in England, where there are few public buildings to serve as models for it, taking all their ideas from religious edifices, instead of a temple have lodged themselves in a church.[8]

Until the advent of modernism in the twentieth century, the broad first choice was between a classical or a medieval revival design, and there were many subsets and variations of these general categories. The designers and their clients determined the style in each case, having to consider the style preferences of the owners, the resources available, and the designated purpose of the buildings.

Both neo-medieval and neo-classical styles prevailed in buildings in the nineteenth century. According to Hugh Honour this movement was very diverse, with threads that were difficult to connect.[9] Thus, creating an association map of "neo-classical" compared to "medieval revival" is speculative and must be imprecise; however the results are quite revealing. Most traditional buildings do present patterns of associations: many of them are inferred and indirect, some are subconscious and unintended; however they do create impressions and generate feelings of response, making statements about values held by their originators, designers, and their owners. These associations will and must change over time as successive generations have different cultural formations. How a set of associations can become outmoded and how new associations take their place will be illustrated towards the conclusion of this article.

The study of associations is a way of considering meaning. The difficult area of the study of the meanings of buildings has not received sufficient attention in the present era. Phenomenology is the study of appearances and the discernment of meaning when seen from a point of view which includes subjective values and emotions. Christian Norberg-Schulz was a student of Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl and an exponent of this approach. He felt that the concept of meaning was vitally important in

[8] Thomas Hope, *An Historical Essay on Architecture* (London: John Murray, 1835), p. 489.
[9] Hugh Honour, *Romanticism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), pp. 14-18.

architectural history and that meanings are subject to change. He wrote,

> Architecture is a living reality. Since remote times architecture has helped man in making his existence meaningful. With the aid of architecture he has gained a foothold in space and time … architecture ought to be understood in terms of meaningful (symbolic) forms … The architecture of different cultural periods should be seen as a physical expression of prevailing religious and philosophical beliefs.[10]

In the nineteenth century, the two umbrella categories of classical and Gothic both had complex webs of association. In nineteenth and twentieth century Britain, the following clusters of associations appear to hold true in most cases. Classical architecture, according to architectural historian Sir John Summerson, is concerned with "the harmony of the parts" and this harmony is achieved by the use of "modular proportion." Although there were many classical churches, in the nineteenth century classical architecture was seen as having fewer direct Christian associations than Gothic. It conveyed a sense of order and authority.[11] It extolled the virtues of Greece and Rome when these polities, for many, formed a model for the British Empire.[12] The buildings in this style displayed symmetry and balance. Neo-classicism became the preferred approach under George IV who instructed architects like John Nash: it normally included styles such as Palladian, Georgian, Greek, Italianate, and Regency. All parts of the building were subject to proportional adjustment according to fixed modular rule.[13] Classical buildings tend to be associated with rational, Platonic philosophy through a connection to the theoretical work of Palladio.[14]

Gothic was seen as essentially medieval, the broad category of medieval including buildings with historical motifs drawn from Byzantine, Norman, Tudor-Gothic, or the castellar style. Gothic also had immediate Christian and ethical associations as the preferred style for churches.[15] It was linked to the desire for a return to a dream of medieval certainty at what was

[10] Christian Norburg Shulz, *Meaning in Western Architecture* (London: Studio Vista, 1975), p. 8.
[11] John Summerson, *The Classical Language of Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), p. 8.
[12] Alex Bremner, *Imperial Gothic: Religious Architecture, High Anglican Culture of the British Empire 1840-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 103.
[13] Robert Chitham, *The Classical Orders of Architecture* (London: Architectural Press, 2003), pp. 13-14.
[14] Rudolph Witkower, 'Principles of Palladio's Architecture', *Warburg Courtauld Inst.*, vol. 8 (1945), p. 6.
[15] John Ruskin, *The Crown of Wild Olive* (London: George Allen, 1907), p. 85.

a time of turbulent social and economic change.[16] It was an irregular, asymmetrical style, essentially Romantic, with an affinity for natural, elliptical forms.[17] Additionally, to the Victorians, there was a dark underside to the Gothic idea: it had definite associations of excitement and terror as was seen in eighteenth century books like *The Castle of Otranto and The Monk*.[18]

Significantly, the Gothic style was seen as being English, and as a result often became the patriotic choice.[19] The political upheavals in France had meant that travel and interchanges had been severely curtailed. As far as most early Victorians were concerned, Gothic was thought to have started in England (not in France) before the Norman invasion.[20]

However, we are considering a moment in time where the choice of building style was made by evaluation between sets of associations. This must start with a single event and a single design decision: the rebuilding which became necessary after an enormous fire at Westminster in London. The Houses of Parliament, also known as the Palace of Westminster, was arguably the most important collection of buildings in the British nation. In 1834 the majority of the buildings making up this complex were consumed by a disastrous fire.

In the mid-Victorian period, England was the wealthiest country in Europe and was in the midst of turbulent social and political change. The choice of the most appropriate style for public buildings was made in an era of architectural eclecticism as outlined above. As we have seen, the stylistic options were formed under two general descriptive terms: neo-classical or Gothic.[21] This question came to the forefront on the occasion of the destruction by fire of key parts of the Old Palace of Westminster in 1834. The Palace before the fire had been quite unprepossessing in appearance; it consisted of five principal medieval structures ranged north to south between the east end of the Abbey and the river. Westminster Hall was, and remains, a Norman great hall, remade in the Gothic mode at the end of the fourteenth century. From this location chambers extended southward, including the chapel of St Stephen, the White Hall, the Painted Chamber, and the Queen's

[16] Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), pp. 11, 49.
[17] John Ruskin, *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (London: National Trust Classics, 1988), p. 23.
[18] Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 27.
[19] Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art*, p. 200; Bernard Porter, *The Battle of the Styles* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 38.
[20] Samuel Kliger, 'The "Goths" in England', *Modern Philology*, vol. 43, no. 2 (1945), p. 107.
[21] Mordaunt Crook, *The Dilemma of Style* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 119.

Chamber. By the eighteenth century the High Courts of Common Law and Equity had been located in Westminster Hall; the House of Commons in St Stephen's Chapel, and the House of Lords was found in the Queen's Chamber. However, these substantial masonry buildings were surrounded by many smaller, timber-frame structures, which made the complex look quite unimpressive, and which greatly increased the fire risk.[22] A structure known as The Stone Building in the classical style had been built facing St Margaret's Street: it had been constructed around 1770 by builders working under architect James Wyatt.[23]

Figure 1. The Houses of Parliament, Westminster. Source: Max Herford, 2018.

The centrally important national monument, Westminster Abbey, and in particular the extraordinary Lady Chapel of Henry VII, faced The Houses of Parliament. This 1520 building was one of the last and most splendid examples of late Perpendicular Gothic. It has been said that after the magnificence of this chapel the Gothic style was exhausted: it could go no further.[24]

[22] Sean Sawyer, 'Delusions of National Grandeur: Reflections on Architecture and History at the Palace of Westminster, 1789-1834', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 13 (2003), p. 237.
[23] Michael Poet, *The Houses of Parliament* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 73.
[24] Nikolaus Pevsner and Simon Bradley, *London 6 Westminster: Buildings of England* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 123, 136.

The outer wall buttresses are still there, taking the form of octagonal turrets with very narrow pierced perpendicular panels, rising to Tudor cupolas of ogee form with bold cusping to their ribs.[25] The chapel was described by historian Sir Banister Fletcher as "the single most important medieval building in England."[26] David Watkin observed: "It amounts to a very strong confident architectural statement of the importance of English Gothic."[27]

The main part of the abbey is a palimpsest of English and Anglo-French Gothic styles. The abbey proper was started earlier by Henry III around 1245. The parts around the nave and the choir were built around 1270.[28] The two western towers were built long after the medieval period between 1722 and 1745 by Nicholas Hawksmoor. Further rebuilding at the chapter house occurred around 1872 under the direction of Sir George Gilbert Scott. With this important Gothic architecture in close proximity, it can be appreciated that the architectural setting at the Westminster precinct presented a supreme challenge to the architects of the 1834 Palace replacement.

The Old Palace burned down in October 1834: on the third of June 1835 a competition for its replacement was announced. Debate was carried into the public arena and the national press. It is relevant to note that deliberations over a proposed new Parliament House had started earlier, around 1832 at the same time as the Whig-sponsored Reform Bill was passed.[29] The three main political factions in Parliament were the Tories, the Whigs, and the Radicals. The Tories were conservative, the backers of the centralized authority of the monarchy, and had held a majority in parliament for many years. The Whigs stood for "constitutional monarchism" but were opposed to absolute monarchy: their power base came from landed interests. The Radicals were in coalition with the Whigs: government in 1834 was narrowly held by this coalition. The Radical movement had arisen in the late eighteenth century to promote parliamentary reform, and to lower taxes and

[25] Banister Fletcher, *Architectural History by the Comparative Method* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 662.
[26] Crook, *Dilemma of Style*, p. 42.
[27] David Watkin, *English Architecture* (London: Thames Hudson, 2005), p. 49; Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture in England: 19th and 20th Centuries* (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 148.
[28] Fletcher, *Architectural History*, p. 662.
[29] Poet, *The Houses of Parliament*, p. 42.

abolish sinecures.[30]

King George IV had died in 1830 having set public taste in favour of the classical through his building projects with such notable architects as John Nash. Following his death, the question of style once again rose to the fore. The Radicals tended to prefer neo-classical, while the Tories and the Whigs both favoured the medieval in the form of English Gothic. Sir Robert Smirke was the government architect and an advocate of the classical. This is seen in his design of the British Museum in London, an overpowering exercise in archaeologically correct Greek Revival. In a memorable turn of phrase, this was described by Joseph Mordaunt Crook as a "gargantuan exercise in *stylophily.*"[31] A choice between Gothic (or strictly speaking, Gothic and Elizabethan) was specified by the Whig coalition as a strategy to block a proposal from Smirke's office, as this would have been for a neo-classical design.

In their search for a national style, after the death of George IV educated early Victorians had turned to antiquarians; the term for what we think of as archaeologists. These figures became the new arbiters of architectural taste. John Britton (1771-1857) promoted the Gothic in a series of guidebooks. He was described as having an equal influence on the rediscovery of Gothic to A. W. Pugin and John Ruskin.[32] Britton's publisher, John Weale, issued the *Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain* (9 vols, 1805-1814). Weale's pattern books fostered a growing demand for Gothic. The decreasing cost of lithography enabled many journals to print engravings of plans and elevations. Specialized journals, such as J. C. Loudon's *Architectural Magazine* (1834-38), began to feature essays on historic styles. Thus, public sentiment turned from the King George's neo-classicism to a more Romantic taste: and this was found in the medieval as described by antiquarians. For many the medieval styles realized in stone a desire to escape into the re-imagined world of Sir Walter Scott.[33]

The young architect Charles Barry was interested in securing the design for the rebuilding project. He was a specialist in the Italianate style and did not have any particular skill or knowledge of Gothic but the (now

[30] Bernard Porter, 'Review: The Battle of the Styles, 1855–61', in *Victorian Studies*, vol. 55, no. 2 (1962), pp. 311, 384.
[31] Joseph Mordaunt Crook, *The Greek Revival in British Architecture 1760-1870* (London: John Murray, 1972), p. 189.
[32] Joseph Mordaunt Crook, 'John Britton: the Genesis of Gothic Revival', in *Concerning Architecture*, ed. J. Summerson (London: Allen Lane, 1968).
[33] Chandler, *Dream of Order*, p. 49.

most famous) figure of A. W. Pugin was on his staff. In Pugin, Barry had ready access to the very highest order of Gothic design skills. Barry was politically adept and was well connected in Whig circles; he had a reputation for "fitting in" with his client's preferences. As a person of humble circumstances making his way as an architect, he wanted to win this prestigious design assignment and was prepared to work in whatever style was selected by Parliament.[34]

After the fire in 1834, it was assumed that Lord Melbourne, the Whig Prime Minister, would direct Smirke to design a new Parliament House. In his official capacity, Smirke had undertaken construction of temporary quarters. Since he was a dedicated neo-classicist, the Radicals did not object to this arrangement. However, both Whigs and Tories were opposed to neo-classical and had made this clear in Parliament before the fire in 1833. They expressly excluded all classical options from the redesign competition: the choices nominated were Gothic or Elizabethan.[35]

Then, in May 1834, King William IV dismissed Melbourne's Whig government and Sir Robert Peel was summoned to head a Tory administration. In early December, Peel learned that before he resigned, Melbourne had asked Smirke to prepare designs for a permanent Parliament House, and this would have been neo-classical. Peel, new to his post, had agreed with his assignment; however, this was unacceptable to the Tories. In January 1835, Lt. Col. Sir Edward Cust, a close associate of Barry, released a pamphlet urging Peel's government to hold a competition for the design of the new complex. With backing from such newspapers as *The Times* and *The Morning Herald*, Smirke's appointment was overturned. Cust proposed that an amateur commission would choose the designer for the new Houses of Parliament in an open competition. In consultation with the peers' committee, a House of Commons panel drafted several resolutions on Cust's proposal: five amateurs would judge plans, from the submissions five designs would be selected and they would be eligible for £500 prizes. Parliament as a whole would then decide whether to build the first prize winner's proposal.[36]

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[34] Hitchcock, *Architecture in England*, p. 150; Stephen Muthesius, *Victorian Architecture* (London: Thames Hudson, 2008), p. 155.
[35] Harry Stuart Goodheart-Rendel, *English Architecture Since the Regency* (London: The National Trust, Century, 1989), p. 61.
[36] W. J. Rorabaugh, 'Politics and the Competition for the Houses of Parliament 1834-1837', *Victorian Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1973), p. 72.

In July, Lord Melbourne named the contest judges. The high costs of creating comprehensive drawings meant that all except the well-established were not prepared to take the risk. Although there were ninety-seven entrants, few prominent architects chose to enter. The commissioners deliberated for several months: then finally they awarded first prize to Charles Barry. There were further delays caused by objections from unsuccessful competitors and there was a motion to move Parliament to a new site, however these obstacles were overcome one by one, and the design work, managed by Barry and Pugin, started around June 1836.[37]

When the design work was under way, Barry allowed Pugin to refine the facade as drawn in the competition entry into the stronger, more definite elevations which are still seen today. The rebuilding and internal finishing took over thirty years, well beyond the death of Pugin in 1842. He had assumed the role of passionate promoter of the Gothic style and its medieval values; both for churches and for civil buildings. He saw Gothic as the representation of a virtuous Catholic way of living and as opposed to the principles of the Classical.[38] Thus, after building had commenced, Pugin passed by the site on the river with an associate. He described it as "All Grecian sir; Tudor details on a classic body."[39] Pugin was referring to what was very close to a classical ground-plan, and also to the near-symmetrical placement of the masses on the Thames River frontage. The standard Gothic facade composition had been roughly triangular, with the highest point over the central nave of a church. However, the Houses of Parliament had an extended rectangular form with the Clock Tower standing separately at the northern end. The massed elements when seen from the river were more or less in balance around a central axis. Putting the Gothic cladding on one side, the composition of masses was classical.

The reasons for the selection of Gothic were important. For the public, the associations that Gothic drew from significant moments in British history became paramount, was reflected at Westminster Abbey. Classical styles were also felt to be too close to the then-dangerous revolutionary culture of France. Gothic was the only choice, the Elizabethan option also mentioned proved problematic; very few architects in the Victorian period knew how to design in this sparsely documented style. It was felt by the public at the time

[37] B. Cocks, *Mid-Victorian Masterpiece* (London: Hutchinson, 1977), p. 32.
[38] A. W. Pugin, *True Principles of Christian or Pointed Architecture* (London: John Weale, 1841), p. 36.
[39] Pugin, *True Principles*, p. ix.

that Gothic was English, and the Perpendicular Gothic style of the late thirteenth century was just that; a statement of English national pride was required for this central political symbol.[40]

During the course of the building Barry was subject to constant harassment by committee members in ceaseless and very often pointless reviews of expenditure. Sir Barnett Cocks' book *Mid-Victorian Masterpiece* is an invaluable record written by a former Clerk of the House of Commons. It tells the story of the building process in considerable detail, without any apologies to the many figures who became more than an occasional irritant to Barry. It seems that Parliament produced many people who, at the moment of exercising authority disclosed a complete ignorance of the matters on which they had to rule. Cocks attributes Barry's premature death to the constant pressure and the lack of support he received at every turn. It became a type of daytime nightmare for Barry and those working with him.[41] The building took around thirty years and cost at least three times the original estimates. The Gothic style used at the Palace of Westminster was a result of the consensus of opinion as it had stood in 1835. During the construction there were frequent disputes over rising cost and frequent design changes. The Palace that was finally built had significant variations to the original drawings. It was finally completed in 1869; unfortunately, neither Barry nor Pugin would live to see its final opening.

The rebuilt Palace of Westminster reopened in 1870. It was largely built in a revival of the English Perpendicular style the visitor sees today. Importantly this was an English style, the last phase of medieval Gothic, a style which was never seen on the continent. The rectangular molded panels on every part of the façade are taken from the Perpendicular phase (1330-1600). The neo-Tudor turrets (1847) at the entrance to Westminster Hall are within sight of the late medieval turrets of the Chapel of Henry VII at Westminster Abbey (1512).[42]

The Houses of Parliament project was an immense success, the public in general approved of the design. It was a spectacular statement of national pride in Britain and her empire: a magnificent and ingenious compromise between Gothic and Palladian deploying each approach to gain particular

[40] Simon Bradley, 'The Englishness of Gothic: Theories, Interpretations, W. Gilpin to J. H. Parker', *Architectural History*, vol. 45 (2002), pp. 326-346.
[41] Cocks, *Mid-Victorian Masterpiece*, p. 50.
[42] Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Cathedrals of England: South-East* (London: Folio Society, 2005), pp. 145, 157.

benefits. This decision firmly established the Gothic style (for a time) as a worthy alternative to Classical for important civic buildings. The houses have served the British public very well and it is now proposed to renovate them to accommodate more members with contemporary technology and modern facilities. The population of the United Kingdom in 1850 was around 24 million, and today, in early 2020, it is 68 million. The style and location of additional accommodation is as yet undecided; however the existing Houses of Parliament carry the highest Historic England Grade One rating. They cannot be rebuilt or changed in any significant way. In particular the Victoria Tower, or Big Ben as it is known today, has become a symbol for London and Britain, recognised in every country worldwide.

Figure 2: The Foreign Office, Whitehall. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Architect George Gilbert Scott and the Foreign Office

The next example of the style question was played out at the Foreign and India Office and the architect was Sir George Gilbert Scott, who coincidentally had been the Architect Surveyor in charge of restoration at Westminster Abbey. In 1850 George Gilbert Scott was a foremost champion of the Gothic style, like Charles Barry his early days were difficult, unlike Charles Barry he worked in this style out of preference. He became, by dint of hard work, the most successful and prolific architect of the Victorian

period. Like Barry, in his early career he had made a meagre living designing whatever he could; workhouses and 'Commissioner Churches' for disadvantaged areas. From this difficult start he had built his very large practice. In his career he oversaw over 900 individual projects. This was managed with the assistance of his drafting and design staff; it was the largest architectural office in London, with 27 employees.[43]

Before 1850, it was the conventional choice to use the Decorated Gothic; the elaborate thirteenth century style for ornamentation and trim in churches. As we have seen, most people identified the Gothic with English patriotic as well as religious values. It was essentially a design suitable for churches, as well as, occasionally, schools and universities. These institutions had, by tradition, been operated by clerics. Scott was not a High Church Anglican: his affiliation was very definitely Evangelical and as he wrote in his Recollections, did not see himself having a mission to revisit the medieval period: he saw himself as a designer in the middle ecclesiastical ground. However, many historians have concluded that he, in time, moved to a position of searching for a new type of expressive, modern Gothic to suit the fast-changing times of Britain after 1850.[44]

In 1844 Scott had won the competition to design the *Nikolaikirche* in Hamburg, and around this time he also visited Flanders and Brussels for the first time. His experience in Europe introduced many new continental design options. These travels took him to Belgium and included a visit to the famous medieval Cloth Hall at Ypres which had been completed in 1304; this was one of the largest commercial buildings in Europe. With its steep roof pitch, its dormer windows, its clock tower and its filigree pinnacles it must have made a great impression on the English architect. It was quite unlike English Gothic in its extreme height with its steep roof pitch and great visual mass. It had no ecclesiastical, civic or academic function; it was a prime example of Gothic used purely as an architectural style in a commercial and civic role.[45]

Around 1845, Scott met John Ruskin in Venice, and a close reading of Ruskin's *Stones of Venice* alerted him to new possibilities for Gothic, of introducing Venetian forms into a new eclectic approach to Gothic. Only one

[43] Sir Thomas Jackson, *Recollections of Thomas Graham Jackson 1835-1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 58.
[44] Gavin Stamp, *Gothic for the Steam Age* (London: Aurum Press, 2015), p. 7; George Gilbert Scott, *Personal and Professional Recollections* (London: Sampson Low, 1879), p. 226.
[45] Scott, *Personal and Professional Recollections*, p. 212.

month later, he saw the dramatic effects William Butterfield had introduced into All Souls, St Margaret's Church in Northcote Rd central London. Kenneth Clark suggests Butterfield had absorbed the ideas seen at St Margaret's after a visit to Siena Cathedral. Scott in his volume *Recollections* records his unqualified agreement with these innovations.[46] He was now fully committed to the excitement of a new rich, eclectic European Gothic style, and was, in principle at least, unprepared to work in any other style. However, the realities of politics were soon to be pitted against this vision.

Scott was always interested in opportunities for design work for the government. In the 1820s, The Foreign Office had premises behind Downing Street, but building subsidence there, along with a need for considerably more space, drove the initiative for a new purpose-built complex. In 1856, a competition was announced for its design. Although George Gilbert Scott only won the third prize with his Gothic/Byzantine design in 1858, after some reconsideration he was appointed as the architect. However, history was to intervene. The government of India had passed from the disgraced East India Company to the India Office around 1859. The company's old office in Leadenhall St was too small for the new organisation, so it was decided to build a new office on the site overlooking St James's Park, adjoining and connected to the new Foreign Office development. Scott's commission was extended to include the building of the India Office but, as Matthew Digby Wyatt was already the India Office's Surveyor, the two reached an agreement that Scott would be responsible for the larger Foreign Office complex, while Wyatt should retain responsibility for the design of the India Office interior.[47]

Scott's commission was soon to be challenged. With the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and its costs in human life, the government had become aware that many Indians had resisted the harsh rule of the East India Company. The company's project of aggressive territorial expansion had been affected with marked cultural insensitivity. These and other religious factors had caused deep resentment in Indian society. The population of India in 1850 was 250 million while that of the UK was less than 25 million; commercial ties between India and the UK were growing very quickly. In particular, Indian cotton was a staple commodity for the new mills of the Industrial Revolution. It became clear that a vitally important relationship

[46] Scott, *Personal and Professional Recollections*, p. 227.
[47] Scott, *Personal and Professional Recollections*, p. 199.

was under severe stress.[48]

As Imperial historian Alex Bremner has pointed out, the addition of the India Office to the complex had changed the project fundamentally.[49] It meant that a statement about Empire was needed and consequently the old assumptions about the most suitable style for what was now "The Foreign and India Office" needed new thought. The Indian Mutiny forced the Foreign Office to recast the relationship in a new way. There was now great importance placed on the impression to be created on Indians and other foreign visitors. It again became a matter of what was the most appropriate building style, and it was appreciated that people from India might not fully comprehend the subtleties of the Gothic or Byzantine style. They would expect to see something which resembled "a political palace." Therefore, Englishness as a critical quality, which had always been linked to Gothic, became less important and the preferences moved again in favour of Italianate. This was seen by many as a more palatial and imperial style which was international and was now seen as modern.[50] The Italianate style was a neo-Renaissance version of Roman classical, softened and made less rigid. Romantic and Picturesque influences were permitted, they allowed limited asymmetry, while strict adherence to canonical details had become less important.

In late 1859 there was a change of government and the Conservative Prime Minister resigned. Lord Palmerston, the newly elected Whig Prime Minister, significantly an Anglican Irish peer, was vehemently opposed to any suggestion of Gothic which could be thought of as "Romish" and was only interested in a classical Italianate design. When he threatened to bring in another architect, Scott relented and started redrawing in the indicated style. Scott took himself off to Paris to look again at the buildings and purchased "several expensive books on classical architecture."[51]

He introduced ornate renaissance details and the complex became Italianate, rather than Gothic. In many histories this is presented as a personal difference between Scott, presented as a progressive, and Palmerston who is described as a reactionary. While these descriptions are colourful, the main

[48] Tim Barringer, 'Review G. Bremner, Imperial Gothic, c. 1840–1870', *Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 74, no. 1 (2015), pp. 109-110.
[49] Alex Bremner, 'Nation and Empire in the Government Architecture of Mid-Victorian London: the Foreign and India office Reconsidered', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 48, no. 3 (2005), pp. 703-742
[50] Barringer, 'Review Imperial Gothic', p. 109.
[51] Scott, *Personal and Professional Recollections*, p. 193.

point made by Bremner was that there had been a fundamental change in the relationship with Britain's largest and most valued possession, India.[52]

In his book *The Gothic Revival* Kenneth Clark describes Scott's frustration and suggests that the St Pancras Midland Hotel project in 1876 was the "gorgeous fruit of his disappointment."[53] A comment in Scott's Recollections about the design being "too good" for the purpose confirms the bitter truth in these words.[54] Scott's Gothic vision had been converted into an elaborate Italianate development. According to historian Michael Wheeler the public preference for Gothic at this time was constrained by deep seated prejudices, due to the style's close association with Roman Catholicism: this was the time of the so-called Catholic Papal Aggression of 1850. Pope Pius IX had restored a Roman Catholic hierarchy to England and the Anglican public were fearful of what they saw as a threat to their position as the Established Church.[55]

The Foreign office project was completed by Scott and his office in the Italianate style, and it can be seen today in Whitehall. It was described by historian Gavin Stamp as "a distinguished and sophisticated design."[56] However this did not prevent a serious proposal to demolish this Foreign Office and, at the same time, all of Victorian Whitehall. It was threatened for demolition by the Minister for Public Buildings, Geoffrey Ripon, and the architects Leslie Martin and Colin Buchanan. Their vision was to initiate widespread demolition make way for a massive modernist Whitehall redevelopment starting in 1965.[57] In the mid twentieth century Victorian architecture was regarded by many as outmoded, inefficient and unnecessarily ornate, while Modernism had been widely accepted as the preferred style of the moment. The style was seen as "modern," efficient and functional. It had become the standard approach of architects: it was the only approach taught in university architectural courses.[58] However, after considerable debate this proposal was rejected and the Foreign and India

[52] Bremner, 'Nation and Empire', p. 724.
[53] Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival: An Essay in the History of Taste* (New York: Icon Editions 1962), p. 188.
[54] Scott, *Personal Professional Recollections*, p. 98.
[55] Michael Wheeler, *The Old Enemies: Catholic and Protestant in Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. xvi, 5, 352.
[56] Stamp, *Gothic for Steam Age*, p. 152.
[57] Hansard, *British Parliamentary Record*, 17 December 1963.
[58] Gavin Stamp, 'I was Lord Kitchener's Valet, or How the Victorian Society Saved London', *Twentieth Century Architecture*, vol. 6 (2002), p. 135.

Office can still be seen today in Whitehall.[59] It was noticed by some that restoration revealed the decorative subtlety of the Victorians' Gothic and classical themes. Even John Summerson, at that time a committed Modernist, concluded: "Surfeited as we are with the fruits of the Modern movement, with its boring slabs and daunting towers, everything Victorian has a delicious impact of strangeness and curiosity." This statement, coming from such a figure was indicative of a deep-seated change in attitude.[60]

Figure 3. The St Pancras Renaissance Hotel. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

[59] Simon Jenkins, 'They saved our Victorian cities. Now they are demolishing my prejudices', *The Guardian*, 29 October (2010), at https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/oct/28/they-conserved-the-victorian-cities. Accessed 13/07/2018.
[60] Jenkins, 'They saved our Victorian cities'.

The St Pancras Hotel

The building of the Foreign Office was under way when, around 1863, Scott received a letter from Joseph Lewis, a director of that Midland Railways company. He was invited to join a limited competition to design the new proposed Midland Hotel. He was asked for a detailed proposal for the Midland Hotel and, despite his design being the most expensive, he was selected. He saw this as his opportunity to replace the lost opportunity of the Foreign office in a new expression in High Continental Gothic.

As we have seen, Scott had become aware of the dramatic new form of modern Gothic produced by William Butterfield around 1855. Butterfield's break away from the conservative Early Gothic style occurred in his new design for All Saint's Church in Margaret St, London. He introduced a new exterior scheme of red and black brickwork; the interior had elaborate moldings to every arch, and vivid mosaic tiles were applied to every possible surface. Sir John Summerson described it as "extremely powerful, but quite ugly."[61] Butterfield broke almost every conventional rule for Gothic designs; to many, it amounted to sensory overload.

Scott learnt that, despite having deep religious convictions, John Ruskin, as well as Augustus Pugin, saw Gothic as being eminently suitable for secular construction in civic buildings, schools, universities and residences.[62] Ruskin had observed Venetian Gothic in its many guises as the distinctive standard for pre-Renaissance building, both residential, civic and ecclesiastical; he did not see Gothic as essentially English. The new High Victorian era with its innovations in manufacturing made available mass produced, cheap building elements such as coloured bricks. Dramatic polychromatic effects were now an option. For Scott in the mid-Victorian age, there was no barrier to a commercial building, a railway station, or a hotel, to be finished in the High Gothic manner.

Around 1840, the Midland Railway was typical of many active commercial undertakings. The British rail system had been developed without any overall plan; a number of privately financed companies simply laid tracks and went into the transport business. The Midland Railway Company was founded with a small rail network operating in the regions to the north of the capital, all lines converged in Derby. By 1860 the company was well established and enjoyed increasing revenue from the carriage of

[61] John Summerson, 'Butterfield, or the Glory of Ugliness', in *Heavenly Mansions* (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 159.
[62] Scott, *Personal Professional Recollections*, p. 253.

coal, iron, and building materials. The beer freight from Burton-on-Trent, the brewery capital of Britain, was its largest business and was still growing. However, Midland did not have its own terminal in London. In 1853, James Joseph Allport (1811-1892) was appointed General Manage and, the fortunes of the company started to improve; it would become the most progressive railway company in Britain. Around 1870, the next step was the acquisition of land near what is now Euston Road for a new rail terminus. There would be a grand, luxurious hotel, its design would be striking, and quite up to date.[63]

It took five years to complete the design and building of the hotel and rail terminus. It was finally opened in 1876. A visual analysis of the St Pancras building would read like this: its immense size is striking, with its intense red and orange colour scheme, red bricks with orange voussoirs to all windows, orange window trim, its unusually steep roof pitch with rows of dormer windows, clock tower, and its turrets with pinnacles, all set against the immense Gothic clock tower at the southern end of the curved façade. From the elaborate porte-cochère at the western end, the 190-metre facade curved back to parallel Euston Road. At its eastern end was in a gigantic 95-metre-high spire capped clock tower. Later Alan Jackson described "its castellated fringes, scores of dormer windows, its myriad pointed-arch windows below the cornice, the multitude of chimneys on its steep pitched roofs, and its every corner marked by spirelet or pinnacle."[64] The overall impression is magnificent and coherent; all the diverse elements seem to belong together in this building. The sources, and their associations are somehow subsumed into the whole. As well, its deliberate asymmetry with its western curved wing gives it a striking asymmetrical shape. The curved front was originally designed to allow easy access to delivery vans; beer from midland breweries was stored in its undercroft, enabling fast deliveries to London pubs.

It became clear from this design that Scott's early approach to Gothic had changed. Sources for the design were the Cloth Hall (Lakenhalle) at Ypres in Flanders (1220-1300), the medieval Palais de Justice in Liege, (after 1468) the Palazzo Publico in Siena (1300), and the Palazzo Ducale in Venice (1424).[65] These locations provided visions of the Gothic from north and

[63] Simon Bradley, *St Pancras Station* (London: Profile Books, 2007), p. 70.
[64] Allan Jackson, *London Termini* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1990), p. 67.
[65] Scott, *Personal Professional Recollections*, pp. 156-161.

south. In his summary of sources, James Stevens Curl refers to "English and French pointed, Flemish motifs and bits of Venetian Gothic."[66] Simon Bradley detects Gothic motifs from Brussels, and details from thirteenth century England and France. He goes on to cite northern Italy as the chief inspiration for materials, and their mixed use in polychromatic combinations.[67]

On its opening in 1876 The Midland Hotel was more than impressive. The final transformation of the hotel to a famous landmark took place in the early years of the twenty first century. It was seen as a memorial celebrating the confidence and pride of the High Victorian age; a statement of Gothic extravagance funded by the boom conditions of the railway boom in the mid-Victorian era. It was designed to serve the needs of what was a new modern fast-paced steam age.

The final episode in this saga was the struggle to preserve this remarkable High Victorian building in a new environment where modernism was the generally accepted architectural style. In 1935 the Midland Grand Hotel had been forced to close due to poor profitability. The effects of the First World War had been devastating. Its antiquated plumbing had made it unattractive to the new wave of American business travelers. In 1948, amid post-war reorganization, the Midland Railway Company was absorbed into a nationalized service called British Rail. In 1952, Nikolaus Pevsner and the Victorian Society proposed the Barlow designed train shed for English Heritage listing. Pevsner, like many others at that time, was an evangelical modernist. He believed that all new buildings or extensions to old buildings should be completed in a modern, not traditional style.[68] He did not propose Scott's Gothic Midland Hotel for heritage listing; its exuberant High Victorian detail offended his modernist distaste for exuberant Gothic ornamentation.[69]

The atmosphere in the middle years of the twentieth century saw the "Triumph of Modernism" so ably described by historian Paul Thompson: a scene where many architects were excited by a property boom combined with a new sense of professional authority. The looked for every opportunity to build and this meant that old buildings had to be demolished to make way

[66] James Stevens Curl, *Victorian Architecture* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1990), pp. 68-70.
[67] Bradley, *St Pancras Station*, p. 111.
[68] Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 35.
[69] Nikolaus Pevsner, *Outlines of European Architecture* (London: Penguin, 1983), p. 383.

for the new. They had a sense of mission to rebuild, but only in the prescribed modern manner. Rebuilding in a traditional style such as Gothic or Classical was completely unacceptable. Checks and balances such as those later found in Historic England, the Georgian Society and the Victorian Society were in their early stages of formation.[70]

However, in 1967, the Labour Minister, Wayland Young, started a campaign to save the hotel building by means of an English Heritage reclassification.[71] This was supported by the efforts of the newly formed Victorian Society, founded in 1958, with writer John Betjeman amongst many others in the campaign. Eminent figures in the art historical world, including John Betjeman, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Nikolaus Pevsner, Gavin Stamp, Ian Nairn, Dan Cruikshank, Sir Hugh Casson, and Sir John Summerson were notable figures who supported the protest. Together they constituted a vocal and articulate lobby, with direct connections to the media.[72] They saw meaning and nuance in Victorian buildings, which were missing in the modern structures in which they worked.

Around 1960 the political situation was unstable, and the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was interested in being seen as "modern and up-to-date." The Victorian Society came into being amid an almost universal dislike of Victorian buildings, fittings and furniture. Towards the end of post-war reconstruction, Modernism was seen as a good style for renewal. Threats to two important buildings provided the Victorian Society with their early contests. The first was the immense Greek Doric Arch at Euston station Drummond St built in 1837. The second was J. B. Bunning's Coal Exchange (1849) in Thames St, in the City of London. In both cases the structures were demolished, but the protests attracted great public attention, and support for the Society grew over time.

Around 1970, in what is now seen as an introspective, post-war era it was hard to appreciate the feelings of national pride in an earlier time, which had prompted such an exuberant High Victorian display as St Pancras. It took a developing new interest in writers such as Dickens, Bronte, Wordsworth, and Tennyson, plus television series to create widespread awareness of the details and settings of Victorian life.[73] Books like *The Destruction of the*

[70] Paul Thompson, 'The Triumph of Modernism', in *A History of English Architecture* (London: Pelican, 1978), p. 305.
[71] Alistair Lansley, *The Transformation of St Pancras Station* (London: Laurence King, 2008), p. 14.
[72] Stamp, *Lord Kitchener's Valet*, pp. 130-144.
[73] Stamp, *Lord Kitchener's Valet*, pp. 130-144.

English Country House (1973) by Roy Strong and Marcus Binney provided graphic evidence of what had been a great cultural loss.[74] From 1975 onwards the public interest in the conservation of Victorian survivors ballooned.

Upstairs, Downstairs traced the progress of a single upper-class London household from the bright Edwardian age to the twilight of British self-confidence at the beginning of the Great Depression. Action was divided between the Bellamy family and their servants. The general impact of this series was to create a powerful effect of historical and social reality. The series was highly acclaimed in England and remained one of the BBC's most honored shows during its five-year running period. In this narrative, as time passes, the daily lives of the characters are followed along with a presentation of their way of life acted out in well thought-out Edwardian and Victorian settings. *Upstairs, Downstairs* was shown in more than seventy countries, and attracted a worldwide audience of well over one billion viewers: it became one of the most widely known cultural artifacts in any medium: it explained the motivations of a wide range of people in a period of rapid social change. This had a huge effect on the public understanding of recent history.

Slowly, with this increased understanding, opinion started to shift towards the benefits of preservation of listed monuments and buildings. Finally, after much effort by the Victorian Society, Grade 1 Heritage Listing for St Pancras Hotel was secured in 1967; however there was still no plan to find sufficient funding to ensure its survival as a working, fully functioning building. In 1977 a plan to fully restore the roof of the Barlow shed was approved by Bernard Kaukas, the British Rail Chief Architect and this was instrumental in the final outcome. In 1983 the first electric trains entered St Pancras Terminal. In 1987 the Channel Tunnel received Royal Assent. In 1990 it was decided by British Rail that St Pancras was the logical terminus for trips to Paris. In part, this decision must have been influenced by the development possibilities of the Scott Hotel, which was, ironically, very close to being demolished. The cost of restoration still seemed too great. In 1992 British Rail announced a £7 million plan to restore the old Midland Hotel, to be funded by a private consortium. There followed eight years of uncertainty. Finally, around 2000 an agreement was in place, with three major companies taking a stake in the project. In 2004, the new consortium was called "St Pancras International" and the hotel was now renamed the "St Pancras Renaissance." In 2007 the first Eurostar train entered St Pancras, and

[74] Roy Strong, *The Destruction of the Country House 1875-1975* (London: Thames Hudson, 1973), pp. 7-10.

later that year there was the official opening by Queen Elizabeth.[75]

Today, the restored St Pancras Renaissance Hotel's architecture makes each visit an unforgettable experience. The St Pancras Terminus with links to Kings Cross and the tube network is today a vital local and international travel hub. With its strange fairytale quality, the fantastic roofline with dormers, towers and pinnacles is now appreciated more than ever. It is a permanent tribute to the imagination of George Gilbert Scott: an appropriate entry point to Europe, having a design inspired by the buildings of Flanders, Siena, Venice and Hamburg.

Conclusion

The Houses of Parliament were built in a revived Gothic style which was actually a hybrid of Gothic cladding and motifs over a classical plan and elevation. The Foreign and India Office was built in Italianate style after a neo-Byzantine plan had been approved and then rejected. The need at the time was for a less English, more international statement. The Midland Hotel, St Pancras, was built in the extravagant High Gothic style which was based on continental sources. This was later threatened with demolition until the tide was turned by renewed public interest in the Victorian period. The vexed question of "in which style shall we build" carried on into the present day.

[75] 'First St Pancras Eurostar service arrives in Paris', *The Guardian*, 15 November (2007), at https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/nov/14/transport.london. Accessed 16/10/2021.