

LIFE IN COSTUME:
THE ARCHITECTURAL FICTIONS AND ANACHRONISMS OF
WILLIAM BURGESS

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the uses and purposes of history in the graphic works and the domestic interiors of nineteenth-century British architect William Burges (1827-1881). Burges is recognized in contemporary historiography as one of the major figures of the Gothic Revival in Britain—in particular the period of stylistic eclecticism and experimentation known as High Victorian Gothic (circa 1850-1870)—but his work has frequently been faulted for a lack of authenticity. In a marking series of studies on historical representation begun in the 1980s, art historian Stephen Bann has claimed that all encounters with the past are ultimately personal in nature. Building on this hypothesis, the author of the dissertation argues that Burges's interiors and decorative objects constitute the visible trace of a life-long quest for identity. The research project first examines Burges's connections to a tradition of antiquarian scholarship. It then traces the nature of Burges's identification with the medieval past over a period of approximately twenty years, from the initial ordering of his topographical albums (circa 1858) to the building of his home of Tower House in London (1875-1878). The author works with notions of fantasy, dream, and fiction to explain the relation between this nineteenth-century architect and his medieval persona, as well as that between his historicist decors and their architectural support. In the context of this research, a fiction is conceived as a world made up of elements both imaginary and real, but which operates under different rules than external reality.

Cette dissertation analyse l'utilisation et le sens de l'histoire dans les œuvres graphiques et les décors intérieurs d'un architecte britannique du XIX^e siècle, William Burges (1827-1881). Burges est reconnu par l'historiographie contemporaine comme l'un des acteurs majeurs du mouvement néogothique en Angleterre, particulièrement de la phase éclectique et expérimentale connue sous le nom de « High Victorian » (circa 1850-1870). Pourtant, son travail a souvent été taxé d'inauthenticité. Au fil d'études marquantes sur les représentations de l'histoire qu'il a entamées vers 1980, l'historien de l'art Stephen Bann a affirmé que toute rencontre avec le passé est ultimement de nature personnelle. S'appuyant sur cette hypothèse, l'auteur de la dissertation argumente que les intérieurs et les objets décoratifs de Burges constituent la trace visible d'une longue quête d'identité. La recherche aborde en premier le rapport qu'entretient Burges avec la tradition historiographique des antiquaires. Elle retrace ensuite sur une période de vingt ans le processus par lequel Burges s'identifie avec le passé médiéval – soit d'une première mise en ordre de ses albums topographiques (vers 1858) à la construction de Tower House, sa maison à Londres (1875-1878). L'auteur utilise les notions de fantasme, de rêve et de fiction pour expliquer la relation entre cet architecte du XIX^e siècle et son alter ego médiéval, ainsi qu'entre ses décors historicistes et leur support architectural. Dans le contexte de cette recherche, la fiction est comprise comme un monde constitué d'éléments imaginaires et réels, mais qui opère selon des règles différentes de la réalité quotidienne.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 An odd man out

Along with nineteenth-century architects George Edmund Street, William Butterfield and George Gilbert Scott, William Burges (1827-1881) is recognized in contemporary historiography as one of the major figures of the Gothic Revival in Britain—in particular of that phase of stylistic eclecticism and formal experimentation known as High Victorian Gothic (circa 1850-1870). A member of the Ecclesiological Society (a learned society founded in 1839 to promote the study and revival of Gothic architecture, especially in the buildings of the Church of England), Burges first rose to prominence as an architect with his winning entry in the competition for Lille Cathedral in 1856 (designed with Henry Clutton). The scheme was remarkable for its precocious use of continental sources and for the archaeological accuracy of its iconography. It helped to establish Burges's lifelong reputation as a medieval scholar, and it initiated close relationships with prominent European propagandists for the Gothic Revival: Adolphe-Napoléon Didron and August Reichensperger.¹

Writing at the turn of the 1870s, however, Charles Lock Eastlake—the Gothic Revival's first chronicler—placed Burges in a very different context: that of an effort to move beyond High Victorian eclecticism. By this time, the ferment of renewal at mid-century had come to seem a cacophonous failure, plagued by a “restless striving after effect

¹ Georg Germann, Gothic Revival in Europe and Britain: Sources, Influences and Ideas, translation by Gerald Onn (London: Lund Humphries with the Architectural Association, 1972), 100-101.

and originality of treatment.”² In Eastlake’s view, the way forward was shown by the work of a small number of younger architects, including E.W. Godwin and George Frederick Bodley as well as William Burges. All three mastered the principles of Gothic architecture, yet tended to simpler and more ascetic forms than the preceding generation—in other words, to abstraction, and to a loosening of the binds of history.³

In fact William Burges was a figure more complex and more marginal than either of these interpretations suggest. His architectural training in the 1840s steeped him in a late antiquarian culture of recording, reproducing and reconfiguring ancient specimens. During the following decades, his participation in the industrial exhibitions of 1851 and 1862 awakened in him a preoccupation with domestic objects and furnishings that was equalled only by the earlier work of A.W.N. Pugin. In the 1860s and 1870s, moreover, his undertaking to recreate an ever fuller medieval world across the media of drawing, photography, and the domestic interior placed him amidst a circle of painters and poets, rather than one of architects.

Alone among a generation of architects deeply preoccupied with developing a new style, Burges gave himself the freedom not to be of his time. As the Gothic Revival lost impetus in the late 1860s, and younger “Goths” such as Godwin or Richard Norman Shaw turned instead to Japanese or English vernacular architecture as sources of inspiration, Burges remained committed to an increasingly unfashionable idiom: that of thirteenth-century French Gothic. He identified with the French medieval draftsman

² Charles L. Eastlake, A History of the Gothic Revival, introduction by Alan Gowans (American Life Foundation: s. l., 1975), 339; see also 304.

³ Ibid, 353-372.

Villard de Honnecourt, imitating his dress, script and graphic style, and he circulated designs of his own in architectural and collector's circles as medieval originals.

By the end of the decade, Burges's burlesque mixture of historical learning and carnivalesque humour had become sufficiently notorious to earn him a piece of "nonsense verse," crafted by the poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti with the aid of A.C.

Swinburne:

There is a babyish party named Burges
Who from infancy hardly emerges;
If you had not been told
He's disgracefully old,
You'd offer a bull's-eye to Burges.⁴

Composed as part of a series of oral satires aimed at various members of Rossetti's circle,⁵ this doggerel constituted a kind of badge of belonging—a badge, however, that placed Burges not at the centre of the High Victorian art world, but at its Bohemian and iconoclastic fringes.

In the same way as Burges's artistic persona was at odds with the expectations of his age, so were his ornamental decors at odds with their material support. One of the first art historians to show real interest in Burges's work, Charles Handley-Read, claimed that

⁴ William Michael Rossetti, Rossetti Papers, 1862 to 1870 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 494; quoted in Crook, William Burges, 91, and Matthew Williams, William Burges (Norwich: Jarrold Publishing, 2004), 19.

⁵ Dated to ca. 1860-1870, D.G. Rossetti's "nonsense verses" were written down from memory by William Michael Rossetti and his wife over thirty years after the fact. Their compilation included verses that parodied the painters Edward Burne-Jones, Ford Madox Brown, James McNeill Whistler and Valentine Prinsep, as well as D.G. Rossetti himself. See Rossetti, Rossetti Papers, 493-497.

his architecture was split from within. On one side of this conceptual divide stood the unadorned forms of Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, and the McConnochie house in Cardiff: direct and pragmatic buildings which were rooted in present needs. On the other side stood the “archaeological shams” of Cork Cathedral, Cardiff Castle and Castell Coch, whose intricate decors offered “total immersion in a vision of the past.”⁶

A similar equation of opacity and falseness coloured John Summerson’s judgment on the schemes for the New Law Courts competition of 1866-1867. In Summerson’s view, for all the prominence of Gothic in the submitted schemes, the Law Courts were in fact a modern competition, the challenge of which was to organize and give legible form to an enormous program.⁷ Even while conceding the symbolic power and aptness of Burges’s proposal—“the judges massed in their inner citadel then proceeding on their long journeys to administer justice all around them”—Summerson faulted its extreme theatricality. In his view, the scheme failed because its designer had “‘act[ed] medieval’ to a preposterous extent...”⁸

Architectural historian Stefan Muthesius was the first to suggest that a peculiar poetics might be at work in such interiors. Commenting on Burges’s competition scheme for Lille Cathedral, he underlined both the constructional simplicity of the proposed furnishings and the way their painted decorations suggested a quite different function and

⁶ Charles Handley-Read, “William Burges”, in Victorian Architecture, ed. Peter Ferriday (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963), 193.

⁷ John Summerson, “A Victorian Competition: The Royal Courts of Justice”, in Victorian Architecture: Four Studies in Evaluation (New York, London: Columbia University Press, 1970), 94-95, 100.

⁸ Ibid, 110-111.

scale than was actually the case.⁹ Painted furniture of this kind reflected an important development in the late 1850s, whereby the Gothic Revival's emphasis on function and construction shifted to representation and figuration. In other words, the burden of a building's beauty was displaced from its architecture to the arts it enfolded.

In Stefan Muthesius's view, Burges was the Revival's "most persistent spokesman" for a rigorous distinction between architecture and decoration, and for the use of sculpture and painting as vehicles for narrative—ideas that found wide expression inside the Medieval Court of the 1862 International Exhibition in London, in the form of painted furniture.¹⁰ This suggestion of a conceptual rupture between ornament and its support was later expanded by Clive Wainwright, who claimed that the novelty of Burges's painted furniture lay in its seamless fusion with the painted and storied decoration on the room's floor, walls and ceiling: the interior's boundaries receded in favour of a total decor.¹¹ Muthesius's notion of figurative ornament as a kind of skin, distinct from architectural structure, has also gained new credence with the recent discovery by Matthew Williams of a partial model of Burges's design for Castell Coch. The wooden model represents only the structural framework for the room; its decor is

⁹ Stefan Muthesius, The High Victorian Movement in Architecture, 1850-1870 (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 157.

¹⁰ Ibid, 154-157.

¹¹ Clive Wainwright, "Pre-Raphaelite Furniture," in The Strange Genius of William Burges, 'Art-Architect', 1827-1881, ed. J. Mordaunt Crook (Cardiff: National Museum of Wales, 1982), 67.

painted onto a paper overlay which, one imagines, could be removed and replaced as easily as it was applied.¹²

Yet the central issue of the decor's status as reality remains unresolved. The disproportion between imaginative investment and actual purpose prompted Mark Girouard to comment that Burges's interiors at Cardiff Castle, for the 3rd marquis of Bute, were "more intellectual exercises than rooms in which to live."¹³ Christopher Drew Armstrong has similarly questioned the reality of Burges's decorative schemes, noting that his design for the facades of Lille Cathedral was essentially pictorial in nature, with sculptural groups fitted into a relatively neutral structural framework.¹⁴ Their iconography offered a coherent narrative of the origins and development of the Christian church, but, in Armstrong's view, it was only real in an archaeological sense.¹⁵

Indeed, most scholarship has tended to interpret Burges's anachronistic decors as a wilful retreat from reality. In the only full survey that has yet been made of Burges's work, J. Mordaunt Crook argued that the connection between High Victorian architects and Pre-Raphaelite painters was more than one of patronage: they shared a similar ethos, viewing art as an instrument of social regeneration, and a common outcome, in which the

¹² Matthew Williams, "Lady Bute's Bedroom, Castell Coch: A Rediscovered Architectural Model," Architectural History 46 (2003), 269-276.

¹³ Mark Girouard, "Cardiff Castle, Glamorganshire," Country Life 129 (1961), 889.

¹⁴ Christopher Drew Armstrong, "Le premier prix: Foederis Arca. William Burges, un imagier au service d'un nouvel art chrétien", in Notre-Dame de la Treille: Du rêve à la réalité. Histoire de la cathédrale de Lille, ed. Frédéric Vienne (Marseille: Éditions Yris, 2002), 103.

¹⁵ Christopher Drew Armstrong, "'Treason to Art, an Insult to England, a Dishonour to France.' Les Ecclésiologues d'Outre-Manche et le concours de Notre-Dame de la Treille", in Vienne, ed., Notre-Dame de la Treille, 95.

failure of their attempts at reform caused them to seek refuge in private nostalgia.¹⁶ Thus Crook considered the idiosyncratic vision of the past embodied in Burges's lodgings in Buckingham Street, London, to be utterly bereft of public relevance:

This flat embodied a dreamworld ... smothered with decanters, goblets, gem-studded cutlery and a mass of extraordinary bibelots ...¹⁷

He likewise viewed Burges's nearly exclusive preference, towards the end of his career, for the Gothic of thirteenth-century Northern France as a sign of his disillusionment and his "withdrawal" from the search for a new style: Burges had moved into the ambit of Aestheticism.¹⁸ In a similar vein, Michael Lewis has described Burges's scheme for the Law Courts as evidence of the Gothic Revival's gradual loss of purpose in the 1860s:

Although Street won the Law Courts competition, the future of the Revival was shown by ... William Burges ... The Revival had advanced so far that it was now returning to where it was at the start of the nineteenth century: a pictorial rather than a moral enterprise ...¹⁹

Likewise, Chris Brooks has argued that Burges's interiors at Cardiff Castle were the "materialization of an inner world," and that the intense privacy of the rooms was symptomatic of the frightening tensions within a highly unequal society.²⁰

¹⁶ J. [Joseph] Mordaunt Crook, William Burges and the High Victorian Dream (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press / John Murray, 1981), 15-35.

¹⁷ J. [Joseph] Mordaunt Crook, "A Vanished Pre-Raphaelite Interior," Daidalos 28 (1988), 56.

¹⁸ J. [Joseph] Mordaunt Crook, "William Burges and the Dilemma of Style," Architectural Review 170 (1981), 8-15.

¹⁹ Michael J. Lewis, The Gothic Revival, World of Art (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 152.

²⁰ Chris Brooks, The Gothic Revival (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), 332-336.

A similar taint has attached to William Burges's endeavours as a student of medieval history. Medievalist Virginia Glenn noted that Burges's studies focused nearly exclusively on decorative surfaces and woodwork, rather than structure and stonework. This "incomplete scholarship" reduced Gothic architecture to a mere scaffold for historicist ornament:

The manner in which [medieval buildings] had been erected, their systems of support, were only of secondary significance; to a creative artist in search of stimulus they were mundane matters. Cork Cathedral ... is a characteristic piece of High Victorian 'art-architecture': its appearance ... is imposed artificially on a purely supportive structure. Never could it be taken for a contemporary of Noyon, Laon, or Senlis, the buildings to which its style owes so much.²¹

For Glenn, the predominance of the decorative in Burges's work was problematic for epistemological rather than architectural reasons. It privileged visible facts instead of invisible laws and unique occurrences instead of regularities—in other words, it was not scientific. Only a chronological and explanatory narrative of Gothic architecture, focused on "the necessities of construction," could be understood as real historical knowledge, and for this reason, Burges remained in Glenn's eyes "a tourist following in [the] wake" of more serious scholars.²²

Similar expectations of modern historical method inform Crook's account of William Burges's activities in the Royal Archaeological Institute, of which he was a member for thirty years. The RAI included such prominent Victorian historians as E. A. Freeman and Robert Willis, but Burges's participation was ruled by an appetite for the

²¹ Virginia Glenn, "William Burges as a Medievalist", in Crook, ed., Strange Genius, 126.

²² Ibid.

unusual rather than a preoccupation with system. Between 1852 and 1867, Burges exhibited numerous items from his personal collection to fellow members of the RAI; for the year 1857 alone, these included

... a drawing of a fifteenth-century ivory tablet, engraved with figures of Morris dancers and Maid Marian, which he had found at Vercelli; a drawing of a false right arm, made of iron and preserved in the Museo Correr at Venice; sketches of Queen Theodolinda's jewels at Monza; and a cast from a German ivory mirror-case, representing the assault on the Castle of Love.²³

Crook dismissed these disparate items as “a rum list of curiosities”: for all Burges's gifts as a designer, the eclecticism of his research and the compulsive nature of his collecting betrayed an illegitimate relationship to the past.²⁴ By implication, Burges shared in the failings of Georgius Oldhousen, the archetypal Victorian Goth satirized by architect Robert Kerr in The Ambassador Extraordinary (1879), and whose love of the visual splendour of the Middle Ages was tainted by historical inaccuracy and sexual ambiguity.²⁵

A common feature of all these interpretations is that they identify decor as the locus of a radical disjunction: of ornament from supporting structure, historical dress from present time, or private fantasy from external reality. Moreover, their shared assumption is that—given this disjunction—present time and external reality were authentic, whereas Burges's lavish decors, historical dress and private fantasies were not. But from Burges's point of view, the opposite may in fact have been true. To conceive of

²³ Crook, William Burges, 77.

²⁴ Ibid, 78.

²⁵ Ibid, 34-38.

his albums of topographical drawings as a collection, or of his designs as more or less permanent displays of historical fragments, is to recognize that they participated in a shared but invisible world. As Krzysztof Pomian pointed out in relation to Baroque cabinets of curiosities, this invisible world is always conceived by the collector, more or less unconsciously, as more significant and more fecund than the realm of visible things.²⁶ What Burges valued in the artefacts culled during his travels was the authentic presence of the past; what he sought to secure, by identifying with Villard de Honnecourt, was a personal authenticity which his own age denied him.

1.2 Living the past

What kind of consciousness seeks out a connection to history that is at once materially intimate and largely fictitious? In this dissertation, I argue that the untimeliness of William Burges's work can be explained in part by his inheritance of a seemingly exhausted tradition of historical learning and representation—that of antiquarianism. From the outset, Burges's predicament was that of a gifted architectural topographer whose pictorial conventions had long since grown commonplace, and no longer seemed convincingly real. Instead, Burges used the inherited materials and methods of his trade for new purposes, or to create new genres. He subtly transformed earlier Romantic genres (the castellated manor, the collector's interior and the suburban villa) by investing them with structural forms of irony; and he transgressed established "genre styles" by appropriating forms drawn from ecclesiastical art and architecture for secular and private

²⁶ Krzysztof Pomian, Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux. Paris, Venise : XVI^e – XVIII^e siècle (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1987), 43.

purposes.²⁷ Within a culture obsessed with the appearance of reality, this relative freedom towards the past allowed Burges to play a compensatory role—that of the trickster, or the maker of fictions, pranks and puns.

Burges's work demonstrates that one possible response to the crisis of historicism in the latter half of the nineteenth century was not to strip away applied ornament and historical references but, on the contrary, to exalt their artifice. For him, architecture and its decor were not merely materially and structurally discontinuous. They can be construed as belonging to two distinct worlds, separate in both space—the one outside, the other inside—and in time—the one real, the other fictional. He conceived of the historicist interior as an environment so complete it would induce a form of disorientation: its spatial closure and the visual intensity of its furnishings allowed one to travel vicariously to distant times or places, and thus to experiment an alternative identity.

Freed from High Victorian narratives of development and progress, historical forms could be viewed, as the century drew to a close, as pure conventions—that is, as words with which one might freely play. As with earlier, Romantic forms of historical representation, this stance also made a theatre of the past, but stripped it of any rhetorical claim to reality. In this sense, one can speak of the historicist interior in the late nineteenth century as a form of “costume.” Even as it lost credibility as a truthful expression of epoch, rank, or moral character, the interior took on a new function of self-invention. More than any formal resemblance to the Aestheticism of the 1870s and 1880s,

²⁷ The notion of genre style is borrowed from Germann, Gothic Revival in Europe and Britain, 9-11, 52. It corresponds to a conception of architectural style as a fixed expressive code, rather than a by-product of historical change.

it is this underlying attitude to the past which links the interiors of William Burges to the dandyism of Baudelaire, Wilde, or Huysmans.

Can historical fictions such as Burges's interiors be considered useful, or even potentially liberating? The answer to this question may hinge on one's understanding of a mask. If it is mistaken for the unmediated expression of personal, national or historical character, then a mask may certainly be deceptive, or even delusional. But a mask can also be an expressive tool—a conscious and coherent reworking of shared conventions, as Richard Sennett argues,²⁸ or as Eric Hobsbawm has put it, a new and necessary emblem pilfered from the storehouse of the past.²⁹

That fictions and life might indeed be inextricably interwoven was forcefully argued by Friedrich Nietzsche in his essay “On the Use and Liability of History for Life” (1874). Here, Nietzsche claimed that his contemporaries' cult of historical process had made them equally incapable of assimilating the past or of being in the present.³⁰ For this reason, the modern individual had no choice but to “leave [his] old habits and [his] first nature behind”—or in other words, to regenerate culture from inside out, by giving form to his immediate experience.³¹ Nietzsche's intent, however, was not to condemn history

²⁸ Richard Sennett, The Fall of Public Man (New York, London: W. W. Norton, 1992), 33-38.

²⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914,” in The Invention of Tradition, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 263-307.

³⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Utility and Liability of History for Life,” in Unfashionable Observations, translation and afterword by Richard T. Gray (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 115-116.

³¹ *Ibid*, 107-108.

as such, but to redefine it as an “impure” science, subordinated to human needs rather than to an abstract credo of objectivity.³² One of the fundamental claims that human beings made on the past, he noted, was the impulse to “preserv[e] and venerat[e]” its material remains.³³

As Nietzsche characterized him, the éternel antiquaire is less an owner or collector of objects than a man himself possessed, by “small, limited, decaying, antiquated things...” This narrow field of vision renders the antiquary incapable of accurately gauging the value or proportion of things, but it also endows him with unique gifts. Inspired by “loyalty and love” towards the past, the antiquary has the ability to dwell imaginatively within ancient artefacts:

The history of his city becomes his own history; he understands its walls, its towered gate, its ordinances, and its popular festivals as an illustrated diary of his youth ... ‘It was possible to live here,’ he says to himself, ‘because it is possible to live here and will in the future be possible to live here, for we are tough and cannot be broken overnight.’ With this ‘we’ he ... senses himself to be the spirit of his house, his lineage, and his city.³⁴

Thus, in Nietzsche’s view, while the meanings attributed to such artefacts by the antiquary might not be objectively true, his relation to the past is nonetheless authentic, because it is a creative expression of life.

Embodied in albums of drawings and photographs, in pieces of gem-studded silverware and painted furniture, and finally, near the end of his life, in the more substantial form of a house, history likewise provided Burges with the means by which he

³² Ibid,” 95.

³³ Ibid, 96.

³⁴ Ibid, 103.

could exist within the present. It compensated for the lack of a natural “tongue,” commensurate with his own age, which Burges believed should have been passed on to him by his forefathers; it offered consolation for the massive, polychrome, and sacramental monuments that he dreamed of for London, but was never able to build; and it provided shelter for a sexual identity deeply at odds with the expectations of his own society. In L’invention du XIX^e siècle, Yves Vadé argues that the nineteenth century viewed and represented itself as a hollow age—one distended between an irretrievable, pre-revolutionary past and a more authentic, but always anticipated, future.³⁵ To live in an historicist costume, and simultaneously to expose its artifice, was a way of giving legible form to this tension; it was, paradoxically, a way of being modern.

The manner in which I have formulated this project owes a great deal to the writings of art historian Stephen Bann. Bann’s studies of historical representations across a wide range of nineteenth-century media provided me with the insight that there was no single “nineteenth-century view” of history. There was clearly a dominant discourse, formulated by historians for whom realist narrative constituted the only credible way to recreate the past. But it coexisted with more personal configurations, through which one might “live” or “stage” the past.³⁶ Not only is the past woven into contemporary life in many different ways, Bann has argued, but these attitudes are often “combined in the

³⁵ Yves Vadé, “Formes du temps: introduction aux chronotypes,” in L’invention du XIX^e siècle, ed. Alain Corbin (Paris: Klincksieck/Presses de la Sorbonne nouvelle, 1999), 195–205.

³⁶ Stephen Bann, Romanticism and the Rise of History, Studies in Intellectual and Cultural History (New York, Don Mills: Twayne Publishers / Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1995).

experience of a single individual.”³⁷ Indeed, in the nineteenth century, their careful “overlapping and interfusing” gave historical representation unprecedented rhetorical strength. However, in Bann’s view, the antiquarian element in this mix has since been largely occulted.³⁸ Much of his work can therefore be read as an attempt to recover attitudes that “stood somewhat askew” to a normative conception of history.³⁹

The historical fragment holds particular significance for Bann because it challenges the primacy of sight and rational discourse as means to access the past. In his view, antiquarianism can be understood as an acute sensibility to the texture, smell and taste of history—its “mouldy air” and “rare picking...as in a Stilton cheese...”⁴⁰ More fundamentally, Bann’s belief that all encounters with history are ultimately personal in nature has lent new relevance to the study of what is most idiosyncratic and biographical in the work of art. As Richard Shiff has pointed out, Bann’s attention to the materiality of artefacts—their “tactile thickness, this excess of dense matter”—betrays a deeper interest in their creators’ “identities and personalities.”⁴¹ This point of view dovetails with my own sense that Burges’s interiors constitute the visible trace of his quest for identity.

³⁷ Stephen Bann, “Clio in Part: On Antiquarianism and the Historical Fragment,” Perspecta 23 (1986), 26.

³⁸ Ibid, 36. Bann makes a similar argument in his preface to Producing the Past: Aspects of Antiquarian Culture and Practice, 1700–1850, eds. Martin Myrone and Lucy Peltz (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1999), xx.

³⁹ Bann, “Clio in Part,” 32.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 34–35.

⁴¹ Richard Shiff, “Something Is Happening,” Art History 28 (2005), 756.

Bann's essays on the configuration of the past in nineteenth-century works of fiction also suggested to me the idea that Burges's works might be situated within a typological series of imagined "past places," crafted by writers as well as by architects.⁴² His analysis of The Ingoldsby Legends, by Richard Harris Barham (1788-1845), proved particularly relevant to my study of Burges's interiors: firstly, because the book were written under an assumed alias (that of Thomas Ingoldsby), and secondly, because it falsely purported to be a collection of genuine stories about a genuine place (the manor of Ingoldsby in Kent). In Bann's view, it would have been obvious to anyone familiar with the novels of Walter Scott that both Ingoldsby and his manor were fictional creations.⁴³ Nonetheless, Thomas Ingoldsby and Richard Barham were closely enough related that the fictional author and his fictional manor could be conceived as overlays, at once masking and revealing the actual person and place:

... Barham ... offset the threatened loss [of his family seat Tappington] with a new, but totally fictional, construction. His poetic strategy was to build, upon the very modest foundations of the Kentish manor-house which he hardly ever occupied, the legendary house of Ingoldsby with its ancestral crusading connections, its comic spectres, and its skeletons in the cupboard. To quote Barham's son and biographer once again: "the description of the mansion therein given is rather of what it might, could, would, or should be, than of what it actually and truly is ..."⁴⁴

⁴² See Stephen Bann, The Clothing of Clio: a Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁴³ Ibid, 119.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 116.

One area in which I have felt the need to depart from Bann's intellectual framework concerns the role that fiction can play in works of architecture. The notion that reality and fiction may overlap in one and the same place, as at Tappington / Ingoldsby, offers a useful clue to the role of decor in Burges's designs. But Bann has also written of The Ingoldsby Legends: "The Manor which we discover exists, and can only exist, in the form of a book."⁴⁵ By this definition, fiction is distinguished from reality by the absence of any physical interaction between the two: they do not touch. In practical terms, however, the only definite boundary between fiction and reality lies in the fact that events occur in reality and do so metaphorically, or speculatively, in fiction. As Thomas Pavel argues, even at the most basic level—that of a child's game of mud pies—fiction integrates certain elements of the physical world. A fiction, then, can be conceived as an analogical world, made up of elements both imaginary and materially real.⁴⁶

The implication of this, for my purpose, is that there exist different possible levels of engagement with a built work of architecture. The experience of walking the halls of a physical building is a familiar one; but how does one engage with a building which claims to be fictional? To engage with any fiction, philosopher Kendall Walton has argued, is to engage in a process of becoming fictional oneself. Fiction demands participation: one does not "[peer] down on fictional worlds" from above but imaginatively act in them, and any spectator who responds emotionally to a fiction actively "impersonates himself" on the stage of his mind.⁴⁷ Burges's own interiors in

⁴⁵ Ibid, 117.

⁴⁶ Thomas Pavel, Fictional Worlds (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 1986), 54-57.

⁴⁷ Kendall L. Walton, "Fearing Fictions," The Journal of Philosophy 75 (1978), 13, 23-24.

Buckingham Street and Tower House were likewise conceived as stages, on which he could impersonate himself in a less constricting and perhaps better-suited role.

1.3 Oneself as another

Identification with a character other than oneself, or with an age other than one's own, is not a given but a process playing out at different levels over time. Therefore, the main body of the dissertation is conceived in chronological terms, as a sequence of thresholds leading William Burges from archaeology to self-invention, and from material constraints ever deeper into fiction. Each chapter is conceptually anchored by a key moment in the development of the architect's persona, and each focuses on a specific locus, virtual or real, through which Burges progressively developed his sense of self between the early 1850s and the late 1870s.

Discussed in chapter 1, the first of these imaginative spaces consists of a series of albums of topographical drawings that Burges began to assemble in 1858, shortly after establishing an architectural practice of his own. Burges's topographical albums have often been used as a source to understand and interpret his later designs, but they have never been envisaged as a meaningful work in their own right. My own intuition is that the albums provide insight into Burges's conflicting attitudes towards the antiquarian tradition in which he was trained. Moreover, despite the sometimes haphazard nature of their contents, I believe the albums can be viewed as a kind of book—an early figuration of practice, in which Burges sought to establish a productive link between medieval archaeology and the making of architecture.

This first chapter casts a backward look over four decades of architectural representation, from the late 1820s to the late 1850s. My objective here is to illustrate

how changing standards of accuracy and truth in representation progressively undermined the antiquarian tradition of the specimen, thus challenging Burges's self-understanding as a medievalist. I examine how Burges's albums register this challenge, as their contents shift from pictorial representations of medieval buildings and objects to haptic explorations of their material fabric. A crucial issue addressed in this chapter is that of publication: alone among the architects of his generation, Burges failed to publish his architectural drawings until relatively late in life. This acte manqué, I argue, reflects a deeper anxiety as to the validity of his early training; it also initiates a project to rebuild, at second hand, a personal language of form.

Discussed in chapter 2, another equally virtual space in which one can trace Burges's identification with the medieval world is the small, manuscript album of drawings known as the "Vellum Sketchbook." Begun by Burges in 1860, and progressively expanded over close to ten years, the Vellum Sketchbook differs from his earlier topographical albums in that it offers less a recording of the past than a graphic re-enactment of it. In its pages, Burges undertook to relearn to draw from first things—taking on not only the archaic techniques of a medieval draftsman, but his fresh and marvelling outlook on the world around him. Thus, what takes place here for the first time is the construction by Burges of a totally self-contained realm of fantasy. The drawing ceases to function as an authentic record; instead it becomes a fiction—a vehicle for illegitimate ornamental or sexual fantasies, and a means to relocate real works to imaginary settings.

The central idea around which this second chapter is organized is that of style—understood as an inward process of genesis and growth, or on the contrary as an external and artificial graft. In particular, I examine how the myth of the Gothic architect as

spontaneous innovator emerged in France during the 1840s and 1850s. I then contrast this with Burges's own more distanced emulation of the figure of the medieval craftsman. Burges's theatrically medieval persona has often been compared to the technical archaisms of the early Pre-Raphaelites; here, however, I seek to relate it instead to his informal contacts with the circle of artists grouped around Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and their gradual break with Ruskin's equation of formal beauty and moral truth.

The dissertation's closing chapters focus on built works: the two dwellings that William Burges crafted for himself in London during the 1860s and 1870s. Discussed in chapter 3, the first of these—an office and lodgings at 15 Buckingham Street, near the Strand, that Burges occupied for close to twenty years—was less a coherent architectural design than the result of a decade-long accumulation of decorative objects, playing out essentially between 1858 and 1871. A prominent feature of these rooms was the painted furniture and sacramental silverware Burges designed for his own use, and which he exhibited in part at the Medieval Court of 1862. Fitted into an existing seventeenth-century house, the painted decors in Buckingham Street are significant as the first occasion on which Burges staged himself physically against the background of a past world: the collection of things with which he surrounded himself were largely nineteenth-century creations, yet they conjured up a fictional world in which medieval history was made materially inhabitable.

While the furnishings inside Buckingham Street were undeniably dream objects, one of my concerns in this chapter has been to show how this dream related to a wider Victorian experience of the ambiguous and unstable nature of material goods. I begin by examining some of the critical terms employed by the Victorians to convey their impression of matter having become at once fantastic and debased: the commodity, the

fetish, and the grotesque. I then discuss the impact of the industrial exhibitions on Burges's production of painted furniture, and how this grotesque fusion of art and commodity was envisioned by both him and the circle of artists around William Morris as a means to give expression and material shelter to personal mythologies, either political or sexual.

Lastly, chapter 4 deals with the genesis of Tower House, the home Burges designed and had built for himself late in life, between 1875 and 1878, in the artistic West London suburb of Holland Park. In comparison to the freestanding objects and fragmentary decors in Buckingham Street, the building of Tower House marked a final formalization of the interior as a sheltering and enveloping abode. What unfolded within its plain, unadorned brick walls was a system of spatial thresholds, thanks to which Burges severed his painted decors ever more ruthlessly from their supporting material shell, as well as from the city at the house's door.

This concluding chapter envisages Tower House as part of the landscape of painters' houses and artistic interiors that began to emerge in London during the late 1860s and 1870s. In comparison to E.W. Godwin's or James McNeill Whistler's experiments with abstract colour harmonies, the narrative decors inside Tower House can seem somewhat archaic. However, I argue that Tower House engaged with the modern world in a way its contemporaries did not. Unlike Whistler's famous Peacock Room, Tower House was mediated from the outset by photography. Moreover, despite its claim to being the home of an artist, it was in fact filled to the rafters with things: cups, teapots, bookcases, dressing tables, and wardrobes. Tower House encompassed a realm of the banal, and in this respect, it is connected to the oneiric universe of Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*.

One of the difficulties in discussing Burges's domestic interiors is the fragmentary nature of the remaining evidence. Unlike Burges's lodgings in the Strand (long since demolished), Tower House survives structurally complete: it is, however, in private hands and inaccessible to the public. In addition, though Burges progressively filled the house during the late 1870s with his existing collection of decorative objects, these have since been dispersed. My discussion of these two works relies therefore on a number of indirect sources, the most important of which are a series of photographs taken at Buckingham Street and compiled by Burges into an album, and the photographic monograph on Tower House published shortly after his death. While there is necessarily a loss in viewing a material work in the mediated form of the photograph, I would argue that it was largely through this medium that Burges himself envisioned the project of a fictional interior.

CHAPTER ONE

AMONG ANTIQUARIES: ACCURACY, AUTHENTICITY
AND THE TOPOGRAPHICAL DRAWING

2.1 Introduction

The private architectural library, William Burges claimed in a lecture of 1865 before a group of students preparing for the Architectural Association's professional examination, would soon be a thing of the past. Treatises and lavish illustrated portfolios were no longer useful, and would be replaced by new means for preserving and transmitting architectural knowledge:

There used to be a time when Architectural literature [sic] was very much more read than it is at the present day ie Architects used to have libraries filled with expensive Architectural books & prints... Now all this is changing and has changed ... Instead of this we have at least 3 well conducted architectural periodicals which give us all the news of the day ... Another great reason for the disuse of architectural libraries is the existence [sic] of a new sort of book which supersedes the others—viz the sketchbook ...¹

The significance of the architectural periodical as an innovative medium in the nineteenth century has been well documented, but the architectural sketchbook is another matter. Despite Burges's claim, the latter was not new at all. On the contrary, the architect's sketchbook was bound to a long tradition of speculative, constructive, and topographical notation. Since the Renaissance, architects and travellers to Italy, Greece and beyond had

¹ William Burges, "History and Literature, Early Middle Ages 6th Century to 12th Century, Voluntary Architectural Examination Lectures, 1865," autograph manuscript, RIBA archives, London.

been studying the remains of classical antiquity they found there and transcribing their discoveries on paper. In early nineteenth-century England and France, moreover, this practice was extended to scouring the countryside with notebook in hand, in order to document little-known medieval buildings. In what sense, then, did Burges understand the sketchbook's "newness"?

At the time he spoke these words, Burges was thirty-eight years old and an established architect in London. He had already won three major architectural competitions and had recently been received as a fellow into the Institute of British Architects. But in order to understand the claim he made for the sketchbook, it is necessary to examine the context in which William Burges began his career: firstly, the tradition of topographical drawing—particularly in its published form—and the ways in which it was reshaped in the first half of the century; secondly, Burges's training as an architect and his own graphic practice in the late 1840s and early 1850s.

As scholars such as Edward Kaufman and Susan Crane have demonstrated, a classic itinerary of the nineteenth century was the appropriation and reconfiguration of the private collection within public institutions and their narratives of national history.² My central argument in this chapter is that the centrality William Burges gave to the fluid medium of the album or scrapbook—the locus of an architect's most intimate and idiosyncratic drawings—ran counter to this general trend. Though he publicly sought to frame his architectural practice in terms of modernity, distancing himself from the

² See Edward N. Kaufman, "A History of the Architectural Museum, from Napoleon through Henry Ford," in Fragments of Chicago's Past: The Collection of Architectural Fragments at the Art Institute of Chicago, ed. Pauline Saliga (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1990), 16-51; Crane, "Story, history and the passionate collector," 187-203.

tradition of the topographical artist and his collections of specimens, his drawings were a means to reclaim and renew that selfsame tradition. Rather than a contribution to a universal history of architecture, Burges's albums were primarily an exercise in self-fashioning, providing the initial kernel around which his later domestic environments took shape.

2.2 A tradition of place

Travel, according to Edward Kaufman, came to be recognized in the nineteenth century as a legitimate and important source of architectural knowledge.³ The roots of this practice lay in the middle of the previous century: between 1750 and 1830, British architectural scholars adopted the same model of study as geologists, botanists, or ethnographers, organizing expeditions to Greece, Syria, or Normandy, and publishing their research in the form of illustrated travel accounts. Kaufman further argues that the knowledge contained in these works was essentially topographical in nature, rather than historical: they related an experience of place, their structure was that of an itinerary, and their claim to authority lay in the demonstrable fact of the author's having been there.⁴

Travel literature of this kind was associated with aristocratic models of education and culture: though architects or painters were necessary adjuncts to the expedition, the patron (usually a learned society or wealthy amateur) often claimed final authorship of

³ Edward Kaufman, "Architecture and Travel in the Age of British Eclecticism," in Architecture and its Image: Four Centuries of Architectural Representation: Works from the Collection of the Canadian Centre for Architecture, eds. Edward Kaufman and Eve Blau,, exhibition catalogue (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1989), 59-85.

⁴ Ibid, 60-61, 64.

the work and conceptual ownership of the artefacts recorded within it. The carefully measured figures were conceived as “specimens.” By analogy to the botanical or geological sample, the architectural specimen consisted of a material fragment culled from, and metonymically standing for, a larger whole: a building, an architectural type, or an historical style. In this sense, architectural specimens served as “examples” to be reproduced elsewhere, and their final embodiment took the form of the private architectural museum—an eclectic montage of objects, architectural details or entire buildings.⁵

2.2.1 An unstable genre

Kaufman’s account is useful in order to understand how the sketchbook, as a personal record of things seen, relates to a wider genre of travel literature. However, it implies a unity and stability to the genre of travel literature that it did not necessarily possess, especially in the nineteenth century. Firstly, travel of this kind was not solely about discovering distant and exotic locales. As the preferred destinations of Greece, Syria and Normandy suggest, it was conceived instead as a privileged access to the past: one travelled to another time as well as to another country. Engraved by John Wood in 1753, the frontispiece to Robert Wood and James Dawkins’s account of their discovery of Palmyra is particularly explicit in this respect.⁶ The two Englishmen are portrayed catching their first glimpse of the long-lost city’s gates. Distance in space—and thus the inherent difficulty of the expedition—is underlined by the foreign dress of the explorers’

⁵ Ibid, 70-73, 80.

⁶ The Ruins of Palmyra, otherwise Tedmor, in the Desert (London : [Robert Wood], MDCCLIII [1753]). The work’s frontispiece is reproduced in Kaufman and Blau, Architecture and its Image.

Moorish retinue and the surrounding exotic vegetation. But the explorers themselves undergo a displacement of another kind: draped in what resembles a toga, rather than a burnoose, Dawkins and Wood are in fact imagining themselves as Roman citizens, about to set foot into one of that Empire's remotest outposts.

Secondly, cheaper printing processes (namely the introduction of steel plates and lithography) opened the production of illustrated topographies to a new class of entrepreneurs without aristocratic or learned connections: publishers, artists, and architects. These tensions can be clearly seen in the most disciplined and systematic account of Norman architecture to be published in England in the 1820s: John Britton's Specimens of the Architectural Antiquities of Normandy (1828).⁷ By the time Britton undertook this project, he was already a well-known topographical artist. He had started out in the business as a hired travelling draftsman, on a project to document the antiquities of England and Wales county by county; but he eventually became a commercially successful publisher in his own right, issuing a celebrated series of illustrated descriptions of the cathedrals of England. Unusually, in the case of the album on Normandy, Britton did not travel to France himself: instead he acted as the work's editor and scholarly commentator, overseeing the project at a distance, while Auguste Charles Pugin took on the dual role of draftsman and head of the survey team. (At least six other artists or architects were also involved, including Benjamin Ferrey and John Nash).

⁷ John Britton, ed., Specimens of the Architectural Antiquities of Normandy, notices by John Britton, drawings by Augustus Pugin, engravings by John and Henry Le Keux (London: J. Britton, 1828). As the work's editor and author of its essays, Britton—not Augustus Pugin—is usually credited with its primary authorship. However, upon first publication in 1828, the plates and essays were issued separately.

The particularity of Britton's project was that it submitted monuments of different ages and different localities to a standardized method of representation. Each building was illustrated first by general views: typically a perspective of the west front, followed by an interior view of the nave looking toward the choir (**figs. 1, 2**). These were followed by the cross-section of a typical bay in the nave, along with its interior and exterior elevations, and then by plans and profiles of capitals and mouldings. The idea underlying this method was that of comparative analysis: individual buildings were put forward as variations on a type, each one illustrating a particular phase in the transition from Romanesque to Gothic. Consistency of scale resolved each monument's structural fabric and sculpted surface into a lucid and seemingly continuous whole. The use of a similar viewpoint in all the perspectives projected the reader into a single, ideal church, which changed before his very eyes—the nave growing ever higher, and its vaulting and vertical divisions increasingly complex.

The primary purpose of Britton's album nonetheless remained that of a pattern book. Any incipient notion of stylistic development was strictly bracketed within fixed geographic boundaries—the architecture portrayed here was the product of a specific province—and fixed temporal terms—the beginning and end of the Middle Ages. Furthermore, even though the album suggested an overall scheme of stylistic and historical change, the individual buildings it illustrated were conceived as works without an author or a history of their own: they belonged instead to separate and successive species, which one could distinguish on the basis of their visible formal traits.⁸ What the

⁸ This method was no doubt borrowed from Thomas Rickman, An Attempt to Discriminate the Styles of English Architecture, From the Conquest to the Reformation (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees,

album portrayed, then, was a succession of events that remained free of causes or circumstances;⁹ this, in turn, made it possible to reproduce them.

2.2.2 Sketchbook, album and sourcebook

For all its seeming transparency, Britton's Normandy was actually an overlay of two distinct undertakings: one of these was the body of sketches amassed in situ by the elder Pugin and his assistants; the other—likely overseen by Britton—was the process of selecting, simplifying, and coordinating the sketches into a coherent narrative. Thus, in the six volumes of preliminary studies assembled by A.C. Pugin, the pictorial views that featured so prominently in the published work were overwhelmed by an enormous quantity of large-scale, measured and orthographic drawings; indeed, detail was so lavishly recorded that the building's tooled surface seems often to have become the sole

Orme, and Brown, [1817]), a work based on an empirical comparison of close to five hundred medieval churches. Rickman combined these observations into a descriptive system, according to which medieval architecture was divided into successive periods, and each period characterized by the features of certain key components. If architecture could be represented as a chart, it was because Rickman viewed style as an absolute category, existing independently of any individual work. The churches he referred to were specific “examples” from which one might learn; but the true nature of a style was better illustrated by “compositions” bringing together parts taken from different churches and reproduced at different scales.

⁹ I borrow the notion of a history without causes from Jean Nayrolles's analysis of Arcisse de Caumont's archaeology as positive science. Theorized in Caumont's Cours d'antiquités monumentales (6 vols., 1830-41), the analogy between architecture and natural history made it possible to rely solely on the observation and comparison of visible facts. The object of this new science was to capture the evolution of medieval architecture over time, as one style yielded to another. See Jean Nayrolles, “Sciences naturelles et archéologie médiévale au XIX^e siècle,” in L'architecture, les sciences et la culture au XIX^e siècle, introduction by François Loyer (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2001), 32-33.

focus of his vision. Despite their totalizing nature, A.C. Pugin's measured sketches were not meant to replace earlier Romantic, atmospheric representations of medieval antiquities. On the contrary, they served to make such drawings fuller, more complete, and seemingly more real.¹⁰

A.C. Pugin encapsulated this programme in the frontispiece he designed for the first volume of Britton's Normandy: ostensibly, it showed a partial elevation of the church of Grande Maladrerie, but it was in fact a composite view of various capitals, stringcourses, and arch mouldings, assembled to scale and framing a fictional view of Caen in the Middle Ages (**fig. 3**). The architectural antiquity, the frontispiece implied, might exist simultaneously in two distinct times and places: as a document which survived in the present, and—in a collector's house, a painting, or the pages of a book—as an imaginative re-living of the past. From A.C. Pugin's point of view, both incarnations were equally authentic; what acted as a rhetorical “shifter” between their distinct locales and time-scales was the dimensionally accurate detail. If Britton's album can at all be conceived as a work of history, then it is because of its imaginative extension in Pugin's volumes of sketches. Here, more than in the published work, the detail functions as a threshold onto a vanished world.

Britton and Pugin's collaboration on Normandy demonstrates that, though there existed a material link between the draftsman's sketchbook and the topographical

¹⁰ Two earlier works upon which Britton and Pugin's Normandy may be seen as building, and seeking to surpass, are the first instalments of Isidore Taylor's Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France—Normandie (1820) and Ancienne Normandie (1825)—and John Sell Cotman's Architectural Antiquities of Normandy (1822).

publication, the two were not identical.¹¹ Until the first decades of the nineteenth century, the sketchbook remained largely submerged within the ensuing publication; if it circulated at all, then it did so in a different manner, from person to person. But the demand for ever more accurate and complete historical representations—in painting, in novels, and on the stage—provided the architectural draftsman with new outlets. During the 1820s, in parallel with his topographical investigations, A.C. Pugin also published several works of an entirely different nature: conceived as sourcebooks for architects and painters, these works comprised anthologies of architectural or decorative fragments, selected from his personal collection of in situ studies and presented with little or no letterpress.¹² Taken as a whole, such works no longer referred to any specific expedition or place: the specimen now stood only for itself.

Though the advent of the ornamental sourcebook at first allowed topographical drawings to come to press with greater immediacy, it ultimately undermined their claim to authority. This point is illustrated by the prolific work of Henry Shaw, an antiquary who, between 1836 and 1858, made a career of publishing specimens of medieval and Renaissance decorative art.¹³ Shaw seemed to follow in Pugin's footsteps, but in fact his

¹¹ The latter might contain not only field notes, studies and preliminary layouts, but also—as in Pugin's personal albums from Normandy—drawings made on other expeditions and for other reasons.

¹² Augustus Pugin, Specimens of Gothic Architecture (1821-3); Gothic Furniture (1827); Pugin's Gothic Ornaments (1828-31).

¹³ Henry Shaw, Specimens of Ancient Furniture (1836, with Samuel Rush Meyrick); Examples of Ornamental Metal Work (1836); Details of Elizabethan Architecture (1839); Alphabets, Numerals, and Devices of the Middle Ages (1845); The Decorative Arts Ecclesiastical and Civil of the Middle Ages

travels were limited to England, and the places he visited were not medieval monuments, but museums, cathedral treasuries and country houses. Shaw's works were widely diffused, but his authority was second-hand: each one of his plates listed the specimen's owner and location, because it was the fame of the collection—and not the draftsman's knowledge—that guaranteed its worth. Rather than a personal interpretation of the past, Shaw's specimens reflected a focus on the rare and the marvellous in private collections begun centuries before; in this sense, they were merely representations of representations.

While Shaw's plates represented a certain debasement of the topographical tradition, they nonetheless imbued the specimen with a quite novel power of mystification. Reversing the usual relationship between draftsman and patron, Shaw showed medieval antiquities in their contemporary state, as they might be found by any adventurous reader. What he did not do was indicate how these different monuments were related to one another, or why they were significant. This appears most clearly in his rendering of a medieval reliquary crafted in the shape of a jewelled foot (**fig. 4**).

Abstracted from the building and the rituals to which it once belonged, and set against a blank background like an object on a shelf, the reliquary obstinately eludes classification: it remains a separate and irreducible incident. Despite Shaw's concern for accuracy of representation (the reliquary is reproduced in finely drawn detail), the plate gives no indication of how the knowledge it embodies might be acted upon or put to use. Freed of any fixed meanings or associations, Shaw's reliquary is akin to a dream-object: a thing that sustains invention, in the form of a story, an interior or a building.

(1851); Dresses and Decorations of the Middle Ages (1858); Specimens of Tile Pavements (1858), Encyclopaedia of Ornament (1858).

In the Renaissance tradition, the architectural sketchbook was acknowledged as a distinct form of work: neither a treatise nor a record of place, it was meant for the architect's personal use and embodied his speculations and practical experience.¹⁴ In the second half of the eighteenth century, however, through its association with archaeological expeditions, the architectural sketchbook took on a narrower purpose: conceived now as a record of travel, it became a medium for recording evidence of distant places and ancient history. The travel sketchbook was the trace of an exclusive achievement, carried out under aristocratic or learned patronage, and its ultimate aim lay in publication, in the expensive format of the illustrated topographical album. Shaw's drawings, however, suggest that—by 1850—this particular understanding of the sketchbook was being—once again—subverted and made it into something new. Even as they lost their aura of rarity, the topographer's sketches—his idiosyncratic notations of things and places seen—now began to flourish as an autonomous genre.

2.2.3 Specimen and home

The kind of architecture in which the specimen was embodied is illustrated by the practice of Edward Blore (1787-1879), whose London office William Burges joined in 1844, at the age of seventeen, and where he remained until Blore's retirement in 1849. Between 1813 and 1826, Blore built a reputation for medieval scholarship by providing topographical illustrations to John Britton's cathedral monographs and Walter Scott's The Provincial Antiquities and Picturesque Scenery of Scotland; he also published a volume of antiquities of his own, which straddled the genres of local, architectural, and dynastic

¹⁴ Thus, sketchbooks were crucially important for an architect such as Francesco di Giorgio Martini.

chronicle.¹⁵ Elected a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1823, Blore gained access to a fluid network of scholars, collectors, and aristocratic patrons. This allowed him to parlay his experience as a topographer into a prolific architectural practice, erecting Commissioner's churches in and around London and Birmingham, restoring the medieval cathedrals of Peterborough, Glasgow and Westminster Abbey (of which he was surveyor from 1827 to 1849), respectively adding to and rebuilding Buckingham Palace and Lambeth Palace, and designing revivalist country houses across England, Scotland and Wales.

The result of the Church Building Act of 1818 (which provided public money for hundreds of new Anglican churches to serve central and northern England's rapidly expanding urban parishes), Commissioners' churches are often viewed as marking one of the low points of nineteenth-century British architecture.¹⁶ They were generally conceived as large and inexpensive auditoria, making use on the inside of modern technologies such as cast iron columns, and distinguished from one another on the outside by a thin ornamental veneer. Yet in a celebrated drawing executed for him by J.M. Gandy, John Soane affirmed that it was indeed possible to derive highly individual designs from such formulaic requirements. In the drawing's foreground, the typical floor-plan of a modern church is juxtaposed with the scattered and fragmentary remains of Classical and medieval antiquity. Arising from this disorderly field, the drawing's middle ground and background contain a dramatic, cloud-capped landscape filled with church

¹⁵ M.H. Port, "Edward Blore," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, vol. 6 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): 283-287. Blore's volume of antiquities was entitled Monumental Remains of Noble and Eminent Persons Comprising the Sepulchral Antiquities of Great Britain (1826).

¹⁶ See for instance Lewis, The Gothic Revival, 49-50.

after church—all identical in general outline, yet fantastically varied in their use of Romanesque, Gothic, Baroque or Neo-Classical ornament. Soane's implication was that, through appearance alone, such buildings could be made to speak in a different voice, each one of them calling forth distinct associations and different moods in the viewer's mind.

An analogous process underwrote Blore's domestic architectural practice. Like Gandy's representation of Soane's churches, Blore's numerous drawings of country houses seem to be the iteration of a single building, set in an unchanging picturesque landscape, and observed from a fixed point of view; all that differs is the placement of towers, chimney-stacks and battlements, and the use of Norman, Elizabethan, Jacobean, or Scottish Baronial details.¹⁷ This eclectic use of style was communicative in intent, affirming all at once the owners' ancestry, upbringing and proprietary claim on the land: thus, the palace Blore designed for a Russian prince at Alupka in the Crimea comprised two distinct fronts—the one Jacobean, to recall the prince's English education, the other “Saracenic,” to naturalize the house within its cliff-top setting overlooking the Black Sea.¹⁸ It was also largely unthreatening, querying neither the occupants' sense of identity nor the nature of their relationships to the past. On the contrary, Blore's drawings systematically portrayed the inhabitants of his period houses in modern dress: they remain as fully contemporary as the passersby or the cows grazing outside, and the historical references incorporated into the building fabric are as exterior to them as the family portraits hanging on their walls (**fig. 5**).

¹⁷ RIBA Drawings collection, London.

¹⁸ Port, “Edward Blore,” 285.

The potentially disquieting quality of the specimen—its ability to simultaneously possess and be possessed by its owner—only came to expression in Blore’s two most famous country houses: Walter Scott’s home at Abbotsford (1812-32), and Samuel Rush Meyrick’s house-museum at Goodrich Court (1828-31). Significantly, both were designed for collectors. Carried out over twenty years, the building of Abbotsford entailed the progressive replacement of a farmhouse by the simulacrum of a much older and larger manor. What rooted the new house in history and the local landscape was the inclusion into its outer walls of stones and architectural fragments taken from actual medieval ruins: the abbey at nearby Melrose, the old church of Galashiels, and a tollbooth at Edinburgh. Inside the house, an analogous role was at first played by Scott’s collection of curiosities, which included such mementoes of national heroes as Rob Roy’s gun or a plaster cast of Robert the Bruce’s skull; from 1824 onwards, the interiors also came to include ancient fragments plundered from other buildings.

In contrast to Abbotsford, the programme underlying the construction of Goodrich Court was explicitly didactic. Meyrick’s aim here was to teach the public to “become confident judges” of historical representations, by presenting it with “a chronological series of armour [set in] a chronological series of finished apartments.”¹⁹ He mounted his collection of armour on wooden mannequins of soldiers and horses, staging it as a succession of tableaux vivants: a Mogul soldier paying homage to a raja; a reconstitution of a medieval joust; a parade of British horsemen, from the Middle Ages to the

¹⁹ Clive Wainwright, The Romantic Interior: the British Collector at Home, 1750-1850 (New Haven: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art / Yale University Press, 1989), 242-244, 249, 251.

Restoration; and lastly Charles I in his war-tent, surrounded by his weapons and standard bearer.²⁰

Both houses were conceived as theatrical performances, in which history was the principal actor. But they were also largely fictional exercises, the ultimate purpose of which was to shore up their owners' fragile sense of identity. When Scott was asked in 1831 to produce a catalogue of the curiosities at Abbotsford, he chose as its title "Reliquae Trotcosienses, or the Gabions of Jonathan Oldbuck," ironically attributing their ownership to one of his fictional characters. The house, he implied, was as fictional as any of his novels; it was not Scotland writ small, but a personal anchor to the past.²¹ The didactic and the personal likewise overlapped at Goodrich Court. The house overlooked the ruins of a medieval castle on the border of England and Wales, which Meyrick had sought in vain to acquire. In visual terms, the two buildings belonged to a single ancient site, and this sleight of hand allowed Meyrick to consolidate a dubious claim to descent from ancient Welsh nobility.²² As Stephen Bann has argued, houses such as these were built on metonymy.²³ The architect might design an expedient and superficially Gothic framework of plaster and ashlar, but the objects and associations that established a substantive connection to the past were chosen or even provided by the

²⁰ Ibid, 251-253.

²¹ Ibid, 162.

²² Ibid, 241, 248. The entrance hall to Goodrich Court and its adjacent staircase were lit by stained glass windows featuring coats of arms of the Meyrick family and a portrait of "Meuric ab Llewelyn, Esquire of the body to Henry VII."

²³ Bann, The Clothing of Clio, 100-101.

houses' owners. To this extent, it was the collector, and not the architect, who was the real author of the performance.

2.3 The recording of time

From the late eighteenth century onward, the underlying logic of topographical study—namely, that historical artefacts were reproducible, and could be integrated into idiosyncratic configurations—was increasingly challenged by an awareness of the depth of historical time.²⁴ Though the notion of “place” was not entirely cast aside, the archaeological paradigm of the travel album came to be redefined in new ways. One change was that the knowledge garnered in any single locus was no longer necessarily understood as complete in itself. Instead, it was viewed as partial evidence towards a universal history, or universal theory, of architecture. This placed topographical drawings in a new and subsidiary relationship to explanatory text. Another change was that the individual artefact came to be seen as the result of an historical process: it might have several successive authors, and thus reflect changing methods and intentions. Attempts to represent the passage of time altered the nature of architectural drawings in a fundamental way. Conceived by A.C. Pugin as a means to enhance pictorial representations of the past, lending them the appearance of the “real,” accuracy of measurement came to be defined

²⁴ In his discussion of travel literature, Kaufman places this hinge much later, in the 1840s. But the idea of using artefacts to constitute a history of art is already present many decades before, for instance in Séroux d'Agincourt's lengthy undertaking of an illustrated Histoire de l'art par les monumens (1810-23). My thanks to Dr. Alberto Pérez-Gómez for pointing this out to me.

Moreover, while Kaufman defines nineteenth-century historical consciousness as one of linear time, it should be noted that the century's understanding of its own place in time was more complex: schemas of continuous progress existed alongside other images of time, such as notions of crisis and rebirth.

in increasingly antithetical terms to “truth,” as an artificial fixing of what should be living, changeful, and individuated.

2.3.1 Drawing as stratigraphy

The architecture of any given place, Robert Willis remarked in 1835, could no longer be considered in isolation. Willis was a polymath: an ordained priest, a professor of natural philosophy at the University of Cambridge, an expert on mechanism, and a medievalist.²⁵ His first foray into architectural history dealt primarily with the Gothic architecture of Italy.²⁶ it was an unusual topic, because, at the time, English propagandists for the revival of Gothic focused nearly exclusively on English models. But this was precisely what whetted Willis’s interest—for if Gothic was to be studied at all, then such a study must “examine well every country into which it penetrated” before it could be considered complete.²⁷ In part, Willis’s work represented an argument for applying the empirical methods of physical science to the study of architecture: because no medieval Vitruvius had laid out the rules according to which Gothic architecture had been built, one could only deduce them by comparing a sufficient number of examples.²⁸ Thus, he

²⁵ See Robert Mark, “Robert Willis, Viollet-le-Duc and the Structural Approach to Gothic Architecture,” Architectura 7 (1977), 56-57, and Nikolaus Pevsner, Robert Willis (Northampton, MA: Smith College, 1970), 2.

²⁶ Robert Willis, Remarks on the Architecture of the Middle Ages, especially of Italy (Cambridge: J. and J. J. Deighton, 1835). This work is discussed in Mary McAuliffe, “Characteristic Features, Decorative Construction: Robert Willis’s Remarks,” Dimensions 13 (1999): 122-127, and Pevsner, Robert Willis, 10-14.

²⁷ Willis, Remarks on the Architecture of the Middle Ages, 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

envisioned his own study of Italian Gothic as part of a future “made out” history of architecture, which would be both diachronic, within individual countries, and comparative, across national borders.²⁹

Yet Willis also developed a surprisingly sophisticated argument about the nature of style. What interested him in Italian Gothic was the fact that, despite the presence of “pointed arches, pinnacles, buttresses, tracery and clustered columns, rib vaulting and lofty towers”, it remained so different in spirit and aspect from Northern Gothic: architectural style, it seemed, could not be reduced to a list of discrete features.³⁰ On the contrary, Willis believed that the Gothic architecture of Europe had been a synthetic and trans-national phenomenon—the product of eclectic sources at its outset and of successive imports in its later development.³¹ Insofar as it integrated elements of older traditions or local ways of building, a style could be at once introduced from abroad and original to a given place:

... so that at the same period of time, and in the same country, we should have buildings in progress, some in the old style, some in the new, and others in every possible gradation between them. These may be called *Imitation* specimens, to distinguish them from regular *Transitions*.³²

Imitation was typical of any revival, including that of Gothic in nineteenth-century England, and it threw “considerable ambiguity over the system of dating buildings from

²⁹ Ibid, 12-13.

³⁰ Ibid, 3.

³¹ Ibid, v, 6-7.

³² Ibid, 8-9.

their styles alone.”³³ This notion was crucial in terms of method, leading Willis to combine documentary and structural history in his later works,³⁴ and to take account of processes that were intrinsically cultural—invention, transmission and adaptation.

The implications of this for topographical drawing became obvious in a project Willis undertook a few years later, to document the cathedrals of England. The first monograph in this series portrayed Canterbury Cathedral as an architectural palimpsest inaccessible to the traveller’s untrained gaze. Not only was it shaped by cultural practices alien to the modern visitor (such as the cult of relics and tombs of the saints, or the spatial separation of clergy and laity), but its “plan and structure” had undergone major changes over time.³⁵ The cathedral was a locus of conflict and change—the result of distinct campaigns of building or repair, carried out by masters masons each seeking to give body to new formal and structural ideas. Therefore, where Britton and Pugin had represented the succession of styles by means of different buildings, Willis substituted comparative

³³ Ibid, 11.

³⁴ “... because the rapid strides which we are now making in architectural history, may probably weaken or correct many of my interpretations; and thus by separating the evidence from the opinions, the foundation of each will always be manifest and the correction rendered more easy, while the history, as a collection of evidence, will lose none of its value. My plan therefore has been, first to collect all the written evidence, and then by a close comparison of it with the building itself, to make the best identification of one with the other that I have been able.” Robert Willis, The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral (London: Longman and Co.; W. Pickering; and G. Bell, 1845), xii.

³⁵ Ibid, xi-xiv.

sections and elevations of the same building, now taken—in conceptual terms—at different times.³⁶

A more ruthless break with topographical conventions on Willis's part was to envision the cathedral's fabric as a geological formation: both individual components (such as the piers supporting the tower) and the cathedral as a whole were represented in plan as accretions of temporal strata, which were indicated simultaneously by means of different shadings (**fig. 6**).³⁷ Pictorial views only featured insofar as they illustrated an historical process, such as Gothic shafts plunging through the low arches and vaults of the nave's Norman crypt; even then, the drawings' import only became clear once one referred to the written commentary or diachronic maps. In the context of British medieval studies, Willis's graphic layering of time implied a new way of looking at ancient buildings.³⁸ It no longer sufficed to record their visible surfaces; one had instead to

³⁶ "To explain the changes which were made in the building by the works of William, I have drawn, from an accurate examination of it in its present state, a transverse section ... and three elevations of compartments ... each of these drawings is separated in the middle by a vertical line, on one side of which the compartment or section appears in its present state, and on the other in the state in which it existed in the state before the fire, so far as I have been able to develop it." Ibid, 74.

³⁷ "The Plan ... is intended to illustrate the changes that have taken place in the building from the period of Gervase to the present time. Various tints of shading are employed to distinguish the works of different periods. Thus Lanfranc's work is full black; vertical strokes are assigned to Ernulf; diagonal (sloping forward) to William of Sens; horizontal to English William. Subsequent works are dotted, and some uncertain parts are distinguished by a diagonal shading sloping backwards." Ibid, [128].

³⁸ Willis's method of graphic layering was prefigured by Carlo Fontana's much earlier historic topography of the Vatican, from Antiquity to modern days, in *Il Tempio Vaticano e sua origine* (1694). Nevertheless, it broke quite radically with earlier historical accounts of medieval architecture in Great

record the process that gave birth to them. What was lost here was the artefact's self-sufficiency as a witness to place: from now on, an artefact only became meaningful once it had been located in time.

2.3.2 Drawing as photography

The project of a universal history also provided a conceptual foundation for John Ruskin's The Stones of Venice, published in three volumes between 1851 and 1853. Though devoted to a single city, The Stones of Venice was no longer a topographical work in any meaningful sense: it was the fruit of travel, but of travel backwards in time; and it spoke of a place, but only as the embodiment of history.

To understand Venice, Ruskin argued, was to understand the anonymous forces that had shaped all of Western architecture. Wedged between the Alps and the Adriatic Sea, the city and its lagoon had been a crucible of primal creative forces:

Opposite in their character and mission, alike in their magnificence of energy, [the Lombard and the Arab] came from the North and from the South, the glacier torrent and the lava stream: they met and contended over the wreck of the Roman Empire; and the very centre of the struggle, the point of pause of both, the dead water of the opposite eddies, charged with embayed fragments of the Roman wreck, is VENICE.³⁹

Though Ruskin built on Willis's insight that medieval architecture had been synthetic in nature, he attributed to phenomena of change and assimilation an essential quality which was absent from Willis's historical works. As Ruskin's geological imagery implied, the

Britain, in which individual buildings tended to be proposed as embodiments of a fixed and particular moment in a chain of stylistic evolution.

³⁹ John Ruskin, The Stones of Venice, vol. 1 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1880), 17.

efforts of individual artists or patrons were to be understood here not as contingent events, but as manifestations of a living, collective mind.⁴⁰ To conceive of style in this way—as a power of generation rather than a set of fixed traits—implied a different way of reading the architectural illustration: not only did Ruskin expect his readers to relate his sketches of Venetian architecture to the accompanying narrative, he also entreated them to look beyond the built work’s outward form, to the vital or morbid impulses which had shaped it from within.

A further, fundamental way in which The Stones of Venice broke with the topographical literature of earlier decades was its author’s sense of alienation from the place that lay before his eyes. Modern Venice, Ruskin claimed, was similar to a fossil mineral, “formed by materials of one substance modelled on the perished crystals of another.”⁴¹ It was animated by a false life that continually intruded into one’s field of vision, impeding access to the city’s past. The difficulty was not merely (as it was for Willis at Canterbury) that earlier works had been dismantled or encased within later additions. Rather, the spirit which first caused Venice to be raised had vanished from its latter-day population of touts, tourists and Austrian soldiers. The city’s true nature could only be recovered through an act of visionary perception, by penetrating into the purposes of its original creators:

⁴⁰ “... the history of Venice might ... be written almost without reference to the construction of her Senate or the prerogatives of her Doge. It is the history of a people eminently at unity in itself, descendents of Roman race, long disciplined by adversity, and compelled by its position either to live nobly or to perish ...” Ibid, 5.

⁴¹ Ibid, v.

The remains of *their* Venice lie hidden behind the cumbrous masses which were the delight of the nation in its dotage; hidden in many a grass-grown court, and silent pathway, and lightless canal ... It must be our task to glean and gather them forth, and restore out of them some faint image of the lost city, more gorgeous a thousand-fold than that which now exists, yet ... built by iron hands and patient hearts, contending against the adversity of nature and the fury of man ...⁴²

Though Ruskin construed this undertaking in archaeological terms, as bringing to light an ancient artefact, it was actually layers of blindness, and not of soil, which needed to be removed.

To glimpse the past through an obscure present was not an imaginative feat, Ruskin insisted, but a heightened form of factuality. Accuracy of measurement (which he systematically disparaged as an artistic aim) was nonetheless an integral part of his archaeological method. Thus, the notion that Gothic architecture was intrinsically changeable he derived directly from a careful recording of St Mark's in Venice, and of Lombard churches in Northern Italy.⁴³ Here, precise measurements showed that medieval builders shaped arches and bays according to an empirical sense of proportionality, and not a mathematical system. Yet however useful as an analytical tool, the measured drawing was incapable of conveying the true character of a medieval work: such buildings had been conceived for a living and moving observer.⁴⁴

⁴² Ruskin, The Stones of Venice, vol. 2, 5.

⁴³ John Ruskin, The Seven Lamps of Architecture (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 1986), 149-159.

⁴⁴ "No person, looking at an architectural drawing of the richly foliated cusps and intervals of Or San Michele, would understand that all this sculpture was extraneous, was a mere added grace, and had nothing to do with the real anatomy of the work ..." Ibid, 91.

If architecture spoke directly to the eye, then perceiving it in all its fullness required that the observer divest himself of cultural prejudice and acquired learning, and make his awareness of the visible world a “broad, white, lucid field.”⁴⁵ Ruskin’s assimilation of the draftsman to a light-sensitive plate was far from accidental, for he had come to conceive of the daguerreotype as a model for topographical records.⁴⁶ Compared with the measured drawing, the daguerreotype captured a surfeit of reality—the patterns of light and shade produced by the building’s masses; the lines and hues of its stones; and the traces of its assembly, weathering, and decay. And unlike the pictorial view, it fixed the fleeting and fragmentary moments of perception that occurred in close proximity to a building, when “the spectator’s head is thrown back, and the angle of sight considerably elevated.”⁴⁷ The desire to emulate photography led Ruskin to experiment with reproductive technologies (the colour lithograph and the etching) that gave a greater sense of immediacy than the more usual woodcuts or engravings. However, it also triggered compromises and interruptions that left The Stones of Venice incomplete.

As Ruskin conceived the work in 1851, the octavo volumes containing the letterpress were to include only those illustrations that were necessary to an understanding of the text.⁴⁸ Yet a full restoration of medieval Venice required illustrations of another order: these were to be fragments of sculpted architecture drawn at full scale, and partial views of buildings seen at close quarters and from below, as their builders had meant

⁴⁵ Ruskin, The Stones of Venice, vol. 3, 37-39.

⁴⁶ John Ruskin, Examples of the Architecture of Venice (Orpington, Kent: George Allen: 1887), “Preface to the first edition (1851)”.

⁴⁷ Ibid, commentary to Plate 6.

⁴⁸ Ruskin, The Stones of Venice, vol. 1, viii-ix.

them to be seen (**fig. 7**). Because their function was to draw the reader into a seemingly unmediated encounter with the ancient city itself, these “irreducible plates” could not be fitted to the format of the book; instead, they would be issued serially, in groups of five and on imperial folio sheets.⁴⁹ Of the sixty plates initially planned, only fifteen were ever published. This failure may be due to the project’s high costs of production and its exclusive reliance on subscribers. But it also points to the formidable burden of truth that had been placed on the draftsman’s person, as well as on his representations. Conceived as an archaeological program, “servile veracity” demanded a record as detailed, complex and layered as the original work.

2.3.3 The drawing superseded

As the incomplete state in which Ruskin left The Stones of Venice attests, by mid-century the expectations of historical plenitude and photographic accuracy could no longer be realized within the limited space of the engraved plate. Instead, they gave rise to a new type of collection that was open to the public, governed as an institution, and devoted to educational purposes: the museum of casts. The earliest such collection in London was founded in 1852 on the initiative of George Gilbert Scott, who in 1849 replaced Blore as surveyor-general to Westminster Abbey. Known as the Architectural Museum (or Royal Architectural Museum after 1857), the institution was based in large part on a private collection of Medieval and Elizabethan casts, which the architect Lewis Nockalls Cottingham had gathered together after 1815 and displayed in his own house from 1825 to his death in 1847. Once integrated into the Architectural Museum,

⁴⁹ Ruskin, Examples of the Architecture of Venice, Prospectus of the first edition of The Stones of Venice.

Cottingham's collection was expanded both by the donation of other personal collections—among which Scott's casts of medieval carving from English churches and those made by Ruskin of the capitals in St Mark's and the Doge's Palace in Venice—and by an ongoing programme to acquire new models of medieval sculpture.⁵⁰

Along with the foundation of the Architectural Association in 1847, the creation of the Architectural Museum represented an attempt by leading British architects to organize into a cohesive profession. With its emphasis on Medieval sculpture and applied arts, the museum provided architects with practical exemplars in areas in which other public institutions (especially the British Museum) were largely uninterested.⁵¹ It was also conceived as a means to supplement the dearth of qualified craftsmen faced by Gothic Revival architects. The architect's working drawing, Scott argued, could give the craftsman only a faint idea of the kind of sculpture and ornament with which a modern Gothic building ought to be adorned; and while the architect might travel abroad, the craftsman was condemned to whatever resources lay at hand.⁵² Drawn from a wide selection of English, French, German and Italian churches, the casts in the museum provided a surrogate for travel, allowing the craftsman to study at home from lifelike replicas. From 1869 on, the potential reach of the collection was further expanded by a photographic survey carried out by Bedford Lemere and Co., the first British firm to specialize solely in architectural photography. From then on, one could visit the

⁵⁰ Peter Wylde, "The First Exhibition: The Architectural Association and the Royal Architectural Museum," Architectural Association Annual Review (1981): 8-14.

⁵¹ Kaufman, "The Architectural Museum," 29-30.

⁵² George Gilbert Scott, A Guide to the Royal Architectural Museum ([London]: s.n., [1876]), 2-3.

cathedrals of Europe entirely vicariously, by comparing photographs of the collection with the narratives of historical progression proposed in published guides to the museum.

In a radical break with earlier Romantic museums, such as Goodrich Court, the Architectural Museum's trustees made no attempt to contextualize the collection within a series of historicizing architectural settings. Instead, the museum's successive locations were conceived as purely functional containers of glass, iron and brick.⁵³ As Edward Kaufman has pointed out, the casts themselves constituted "[the Museum's] decor, its furnishings, its architecture."⁵⁴ From a distance, the small and densely-packed plaster casts covering every available surface resolved into an overwhelming vista of historical time; any distinction between different places of origin could only be made close at hand, by referring to the unobtrusive labels fixed to the walls. Despite its lack of architectural beauty, G. G. Scott argued in 1876, the Architectural Museum offered an historical panorama that was as instructive, in its own way, as that inside nearby Westminster Abbey.⁵⁵ Whereas the cathedral's fabric was shaped by interrupted works and abrupt changes of direction, the museum offered a spectacle of subtle but continuous change: here one grasped the gradations of style "whose progression flowed on in one almost unbroken and uniform course."⁵⁶

⁵³ The collection was first housed in a loft in Cannon Street, Westminster; from 1857 to 1869, on the upper floor of one of the South Kensington Museum's iron galleries; and finally in a top-lit, three-story gallery located behind the Westminster School of Art.

⁵⁴ Kaufman, "The Architectural Museum," 32.

⁵⁵ Scott, A Guide to the Royal Architectural Museum, 1-2.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 11.

2.4 A new kind of book

In his discussion of travel literature in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Edward Kaufman suggested that, far from being suppressed by historicism, the tradition of topographical study merely became layered beneath other epistemologies.⁵⁷ Freed from its association with aristocratic or scholarly patronage, the architect's sketchbook was one of the loci in which the topographical tradition could still be pursued in the 1850s and 1860s. However, familiarity with antiquities no longer promised the architect a sure means to surpass his elders or to stand out from his peers. Furthermore, it had become unclear in what sense the graphic record of an antiquity still constituted an authority for new designs. For architects coming of age at mid-century, the question to be addressed was not only in what form to publish, but how to establish a productive link between the practice of drawing and that of building.

2.4.1 The difficulty of publishing

The uncertainties surrounding the format, audience and purpose of an architect's sketchbook found expression in the publications of three major architects of the Gothic Revival in England: George Edmund Street, Richard Norman Shaw and William Eden Nesfield. All three architects took up Ruskin's challenge of looking beyond England for formal inspiration, and all three published the fruit of their travels within a relatively short lapse of time, between 1855 and 1862.

⁵⁷ Kaufman, "Architecture and Travel," 82-5.

The earliest and most coherent work in this series was a volume by Street, entitled Brick and Marble in the Middle Ages: Notes of a Tour in the North of Italy.⁵⁸ Despite the title's reference to a "tour," the book's editorial success hinged in fact on Street's lucid analysis of his prospective readers, and his decision to segregate the material which might be useful to an audience of professional architects from his more personal record of discovery. One of the products of Street's repeated journeys to Italy remained strictly private: this was an album of views, assembled from individual sketches and arranged according to the itinerary he followed during his travels in 1856 and 1857.⁵⁹ The drawings in the album are highly expressive, recording the movement of the draftsman's eye over richly worked surfaces and sculpted ornament, and the resulting effect is of the actual building nearly dissolved into a rapturous moment of perception. In Brick and Marble, however, Street attempted to rationalize the experience of his journey into abstract principles of composition. The studies of individual buildings laid out in the first part of the book were validated by its concluding chapter on the use of colour in construction; and the travel sketches were distilled into a visual grammar of ornamental patterns (**fig. 8**). Because it offered principles rather than specimens, and called forth inventions rather than reproductions, Street laid claim in his book to an objective truth which he felt his sketchbook lacked.

⁵⁸ George Edmund Street, Brick and Marble in the Middle Ages: Notes of a Tour in the North of Italy (London: John Murray, 1855).

⁵⁹ George Edmund Street, ... Views in France, Italy ..., album of drawings dated between ca. 1856 and 1857. Canadian Centre for Architecture, Photographic collection, Montreal.

Contrary to Street, Shaw and Nesfield chose instead to pursue the tradition of the pictorial album.⁶⁰ Both architects were much younger than Street; they may have viewed the publication of a travel sketchbook as a way to demonstrate their proficiency upon entering the profession. Both albums use a number of rhetorical devices to imply the active presence of a draftsman's sensibility within the representation: buildings are shown from unusual or rarely accessible points of view, in ways that convey impressions of visual surprise or vertigo, and with the author frequently portrayed alongside the building (**fig. 9**). Even though these albums were proposed as works of reference, with the drawings keyed to an alphabetical index of countries and localities, the specimens they portrayed were only significant inasmuch as they had been filtered and refined by the author's visual imagination.

A defining feature of the early nineteenth-century topographical album was the measured drawings that provided a complete and consistent record of the expedition's findings. Nesfield and Shaw, however, largely evacuated such drawings from their albums. What their plates purported to convey was instead a building's effect under changing atmospheric conditions, lighting, or angles of view. Neither author made any mention of it, but they no doubt sought to compete with the photographs of historical monuments that architects and scholars began to collect and assemble into albums in the

⁶⁰ W[illiam] Eden Nesfield, Specimens of Mediaeval Architecture Chiefly Selected from Examples of the 12th and 13th Centuries in France and Italy, and Drawn by W. Eden Nesfield, Architect, London (London : Day and Son, 1862); Richard Norman Shaw, Architectural Sketches from the Continent (London: Published for the proprietors, 1872 [facsimile of the original publication, London: Day and Son, 1858]).

1860s.⁶¹ Nesfield and Shaw conceived their drawings not as documents, but as portable souvenirs: they were mnemonic in the sense that they recorded a fleeting impression, leaving out or abbreviating the building's detail. In turn, the fragmentary and imprecise nature of the drawings made them independent of their place of origin. Paradoxically, it was this distance from the original that made the specimen once again available for use. The medieval monument could no longer be copied; instead, it would resurface in a new creation as the recollection of a shadow or an outline.

2.4.2 A claim to modernity

The impact of the new historical culture on emerging architects can also be traced in William Burges's first independent publication: submitted to the Royal Academy exhibition of 1852, this was a pictorial restoration of the shrine of Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey (**fig. 10**). Executed in watercolours over pencil, Burges's restoration was in several respects an eerie double of Augustus Welby Pugin's lithographed frontispiece to the Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament (**fig. 11**).⁶² It projected the viewer into a privileged locus (the sanctuary); it showed a space filled with colour and applied works of art (in mosaic, brass, painted wood and embroidered fabric); and it portrayed a moment in which this decor was brought to life by ritual. However, the drawing's relation to present time was quite different from that of its model.

⁶¹ See Robert Elwall, Photography Takes Command: The Camera and British Architecture 1890-1939, exhibition catalogue (London: RIBA Heinz Gallery, 1994). One such series of albums is that compiled by British architect and architectural historian J. Johnson c.1868-74, now in the photographic collection of the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal (6 albums in 5 volumes).

⁶² A. W. N. Pugin, Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament and Costume, Compiled and Illustrated from Ancient Authorities and Examples (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1844).

A.W.N. Pugin's frontispiece could be read simultaneously as the recreation of a medieval Catholic church and as the project of a modern one: it represented what nineteenth-century England might create once it restored the creed and liturgy of its ancestors. For him, medieval dress of this kind was not an anachronism; it was underwritten by a Christian symbolic code that was still valid in the modern world, and that attributed a single, fixed meaning to each pictorial and architectural form.⁶³ Nor were the Middle Ages historical in the same sense as his own century; instead, they encompassed all of Christian time up to the decisive breaking point of the Reformation.⁶⁴ In this view, medieval iconography was an unchanging language, and it provided a bulwark against the anxieties of eclecticism.

In Burges's drawing of Westminster Abbey, A.W.N. Pugin's unitary vision of past and present was replaced by the vivid portrayal of a specific historical incident. The scene was based on a specific document (Erasmus's written account of a visit to Canterbury, quoted at length by Robert Willis in 1845) and on a specific event this document related: the wooden cover over St. Thomas Becket's reliquary being hoisted aloft by ropes during the celebration of the Mass.⁶⁵ Both the drawing's Latin title ("Sancti:Edwardi:Feretrum")

⁶³ Ibid, iii.

⁶⁴ A. W. N. Pugin, Contrasts, or a Parallel between the Architecture of the 15th and 19th centuries, reprint of second edition (1841), introduction by H.R. Hitchcock (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1969), iv-v.

⁶⁵ Willis, Canterbury Cathedral, 100: "[The shrine] was built about a man's height all of stone, then upwards of timber plain, within which was a chest of iron containing the bones of Thomas à Becket. The timber-work of this shrine was covered with plates of gold, garnished with brooches, images, chains, precious stones, and great orient pearls, the spoils of which shrine filled two great chests, one of which six

and the theatrical nature of its subject suggested to the viewer that what was presented here was history in the process of happening, as a medieval believer might have experienced it. Moreover, by shifting the implied point of view from the nave to within the chancel, by letting the drawing's limits merge into the shadows under the ceiling vaults, and by applying his watercolours in deliberately quick and imprecise strokes, Burges suggested that one was not so much an observer as a direct participant in the unfolding scene.

Fictionalized in this way, the drawing was far closer to historical painting than to the traditional format of the specimen. It no longer allowed the viewer to weave the ancient artefact into his personal history, but offered instead a vicarious experience of temporal distension and disorientation. As Erasmus described it in the sixteenth century, Canterbury cathedral had been staged as a theatre, in which disparate icons each told their own dubiously miraculous story.⁶⁶ In an analogous manner, Burges's drawing portrayed Westminster Abbey as a series of visual incidents, each one of which opened like a trapdoor onto other, more distant places and times. The cabled columns and mosaic pavement alluded to the cathedral's origins in the Christian basilicas of Imperial and Byzantine Rome; the reliquary to the cathedral's founder and its original Norman fabric; and the shrine's wooden chasse—based on a specimen from Limoges in the Museum of Economic Geology in London—to the French craftsmen who first brought Gothic to England.⁶⁷

or eight strong men could do no more than convey out of the church ... the golden shrine had a wooden cover suspended by ropes, so that it could be raised easily when the shrine was exhibited.”

⁶⁶ Willis, *Canterbury Cathedral*, 112-3.

⁶⁷ William Burges, “Metalwork,” album of drawings, RIBA drawings collection, London.

Beyond its insistent registration of historical change, Burges's pictorial restoration was also deliberately modern in its choice of subject. Throughout the 1840s, Westminster Abbey had been a focus of debate concerning the purpose and means of architectural restoration. During his lengthy tenure as surveyor, Burges's master Edward Blore paid relatively little attention to the structural or formal idiosyncrasies of the Abbey, treating it instead as a generic Gothic structure whose antiquity could be visually enhanced by the addition of modern Gothic details. His work was publicly criticized by the Cambridge Camden Society as archaeologically unsound and destructive of whatever authentically medieval fabric remained.⁶⁸ When Blore retired, his replacement George Gilbert Scott rapidly articulated a different approach, exhibiting a proposal at the Royal Academy exhibition of 1850 to restore the Abbey's chapterhouse along archaeological lines. Its modern furnishings and accretions were to be removed, bringing to light its ribbed vault and what survived of its original décor of encaustic tiles and wall paintings; what elements had been destroyed would be completed with reference to buildings of similar date elsewhere in England.⁶⁹ By re-enacting this event two years later, in the same venue and with a similar proposal for the Abbey's chancel, Burges publicly distanced himself from his master and embraced the archaeological school grouped around G.G. Scott and the Architectural Museum. Burges's drawing shows the cathedral as Blore ought to have restored it—not as a vague evocation of the past, but as an historical document in its own right.

⁶⁸ William J. Jordan, "Sir George Gilbert Scott R.A., Surveyor to Westminster Abbey 1849-1878," *Architectural History* 23 (1980): 60-90.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 63-65.

Conveying both a sense of immediacy and one of historical depth, Burges's rendering of Westminster Abbey was an extremely effective representation of time. Yet the drawing can also be read as an expression of doubt, for in one small but significant respect, it belied his professed allegiance to history as fact. At the bottom of the sheet, Burges inscribed the drawing's title in red ink, in an elaborate Gothic script borrowed from medieval Psalters: the self-conscious anachronism of this device echoed not only A.W.N. Pugin's attempts to mimic the appearance of late medieval imprints, but Burges's own use of medieval script in early, unpublished sheets of specimens, and his development of an increasingly intricate medieval monogram on the title pages to his first notebooks. Script and signature served to erase the boundary between the time of the draftsman and that of his subject, instituting instead a narrative voice that dwelled in the Middle Ages—no longer quite William Burges, but his avatar "Willielmus Burges." In this sense, Burges's drawing of Westminster Abbey rested on two distinct and potentially contradictory notions of authenticity: one of these was archaeological accuracy; the other, the author's inward empathy with a long-gone world.

Moreover, if Burges's aim was to bring the past to life in all its allusive detail, then his chosen vehicle—that of a finished picture, complete in itself, rather the representation of an architecture yet to be born—must ultimately have proved deeply dissatisfying. His drawing lay claim to the evocative power of painting, but gave no indication how that power might be transposed to the act of building. Instead of securing him a place in the world of architectural practice, the restoration of Edward's shrine relegated Burges to the margins of professional painting.

2.4.3 A second genesis

In appearance, travel and its ensuing publication played a less prominent role in Burges's architectural career than in that of his professional rivals. Unlike Street, Shaw and Nesfield, he waited until 1870 before issuing a slim portfolio of architectural drawings culled from his years of travel:⁷⁰ by this late date, the impetus of the Gothic Revival had largely dissipated, and the drawings had lost much of their topicality. In the preface to this belated work, Burges claimed that a much earlier project for a book had been pre-empted by the prospectus for Viollet-le-Duc's Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française, the first volume of which came to publication in 1854. Viollet-le-Duc's Dictionnaire raisonné made a radical break with the accounts of medieval architecture published in the 1820s and 30s: it was explanatory, rather than descriptive; it dealt with building methods and architectural types rather than with individual monuments; and the figures represented "dissections" of architectural organs, shown at various stages of evolution (**fig. 12**).⁷¹ For Viollet-le-Duc, medieval architecture had been

⁷⁰ William Burges, Architectural Drawings (London: For the author, 1870).

⁷¹ The origins of Viollet-le-Duc's anatomical representations of medieval building work are traced in Martin Bressani, "The Life of Stone: Viollet-le-Duc's Physiology of Architecture," ANY no. 14 (1996), 23-25, and "Opposition et équilibre: le rationalisme organique de Viollet-le-Duc." Revue de l'art no. 112 (1996), 28-34. Bressani argues that both Viollet-le-Duc's use of exploded perspective and his representations of architectural components at various stages of development and perfection were based on the anatomical treatise of Jean-Marc Bourguery, Traité complet de l'anatomie de l'homme (1831-1854).

Anatomical representations applied to medieval architecture are also to be found in the work of Robert Willis. Conceived as an écorché, his analytic illustration of a compound impost from Whitby Abbey appeared in John Henry Parker, A Glossary of Terms used in Grecian, Roman, Italian, and Gothic

a coherent and dynamic language of form, whose developments were closely related to the history of the French nation:

Il nous a paru difficile de rendre compte des transformations successives des arts de l'architecture sans donner en même temps un aperçu de la civilisation dont cette architecture est comme l'enveloppe; et si la tâche s'est trouvée au-dessus de nos forces, nous aurons au moins ouvert une voie nouvelle à parcourir, car nous ne saurions admettre l'étude du vêtement indépendamment de l'homme qui le porte.⁷²

These connections, however, were so ramified that they could not be contained within a single narrative. The dictionary circumvented this difficulty by making it possible to “enter” the medieval world from any given rubric,⁷³ and to untangle the strands of its history by referring from one article to the next:

Cette forme ... nous permet de présenter une masse considérable de renseignements et d'exemples qui n'eussent pu trouver leur place dans une histoire... Elle nous a paru... mieux faire reconnaître les diverses parties compliquées, mais rigoureusement déduites, qui entrent dans la composition de nos monuments du moyen âge, puisqu'elle nous oblige, pour ainsi dire, à les disséquer séparément, tout en décrivant les fonctions et les transformations de ces différentes parties.⁷⁴

Architecture, 5th edition (Oxford: John Henry Parker; London: David Bogue, 1850), vol. 1, 301. My thanks to Dr. Martin Bressani for the reference.

⁷² E. [Eugène-Emmanuel] Viollet-le-Duc, Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XI^e au XVI^e siècle (Paris: V^e A. Morel et C^{ie}, 1875), vol. 1, iv.

⁷³ See Bressani, “Opposition et équilibre,” 32. Bressani suggests that Viollet-le-Duc's intention was to expose “les moeurs et les idées”—the mores and ideas—among which the forms of medieval architecture were born.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, v-vi.

But at the time, Burges's own forays into architectural publication were far more conservative: with its cursory historical narrative and plates of measured ornamental details, Remarks on the Domestic Architecture of France—penned by architect Henry Clutton and illustrated in part by Burges—remained largely wedded to the format of earlier topographical albums.⁷⁵ The work's only innovative feature lay in its pictorial restorations of medieval domestic life, which fused costume, furnishings and architectural décor (**fig. 13**). From Burges's point of view, then, the problem posed by the Dictionnaire raisonné was almost certainly not one of duplication; on the contrary, it would have profoundly challenged his idea of what an architectural book should contain.

If Burges did indeed have a change of heart in the early 1850s regarding a planned publication, then its cause can perhaps be better understood in light of another passage of the preface. Burges situated the origins of these drawings in the period leading up to his “long journey” to France and Italy, in 1853-4. This journey was to be Burges's fourth to the continent;⁷⁶ like his earlier expeditions across the English countryside while articling under Blore, trips of this kind had become a commonplace feature of an English architect's practice.⁷⁷ What distinguished this journey from his earlier ones, Burges claimed, was the fact that an unnamed “cynical friend” had urged him to abandon

⁷⁵ Henry Clutton, Remarks, with Illustrations, on the Domestic Architecture of France, from the Accession of Charles VI to the demise of Louis XII (London: Day and Son, 1853).

⁷⁶ In 1849, Burges travelled to Normandy, spending part of the year in Paris; in 1850, he visited Germany and Belgium; and in 1851, he returned to Paris, from there proceeding to Beaune and Troyes. See William Burges, Abstract of diaries, 1834-81, manuscript (photocopy), National Art Library, London.

⁷⁷ Gavin Stamp, “High Victorian Gothic and the Architecture of Normandy,” Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 62 (2003): 194-211.

picturesque renderings, and instead to produce drawings that would be “useful” for an architectural practice.⁷⁸ Though not necessarily true, this story of genesis is compelling, because it hinges on the ultimate purpose of architectural sketches and corresponds to an abrupt change in Burges’s use of drawing as a record of things seen.

For Burges, the years leading up to the “long journey” constituted a critical period of doubt, during which he sought to come to terms with the tradition in which he had trained. His initiation into architecture had been fraught with multiple anxieties: in personal terms, it represented a decisive break with his father’s trade as an engineer; professionally, it meant submitting to the pressures of the competitive marketplace that was replacing traditional links of patronage between aristocrat, clergyman and builder. Moreover, while Burges’s elderly master had possessed business acumen and technical skill, he was unable to give his pupil the stable sense of artistic identity he craved. For a young architect, the difficulty with Blore was not so much that his practice was outmoded, but that he was emotionally disconnected from his own production: his eclectic use of historical styles was a tool in the service of his patrons, and not a personal language he might hand down to an apprentice.

This sense of personal and artistic disarray made Burges highly susceptible to any suggestion of an architect’s “necessary knowledge.” Indeed, an unspoken or unconscious presence in his mind at this time may well have been the third and final volume of The Stones of Venice (issued in 1853), containing Ruskin’s closing argument against academic art. All artistic labour, Ruskin stated here, was fundamentally empirical; as far as the painter was concerned, “theories or reasons of anything” were only false

⁷⁸ Burges, Architectural Drawings, 1-2.

knowledge. Instead, the artist should aim solely for mastery of his own relatively simple tools:

... for [artists], the only true reasons for contentment with the sum of knowledge they possess are these: that is it the kind of knowledge they need for their duty and happiness in life; that all they have is tested and certain, so far as it is in their power; that all they have is well in order, and within reach when they need it; that it has not cost too much time in the getting; that none of it, once got, has been lost; and that there is not too much to be easily taken care of.⁷⁹

Such practical and strictly circumscribed knowledge, Ruskin added, could only be transmitted through a traditional process of apprenticeship. In fact, the spirit in which Burges undertook his continental travels in 1853-4 was truly that of a pedagogical journey: having undergone no true apprenticeship himself, he would learn instead from dead masters, and from the buildings and objects they had left behind. The drawings with which he would later return to England were to constitute the corpus on which he might at last found his identity as an architect.

The idea of an authority founded on practical knowledge may also explain the impact on Burges of Viollet-le-Duc's work of the 1850s. The real intention behind the Dictionnaire raisonné was constructive: according to Viollet-le-Duc, only by grasping the "principe vivifiant" or "principe créateur" at work in medieval art could one undertake its true revival, instead of merely bringing forth sterile archaeological reconstructions. For Burges, the significance of the Dictionnaire raisonné must have lain in its implication that even the most minute work of art might open a window onto a distinct technical and

⁷⁹ Ruskin, The Stones of Venice, vol. 3, 50.

creative imagination.⁸⁰ This notion underlies the encyclopaedic scope of Burges's later historical studies; furthermore, it explains why, well into the early 1860s, Burges felt the need to travel abroad again each time he undertook a major architectural project: to study the works of the past was to learn to create.⁸¹

2.4.4 The useful drawing

What Burges produced during his “long journey” and his subsequent travels of 1855 and 1856 was indeed of a different nature from what came before. Instead of the small perspective views of buildings or street scenes with which he filled his notebooks on earlier trips, his drawings from this time are mostly orthographic, combining detailed sections and plans of large architectural fragments—roofs, steeples, vaulted bays, or window tracery—and various practical objects—such as hinges, doorknockers, and well pulleys (**fig. 14**).⁸² He used perspective extremely circumspectly, usually as a means to record complex wooden assemblages that could not be shown in plan. At first sight, one might assume this mode of drawing to have been merely a return to a traditional form of

⁸⁰ Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture*, vol. 1, ix-xi.

⁸¹ Three trips can be associated with some certainty with architectural competitions in which Burges took part: to Normandy and the Île-de-France in 1855, in preparation of the competition for Lille cathedral; to Northern Italy in 1856 in preparation of that for the Crimean Memorial Church in Constantinople; and again to Northern France in 1862, at the time of the competition for St Fin Barre's cathedral in Cork. See Burges, *Abstract of diaries, 1834-81*.

⁸² Burges's focus on the material nature of the works he studied was of course only new in the context of his own practice. As Dr. Alberto Pérez-Gómez has suggested to me, his search of an immediate, bodily encounter with the material remains history echoes the drawings in Palladio's sketchbooks of his travels to Rome.

topographical notation. Burges himself later referred to these studies as “measured drawings,” as opposed to his earlier pictorial “sketches.”⁸³ But in fact, they proceeded from a different notion of what constituted a drawing’s authenticity, and thus a more appropriate term for them might be anatomical studies.

To think of the building as a body provided a way out of the dichotomy between perspectival and orthographic modes of representation. It shifted the onus of the drawing from the building as object—to be accurately captured by the eye, or obsessively described by geometry—to the draughtsman’s own encounter with it. Ten years after his “long journey,” Burges argued that knowledge of an ancient artefact could only be acquired through a direct, physical engagement with it. In order to reveal how it had been made, one had to touch it, climb inside it, and “probe” beneath its surfaces with one’s hands, as might a surgeon.⁸⁴ Working with a two-foot rule and five-foot rod meant that architecture could only really be known at the scale of its parts; therefore, the drawings which resulted from this investigation were extremely detailed. But what made these studies valuable—“authentic” or “true documents,” in Burges’s words⁸⁵—was the way in which they recorded a process of discovery. The insistence on corporeal as opposed to visual memory staked out a territory for architectural drawing on which neither engraving nor photography could impinge. To record the fleche at Amiens from within was to learn

⁸³ William Burges, “Measured Drawings versus Sketches,” The Building News 12 (1865), 557-558.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 557.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 558; see also Burges, “Early Middle Ages,” folio 37.

how the building had been sized and assembled piece by piece, and to re-enact its builders' gestures as they raised it level by level.⁸⁶

The "dirty & soiled paper" of the in situ record embodied a tacit knowledge of craft.⁸⁷ In turn, this allowed the modern draftsman to assimilate the historical artefact and bring it forth again in a new way. Thus, one of the most striking features of the scrap albums in which Burges later bound his drawings is the lack of any strict differentiation between studies and designs. Both types of drawing were fitted into similar bindings and formats, and both adhered to the period conventions of the architect's working drawing: they were traced on cartridge paper, in sepia ink over pencil; their scale was typically large (a quarter or half-inch scale for buildings and furnishings, half or full scale for decorative objects and details); smaller views, partial details, or even photographs were frequently inset within the larger orthographic drawing; and when space ran out on the original sheet, the drawing was casually pursued on additional pasted-in flaps. The logic of the specimen had been to reduce the ancient artefact to the format of an engraved illustration, making it available for multiple reproductions by multiple users. The working drawing, on the contrary, made the artefact an object of intimate enquiry, speculation and possible transformation.

Burges's drawings from this period embrace a type of artefact that had little relevance to the building world of his own time, and indeed that lay outside the conventional bounds of architectural knowledge: for instance, the Coranic letters

⁸⁶ William Burges, "Carpentry and Woodwork, 11 May 1858," album of drawings with signed autograph manuscript list of contents, Prints and drawings collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

⁸⁷ Burges, "Early Middle Ages," folio 37.

embroidered on a medieval bishop's mitre in the Hôtel de Cluny (1855); the personal ornaments of a Lombard queen, found in a cathedral treasure at Monza; or an iron prosthesis in the Correr museum in Venice (both 1856) (**fig. 15**).⁸⁸ Such odd presences call to mind the metonymic function of the specimen in the Romantic interiors of the early nineteenth century. In Burges's case, however, the "usefulness" of these notations must really be understood in terms of creative imagination. In his drawing of a jewelled comb from Monza, he sought to trace the process by which disparate materials had been fused into a new and original whole. The end view and section through the tiny object showed how its ivory body had been encased in a web of wrought gold, and how this filigree in turn had been crimped to hold in place chips of enamel.⁸⁹ Though the artefact itself was unlikely to be reproduced, it provided an analogue for novel kinds of architectural assemblage.

2.4.5 Book and collection

A central aspect of Burges's defence of drawing as a legitimate form of knowledge was that the sketchbook constituted an architect's ultimate work of reference: "... a man who has made a sketch book must know exactly what is in it & can refer to it at any moment."⁹⁰ But did his studies of medieval architecture really amount to a coherent work? The ideal of the book was certainly determinant in Burges's attempt in

⁸⁸ All these artefacts date from a trip to Northern Italy in 1856, to "study for Constantinople"; but similar drawings—of antique gold jewellery in the Museo Nazionale, Naples, and of the imperial crown of Costanza in the cathedral of Palermo—date to 1853-54.

⁸⁹ Burges, "Metalwork."

⁹⁰ Burges, "Early Middle Ages."

1858-9 to formalize his drawings into a series of scrap albums, organized according to practical application (by stylistic genre, by trade; or, more usually, by materials and methods of construction).⁹¹ In appearance, each album was initially conceived as a closed and essentially complete work: contents were arranged in alphabetical order, according to the building component or type of furnishing that they illustrated, and each drawing was described and indexed by page number in a manuscript list pasted to the album's front page.

However, the seeming rationality of the scheme was contradicted in fundamental ways by the albums' materiality. Conceived for family scrapbooks, the volumes into which Burges bound his drawings were provided with stubs along the inner spine, into which one could either paste additional pages, as the need arose, or remove existing ones: thus, by their very nature, the albums' contents remained in fact fluid and undefined. Moreover, it is surely significant that Burges never bothered to redraw any of his original sketches or working drawings to fit the supposedly definitive format of a personal pattern book. On the contrary, the formal process that rules the albums is one of fragmentation, mutilation, and juxtaposition. Torn from their original bindings (often in the so-called "small notebooks"), small sketches produced on the road in a variety of media and on

⁹¹ Burges's albums of topographical studies in the Victoria and Albert Museum include the following titles: "Carpentry and Woodwork, 11 May 1858," "Ecclesiastical Art," "Figures and Costume," "Furniture," "Ironwork, Brasswork, 12 March 1858," "Jewellery," "Military Architecture," "Mosaic, 28 September 1858," and "Polychromy, 18 October 1858." Another (undated) series of albums in the RIBA drawings collection includes "Details," "Domestic Art," "Early Decorated," "Ecclesiastical Art," "Metalwork," "Orfèvrerie Domestique," "Orfèvrerie Ecclesiastical," "Polychromy," "Renaissance," "Stonework," "Tracery," and "Woodwork."

different types of paper were re-assembled by Burges in new configurations on the albums' larger sheets (**fig. 16**), while his large free-standing drawings were ruthlessly folded and trimmed, Procrustes-like, to fit their new housing.

Seemingly final, the careful indexes Burges drew up in 1858-9 were rapidly overwhelmed by additional sketches, rubbings and samples that accrued in following years, in an ongoing and ad hoc process of accumulation. Burges framed this unceasing quest for knowledge as a burden imposed wholly from without, by his patrons' hunger for history:

This taste for antiquity is in reality a grievous burden upon [the architect], for he is continually called upon to design things which, if we had an art of our own, would be designed, except in some rare instances, by the artisan himself. Hence the architect is called upon to design chalices, candlesticks, altar frontals, and dorsals [sic], embroidery, book-covers ...⁹²

In reality, the process was fuelled at least partly from within. Indeed, one of the characteristic features of Burges's later additions to the albums is the proliferation of the wonderful. Objects begin to appear that are neither culled from travels, nor remotely likely to be requested by a patron: a tasselled and jewelled seagull's egg, a set of spoons fashioned from coral and polished shell, a dagger retrieved from the moat at Cardiff Castle, or a shoe dug up from the bank of the Thames (**fig. 17**). Like Henry Shaw's foot-shaped reliquary, the only virtue of such objects was that they belonged to a wholly unfamiliar past; in Burges's eyes, this absolute lack of purpose in the modern world—this purity, one might say—was no doubt precisely what lent them value. Burges's sense of self as a creator had by this time become wholly tied up with the idea of re-enacting past

⁹² Burges, "Measured Drawings," 558.

works: the accumulation of historical studies in his sketchbooks served as a psychic refuge, progressively blotting out the contradictions of the modern world. Burges's identity as an architect was not in fact founded on a finite book, but on his ownership of a vast and ever-increasing collection of drawings.

Contrary to that of a book, the publication of a collection can best be conceived as a network of mutual exchange. Access is granted to the visitor as a personal privilege by the collection's owner; in turn, the visitor may leave a trace of his passage by contributing an item of his own. Burges's albums bear witness to the very same process, for in addition to the records of his own travels, they include studies given or lent to Burges by other architects and artists, as well as drawings he made of objects in the collections of patrons, fellow medievalists, and the London antiquity dealers whom he patronized. Burges's fellows in the Royal Archaeological Institute, before whom he gave frequent viewings of his drawings and personal treasures, can also be seen as part of the sketchbook's intimate audience. Thus, the tardiness and graphic reticence of the folio of drawings Burges published in 1870 can perhaps be ascribed to the fact that more essential acts of publication had already taken place—both in a mediated fashion, through his architectural production of the 1850s and 60s, and more directly, within the confines of his office and home. The published folio was a kind of keepsake offered to friends and colleagues who had already perused his albums; for the wider public, it served as a tantalizingly concise catalogue to the much richer exhibition from which they were excluded.

2.4.6 Sketchbook and interior

According to Krzysztof Pomian, the collection is distinguished from other types of material goods by the iconic value attributed to the objects within it. Monetary and use value are placed in parenthesis; what is highlighted instead is the objects' provenance and continued participation in a distant realm.⁹³ Moreover, the collection is always offered to a gaze: in Antiquity, to that of the dead or of the gods; in the Baroque age, to that of the collector himself. The Baroque Kunst- und Wunderkammer, Pomian pointed out, was consistently represented as an allegory of totalizing sight, multiplied in the reflective surfaces of mirrors and burnished armour. When the Baroque collector stood at the centre of his cabinet, his gaze embraced all of nature and history, in the shape of the representative objects, animals, and portraits hanging on its walls.⁹⁴

As Susan Feinberg has argued, the Renaissance tradition of the house-museum persisted well into the nineteenth century, albeit in increasingly sharp competition with the modern ideal of a "pedagogical, public Temple of Art."⁹⁵ Both notions were intertwined in John Soane's idea of an architectural museum, to which he first gave shape at Pitzhanger Manor (1801-2) and later reconstructed in his London home in Lincoln's Inn Fields (from 1812 on). At first, Soane construed his collection of plaster casts and models as a private academy for the architectural education of his own son; following his appointment as lecturer at the Royal Academy in 1806, he also came to envisage it as an

⁹³ Pomian, Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux, 15-19, 30-31.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 63-66.

⁹⁵ Susan G. Feinberg, "The Genesis of Sir John Soane's Museum Idea: 1801-1810," The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 43 (1984): 225-237.

educational museum open to the Academy's architectural students.⁹⁶ However, once he realized his son had no wish to be part of an artistic dynasty, Soane recast his project of a museum as a moodily autobiographical "ruinscape," evocative of his own travels in the Roman Campagna.⁹⁷ The grotesque re-ordering of classical fragments in the Plaister Room and the Catacombs below made a simultaneous claim to artistic immortality and doom, alluding on the one hand to Soane's self-perception as "a preserver and interpreter of antiquity," and on the other to his lack of intellectual progeny.⁹⁸

Similar tensions were embodied in Burges's idea of the sketchbook. He vaunted the measured drawing to the Architectural Association's students as an objective and foundational kind of knowledge that could be acquired by whoever entered an actual medieval building. But the sketchbook also had a deeply personal dimension, as the tangible mark of his own peculiar empathy with the Middle Ages. Thus, rather than folding his albums into a public museum of reference, as Scott and Ruskin had done with their collection of casts, Burges erected around them a fortress-like interior. In 1855, Burges left behind for good the Regency suburbs of South London where he had been born and raised. The following year, he set up his office and lodgings in Holborn, in a narrow street leading from the Strand down to the bank of the Thames; there he was to remain for the following twenty years. One of the first pieces of furniture he designed for these lodgings was a large bookcase (now known as the Architecture Cabinet) in which he kept his notebooks and albums. Built in 1858 (the year he started formalizing his drawings into an encyclopaedic work of reference), the bookcase was inspired by the rare,

⁹⁶ Ibid, 226, 236.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 235.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 226, 236-237.

painted medieval armoires in the cathedrals of Noyon and Bayeux: its structure was plain and massive, but it was visually transformed into the miniature of a building by the addition of a fictitious roof, with painted tiles and sculpted dormers and finials (**fig. 18**).⁹⁹ In proportion, the bookcase was less like a house than like a medieval castle's keep, and the symbolism of its outline foreshadowed that of the great tower that Burges designed for the New Law Courts competition of 1866.

The Southwest tower of the Law Courts was a fireproof storehouse for court papers and deeds of title. It contained the Courts' institutional memory, and so provided the foundation for its authority over the surrounding city (**fig. 19**). The Architecture Cabinet may have played a similar role for an architect who considered himself largely self-taught: Burges's articles "Measured Drawings" and "Sketches" insist on the inadequacy of architectural training in nineteenth-century England, and on the necessity for young architects to learn directly from buildings, rather than from their masters; likewise, his preface to *Architectural Drawings* can be interpreted in its entirety as the story of a self-made man. In this light, the Architecture Cabinet functioned as a surrogate for a living tradition of architecture—the mother tongue that a real master, Burges implied, would have passed on to him. In a context in which all historical styles had been made available for use, the purpose of the albums in the Architecture Cabinet was not to expand Burges's range of expression, but to restrict it to what he had seen with his own eyes, and touched with his own hands. It was the experience of travel embodied in the bookcase that gave him the authority to build.

⁹⁹ The armoire at Noyon was reproduced in colour in the first volume of Viollet-le-Duc's

Dictionnaire raisonné du mobilier français de l'époque carlovingienne à la Renaissance (first published in 1858) and in Nesfield, Specimens of Mediaeval Architecture.

Rather than a break with the past, Burges's lodgings in Buckingham Street embodied a sense of continuity with the tradition of topographical study. If the sketchbook and the album were at all new, as Burges claimed at the Architectural Association, then it was solely because of their spatial compression: all history could be contained within their bindings and kept behind closed panels or drawn curtains. Contrary to Soane's museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields, the visual emphasis at Buckingham Street was shifted from the contemplation of the past—in the shape of actual classical fragments—to its wholesale re-enactment. Here, the specimen and its dubious authenticity were progressively displaced by objects that Burges created himself. In their complex iconography, mingling classical and medieval themes, or in their assemblage of disparate materials, each piece of furniture or silverware would constitute an iteration of the material assembled in his albums.

CHAPTER TWO

AMONG BOHEMIANS: IDENTIFICATION, PARODY AND PERSONA IN THE “VELLUM SKETCHBOOK”

3.1 Introduction

Since J. Mordaunt Crook published a monograph on William Burges some thirty years ago, it has been recognized that this British nineteenth-century architect self-consciously patterned his style of drawing on that of Villard de Honnecourt, the author of an extremely rare surviving portfolio of thirteenth-century drawings and inscriptions. Curiously, neither Crook nor any subsequent scholar has examined what purposes such emulation was meant to serve, still less whether Burges’s outward imitation of Villard expressed any sort of inward identification with his medieval model, or how such a practice was related to contemporary ideas about the productive relation between medieval and modern art. These are the questions which this chapter seeks to address.

The discussion will focus in turn on three distinct bodies of material. A first section, entitled “Writing Villard,” examines how the medieval manuscript was interpreted in the context of the Gothic Revival in France during the 1840s and 1850s, and how these early critical readings both differed from and fed into Burges’s own. A second section, “Drawing Villard,” offers a detailed analysis of Burges’s graphic re-enactment of Villard’s portfolio in the Vellum Sketchbook, a slim notebook of drawings he produced during the 1860s. The chapter’s closing section, “Being Villard,” portrays the artistic and professional context within which Burges’s imaginative engagement with

Villard's portfolio took place, and in particular the first formulations in British painting of what later came to be called "Aestheticism."

Notions of escape, retreat, or rebellion have often been used to explain the flowering of Burges's idiosyncratic imaginative world, as though to stress its nostalgic, wistful, or even delusional character. A form of nostalgia may have been part of the picture, but the central argument in this chapter is that Burges's use of fantasy grew out of a dispassionate assessment of the conditions of architectural practice in mid-century England—perhaps even a grudging acceptance of its limitations. The Vellum Sketchbook was the work of an architect who had barely turned thirty, and who had only recently been received into the Royal Institute of British Architects. By focusing on this relatively early work, rather than Burges's somewhat later painted furniture and domestic decors, my aim in this chapter has been to restore fantasy to its central place in Burges's creative process: it was not, as has been claimed, merely the symptom of defeat in an artist who had failed to be modern.¹ There is more than one way to be modern: early Aesthetic painting developed in response to its producers' own questions and desires, rather than in flight from outside pressure, and much the same is true of Burges's Vellum Sketchbook.

In this chapter I do not attempt to determine the accuracy—or lack of it—of nineteenth-century interpretations of Villard's portfolio. As the medievalist Carl F. Barnes has noted, all scholarship until at least 1901 was vitiated by two questionable assumptions: that the manuscript was the work of a single author, and that this author was an architect. In the twentieth century, it was established that the drawings and inscriptions in the manuscript were in fact a palimpsest of three successive authors: in particular, the

¹ See Crook, "William Burges and the Dilemma of Style," 8-15.

stereometrical drawings which had until then justified Villard's status as a mason were found to have been added later, by an anonymous Master II whose relation with Villard remains unclear.² Although Villard de Honnecourt is still sometimes referred to as an architect, there is in fact little evidence that he was a master mason, or indeed a master of any craft connected with medieval buildings.³ Though Villard identified himself by name and commended his drawings to posterity, nowhere did he state his trade, the reason for his travels, or the works with which he was connected.⁴ The manuscript's enigmatic nature was in fact key to its enthusiastic reception in the mid nineteenth century. It allowed Villard to function as something of a blank screen: successive interpretations of medieval practice were projected onto the manuscript's professed author; and in turn, these imaginary Villards were projected back, as possible models, onto the practice of the nineteenth-century architect.

3.2 Writing Villard

3.2.1 The genesis of style

If there is a single consistent image running through the writings on Villard in mid century France, it is that of a new style coming into being. This image was crafted by

² François Bucher, Architector: the Lodge Books and Sketchbooks of Medieval Architects, vol. 1 (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), 28-30.

³ Bucher refers to Villard as a minor builder or sub-contractor on cathedral work.

⁴ Carl F. Barnes, Jr., "The 'Problem' of Villard de Honnecourt" [original English text of "Le 'problème' de Villard de Honnecourt," Les bâtisseurs des cathédrales gothiques (Strasbourg: Éditions les musées de la Ville de Strasbourg, 1989): 209-23]; available from <http://www.villardman.net/problem.html>; Internet; accessed September 1, 2007.

Jules Quicherat, an historian and archaeologist at the École des Chartes in Paris, who in 1849 contributed the first extended assessment of Villard's portfolio: a "Notice sur l'album de Villard de Honnecourt, architecte du XIII^e siècle," published in three instalments in the Revue archéologique.⁵ Though the existence of the manuscript had been public knowledge since 1820, Quicherat felt that a document of such great antiquity deserved scholarly attention, and his primary aim was to make the material available to a wider public. His essay was in part a straightforward description of the manuscript's contents, classified by genre—geometry and trigonometry; stone-cutting; mechanics, architecture; furniture; figures—and illustrated with engraved facsimiles of individual drawings. In an attempt to date the manuscript, Quicherat also devoted a significant part of his essay to a speculative reconstruction of Villard's biography.

Quicherat surmised that Villard had been an architect: near the end of his working life, he had no doubt assembled his drawings into a practical treatise for his successors in the trade.⁶ The drawings traced an itinerary across continental Europe, and the extent of these travels suggested that Villard had been a master of some repute, participating in the building of such great churches as the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Cambrai.⁷ Villard drew from nature, applied geometry to the study of the human figure, and studied the remains of classical monuments; along with his knowledge of Latin, this wide range of interests suggested that he was a man of both letters and science, who had likely

⁵ Jules Quicherat, "Notice sur l'album de Villard de Honnecourt, architecte du XIII^e siècle," Revue archéologique ser. 1, vol. 6 (1849): 65-80, 164-188, 209-226 + plates 116-118.

⁶ Ibid, 65-66.

⁷ Ibid, 66-68.

completed the classical curriculum of trivium and quadrivium.⁸ Quicherat concluded his essay with the assertion that, despite changed historical circumstances, the education of a thirteenth-century architect had remained in large part faithful to the Vitruvian ideal of universal knowledge.⁹

Crucially, Quicherat dated the creation of Villard's portfolio to the period between 1243 and 1251, making its author a direct witness and participant in the flowering of Gothic architecture in Northern France.¹⁰ In fact, Quicherat's interest in Villard was shaped to a great extent by a developmental conception of architecture, according to which each historical style contained within it both the memory of its predecessor and the seeds of future change. This notion rested upon an analogy with language that Quicherat developed at length two years later, in an essay entitled "De l'architecture romane."¹¹ Here he argued that architectural styles could not be characterized by external appearance or constructive details alone; rather, they were the product of an organizing principle, which shaped from within the fundamental disposition of buildings. Styles could be likened not only to animal species—whose true distinctions lay in the overall structure of their bodies rather than their individual organs—but also to languages—which were

⁸ Quicherat, "Notice"; available from http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Notice_sur_l%E2%80%99Album_de_Villard_de_Honnecourt_architecte_du_XIIIe_si%C3%A8cle_%289%29; Internet; accessed May 26, 2008.

⁹ Quicherat, "Notice"; available from http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Notice_sur_l%E2%80%99Album_de_Villard_de_Honnecourt_architecte_du_XIIIe_si%C3%A8cle_%28Conclusion_et_planches%2; Internet; accessed May 26, 2008.

¹⁰ Quicherat, "Notice," 70-72.

¹¹ Jules Quicherat, "De l'architecture romane," Revue archéologique 1st ser. 8 (1851): 145-158; 1st ser. 9 (1852): 525-540; 1st ser. 10 (1853): 65-81; 1st ser. 11 (1853): 668-690.

differentiated by their grammatical rules, rather than their vocabulary.¹² Thus, though Romanesque builders in France made use of similar constructive practices and ornamental motifs as their Roman predecessors, it could not be claimed that their architecture was a degenerate form of classical architecture: Romanesque architecture possessed an intrinsic identity in the same way that French, for all its borrowings from earlier idioms, was something more than a debased form of Latin.¹³

Quicherat was indebted to contemporary theories of biology. However, in his attempt to distinguish circumstantial features of ornament from more essential principles of construction, he came to focus on radical discontinuities in the archaeological record rather than its gradual transformation. He argued that the genesis of a new style was necessarily a chaotic process, for in times of change artists were compelled to operate outside established canons. Thus, they were liable to false starts, to excesses, or to the awkward repetition of older formulas.¹⁴ Quicherat's innovation lay in the suggestion that the invisible "principle" behind architectural forms was not purely mechanistic; in his

¹² "... l'architecture romane ... n'est qu'une manière d'être particulière de la construction et dont en définitive le caractère ne peut tenir qu'aux dispositions fondamentales des édifices, aux lois d'après lesquelles les pleins et les vides s'y montrent combinés ; de même que les caractères distinctifs des espèces animales résident dans la structure du corps et non dans le tissu des organes ; de même que ceux des langues romanes résident dans leurs règles grammaticales et non dans leur vocabulaire." Ibid, 148-149.

¹³ Quicherat, "De l'architecture romane," 690.

¹⁴ "... aucune tradition d'école ne les guide; ils cherchent, ils arrivent comme ils peuvent : tel en violant les proportions avec une hardiesse qu'on ne s'est plus permise par la suite; tel autre, au contraire, en les observant avec une contrainte qui prouve que les modèles de l'époque précédente étaient encore sous ses yeux." Ibid, 76.

view, stylistic change was driven by a new cultural temper and the ensuing desire among builders for new forms of expression.

For all its novelty, the resurgence of the figure of “medieval man” in French archaeology in the second half of the nineteenth century remained limited in extent: as Jean Nayrolles has noted, the medieval creator was construed less as an individual mind than a paradigmatic type: a being “entirely determined by his belonging to a given moment, environment and race.”¹⁵ But it was precisely this relative anonymity which lent the medieval builder such relevance in the eyes of nineteenth-century medievalists. Intended by its author as an object of historical study, Quicherat’s brief biographical sketch of Villard came to represent for a younger generation the portrait of a learned and inquiring architect labouring in a time of change. For the architects grouped around A.N. Didron and his Annales Archéologiques (a periodical which served as the principal mouthpiece for the Gothic Revival in France), medieval archaeology no longer condemned the modern architect to reproduce what had already been made. Instead, it now seemed a way to recover a lost capacity for invention. Likewise, Villard’s disappearance from the historical record—what Quicherat referred to as the medieval architect’s “titres perdus”—came to symbolize the wilful suppression of Gothic from the official architectural culture of modern France.¹⁶

¹⁵ “L’homme médiéval demeure anonyme, il n’apparaît même pas comme un individu, puisqu’il est totalement déterminé par son appartenance à un moment, un milieu et une race.” Nayrolles, “Sciences naturelles et archéologie médiévale,” 46.

¹⁶ Quicherat, “Notice,” 69.

3.2.2 A painter of modern life

The manner in which Villard's portfolio was received in French architectural circles at the end of the 1850s was largely shaped by earlier, bitter debates about the legitimacy of reviving or adapting Gothic architecture for modern uses. At the beginning of the decade, A.N. Didron had asserted that medieval architecture and applied arts were undergoing in all nations an unstoppable renaissance.¹⁷ Yet according to Barry Bergdoll, the 1850s were in fact a time when "the European Gothic Revivals were evolving and facing new challenges." Previously sharp lines of battle between Gothic and Classical camps became blurred amid a wide range of cultural and political concerns: "stylistic eclecticism versus national purity, invention versus tradition, nationalism versus cosmopolitanism, and the challenge of new building programs and new materials to the historicist logic of the Gothic Revival position."¹⁸

Nowhere was the equivocal nature of the Revival's success more acutely felt than in France. During the 1830s and early 1840s, the struggle of the medievalists working within the state commissions for architectural heritage—grouped around Prosper Mérimée, Jean-Baptiste Lassus and Viollet-le-Duc—had been directed against the École des Beaux-Arts's defence of Classical precedent and its dismissal of Gothic as an architecture of pure fancy, without geometrical or proportional rules. But as Bergdoll has noted, a series of polemical articles published in 1845-6 by Lassus and Viollet-le-Duc in the Annales archéologiques gave warning that the battleground had begun to shift. The

¹⁷ "... le mouvement est considérable, universel et par conséquent invincible." [Adolphe-Napoléon] Didron, "Renaissance de l'architecture chrétienne," Annales archéologiques 13 (1853): 314-27.

¹⁸ Barry Bergdoll, "The Idea of a Cathedral in 1852," in A.W.N. Pugin : Master of Gothic Revival, ed. Paul Atterbury (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 104-120.

enemy against which the claims of Gothic now had to be defended was a younger generation of architects, who, like their Romantic forebears Duban, Labrousse and Duc, found in transitional styles a more apt expression of modernity, progress, and historical change.¹⁹ To Lassus's dismay, Gothic was no longer universally associated with political progress.²⁰ On the contrary, he now saw in the cultural establishment's conservative positions a far lesser threat than in the new eclecticism:

Aujourd'hui trois écoles rallient autour d'elles les sympathies diverses des artistes. Deux d'entre elles s'appuient sur la même base, l'*unité* ; la dernière, qui prétend au rationalisme, proclame l'éclectisme dans l'art. C'est à cette dernière seule que nous nous attaquons, parce que c'est d'elle seule qu'est sortie l'anarchie [actuelle] ...²¹

¹⁹ Ibid, 113-115. The main articles in this journalistic campaign were: [Jean-Baptiste] Lassus, "De l'art et de l'archéologie," Annales archéologiques 2 (1845): 69-77, 198-204, 329-335; E. Viollet-le-Duc, "De l'art étranger et de l'art national," Annales archéologiques 2 (1845): 303-308; idem, "Du style gothique au XIX^e siècle," Annales archéologiques 4 (1846): 325-353.

²⁰ "... nous étions fort éloignés de penser surtout [que nos adversaires] dussent sortir des rangs de ceux-là même qui prêchent le progrès, la liberté et la réforme en politique." Lassus, "De l'art et de l'archéologie," 329.

²¹ Ibid, 329. The ideas of the "rationalist school" were widely diffused in a popularizing account of the history of French architecture, published serially between 1839 and 1852 by the architects Albert Lenoir and Léon Vaudoyer, in the periodical Le magasin pittoresque. Their thesis was based on concepts developed in the 1820s by the historians François Guizot and Augustin Thierry. In an attempt to identify the origins of French civilization, Guizot and Thierry focused on distant and varied progenitors, suggesting that modern France was born of a "more complex fusion of forces, conflicts, and beliefs" than hitherto believed. In turn, this suggested to Lenoir and Vaudoyer that no single historical art form could claim exclusive validity as a model for the present. See Robin Middleton, "The Rationalist Interpretations of Classicism of Léonce Reynaud and Viollet-le-Duc," AA Files 11 (1986): 29-48.

Lassus's revivalist stance was predicated on a cyclical vision of cultural history, according to which—instead of seamless progress—there existed only long-term continuities interrupted by convulsive bouts of revolution and anarchy. In the realm of art, one such break had been the erasure of the traditions of the guilds during the Renaissance; another was the overthrow of the stultified curriculum of the *École des Beaux-Arts* by the generation of 1830. Since then, no new foundation for architecture had emerged from the ensuing chaos.²² As Lassus understood it, true style could only consist in a gift which one generation passed onto the next. It formed a body of gestures and forms that might undergo gradual transformation, but that at a deeper level retained its intrinsic identity. The breaking of this chain made all artists into cripples, unable to advance unaided or even “live in present time.”²³ Therefore, the best one could hope for in this transitional age was that a new art might be made to thrive artificially—like a graft—on an older and unitary tradition.²⁴ A rift in time had been opened that—paradoxically—could only be repaired by a new and heroic rupture with the recent past.

Lassus's intellectual preoccupations of the 1840s and 1850s—the nature of style, the struggle against eclecticism, and the degraded condition of the modern artist—are crucial to understanding his project of a facsimile edition of the manuscript of Villard de Honnecourt. Published posthumously and in fragmentary form in 1858, under the direction of Lassus's executor the architect Alfred Darcel, the facsimile was the first work

²² Lassus, “De l’art et de l’archéologie,” 200.

²³ “Heureux mille fois ceux qui sont arrivés dans un temps où ce sentiment [de l’art] était assez puissant pour leur permettre de vivre dans le temps présent.” In contrast, the contemporary artist is likened to “un souffreteux” and “un infirme incapable de se soutenir seul.” Ibid., 200, 331.

²⁴ Ibid, 335.

to present a complete analysis and pictorial reproduction of the medieval manuscript's contents. Little is known about the circumstances of the work's production, other than that Lassus conceived of the idea in 1849, in consultation with Quicherat, and had engravings made of the manuscript's leaves in 1851.²⁵ Yet it seems likely that Lassus laboured at this project fairly continuously until the time of his death in 1857, for, even in its incomplete final state, the facsimile presented the reader with a complex palimpsest of interpretations.

In addition to the engraved plates and their accompanying commentaries, the facsimile edition also included Lassus's original preface, an essay entitled "Considérations sur la renaissance de l'art français au XIX^e siècle," a reworked version of Quicherat's "Notice" of 1849, and a concluding summary on the significance of Villard's portfolio. The "Considérations" reformulated Lassus's earlier arguments concerning the necessity of reviving medieval art: since a new style could not be invented, the only way out of the crisis of eclecticism was to retrieve earlier, national traditions. As Lassus conceived it, the process of reviving Gothic was akin to relearning a forgotten mother-tongue: the anxieties of the present and its conflicting languages would at last be resolved in a restored chain of generations.

Seen solely through the lens of the historical narrative of the "Considérations," Villard's portfolio implicitly acquired a canonical status: it was the last surviving address

²⁵ Jean-Michel Leniaud, Jean-Baptiste Lassus (1807-1857) ou Le temps retrouvé des cathédrales (Paris: Arts et métiers graphiques; Geneva: Droz, 1980), 45; Robert Willis, Facsimile of the Sketch-book of Wilars de Honecourt: An Architect of the Thirteenth Century, with commentaries and descriptions by M. J. B. A. Lassus ... and by M. J. Quicherat ... translated and edited, with many additional articles and notes by Robert Willis ... (London: John Henry and James Parker, 1859), vii.

of a medieval master to his successors in art, uttered prior to the “decadence” of late Gothic into ornamental excess and the ensuing “invasion of Paganism.”²⁶ In his concluding summary, Lassus claimed—as Quicherat had done before him—that the manuscript proved the medieval architect to have been a polymath: all at once a man of letters, a decorator, and a civil and military engineer.²⁷ Its drawings of machinery or procedures for surveying and stone-cutting demonstrated the mechanical and geometrical knowledge required by the medieval architect, as well as his appreciation for the structural properties of masonry vaults. In this sense, the manuscript provided the first documentary evidence of Gothic architecture’s technical rigour and sophistication.²⁸

But a quite different interpretation of the manuscript’s import emerges from Lassus’s detailed commentaries on the plates themselves. In dealing directly with the artefact and its peculiar structure, Lassus came to see Villard as an eyewitness to his age, compulsively jotting down evidence of the new world arising before his eyes, even as he, an architect, was helping to shape it. His most eloquent formulation of this idea was his commentary to folios 17 and 18, containing Villard’s plan and view of the towers of Laon

²⁶ In Lassus’s view, the styles of the late Gothic and Renaissance periods had shared similar fallacies of representational realism and constructive falseness: “[L’architecture classique,] C’est le désordre, modéré si l’on veut par un grand goût dans l’arrangement, mais ce n’est après tout que le désordre et quelquefois l’extravagance du XV^e siècle gothique. La forme seule est changée.” J. B. A. (Jean-Baptiste) Lassus, Album de Villard de Honnecourt, architecte du XIII^e siècle; manuscrit publié en fac-simile annoté, précédé de considérations sur la renaissance de l’art français au XIX^e siècle et suivi d’un glossaire par J. B. A. Lassus; ouvrage mis au jour, après la mort de M. Lassus et conformément à ses manuscrits par Alfred Darcel (Paris: L. Laget, 1968, reprinted 1976; facsimile of the original edition of 1858), 26.

²⁷ Ibid, 182.

²⁸ Ibid, 178-179, 182.

Cathedral. The drawings, Lassus noted, contained numerous errors of fact: the draftsman had altered the towers' true proportions, changed the configuration of the buttresses' supports and window surrounds, and grossly exaggerated the size of ornaments; moreover, there were inconsistencies between Villard's two representations of the same object.²⁹ Comparing them to known thirteenth-century palimpsest drawings, Lassus concluded that these were not working drawings, but a sort of mnemonic device made in situ, and to be completed later on another building site:

Villard de Honnecourt ne pouvait rendre un plus bel hommage aux tours de Laon que d'étudier l'une d'elles, pour la reproduire peut-être dans les pays où il était appelé. Mais, dans l'étude qu'il en fait, il se contente d'une étude perspective et d'un plan sans mesures d'aucune sorte. Il est maître d'un style qui s'épanouit pendant qu'il travaille, et s'épanouit en partie peut-être par lui, et n'a pas besoin de relever avec soin tous les détails et toutes les mesures, comme nous le faisons, afin de nous identifier pour ainsi dire, avec ses formes et ses dimensions que nous voulons reproduire, ou dont nous voulons à tout le moins nous inspirer. Pour lui les dispositions générales du plan et de l'élévation suffisent, car il est bien certain d'en prendre ce qu'il lui faudra une fois à l'œuvre, lorsque, le compas du praticien en main, il tracera de ces épures savantes, comme celles que les parchemins de Strasbourg et les dalles de Limoges nous ont conservées.³⁰

As implied by Lassus's mention of "un style qui s'épanouit," the discrepancies between the actual cathedral and Villard's rapid notations of it were due to the temporal distance between the draftsman and his subject. By the time Villard drew them, the towers of Laon were already over seventy years old; in the mean time, Gothic itself had moved on. It was in the lacunae of the graphic record that this change was registered; for in reconstituting

²⁹ Ibid, 82-83.

³⁰ Ibid, 81-82.

part of the cathedral towers from memory, Villard had unwittingly “translated” them into his own more modern idiom. Therefore, the drawings’ true import lay in their demonstration that style was a dynamic process, carried forward both by the builder’s practical experience and by his inner identification with the formal conventions of his age.

According to Lassus, a similar process of assimilation had also been at work in Villard’s drawings of Classical art. Along with Villard’s studies from nature, folio 10 of the manuscript—a drawing of an ancient Roman mausoleum—had been taken by Quicherat as proof of the medieval architect’s ideal of universal learning. But for all Villard’s interest in this remain of antiquity, Lassus countered, he had seen it entirely through the lens of an inward “Gothicism,” giving the central figure the pose of a sceptred and crowned king, clothing him in Byzantine drapery, and transforming the classical urns into Christian cruets and ciboria (**fig. 20**).³¹ In contrast to modern eclecticism, such imitation was truthful because it was transformative, registering both cultural memory and historical change. In the same way that the French language had assimilated earlier linguistic strata (Frankish, Celtic and Latin), the possession of a single language of form, passed on to him directly by the preceding generation and therefore perfectly commensurate with his race and age, had allowed Villard to make even the remains of the classical past his own.

Thus, for Lassus, Villard came to embody the antithesis of the nineteenth-century architect—that sickly creator who was over-aware of history, plagued by doubt, and given to compulsive measurement. Even his seeming weaknesses as a draftsman were in fact

³¹ Ibid, 69-70.

signs of his superiority as an artist, for the abbreviations and alterations contained in his drawings had come unbidden to him. Rather than a contrived desire for originality, Villard's creativity had fed on a sense of conformity with the aspirations of his age. This unquestioning confidence in his own modernity had made the artist free, allowing him to select from and alter at will the legacy of the recent past.³²

Conceived by Lassus as an ultimate apology for a national and rational Gothic architecture, the facsimile edition of Villard's portfolio was addressed by him not to the Revival's opponents but a succeeding generation of architectural students.³³ However awkward, Villard's sketches were the result of an unprejudiced study of the monuments, devices and living things that had surrounded him. In Lassus's view, this freedom from canons made the manuscript relevant as a manual of instruction within a wholly new kind of architectural training. The study of classical monuments should henceforth be relegated to the field of archaeology, and the student incited instead to express his own thoughts.³⁴ What remained unspoken, however, was the fictional underpinning of this educational project: Lassus's assumption that a fresh apprehension of the world would necessarily be mediated by Gothic rested solely on the conviction that, after a hiatus of four centuries, a

³² "La forme qui lui plaisait était dessinée à main levée et notée dans ses parties essentielles sur son Album, il revenait à son atelier, pouvait aussi bien imiter pour reconstruire, mais il ne copiait pas [car] ... il appartenait à une génération qui puisait dans l'air, pour ainsi dire, le souffle inspirateur; qui était tellement empreinte, enfin, du sentiment gothique, qu'il lui était impossible de ne pas faire ce qu'elle faisait." Ibid, 180.

³³ Ibid, xiv.

³⁴ Ibid, xvi.

modern student might still feel by dint of his race as close in mind to Villard as Villard had to his own masters.

3.2.3 An architect in collaborative

The facsimile edition of Villard's portfolio received extensive coverage in the French press at the time of its publication; however, even sympathetic observers were critical of the polemical apparatus in which Lassus had embedded his commentaries to the plates. A typical response was that of Prosper Mérimée, who, as the former head of France's Commission des monuments historiques, might have been expected to support Lassus's defence of medieval architecture. Yet in Mérimée's opinion, the renewed attack on classicism and eclecticism which he found in the "Considérations" belonged to an earlier decade and its outworn debates. The production of architecture in France had long ceased to be ruled by any "exclusive taste;" therefore, there was no longer any need for such an impassioned defence of Gothic.³⁵

A more radical criticism of Lassus's work was articulated by Viollet-le-Duc. In a review of Lassus's facsimile for the Gazette des Beaux-Arts, Viollet-le-Duc mockingly stated that this lavish reproduction of a modest carnet was even less useful to the public's understanding of Gothic architecture than were illustrated monographs on the cathedrals of Paris or Reims—a genre for which he held little affection. Villard's portfolio, Viollet-le-Duc claimed, could in no way be understood as a manual or treatise. Instead it was

³⁵ Prosper Mérimée, "Album de Villard de Honnecourt" [1858], in Études sur les arts du Moyen Âge (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 1967), 229-70. The article was originally published in the periodical Le moniteur.

rather a mere sketchbook, “of the kind we [architects] leave lying on our desks...,” and in which the trivial jostled with the sacred and the symbolic.³⁶

Viollet-le-Duc’s reception of Villard’s portfolio deserves close examination, because it signals a gradual shift away from archaeological accuracy within the revivalist project. In 1845, Viollet-le-Duc had used arguments similar to those of Lassus, stating that the inevitable precursor to the production of a modern art was to fully reclaim the principles of the art of the past: “Pour former un art nouveau, il faut une civilisation nouvelle, et nous ne sommes pas dans ce cas.”³⁷ By 1859, however, what now seemed indefensible to Viollet-le-Duc was Lassus’s attempt to erect a single medieval artefact into a fixed and canonical body of knowledge. The real interest of Villard’s portfolio, he argued, lay precisely in the fact that it was not a treatise:

... l’album de Villard de Honnecourt est un livre plus intéressant, plus curieux que ne le serait un traité sur la matière, car il nous découvre la vie intime, les travaux journaliers de ces architectes laïques qui ont fondé la grande école du XIII^e siècle. Or aujourd’hui, si les artistes doivent travailler pour les vivants, il faut qu’ils vivent avec les morts. Car il n’est que ceux-là qui enseignent.³⁸

³⁶ “... on s’était imaginé que ces quelques feuilles de vélin étaient destinées à révéler les mystères des maîtres du treizième siècle, et on fut un peu surpris de n’y trouver que des croquis souvent informes, mal en ordre, sans corrélation entre eux, parfois inexplicables ...” E. [Eugène-Emmanuel] Viollet-le-Duc, “Album de Villard de Honnecourt, architecte du treizième siècle,” Revue archéologique N.S. 7 (1863): 103-118, 184-193, 250-258, 361-370. See also idem, “Première apparition de Villard de Honnecourt, architecte du XIII^e siècle,” Gazette des Beaux-Arts 1 (1859): 286-295.

³⁷ Viollet-le-Duc, “Du style gothique au XIX^e siècle,” 351.

³⁸ Viollet-le-Duc, “Première apparition,” 295.

For all the deficiencies of Villard's drawings, the curiosity and practical spirit they expressed were those of a layman, a realist, and a freethinker, a man independent of stylistic allegiances and of aristocratic or ecclesiastical patrons.³⁹ What the past could teach the present, then, was not a repertoire of forms or constructive methods, but an intellectual attitude to architectural practice—one of patient experimentation, improvement and innovation.

Viollet-le-Duc's interpretation of the historical figure of Villard was obviously indebted to Lassus's work, developing as it did the trope of an artist wholly immersed in the endeavours of his own epoch. Yet there was a fundamental difference between the two authors' imaginative relationship to the medieval past. For Lassus, Villard's ease at adapting earlier artistic conventions to the needs of his age stood in painful contrast to his own laborious reconstruction of a coherent style from archaeological data. Close study of his manuscript was essential to understanding what remained, for Lassus, a deeply alien consciousness.⁴⁰ On the contrary, Viollet-le-Duc's analysis rested on an ever-closer identification of nineteenth-century France with its medieval counterpart, and of his own activities as an architect with those of his medieval forebears.

³⁹ "Dans ces notes écrites à côté de ses croquis, jamais l'apparence d'une prévention d'école ... Toute idée nouvelle est recueillie. L'artiste choisit avec une entière liberté d'esprit; il ne repousse aucun progrès; il prend ses enseignements partout où il les rencontre." Viollet-le-Duc, "Album de Villard," 362; also 364-5.

⁴⁰ In the English edition of Villard's portfolio, Robert Willis paraphrased thus Lassus's commentary to folio X: "the faithful rendering of style in drawing is a quality entirely modern ... [In the past] drawings always possessed the character which prevailed at the time when the artist lived..." Willis, Wilars de Honecort, 39.

Both Viollet-le-Duc's initial review of Lassus's facsimile and his subsequent essay on the renaissance of French art in the nineteenth century take the form of fictionalized "apparitions," in which an elderly Villard materializes in his study late in the evening, to discuss the current state of architecture and the practice of his own day. This spectre is of course a comic figure: Lassus's medieval hero is transformed into a slight, stooped and greying man, his face framed by a tight-fitting green bonnet. But Villard's ghost also possesses an intrinsic seriousness: dismissing all learned studies of his life and work, he portrays himself instead as merely one artist among many—the friend of the cathedral builders "Pierre de Corbie, Robert de Luzarches, Pierre de Montereau, Renaud de Cormont, Jean de Chelles et tant d'autres, mes contemporains et mes émules ...".⁴¹ Together these artists formed "une société à part, indépendante"—a caste of thinkers and builders that had begun to sap the intellectual foundations of feudal and monastic power.⁴² Thus, in Viollet-le-Duc's view, Villard had practised a popular and collaborative art, subsuming his personal identity within the anonymous forces driving the historical process.⁴³

⁴¹ E. Viollet-le-Duc, "Deuxième apparition de Villard de Honnecourt : à propos de la renaissance des arts en France," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 5 (1860): 24-31; also "Album de Villard," 109. Pierre de Corbie is the only builder actually mentioned by name in the manuscript of Villard. The others were familiar to Viollet-le-Duc through his research for the article "Cathédrale" and his restoration work on Notre-Dame de Paris: Robert de Luzarches was the first architect for Amiens Cathedral; Regnault de Cormont was one of his successors. Jean de Chelles began the rebuilding of the transepts at Paris (c. 1245-58); after his death he was replaced by Pierre de Montreuil.

⁴² Ibid, 26-7.

⁴³ "Nos oeuvres sont roturières, elles sont sorties du peuple et sont restées peuple, nos statuaires, nos architectes, nos peintres, s'appellent Légion; ils n'ont fait tous que donner une forme ... à une grande

Part of the background to these “apparitions” of Villard is to be found in Viollet-le-Duc’s rhetorical use of fiction as a means to penetrate past worlds. As we have already seen in the previous chapter, to undertake to read the Dictionnaire raisonné de l’architecture française was to enter into a tangled and enveloping reality. And because the articles of the Dictionnaire bore essentially on practical matters of building, what one carried away from this immersive experience was not so much a passive knowledge of history as an ability to bring forth the new.

The fictional underpinnings of Viollet-le-Duc’s method are even more explicit in the later Dictionnaire raisonné du mobilier français (1858-70, 6 vols.), especially in the lengthy essay on the fabrication of furniture and domestic fittings included in the work’s first volume.⁴⁴ The essay stands out because it breaks with the alphabetical order and fragmentary structure of the remainder of the dictionary; it is also the sole instance in the work where Viollet-le-Duc attempts to make the past tell its own story. Ostensibly, his role as author is limited here to introducing the reader to a suddenly resuscitated medieval cabinetmaker: “Jacques le huchier.” Speaking in his own voice and with his own words, Jacques first guides the reader around his workshop, explaining the technical difficulties of his trade and its intimate connection with other crafts. He then accompanies both author and reader on a tour of neighbouring workshops, where Jacques’s colleagues explain such allied arts as the carving of ivory, the chasing of silver, the painting of

pensée d’émancipation intellectuelle, qui commence vers la fin du XII^e siècle pour ne pas s’arrêter un seul jour dans sa marche.” Viollet-le-Duc, “Deuxième apparition,” 31. See also “Album de Villard,” 255.

⁴⁴ E. [Eugène-Emmanuel] Viollet-le-Duc, “Fabrication des meubles,” in Dictionnaire raisonné du mobilier français de l’époque carlovingienne à la Renaissance, vol. 1 (Paris: V^e A. Morel, 1872), 370-501.

patterns, the forging of locks and hinges, and finally the casting of iron, copper and bronze.

Presented by Viollet-le-Duc as a purely pedagogical device (a means to make his historical discourse more lively and limpid),⁴⁵ the fictional embodiment of the past in the guise of a cabinetmaker and his fellow artisans was in fact indicative of a specific attitude to history. It suggested a possible intimacy with the past, that could be acquired through the painstaking probing of its tangible remains. Tellingly, the very first plate in the essay—the figure of a carved wooden bench—shows the artefact in the moment of coming into being (**fig. 21**).⁴⁶ Supports, armrests and stretchers are momentarily suspended in mid air: it is as if the bench's final form were just now taking shape in the mind of its maker, as he seeks the right balance between structural stability, adequacy to purpose and the intrinsic constraints of his material. Viollet-le-Duc's fragmentary and exploded perspective is no longer the representation of a finished and long-past object, made available for reproduction in modern settings; rather, it is the representation of an ongoing process, at once more vital and more authentic.

3.2.4 Into England

Contrary to France, Villard's portfolio was never widely discussed in England: the prominent medievalist Robert Willis published a translation and extensively revised edition of Lassus's facsimile in 1859, but otherwise the manuscript's reception was

⁴⁵ “Pour éviter les longueurs et rendre nos descriptions des moyens de fabrication plus vives et plus claires, nous nous supposons introduits dans un atelier de menuiserie en meubles, d'un huchier, vers la fin du XIII^e siècle, et nous rendons compte du travail des ouvriers.” Ibid, 370.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 371.

largely the work of a single man—William Burges. Burges published three essays discussing Villard in the immediate aftermath of Lassus’s facsimile. The first of these was an eye-witness account of the manuscript’s appearance and contents, written shortly after his expedition in 1858 to the Bibliothèque Impériale in Paris; this was followed in short order by a review of Robert Willis’s translation and revision of Lassus’s work.⁴⁷ Dating from 1860, the last of Burges’s writings on Villard is embedded in an historical survey of architectural drawing from classical antiquity to the nineteenth century—a paper crafted as an inaugural lecture upon Burges’s accession to fellowship in the Royal Institute of British Architects.⁴⁸

The occasion for this latter paper was the symbolic foundation of Burges’s practice as an architect, and so the drawings he chose to present to his audience of professionals can legitimately be read as a statement of intention. When the lecture was published in 1861, Burges included a plate of illustrations that belied the original paper’s universal scope (**fig. 22**). All were fragmentary reproductions of medieval manuscripts or palimpsest drawings, and all showed buildings which had either disappeared or never been built: the Early Christian monasteries of St. Gall and Canterbury; the west front of an unidentified thirteenth-century church; the choir of Notre-Dame of Cambrai and an unrealized buttress for Reims, from the album of Villard; and a fifteenth-century scheme for a tomb for Henry VII.

⁴⁷ William Burges, “An Architect’s Sketchbook of the Thirteenth Century,” The Builder 16 (1858): 758, 770-772; “Fac-simile of the Sketch Book of Wilars de Honecort,” The Building News 5 (1859): 897-898.

⁴⁸ William Burges, “Architectural Drawing,” Papers Read at the Royal Institute of British Architects (1860-61): 14-23.

Besides their peculiar status as ruins or unrealized projects, the sole commonality between these disparate works was graphic. Within the flattened space of the drawing, the reality of depth was conveyed by means utterly foreign to nineteenth-century conventions of architectural drawing—walls set at right angles were shown within the same elevation; a winding staircase was represented in plan as a spiral line converging inward; the plan of an interior courtyard was inserted within the elevation of the portal leading to it; and voids cut into the mass of a buttress were depicted as solid blocks of ink. As striking as the implicit medievalism of the plate was its emphatic rejection of pictorial realism: the drawings did not show medieval monuments “as they were,” but an idea of form in the draftsman’s mind.

The central argument of Burges’s lecture was that the vitality of Villard’s drawings was due to the archaic simplicity of his tools: lead point and crow quill forced the artist to reduce visible reality to its essential outlines. In turn, this allowed the drawing to register the very act of perception:

If we look at the way in which Wilars renders his architecture, we find that everything is simplified: the capital consists invariably of a necking, two horns ending in rounded points, and a perfectly simple and flat abacus ... The drawing was merely his short-hand for a capital of any size; for he doubtless had all the additional details at his fingers’ ends.⁴⁹

Paradoxically, it was the inaccuracies and abbreviations of Villard’s graphic method that gave his sketchbook contemporary relevance. Contrary to the modern genre of the archaeological portfolio, the architectural sketchbook was intrinsically productive. The incompleteness of its representations opened an interval in which memory and fancy were

⁴⁹ Burges, “An Architect’s Sketchbook,” 770; idem, “Architectural Drawing,” 19.

compelled to take over from the graphic record, and it was in this moment that worn-out architectural conventions could be given a new life. The life of the drawing, Burges affirmed, would feed into the resulting design.

The immediate reaction to Burges's RIBA lecture indicates the extent to which his ideas broke with dominant notions of practice in mid century Britain. Though a committed medievalist and a close collaborator of the Ecclesiological Society, G.E. Street dismissed the issue of graphic manner as a matter of sheer expediency: for an architect, the drawing's only value was to show "the absolute and exact lines" of the projected work.⁵⁰ A similar point of view was put forward by the prolific critic Robert Kerr. He too asserted that one had to differentiate between "artistic" and "architectural" drawing. With the former, graphic manner was a means to establish mood, and so a different style was necessary to represent Classical and Gothic buildings. The latter, however, was a purely instrumental language: all one asked of it was that it be "so legible and intelligible as to represent the subject truly."⁵¹

It is not surprising that English architects proved so reticent toward Villard's portfolio: during the 1840s and 50s, French critics had effectively nationalised the manuscript, intricately interweaving it into that country's artistic and political debates. Rather, the question is why this obscure French artisan appeared so uniquely relevant to Burges. Part of the answer may lie in Burges's peculiar brand of cosmopolitanism: unlike fellow Ecclesiologists such as Street or William Butterfield, Burges also viewed himself as part of a wider Gothic Internationale—corresponding with Didron in France and

⁵⁰ Burges, "Architectural Drawing," 26-7.

⁵¹ Ibid, 27-8.

August Reichensperger in Germany, and defending the continental ideal of the cathedral as the locus of a reborn art. A further manifestation of Burges's internationalism was his ongoing confrontation with the works of Viollet-le-Duc. Just as the Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française was a largely unacknowledged presence in Burges's earlier project for a comprehensive sketchbook, so Viollet-le-Duc's fictional encounters with Villard formed a ghostly background to Burges's essays, spurring his interest in the manuscript and providing him with the outlines of a critical method. The parallel between Viollet-le-Duc and Burges is not to be found in their respective portraits of Villard: for the former, the medieval architect was an empirical thinker; for the latter, a maker with a radically idiosyncratic vision. Rather, it lies in a shared notion that a productive relationship with history could only come about through re-enactment: one had first to internalize the ancient artefact by taking it apart at the seams, and then proceed to remake it.

3.3 Drawing Villard

3.3.1 Nature and life

Unlike Viollet-Le-Duc, before whom the living Villard made a brief appearance only to vanish from his writings, Burges remained preoccupied by the drawings in Villard's portfolio for close to a decade. And whereas the French architect's engagement with Villard took place only in writing, Burges's essays played a relatively small part in his ongoing confrontation with the medieval artefact. Far more central was the so-called "Vellum Sketchbook," a slim volume containing eighteen sheets of thick vellum folded

down the middle, sewn two by two into quires, and bound into a leather portfolio.⁵²

Almost none of the drawings in the Vellum Sketchbook are dated, but its material attributes correspond closely to the description Burges gave in 1858 of Villard's original manuscript, held in the Bibliothèque Impériale in Paris. Thus it seems certain that production began only after Burges's firsthand encounter with the manuscript. The timeframe of the sketchbook's creation can also be determined with some precision by analysing its subject matter. A little less than half the drawings in the Vellum Sketchbook constitute visual records of buildings or monuments in places that Burges is known to have visited, or likely visited, during the first half of the 1860s—Florence (1860 and 1861); Prato, Milan, Monza, Bologna, Verona, Parma, Bern, Basle, and Langres (1861); Chartres (1862); Dublin (1862 and 1863); Bordeaux, Poitiers, and Carcassonne (1863); and finally Beauvais (1862, 1863, and 1864).⁵³ The Vellum Sketchbook further includes six pages containing representations of Burges's own designs. For the most part, these too can be reliably dated to the period between 1860 and 1867: a dossal for the church at Fleet in Hampshire (1860-61); iconographic schemes for Gayhurst manor in

⁵² William Burges, Vellum Sketchbook, RIBA Drawings collection, London.

⁵³ Burges's Abstract of diaries, 1834-81, records travels to Normandy, Tuscany and Burgundy in 1860; to Champagne, Switzerland, Northern Italy and Provence in 1861; to Amiens, Beauvais and Chartres in 1862; to Normandy, Poitou and Aquitaine in 1863; to Cork, Ireland, in both 1862 and 1863; and to Beauvais, Picardy and Belgium in 1864. Several of these destinations were also the object of subsequent trips in the late 1860s or the 1870s. There is only one clear exception to this chronological correspondence between travel and drawing: this is the record of a wall painting in the papal basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, on the overleaf of folio 6 (Burges had travelled to Rome in 1853 and 1854, but did not return there until 1876).

Buckinghamshire (1859-61); a crosier for the Bishop of Dunedin (1865-6); and a tower Burges designed for the Law Courts competition (1866-7).⁵⁴

For all its slightness as an object, the choice and arrangement of the Vellum Sketchbook's contents are decisive, as though for Burges it had truly marked a new beginning. On opening its cover, one is confronted not with architectural drawings, but with a scene from a London zoo (**fig. 23**). Eight small outline sketches of animals fill this first page (a lion and lioness, a rhinoceros, a long-haired goat, a bear, an elephant, and a wolf). Seven similar drawings follow on the overleaf (a praying mantis, a cat, a parrot, a grazing doe, the head of a monkey, a chameleon, and a close-up view of the latter's eye and snout). Two hand-written annotations in fine lowercase script suggest to the reader that the drawings have all been taken directly from Nature:

This is an insect called a caballa. I know that I found it in the garden of the Franciscans at Fiesole. The latin name is mantus religiosa & oratoria – because it says its prayers.

This is a little beast called a chameleon. I know that he changes his colour according to natural objects near which he is placed.⁵⁵

If one takes the descriptions at face value, then the author of these drawings has wiped clean the slate of his mind; if he was already an artist, then he has decided to start over again from first things, drawing only what he can see with his own eyes.

Thus, one way to read the Vellum Sketchbook is to view it as a book of nature and life—a series of faithful transcriptions of living things, real persons, and actual monuments, that play out in real time according to Burges's peregrinations on the

⁵⁴ The drawings for Fleet, Gayhurst, and the Law Courts are identified as such by inscriptions in pencil added later by Burges.

⁵⁵ Burges, Vellum Sketchbook, folio 1 verso.

continent during the 1860s. Indeed, in terms of outward form, the Vellum Sketchbook is an exactly accurate re-enactment of Villard's graphic process. It is drawn with the same instruments (a crow quill and sepia ink), on the same size and type of paper (stiff, thick sheets of vellum), on a similar number of pages (seventy-two to the manuscript's surviving sixty-six), and it is set inside an identical binding (a dark green pigskin jacket, fitted with a flap to protect its contents against rain or snow encountered on the road).⁵⁶ Moreover, Burges's self-imposed restriction of medium led by necessity—as he believed had been the case with Villard—to the graphic simplification of the artist's living models. The portraits Burges made in Florence eschew any suggestion of volume or shadow, reducing the figure to an essential outline.⁵⁷ Although the individual faces are strongly characterized, their distinguishing features are pared down to a few bold strokes: the flare of a nose, the swelling of lips, and the dark stain of eyes. With few exceptions, the portraits are set against a blank ground, as though to emphasise the fleeting and spontaneous quality of the traveller's gaze: these are not works from a studio, but a record of passing encounters on the road.

The happenstance of travel (or its semblance) likewise rules the sketchbook's contents. As one turns its pages, animal and human figures alternate pell-mell with plants and flowers, costumes and street scenes, buildings, furnishings, and statuary; where these disparate subjects are woven together within a single leaf, the effect is that of a dense and intricate visual world. A particularly striking instance of this occurs on the overleaf of folio 8 (**fig. 24**): here Burges has gathered together fragments of plants (the blooms of a

⁵⁶ The vellum folios in Villard's portfolio are trimmed to 235-240 mm x 154-160 mm; those in Burges's Vellum Sketchbook to around 235 x 170 mm.

⁵⁷ Burges, Vellum Sketchbook, folios 3 verso, 4 verso, 7 verso, 15 verso-17 verso.

rose of Sharon and a fuchsia) and architecture (a carved Gothic organ loft and a pegged wooden door); all are shown in perspective, their parts unfurling in the empty space of the page, in a way that accentuates their physical reality. Yet the status of these assembled fragments as real things in a real world is at best ambiguous, for Burges also inserted one of his flat decorative designs (a Crucifixion scene for the church at Fleet) among the blooms and carvings, and the page lies opposite his decorative scheme for Gayhurst, conceived around the Biblical theme of humanity's Fall, expulsion from Eden, and cultivation of the wilderness. The juxtaposition of these contradictory fields of imagery—the timeless and unchanging narrative of the Bible, and the evidence of historical change embodied in architectural forms and natural life—raises the question of which Burges held to be true.

3.3.2 Development as a unifying metaphor

Building on David Brownlee's study of British architectural theory in the 1840s, art historian Michael Hall has explained the sudden proliferation of scientific imagery in the church architecture of the late 1840s and 1850s by the imaginative hold of the notion of "development" on a wide range of intellectual fields. In the realm of natural science, the study of the fossil record led to a new understanding of the immensity of the earth's age. Initially, Hall reminds us, this discovery "seemed to enhance religious belief rather than undermine it," because it was taken as proof of "God's continuous involvement with the process of Creation."⁵⁸ In England at least, nature seemed a short time to have been

⁵⁸ Michael Hall, "What Do Victorian Churches Mean? Symbolism and Sacramentalism in Anglican Church Architecture, 1850-1870." Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 59 (2000), 81-82.

re-encharmed by science: the earth's profusion of geological layers and the fantastical fossil creatures contained in them argued in favour of a vital, ongoing process of creation at work in the visible world.

In the context of church doctrine, evidence of nature's progressive unfolding meant that the human understanding of divine revelation became ever fuller over time. In consequence, the church's authority could not be based solely on its links to the past.⁵⁹ The shift in emphasis from the early to the modern church encouraged architects to envision a form of Gothic that would likewise be made modern. From the late 1840s on, the Ecclesiological Society ceased to advocate the wholesale reproduction of medieval churches, proposing instead that Gothic be "developed" by incorporating a much wider range of sources, in both chronological and geographical terms.⁶⁰ Thus, traditional iconographic schemes were briefly superseded in Victorian churches by metaphorical representations of this modern Creation story: brick banding and mural painting evoked layered and folded geological strata; stained-glass windows and carved capitals enumerated the manifold forms taken by animal and plant life.

The fusion of science and religion in mid-Victorian architecture was gradually unravelled by changes in theology and science alike. From the 1850s on, the High Church faction of Anglicanism came to lay ever greater stress on the eternal and unchanging nature of the sacraments; as a result, representations of history and development came to be seen as a secondary feature of church decoration.⁶¹ In parallel, the publication in 1859 of Darwin's The Origin of the Species and in 1870 of its sequel The Descent of Man

⁵⁹ Ibid, 78, 80.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 80-81.

⁶¹ Ibid, 86-87.

displaced the notion of a divine plan at work in nature by a mechanistic explanation for the diversity of life. Religion and science came to be understood as complementary but nonetheless fundamentally distinct ways of apprehending the world—the one ethical, the other explanatory. What Victorian architects experienced in the process was not necessarily a loss of faith, but rather a loss of confidence in the metaphorical power of their imagery.⁶²

Viewed as a representation of nature, the Vellum Sketchbook stands on the cusp of this change. In some respects, it is still a paean to a productive and sexually potent natural world: Burges's drawings of flowers emphasize their reproductive capacity, in one instance transforming a flower's stamen into the faintest outline of a manikin, in another portraying blooms miraculously sprouting from a castellated vase in the shape of a medieval city. Conventionalized by means of plan or sectional views, plant life scrolls for page after page across painted diapers and carved friezes, spandrels and capitals, until, in Burges's drawing of a medieval house in Beauvais, it almost overgrows the building's façade (**fig. 25**). Yet the nature of the Vellum Sketchbook is no longer that, at once familiarly English and intensely symbolic, of Pre-Raphaelite painting or of the Oxford Museum. Here, common garden flowers lie next to exotic specimens from a Victorian hothouse. As for Burges's closely and intensely observed drawing of animals, his uncanny graphic method of isolating them within pages of architectural specimens arguably transports all of them—as much the figure of a dead, common dormouse as that of the chameleon—into the realm of the marvellous.

⁶² Ibid, 84.

A key moment in the creation of the Vellum Sketchbook is Burges's undated addition, in the margin to the first page's overleaf, of two small grotesques, both of which are drawn in a lighter ink than the neighbouring naturalistic studies. The lower one represents a winged beast, a hybrid between a lion and a goat. Above, a woman's face rides two hooved legs and is crowned by the head of a bird; sprouting from the bird's beak, a winged tongue arches back and around between the beast's legs, emerging as a claw in front of its groin. Both are products of a natural world which is equally fertile and monstrous; indeed, in their sheer exuberance, they seem to stem from a similar imagination as the cabinet of a Baroque collector. The cabinet of curiosities, according to Krzysztof Pomian, was the product of an interim age, in which nature had lost its status as a revealed truth, but had not yet been fully rationalized by science: it was therefore "incoherent, disorderly, fraught with contradictions, and pulled in opposite directions..."⁶³ Unlike the cabinet, however, the Vellum Sketchbook was not understood by its maker as coextensive with the outside world: it produced itself instead as a manifest anachronism. Nor was it really a representation of nature as such. The fertility embodied in the sketchbook's grotesques no longer inhered in the natural world but in the fantasy of its creator; what made them come alive and seem momentarily real was the act of removing them to another, wholly imaginary time.

⁶³ "Incarnée dans une Kunst- und Wunderkammer, dans la bibliothèque d'un érudit, dans le laboratoire d'un chimiste, praticien de la philosophie hermétique, ou d'un physicien pour qui l'optique reste une science des miracles, exubérante, incohérente, désordonnée, travaillée par des contradictions, tirée à hue et à dia, la curiosité a gouverné par intérim entre le règne de la théologie et celui de la science." Pomian, Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux, 80.

3.3.3 Fantasy and parody

If the historical awareness of the nineteenth century can be conceived as a kind of fall, then what Burges found in Villard's portfolio was a state of architectural innocence: a way of drawing that reduced architecture to essential outlines and elemental structures, and a spontaneous delight in ornament that drew all at once on nature, religious symbols, and classical learning. Villard's pictorial universe provided Burges with an imaginative counter-world to that in which he lived and practiced: in his own words, modern England was a world in which religion had retreated into private worship, and in which neither public buildings nor works of engineering were viewed as legitimate objects for ornament or expense.⁶⁴

In his writings of the late 1860s, Burges repeatedly invoked a possible future in which histories would no longer be written, and pattern books no longer printed. Instead, the painted or carved image would give expression to shared beliefs; private wealth would sponsor public rituals; and architecture would serve once again as a living museum of the arts.⁶⁵ Yet it should be stressed that Burges always deferred this possible future to another and later century. He believed his own age had lost the knack of forgetting, and so it was impossible to cut oneself off from the surfeit of historical knowledge which had accrued over the previous century. All historical styles had now been made available for use, and the question of which to employ could only be answered arbitrarily, as a matter

⁶⁴ William Burges, "Introductory," in Art Applied to Industry: A Series of Lectures, delivered to the Society of Arts, the Architectural Association and the South Kensington Museum (Oxford: John and Henry Parker, 1864), 1-12.

⁶⁵ William Burges, "Art and Religion," in The Church and the World: Essays on Questions of the Day in 1868, ed. Rev. Orby Shipley (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1868), 574-598.

of personal preference.⁶⁶ These convictions confronted Burges with a set of paradoxes. The first was that, though he doubted that an archaeological revival could bring forth live works, archaeology remained the only language at his disposal. The second was that, though he believed the purpose of architecture to be essentially representational, there no longer was an audience for public myths. Fundamentally, Burges's impulse as a creator was not to re-found art on a new basis, still less the society within which it was produced. Instead, his resolution of these creative paradoxes took the form of a fictional second life, in which style might still be construed as "natural" and symbols as "true."

Therefore, another way to read the Vellum Sketchbook is to view it as the locus of an elaborate fantasy. In the moment in which Burges took in hand the archaic instruments of vellum and quill, he became an imagined other. The innocent gaze which the draftsman brought to bear on the world, the naïve voice in which he expressed his wonder at it, and the spontaneous vigour with which he rearranged what he found were not Burges's own, but those of a fictional "Villard" who had been made to materialize in the middle of nineteenth-century Europe.

The product of this imaginative process was less a sketchbook than the simulacrum of one. Villard's drawings were incidental by-products of his travels: they were made on loose sheets of vellum, with no fixed orientation of top to bottom or right to left, and vacant spaces were filled in over time with little attention to narrative continuity. With Burges, these relationships were reversed, and the incidental construction of the medieval manuscript yielded to the logic of a single, deliberately crafted representation. He carefully selected what to imitate in Villard's drawings and

⁶⁶ Burges, "Early Middle Ages;"; also idem, Art Applied to Industry, 8.

what to omit—leaving aside the diagrams of stone-cutting, machinery and operative geometry which figure so prominently in the manuscript, and taking up only what might be construed as “studies from life.” A similar shift between the two works took place in terms of architectural representation. In contrast to the operative plans, sections and elevations contained in the original manuscript, Burges’s preferred mode in the Vellum Sketchbook was the sectional perspective. Such drawings were scenographic rather than tectonic: they abstracted the building from any real physical context, instead giving access to a painted or inhabited life contained wholly within (**fig. 26**).

Even though the Vellum Sketchbook contains several designs that would only be materialized years later in Burges’s house in Holland Park, the work’s function as a whole was not primarily that of a practical pattern book. Above all, it acted as a threshold between two distinct worlds: that of external reality and that of the artist’s own imagination. In this respect, a particularly revealing drawing in the Vellum Sketchbook is that of a medieval tomb Burges discovered at Beauvais (**fig. 27**).⁶⁷ Burges’s caption to the image simultaneously insists on its status as a first-hand observation and undermines the credibility of the world from which it issues:

This is the tomb of Saint Arnould near Beauvais & the holes are for the sick to pass thro’
& when they have drunk from the fountain they are immediately cured & of this you may
be certain.

Taken together, image and caption are an obvious parody of the fantastical elements in Villard’s portfolio, such as his recipes for medicinal potions or his elaborate description of a device for perpetual motion. But they also function as a figuration of the Vellum

⁶⁷ Burges, Vellum Sketchbook, folio 20 verso.

Sketchbook itself, “produc[ing] the maker and the object, and thus encapsulat[ing] the process and its product ...”⁶⁸ The dark holes insistently drawn by Burges on the sides of the tomb mirror the mouths of the organically-shaped vases drawn on the following page, out of which living blooms seem spontaneously to grow. Like the mirror in Alice in Wonderland, these blackened orifices are metaphors of passage into a generative world, in which all formal combinations become possible. Yet the resulting product has no clear claim to reality: as Burges’s ironic annotations to his own drawings constantly remind us, the sketchbook’s ostensible author is a naïf—a man prone to non sequiturs, to portentous statements of the obvious, and to taking dubious legends at face value. If the Vellum Sketchbook is a parody, then above all it highlights the artifice of Burges’s assumed identity as a medieval draftsman. In a sense, it is no more authentic than his real identity as an architect in Victorian London.

3.3.4 The ambiguous symbol

The ambiguities of Burges’s imaginative process in the Vellum Sketchbook appear most clearly in the Jenner Crosier, which Burges designed and had manufactured for the Anglican bishop of Dunedin in 1866-7, and which he illustrated in the Vellum Sketchbook as a curiosity from the “isles where they eat one another” (a New Zealand unknown to the Middle Ages) (**fig. 28**).⁶⁹ Though the carved figurines on the crosier’s ivory handle are clearly meant to “tell a story,” that story’s content remains always elusive. At first hand, the figurines seem to represent the legend of England’s patron Saint

⁶⁸ Hélène Lipstadt, “Architectural Publications, Competitions, and Exhibitions”, in Kaufman and Blau, eds., Architecture and its Image, 110.

⁶⁹ Burges, Vellum Sketchbook, folio 32 recto.

George slaying a dragon: thus the crosier symbolizes both the colony's inclusion in the British Empire and the Church of England's evangelical mission among its native population. But the figures of knight, dragon, and lady might also be a representation in Gothic dress of the Greek myth of Perseus and Andromeda: viewed this way, the crosier also embodies Burges's belief in the similarities between Gothic and classical Greek architecture. Furthermore, the imagery on the crosier relates to a constellation of more private meanings, which played out simultaneously in Burges's interior in Buckingham Street. The dragon may be an iteration of the allegorical monsters—Contract, Arbitration, Law, etc.—painted on the cabinet in his study (c. 1858); if so, then the bound female figure might symbolize art threatened by the conditions of contemporary practice.⁷⁰ The contrasting poses of the armoured knight and the dragon's bound victim suggest yet another realm of imagery—that of the Sleeping Beauty panel Burges had painted over his bed (c. 1865-7), in which a woman lies unconscious, her arms pulled back behind her head to reveal her breasts, while an erect male partner silently watches over.⁷¹ With this, the crosier enters into a world of externalized sexual fantasies, in which women are portrayed as oblivious or captive objects of desire.

In her discussion of a famous series of portraits of women painted by Dante Gabriel Rossetti at the turn of the 1860s, art historian Elizabeth Prettejohn used the notions of “non-symbolizing” or “proliferating” symbols to describe the allusive ornaments with which these female figures are adorned—pieces of jewellery, details of clothing, or flowers and fruit. Unlike the objects collected at the time by painters

⁷⁰ Crook, William Burges, 320-321.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 326.

specialising in historical genre scenes, the pictorial accessories Rossetti employed do not allude to any specific time or place: Japanese and Chinese objects, which only became widely available on the British art market in the 1850s and 1860s, appear alongside costumes and poses referring to much earlier periods in Western history, such as the Venetian Renaissance or the ancient Middle East. Though these objects contributed to the overall visual theme of the painting, they could no longer be “decoded” individually as meaningful symbolic objects.⁷²

What makes Burges’s work unusual is that the proliferating meanings embedded in a work like the Jenner crosier also gave rise to a proliferation of contradictory representations. In addition to the drawing in the Vellum Sketchbook, the crosier was portrayed in the decorative art magazine L’art pour tous as an original thirteenth-century artwork from France, and in one of Burges’s photographic albums as a modern manufactured object (**fig. 29, 30**).⁷³ The same is true of the tower for the Law Courts competition, designed to dominate the building’s façade on the Strand. In a perspective drawn by Axel Haig for the competition boards, the tower formed a picturesque backdrop to the traffic and trade of modern London.⁷⁴ But in the Vellum Sketchbook, Burges himself portrayed it as a cosmology in stone, its symbolic meaning conveyed by sculpted

⁷² Elizabeth Prettejohn, Rossetti and his Circle (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1997), 14-16, 19-20, 24.

⁷³ “XIII^e siècle.—Orfèvrerie française. Crosse d’évêque en cuivre ciselé,” L’art pour tous: Encyclopédie de l’art industriel et décoratif 14 (1875): 1457.

⁷⁴ William Burges, Report to the Courts of Justice Commission (London: George Edward Eyre and William Spottiswoode, Printers to the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty, 1867).

personifications of the planets and the Zodiac.⁷⁵ Within the covers of the sketchbook, it proved possible to abstract the tower from its real setting in modern London, and to relocate it to a world in which nature, myth and art were still (or once again) wholly fused.

The Vellum Sketchbook belongs to a wider set of representations, all of which allude to the instability of Burges's creations in place and time. His contemporary perspective of Cork Cathedral (c. 1862) shows the west front being raised by medieval masons working with hammer, chisel and hoist (**fig. 31**); that for the Clock Tower at Cardiff Castle (1865) a yard peopled by ladies and knights in armour. In his study of Burges's scheme for the Crimean Memorial church in Constantinople (1856-7), Mark Crinson points out how Burges manipulated the watercolour perspective in such a way as to blur the physical boundaries between the church and the Muslim city around it: its detached campanile can be read as a minaret of the mosque behind, its porch as a caravanserai for Turkish traders.⁷⁶ In Crinson's view, Burges's graphic strategy served to naturalize what was essentially a foreign and even imperial project within the physical locale of Constantinople. But Burges also viewed Turkey as a country in which the "colour" of the Middle Ages (its elaborate costumes and handcrafts) could still be experienced at first hand.⁷⁷ In this sense, the building's ornament served to displace the design not only from London to Constantinople, but also from a modern to a pre-modern age.

⁷⁵ Burges, Vellum Sketchbook, folio 3 verso.

⁷⁶ Mark Crinson, Empire Building: Orientalism and Victorian Architecture (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), 152-153.

⁷⁷ Burges, Art Applied to Industry, 10.

Much like Rossetti's paintings, the Vellum Sketchbook is not really a representation of history at all. Though clearly distinct from the London in which Burges actually lived and moved, the "age" figured within its pages is a flattened and fabricated time—neither past nor future—in which specimens from nature and medieval art coexist alongside buildings and decorative objects Burges himself designed during the 1860s. More importantly, none of these disparate objects are unambiguously real. What Burges explored in the Vellum Sketchbook is the condition of architecture as pure ornament: could one still treat the building as a framework for symbolic imagery, once the ties linking "symbolic object and symbolized concept" had dissolved? If one judges by the cloud of representations with which Burges surrounded his works, then he found that such an architecture could generate multiple fictional truths about itself—existing, as it were, in several places and times at once. His elusive use of ornament, at once symbolic and obscure, served to draw to draw the viewer into the world of the work, by compelling him to speculate on its possible significance. Yet, precisely because his imagery opened onto a multiplicity of possible narratives, it also opened a gap between the work's private and public meanings.

3.4 Being Villard

3.4.1 Rossetti and his circle

In November 1858, shortly after the publication of Burges's first essay on Villard in the pages of The Builder, his confrere Robert Kerr countered in the same periodical with a satire of anachronism as a heroic posture. Ostensibly, Kerr wished to commend to the readers' attention the manifesto of an interesting young architect who, inspired by Villard's sketches, had adopted the biblical prosody of Thomas Carlyle, rechristened

himself “John de Camden Town, master of the works,” and dedicated himself to redesigning London shops in a style more congruent with the Scandinavian sagas.⁷⁸ What Kerr sought to imply was that the modern Gothic of the 1850s would prove to be yet another passing fashion, and, more generally, that the promotion of one style over another said nothing essential about the condition or purposes of architecture in modern England.

Kerr’s satire captured the potentially burlesque implications of patterning one’s practice on that of a long-dead master; but in a deeper sense, it misread Burges’s intentions. For the world in which Burges’s fascination with Villard played out during the 1860s was not primarily one of professional architects or builders. Moreover, the question that preoccupied him during this time was not that of style, but that of his social identity as a creator. Burges’s imaginative portrait of the medieval architect as a “maker above other makers” reaffirmed architecture’s status as a fine art – independent all at once of technology, of the systematic aims of industrial design, and of the repetitive standards of the modern builder. A less explicit aspect of this statement was that architecture, as an art, was also free of any moral and social purpose beyond its own formal integrity. The world in which this notion first emerged was a network of painters, poets and art patrons loosely centred on the person of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Together with John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti was a central actor in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a grouping of young artists founded in 1848.⁷⁹ Their collective identity as “Pre-Raphaelites” expressed an

⁷⁸ R.[obert] K.[err], “Heroes and Hero-Worship: The Hero as Architect,” The Builder 16 (1858): 794-795.

⁷⁹ Tim Barringer, The Pre-Raphaelites, Everyman Art Library (London: Calmann and King, 1998), 32-33.

ambition to emulate the ascetic pictorial practices of late medieval Italian art: clarity of outline, a flat treatment of colour, a rejection of illusionist perspective, and an insistent acknowledgement of the pictorial frame. Identification with the medieval past was a powerful impulse within the group, giving rise to a series of self-portrayals in historical costume: Millais had himself photographed as Dante, crowned by a wreath of laurels; in Rossetti's poems and paintings, Dante and Beatrice stand as metaphors for the artist's relationship with his deceased wife Elizabeth Siddall. Based on a tale by Boccaccio, Millais's Isabella (1848-9) can likewise be read as a portrait of the Brotherhood transposed to fourteenth-century Florence, with two of its members sitting as models for the painting's figures.⁸⁰

For the Pre-Raphaelites, however, allegiance to medieval practice also symbolized a desire for greater immediacy of perception. They emphasized truth to nature over ideal beauty by faithfully representing living models, animals, and plants; where this method was employed to depict religious scenes, the result had a deeply disturbing effect on Victorian audiences, because it made the life of Christ seem shockingly real.⁸¹ In 1851, Ruskin defended the Pre-Raphaelites in a public letter to The Times, arguing that medievalism was only a secondary aspect of their programme, and that their real aim was to depict the facts of nature as seen by the unaided, embodied eye.⁸² As Ruskin further recognized, each of these visible facts pointed to a distinct symbolic meaning: such works

⁸⁰ Ibid, 12-3.

⁸¹ Ibid, 37-40.

⁸² Ibid, 37.

were meant to be read.⁸³ In spite of their medievalism, the Pre-Raphaelites understood themselves and their art as wholly part of the contemporary world. Their process of meticulous observation and transcription drew on a masculine ethos of labour, and their representations of vernacular landscapes and commonplace interiors were a means to address distinctly modern situations. Crowded detail, narrative, and moral didacticism were all combined in Holman Hunt's The Awakening Conscience (1853-4): modelled with ethnographical accuracy on a room in an actual brothel, the scene functions as a dense web of significations. Visual clues indicate both the protagonist's condition as "kept woman" (the garish furniture, the clock under a glass dome, the wounded bird under the table) and her moment of spiritual revelation (the sunshine and trees reflected in the mirror, the nostalgic song left open on the piano).⁸⁴

By the time Burges came into contact with Rossetti in the late 1850s, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had split apart and Rossetti had begun to "unpick" the connections established by Ruskin between the work of art, the artist's character and the external world.⁸⁵ Bocca Baciata, a portrait modelled on Fanny Cornforth in 1859, was Rossetti's first attempt to emulate the sensual use of colour of the Venetian Renaissance (**fig. 32**). Not only did the painting's focus on Cornforth's hair and flesh break with the pictorial asceticism of earlier Pre-Raphaelite art, it also subverted expectations of an embedded pictorial narrative: the painting's title came to Rossetti as an afterthought,

⁸³ Kate Flint, The Victorians and the Visual Imagination (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 215-216.

⁸⁴ Barringer, Pre-Raphaelites, 94-97.

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Prettejohn, Beauty and Art: 1750-2000, Oxford History of Art (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 113-115.

implying that its meaning was already immanent in its colouring and design.⁸⁶ The literary allusion contained in the title—a reference to Boccaccio—also defied conventional morality, because it suggested that sexual promiscuity might in the end be rewarded by happiness.⁸⁷ Rossetti's Bocca Baciata had none of the moral charge of earlier Pre-Raphaelite art, but it empowered painting to engage with realities which had few outlets in Victorian culture beyond medical, legal or religious literature: be they private passions, such as William Morris's portrayal of his wife Jane Burden as impenitent adulteress in La Belle Iseult (1858),⁸⁸ or private mythologies, such as Simeon Solomon's conflation of physical beauty, androgyny and paganism in Bacchus (1867) and Heliogabalus (1866).⁸⁹

Rossetti's formal experimentations in painting nourished the theory of art's autonomy articulated by the poet and critic Algernon Swinburne in the middle of the 1860s. In his study on William Blake, first published in book form in 1868, Swinburne proposed that the integrity of the creative artist consisted in a single-minded dedication to his own art, as opposed to moral duty or scientific fact.⁹⁰ He also rejected any notion that art might lead to a form of immortality or spiritual transcendence. If taken seriously, “art for art's sake” meant that the value of the artwork had to be found in its material process rather than any resulting content : “Art's principle makes the manner of doing a thing the

⁸⁶ Ibid, 118-119.

⁸⁷ Barringer, Pre-Raphaelites, 146-149.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 20-21.

⁸⁹ Prettejohn, Rossetti and his Circle, 36-37.

⁹⁰ Prettejohn, Beauty and Art, 125.

essence of the thing done, the purpose or result of it the accident.”⁹¹ As William Michael Rossetti noted at the time, Swinburne’s aesthetic was self-consciously “pagan” in that it celebrated beauty as a fugitive and contingent quality, to be experienced in the here and now.⁹²

Though based on a careful reading of Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire, Swinburne’s ideas about art can also be construed as a theorization of Rossetti’s actual life in art. A parallel aspect of Rossetti’s oblique attack on Pre-Raphaelite values was the self-consciously “Bohemian” household he set up at Tudor House in Chelsea in 1862, shortly after his wife’s death. Contrary to the conventional households favoured until then by English painters, Tudor House drew on the myths of the gypsy encampment and the “vie de Bohême” of Parisian artists. In addition to the usual informal visitors, Swinburne, Rossetti’s brother William Michael, and the painter Frederick Sandys were all occasional lodgers there; moreover, the social life that played out in its walls was essentially masculine. When women were present, it was more often in the role of models and lovers than that of wives or sisters.⁹³ A particularly interesting document relating to Tudor House is a photograph taken in its garden around 1863:

... [it] shows Cornforth among a male confraternity that includes, from left to right, Swinburne, Rossetti, and William Michael Rossetti. This is almost a parody of a conventional Victorian family photograph, with Swinburne in the role of the eccentric younger brother or nephew, and Cornforth enthroned in the position usually reserved for

⁹¹ Algernon Charles Swinburne, William Blake: A Critical History (1868), quoted in Prettejohn, Beauty and Art, 126.

⁹² Prettejohn, Beauty and Art, 126-127.

⁹³ Prettejohn, Rossetti and his Circle, 17-19.

the mother. Rossetti presides over the party with an expansive gesture appropriate to paternal authority. But the only orthodox family relationship in the photograph is that between the brothers ...⁹⁴

An equally important aspect of Rossetti's self-transformation was his decision to withdraw his painterly production from the public realm. In contrast to the intense public discussion of Pre-Raphaelite works in the early 1850s, during the following decades Rossetti's painting were seldom exhibited in public, appearing instead in a restricted social network of "intimates and patrons," loosely centred on his own person.⁹⁵

3.4.2 Among Bohemians

As an architect in a community of painters, Burges's position within this rarefied world was necessarily insecure. Never one of Rossetti's intimates, his relationship with the painter's circle remained largely indirect, mediated in turn by institutions, patronage and mutual acquaintances.⁹⁶ Thus, in 1859, he hired a large number of artists to paint panels on a vast bookcase of his own design, among whom Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, Simeon Solomon, and Solomon's friend Henry Holiday.⁹⁷ From 1860 until its dissolution the following year, Burges was also a member of the short-lived Hogarth Club in London, founded in 1858 by Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown as an alternative venue for exhibitions to the Royal Academy. Burges's entry to this world was almost certainly

⁹⁴ Ibid, 19.

⁹⁵ Barringer, Pre-Raphaelites, 136.

⁹⁶ See Deborah Cherry, "The Hogarth Club: 1858-1861," The Burlington Magazine 122 (1980): 236-244; Crook, William Burges, 321; Barringer, Pre-Raphaelites, 87; Prettejohn, Rossetti and his Circle, 15.

⁹⁷ Crook, William Burges, 321.

his neighbour in Buckingham Street from 1856 to 1868, the watercolourist George Price Boyce: Boyce and Rossetti were both close friends and simultaneous lovers of Fanny Cornforth, and it was Boyce who commissioned Bocca Baciata.⁹⁸ Burges also became acquainted with prominent Aesthetic painters from outside Rossetti's immediate circle, namely James McNeill Whistler (probably through the architect E. W. Godwin) and Frederic Leighton, whom Burges met in Rome in 1853 and for whom he briefly did research on historical costume (Burges may later have been reintroduced to Leighton's house in Holland Park by its architect George Aichison).

Far more important than the actual nature of these contacts is the way they nourished Burges's identity as an "art-architect," operating at the margins of conventional society. An important document relating to Burges's self-image is the abstract of his diaries dictated shortly before his death. The exercise allowed him to cast his identity into a coherent and final shape, alternately omitting or bringing into prominence disparate events and people who had crossed his path. One of this document's more remarkable features is the place reserved in it to London's Aesthetic circles. Among the things Burges wished to be remembered for were that he had attended the same school as Rossetti, socialized with Edward Burne-Jones, William Morris and the art critic W.M. Rossetti, had breakfast with the poet Algernon Swinburne, dined with the painter Frederic Leighton, visited Morris's Red House in Bexleyheath and J.M. Whistler's Peacock Room in London, and lastly, received deathbed visits from both Whistler and Oscar Wilde.⁹⁹ All

⁹⁸ Prettejohn, Rossetti and his Circle, 15.

⁹⁹ Burges, Abstract of diaries, 1834-81.

of these men were relative outsiders in Victorian London; what the abstract of diaries tells us is that Burges believed himself to belong in their midst.

Like the abstract of diaries, the Vellum Sketchbook too contains markers of Burges's identification with London's aesthetes and bohemians. Near the end of the sketchbook, he inserted a series of drawings depicting a woman or siren absorbed in her own reflection (**fig. 33**).¹⁰⁰ The siren had a place in Villard's world as a Christian symbol of temptation, but the addition of a mirror alluded to a whole gallery of Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic representations, in which a female artist-figure either observes reality at a remove, mediated by a mirror, or focuses inward on a self-contained realm of fantasy or desire. One of the most frequently illustrated literary themes in nineteenth-century British art was Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem The Lady of Shalott (1832), the story of a woman imprisoned in a tower.¹⁰¹ Condemned to view the world solely through the reflections in her mirror, the Lady of Shalott weaves what she sees there into tapestry. When she finally breaks her spell and looks directly at the world, the web unravels and she herself dies. For Tennyson, the artistic isolation symbolized in the poem was a curse to be redeemed by love, and the poem's outcome in death a figure of salvation rather than failure.¹⁰² In William Holman Hunt's illustration for the Moxon edition of Tennyson's poems (1857), however, the poem's meaning became reversed. Hunt portrayed the moment in which the Lady of Shalott looks at the world as a moment of madness and destruction, brought on

¹⁰⁰ Burges, Vellum Sketchbook, folios 23 verso, 24 recto, 25 verso.

¹⁰¹ Christine Poulson, "Death and the Maiden: The Lady of Shalott and the Pre-Raphaelites," in Reframing the Pre-Raphaelites: Historical and Theoretical Essays, ed. Ellen Harding (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), 173.

¹⁰² Ibid, 179.

by the artist's sensual dereliction of duty (**fig. 34**).¹⁰³ In the first half of the 1860s, the figure of woman and mirror reappeared stripped of its underlying narrative, in two paintings by Rossetti and Whistler modelled on their respective mistresses Fanny Cornforth and Jo Hiffernan.¹⁰⁴ By this time, Prettejohn has suggested, the absorption of these figures in their own reflection had become a Narcissus-like figure “for autonomous art, sufficient in its own beauty without reference to extraneous purposes or ends.”¹⁰⁵

In a way, Burges's decision to pattern his practice as an architect after that of the artists in Rossetti's circle was an odd one. Although Pre-Raphaelite painters executed numerous mural paintings and designs for stained glass for High Victorian churches and civic buildings, their interest in architecture was at best tangential. As G.G. Scott believed that the Architectural Museum would bridge the social and intellectual gap between architects and workmen, so Ruskin saw a similar opportunity in the building of the Oxford Museum by architects Woodward and Deane (1853-60), in whose planning he was closely involved. His initial vision for the museum was that the Irish workforce hired to carry out its elaborate programme of didactic sculptures of natural life would be educated and “guided” by the Pre-Raphaelites.¹⁰⁶ However, the hoped-for collaboration never materialized. Instead, following a visit to the Oxford Museum in 1857, Rossetti enrolled his colleagues in a completely different undertaking—to adorn the debating

¹⁰³ Ibid, 173-7.

¹⁰⁴ D. G. Rossetti, Fazio's Mistress (1863), and J. M. Whistler, The Little White Girl: Symphony in White No. 2 (1864). See Prettejohn, Rossetti and his Circle, 26-31.

¹⁰⁵ Prettejohn, Beauty and Art, 121-4.

¹⁰⁶ Brian Hanson, Architects and the “Building World” from Chambers to Ruskin: Constructing Authority (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 220-221.

chamber in Woodward and Deane's Oxford Union with a series of frescoes based on Thomas Malory's late-medieval romance Le Morte d'Arthur. Rossetti's defection from the Oxford Museum was a significant move: it placed art inside the building rather than without, in the realm of books and rhetoric rather than that of nature, and it restricted the artist's role in the building process to the creation of symbolic surfaces, as opposed to Ruskin's ideal of a wholly symbolic fabric.¹⁰⁷

Nonetheless, if one views Burges's drawings of self-absorbed sirens as a series of artistic self-portraits, then it becomes clear that the early Pre-Raphaelites' ethos of masculine labour and engagement with society were superseded, in his mind, by the feminine faculties of idea and imagination. What Burges no doubt appreciated in the Oxford Union murals, as well as in the portraits of women which Rossetti began to produce in 1859, was the power of painting to create a closed, decorative, and erotically charged world. By adopting Villard's portfolio as a model for his own practice of drawing, it was this world-creating power that he sought to usurp.

3.4.3 The artist as grotesque

In her recent work on beauty as a critical issue in the visual arts, Elizabeth Prettejohn has stressed the empirical and speculative nature of Aestheticism in nineteenth-century Great Britain. In her view, Aestheticism should be understood less as a coherent set of practices or rules than as the formulation of a question: what would a work

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 222.

of art be like if its sole aim were to produce beauty?¹⁰⁸ If one considers the Vellum Sketchbook as one possible answer to this question, then the conclusion Burges came to was that beauty—conceived as the realm of culture, myth, and the erotic—had become radically divorced from that of technology. The only form in which it could still be produced was that of a slight and paradoxical counter-world to the objects it would adorn.

In a lecture delivered to the Society of Arts in 1864, Burges contradicted at length Ruskin's position that the technical realm lay entirely outside the bounds of art. One could indeed, he claimed, make a railway bridge beautiful:

Formerly the two professions of engineer and architect were not divided, and if we look into the old books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries we shall find that even machinery was to a certain extent made ornamental ... Hitherto we have done the reverse. The machines have been very strong and have done their work very well, but they have been dreadfully ugly, bearing about the same relation to what they ought to be as a skeleton does to the human body. One is very much tempted to imagine and try and think out how our ancestors of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries would have treated a royal locomotive with its tender and carriage ... : perhaps they would have converted the locomotive into the form of a dragon vomiting the smoke through its upraised head; his body and wings being rich with gold, colour, tin, and brass, and perhaps even great crystal balls would do duty for eyes.¹⁰⁹

To apprehend the machine in metaphorical terms as a chimera was a familiar trope at the time. Long before Burges, Victor Hugo argued that the Middle Ages would have

¹⁰⁸ Prettejohn, *Beauty and Art*, 151-155; idem, "The Modernism of Frederic Leighton," in *English Art 1860-1914: Modern Artists and Identity*, eds. David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 48.

¹⁰⁹ Burges, *Art Applied to Industry*, 52.

conceived the “iron horse” of the locomotive in the more fitting shape of an animated gargoyle;¹¹⁰ in 1865, Ruskin likened it to a finely-homed iron anatomy, beside which actual living creatures paled.¹¹¹ What is proper to Burges is the articulation of a quasi-surrealistic strategy, in which representations of nature and myth would be made to collide—literally and in the present day—with the brute products of industry: the locomotive, the steamboat, or the sheds of Hungerford Market.

¹¹⁰ “Il est vrai qu'il ne faut pas voir le cheval de fer ; si on le voit, toute la poésie s'en va. À l'entendre, c'est un monstre, à le voir, ce n'est qu'une machine. Voilà la triste infirmité de notre temps; l'utile tout sec, jamais le beau. Il y a quatre cents ans, si ceux qui ont inventé la poudre avaient inventé la vapeur, et ils en étaient bien capables, le cheval de fer eût été autrement façonné et autrement caparaçonné; le cheval de fer eût été quelque chose de vivant comme un cheval et de terrible comme une statue ... le soir, on eût vu passer près des villes tantôt une colossale gargouille aux ailes déployées, tantôt un dragon vomissant le feu, tantôt un éléphant la trompe haute, haletant et rugissant, effarés, ardents, fumants, formidables, traînant après eux comme des proies cent autres monstres enchaînés, et traversant les plaines avec la vitesse, le bruit et la figure de la foudre. C'eût été grand.” Victor Hugo, letter to his wife written from Antwerp, 22 August 1837; published posthumously in *En voyage: France et Belgique* (Paris: Hetzel, 1892), 93.

¹¹¹ “I cannot express the amazed awe, the crushed humility, with which I sometimes watch a locomotive take its breath at a railway station, and think what work there is in its bars and wheels, and what manner of men they must be who dig brown ironstone out of the ground, and forge it into THAT! What ... infinitely complex anatomy of active steel, compared with which the skeleton of a living creature would seem a mere morbid secretion and phosphatous prop of flesh.” John Ruskin, “The Cestus of Aglaia,” *Art Journal* N.S. 4 (February 1865): 33-35; quoted in Middleton, “Viollet-le-Duc's Academic Ventures and the *Entretiens sur l'architecture*,” in *Gottfried Semper und die Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1976), 243-244. I am grateful to Dr. Martin Bressani for suggesting a possible parallel between Burges's conceit and those of Hugo and Ruskin.

Twentieth-century critics have seized upon this conceit as an egregious instance of play-acting, but it was a perfectly plausible extension of the formal and intellectual collision then taking place in London, at St Pancras Station (1863-5). Designed by the civil engineer William Henry Barlow, the station's immense iron-and-glass train shed was at the time being incongruously wedded to George Gilbert Scott's street-side Midland Hotel, a turreted evocation in brick masonry of a North German medieval city hall. In fact, the crystal eyes on Burges's medieval locomotive refer quite explicitly to the feldspar globes which Scott incorporated into his rood screen for Hereford Cathedral, feted at the London International Exhibition of 1862 as a truly modern expression of Gothic for its use of cast iron, mechanically polished stones and electrotyped sculpture (**fig. 35**). The difference between Scott's "modernity" and Burges's "anachronism" was that the latter meant to juxtapose engineering and ornament in a way that was emphatically grotesque.

Inevitably, Burges's conception of ornament and its substrate as clashing, contradictory worlds contaminated his conception of self. With Lassus and Viollet-le-Duc, the relevance of Villard's portfolio to modern architectural practice had rested on an imagined closeness between the medieval artisan and his nineteenth-century counterpart—either by dint of their shared race and mother tongue, or because of their similarly secular and rational mind. For Burges, on the other hand, Villard represented nothing so intimate or determining as a master or ancestor. He would no doubt have agreed with Lassus that the Gothic of thirteenth-century northern France constituted a kind of language, but it was one with which he—a modern Englishman from an evangelical background—had no organic connection. On the contrary, Burges's

emulation of Villard played on the obvious disjunctions between himself as an actor, his chosen character, and the setting of Victorian London.

Therefore, perhaps the most accurate way to consider Burges's appropriation of Villard is to view it as a persona. As Carl Jung defined the concept in the early twentieth century, the persona is a psychological construct: not a sovereign, centred and reified personality, but a mask that mediates between the individual and the demands placed upon him by the community.¹¹² The persona is only one voice among many that issue from the self: it is not in itself a false or inauthentic expression, but it remains always incomplete and only partially true. Much as Rossetti found a vehicle for sensuality in the closed world of the decorative portrait, or Simeon Solomon a means of sexual self-affirmation in pre-Christian mythology, Burges's Villard-persona provided him with a consistent creative voice in a culture with little use for public symbols or spontaneous expression. By repeatedly inscribing himself into the fictional world of the Vellum Sketchbook, he created the metaphorical equivalent of the six-mile-long wall that encircled William Beckford's home at Fonthill Abbey.¹¹³ The underlying process was inherently theatrical—equivalent to donning a stage costume—but it made room for a sexual and ornamental imagination that coupled fish with fowl, heads with tails, gnomes with mermaids, and lascivious Princes with sleeping Beauties.

¹¹² C[arl] G. Jung, excerpt from "The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious," in The Essential Jung, ed. Anthony Storr (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 94-96.

¹¹³ Brooks, The Gothic Revival, 155-157.

CHAPTER THREE

AT THE EXHIBITIONS: GROTESQUES, FETISHES AND PAINTED FURNITURE

4.1 Introduction

In an issue of Daidalos dedicated to the interior as “soul-box,” J. Mordaunt Crook described William Burges’s rooms at 15 Buckingham Street, London (1856-78), as a vanished Pre-Raphaelite interior.¹ The rooms’ contents, he acknowledged, were the result of a haphazard process of accumulation. But the decorative objects and furniture with which they were filled, as well as the painted decorations on their walls and ceilings, nonetheless amounted in the end to a closed and complete dream world. In Crook’s interpretation, the rooms lent substance and solidity to Burges’s sense of self, but only by radically shutting out external reality: “here Burges himself has become the dreamer, asleep in his Palace of Art.”² If Burges’s lodgings in Buckingham Street were the embodiment of a dream, then it was a dream without referents in the world beyond their walls. The artist, it seemed, could only define himself through a deliberate act of obliteration—the production of a home.

But did Burges’s rooms in Buckingham Street constitute in fact a seamless cage for their inhabitant? Described by Crook as part of a late retreat from the conflict-ridden realm of public architecture and the search for a new style,³ Burges’s preoccupation with the domestic interior really began long before. His earliest pieces of painted furniture are

¹ Crook, “A Vanished Pre-Raphaelite Interior,” 50.

² Ibid, 56.

³ Crook, , “William Burges and the Dilemma of Style,” 13-14.

roughly contemporary with his designs for Lille Cathedral and the Crimean Memorial church in Constantinople, and predate by at least ten years his large domestic schemes of the late 1860s and 1870s, at Cardiff Castle and Castell Coch in Wales, and Knightshayes Court in Devon. Moreover, though Burges's smaller decorative works were mostly destined for domestic use, in the houses of individual patrons or in Burges's own rooms, they were never wholly private. Produced by shifting networks of cabinetmakers, goldsmiths and painters, put on show in local and international exhibitions, published and discussed in the architectural press, and finally mediated through photography, Burges's furniture always hovered on the fringes of the public and the intimate.

This chapter argues that, for Burges, the creation of painted furniture was an undertaking which prefigured, and ultimately nourished, his architectural projects. It allowed him to experiment with collaborative forms of practice, as well as with ornamental strategies of displaced meaning, proportion and setting. It participated in a widespread preoccupation at mid-century with decorative objects in particular, and more generally with the seemingly debased nature of modern material things. Thus, Burges's painted furniture of the late 1850s and 1860s cannot be understood without reference to the industrial exhibitions, and especially to the spectacle inside the Crystal Palace.

In terms of architectural production, the Great Exhibition of 1851 is little more than a footnote in Burges's career. After leaving Blore's practice in 1849, at the age of twenty-two, he went to work for Matthew Digby Wyatt (then Henry Cole's principal assistant for the upcoming Exhibition), remaining with him for four years.⁴ Yet the

⁴ Under Wyatt's supervision, Burges worked first on a portfolio of examples of decorative ironwork (M. [Matthew] Digby Wyatt, Metal-work and its artistic design: dedicated, by express permission,

Exhibition also projected Burges from a sparsely furnished world of medieval antiquities into a profusion of novel products, materials and forms. It subverted what to him was a familiar syntax—that of the medieval specimen and its representation in the space of the album—by applying it to goods that were neither ancient nor rare. It provided him with the spatial and pictorial models through which he later mediated his own decorative creations, first in the Medieval Court of 1862, and later in the photographic album (discussed in chapter 4). Above all, the exhibitions exposed him to an aesthetic of the grotesque that later resurfaced in the creation of his own furniture.

The first section of this chapter discusses some of the critical terms that the Victorians employed to convey their diffuse sense of the instability of material things: the commodity, the grotesque, and the fetish. A second section examines Burges's early production of painted furniture, up to the Medieval Court of 1862, and how it related to parallel undertakings by artists such as William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The concluding section looks more closely at Burges's lodgings in Buckingham Street, the décor that developed there between 1862 and 1870, and how painted furniture came to embody a fictional world.

A few years after the Great Exhibition, Owen Jones argued in The Grammar of Ornament that it was from the field of decorative design, not that of architecture, that the

to the Right Hon. Henry Labouchere (London: Day, 1852)), sketching historical specimens in the Louvre Museum, and likely visiting the Exposition nationale of 1849 in Paris. Between 1851 and 1853, he also collaborated on the production of an album of works of decorative art culled from the Great Exhibition (M. [Matthew] Digby Wyatt, Industrial Arts of the XIXth Century at the Great Exhibition, 2 volumes (London: Day and Son, 1853)).

new would at last emerge. In order to bring it forth, he added, the designer had to go primitive, imaginatively reverting to a state of original innocence:

... we must even be as little children or as savages; we must get rid of the acquired and artificial, and return to and develop natural instincts.⁵

Steeped in an antiquarian tradition of recording and reproduction, Burges seems an unlikely candidate as Jones's imaginary savage. But what is a dream, if not an indirect way of yielding to one's instincts?

4.2 An aesthetic of the grotesque

4.2.1 A crisis of things

In 1905, Hermann Muthesius argued in his monumental study of the English house that the nineteenth-century interior had been infected by a fundamental wrongness. Rather than being a power for change, the expansion of industrial production and subsequent rise in standards of living and consumption at mid-century had turned the home into a form of masquerade, in which the new passed for the authentically old, ersatz materials for the authentically valuable, and the machine-finished reproduction for its laboriously hand-crafted model:

The old forms persisted as animated corpses; due to a lack of nourishing life-power, they became ever uglier and more deformed. In the end they were hideous caricatures—the

⁵ Owen Jones, The Grammar of Ornament, illustrated by Examples from Various Styles of Ornament, with lithographs by Francis Bedford (London: Day and Son, 1856), 3.

furniture of the age of stylistic imitations in the latter half of the nineteenth century can be summarized in no other way.⁶

In particular, Burges's late home of Tower House exemplified for Muthesius all that would be left behind in the new century: its strenuous medievalism, its clutter of bibelots, and the dense superflux of carved, painted and gilded ornament covering all visible surfaces.⁷ But the worst about Burges's interiors, in Muthesius's view, was the heavy, angular and uncomfortable furniture with which they were filled.

This was a paradox, because for Muthesius Burges had been the most gifted Gothic Revivalist of his generation. In his versatility and mastery of all that touched the fine and the decorative arts, he had shared something of Pugin's genius.⁸ Inside his house, however, all the sound ideas relating to the layout of rooms and wall surfaces or the use of colour and ornament had become mired in an effort to resurrect a dead style. As a result, the furniture has become monstrous—some pieces over-decorated with superadded excrescences, after the manner of the thirteenth century; others, though box-like in construction, completely painted over with colour. Muthesius could think of only one word to describe the whole: "Unkultur."⁹ In other words, Burges's medievalism had made him unable to give form to modern life in a meaningful way.

But if the domestic interior became deformed during the nineteenth century, as Muthesius claimed, it was perhaps less because of an excessive attachment to history than

⁶ Hermann Muthesius, Das Englische Haus: Entwicklung, Bedingungen, Anlage, Aufbau, Einrichtung und Innenraum (Berlin: Ernst Wasmuth, 1905), vol. 3, 67 [author's translation].

⁷ Ibid, 76.

⁸ Ibid, 75.

⁹ Ibid, 76.

because of the unsettled status of the objects it contained. During the 1850s and 1860s, industrial capacity made it possible for the first time to quickly and reliably provide the burgeoning middle-class market with furnishings for the home.¹⁰ New modes of display exalted these same goods, turning them quite literally into objects of cult, which seemed to speak for the self in a way that their owners' words or actions alone could not.¹¹ In turn, the proliferation of inexpensive, manufactured simulacra called into question the unique value of the antiquities and art works that were so essential to earlier, Romantic interiors. The Victorians, Muthesius noted, had now come to revel in the grotesque:

It was the age that gave out prizes specifically for imitation. Papier-mâché that looked like metal, plaster that perfectly imitated the appearance of stone, wallpapers that simulated the effect of marble cladding, oil painting that deceptively evoked the graining of wood, those were the things that then aroused interest and wonder.¹²

4.2.2 The commodity exalted

It is already well established that the key moment in this crisis of things was the advent of the industrial exhibition as a form of mass spectacle. Ostensibly a celebration of Britain's manufacturing prowess and material abundance, the Great Exhibition of 1851 was in fact conceived from the outset in a spirit of insecurity, born of the preceding decade's slow industrial growth, dwindling competitiveness, economic recession, and

¹⁰ Jeffrey A. Auerbach, The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1999), 19.

¹¹ Thomas Richards, The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 7.

¹² Muthesius, Das Englische Haus, 70 [author's translation].

political and social unrest.¹³ The Exhibition's practical focus on the display of 'decorative manufactures' was therefore an attempt on the part of its organizers to create new markets for British wares by bringing them directly to the public.¹⁴ Henry Cole, the Exhibition's most active promoter and ideologist, claimed in The Journal of Design and Manufactures that the visual confrontation with well-made products would of itself prove instructive, and that seeing would be tantamount to appreciating:

It is a universal complaint among manufacturers that the taste for good art does not exist in sufficient extent to reward them for the cost of producing superior works; that the public prefers the vulgar, the gaudy, the ugly even, to the beautiful and perfect.

We are persuaded that, if artistic manufactures are not appreciated, it is because they are not widely enough known. We believe that when works of high merit, of British origin, are brought forward they will be thoroughly appreciated and thoroughly enjoyed. We believe that this exhibition, when thrown open gratuitously to all, will tend to improve the public taste.¹⁵

The notion of display upon which the Great Exhibition was predicated was novel indeed. Far from being a ubiquitous visual spectacle, commodities remained confined to the margins of city life and city representations well into the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ On the sidewalks of London, the sale ware was viewed primarily as an object of everyday use: it was handled and exchanged without ceremony and advertised not so much visually as orally and textually, by the cries of street barkers and by pasted bills and

¹³ Auerbach, The Great Exhibition, 9-20.

¹⁴ Ibid, 23-25.

¹⁵ Ibid, 12.

¹⁶ Richards, Advertising and Spectacle, 15.

sandwich-board men.¹⁷ Commercial attempts to exalt the commodity in the street, by means of tumbrels bearing “exaggerated umbrellas, Cheshire cheeses, tubs of butter, and sides of bacon,” elicited ridicule rather than intoxication.¹⁸

Cole’s programme for the Exhibition, however, lent a new and ambiguous status to the wares that went on display: these were no longer understood merely as objects of use, but also as “educational devices.”¹⁹ Inside the Crystal Palace, this hybrid condition was reflected in the wealth of objects that were conceived solely for purposes of demonstration and show, that highlighted unfamiliar synthetic materials or novel and sometimes absurdly contradictory uses, and that could never have been profitably produced for a middle-class market. In this sense, if the Exhibition was indeed a “warehouse of consumer goods ... stuffed with everyday goods for the middle class,”²⁰ then it was one in which these goods had gone strange. Papier-mâché passed for velvet plush and gutta-percha for mahogany;²¹ pocket knives sported eighty blades; candelabra took on the sinuous shape of plants, and scissors the coruscated outline of coral (**fig. 36**).²²

Thus, from the point of view of the visitor, the experience of the Great Exhibition was one of confrontation with things that resisted all attempts at categorization or

¹⁷ Ibid, 45.

¹⁸ Ibid, 48-9.

¹⁹ Ibid, 23.

²⁰ Auerbach, The Great Exhibition, 121.

²¹ Nikolaus Pevsner, High Victorian Design: a Study of the Exhibits of 1851 (London: Architectural Press, 1951), 33-40.

²² Ibid, 87-89, 93-98.

taxonomy. A satirical rendering of the Exhibition's closing by George Cruikshank (**fig. 37**) showed the Crystal Palace unleashing on the world a seething confusion of commodities and art works, the trivial and the monumental, the singular and the anonymous:

... Robert Lucas Chance's lighthouse, five equestrian statues ..., four chandeliers, three disembodied boots, carpets and rugs, pots, vases, a steam engine, H. Ploucquet's stuffed animals ..., automata, a cannon, swords, knight in armor, the colossal Bavarian lion, a classical female torso, four clocks, two organs, the Saffron Walden stuffed elephant lent to bear the Indian palanquin, cellos, hats, parasols, fans, feathers, Mr. Murphy's Great (Dublin) Bell, bellows, rakes, spades, a tiger skin from Nicholay's, clothes, drapery ...²³

Many of the individual exhibits likewise proposed incongruous hybrids, in the form of jewellery, dress or furniture onto which were grafted the life-like remains of dead animals, or oxymoronic tableware, whose naturalistic ornament offered an eerie simulacrum of their edible contents.²⁴ The public's encounter with such objects was necessarily a disturbing one, because they transgressed conventional boundaries between

²³ Isobel Armstrong, "Languages of Glass: The Dreaming Collection", in Victorian Prism: Reflections of the Crystal Palace, eds. James Buzzard, Joseph W. Childers and Eileen Gillooly (Charlottesville; London: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 55. Entitled "The Dispersion of the Works of All Nations from the Great Exhibition of 1851," Cruikshank's engraving was part of a series of illustrations to Henry Mayhew's tale of a middle-class British family's visit to the Crystal Palace (Henry Mayhew and George Cruikshank, 1851: or, The Adventures of Mr. and Mrs. Sandboys and Family, who Came up to London to 'Enjoy Themselves,' and to See the Great Exhibition (London: D. Bogue, ca. 1851)).

²⁴ Shelagh Wilson, "Monsters and Monstrosities: Grotesque Taste and Victorian Design", Victorian Culture and the Idea of the Grotesque, ed. Colin Trodd, Paul Barlow and David Amigoni (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 150-152.

the living and the dead, between things and their representation, and between the body of the household object and that of its user.²⁵

Moreover, the spatial and visual logic of the Crystal Palace prevented any of the exhibits from being understood for what they truly were. Presented no longer on the street, but in a framework of polychrome iron and Oriental carpets that was largely opaque to the city outside, the commodities on show were closely crowded together in a novel effect of visual density (**fig. 38**). Flooded with light and isolated by pedestals and casings, the commodity was perceived in the press of the moving crowd as part of an animated and confusing procession. All understanding of its use, provenance or the conditions of its production and exchange was necessary lost.²⁶ The Exhibition's mode of display transformed a disparate accumulation of goods into a unified, dream-like spectacle: "a vast space of association" and desire, in which individual things, having "[lost] all distinctness," functioned as empty vessels for the viewer's identification.²⁷

4.2.3 The object as fetish

The grotesque, Shelagh Wilson has noted, was defined by most mid-nineteenth-century design criticism as an "absence": that is, a mode of expression to be contained, if not repressed and denied.²⁸ Although Ruskin sought in The Stones of Venice to redefine the grotesque as a potentially noble aesthetic category, his views remained marginal

²⁵ Ibid, 148, 152-153.

²⁶ Richards, Advertising and Spectacle, 20-32, 38.

²⁷ Ibid, 30-31.

²⁸ Wilson, "Monsters and Monstrosities," 148.

throughout the 1850s.²⁹ Because the grotesque focused on bodily realism rather than classical ideals of beauty, it was more commonly conceived as a trivial and lowly form of entertainment—confined by theory to a limited field of humorous decorative detail, and in practice to didactic exhibits of ornamental error, such as the collection Henry Cole established within the new Museum of Manufactures in order “to illustrate false principles of design.”³⁰

Where the grotesque did come to expression, however, was in the exhibit. Submitted by individual manufacturers and selected by local committees, the objects produced for the Great Exhibition escaped the oversight of its commissioners,³¹ and transgressed natural categories in undisciplined and extravagant fashion: making the dead seem live, the mineral seem vegetal, or the animal seem human. Why this sudden proliferation of monstrous hybrids? Wilson explains the phenomenon as a celebration of the transformative powers of manufacturing.³² But more fundamentally, the grotesque expressed the increasingly ambiguous nature of made things. Debased in both material and form, the decorative manufacture was nonetheless becoming invested with the power to contain, shelter, and speak for its owner.

²⁹ Ibid, 146. For Ruskin, the grotesque was ‘noble’ inasmuch as it was the expression of an uneducated workman’s liberated imagination. Conceived in this way, grotesque ornament combined humour and seriousness; although it represented imaginary creatures, it was morally truthful because it gave shape to fears and evils that were indeed part of the real world. See Ruskin, The Stones of Venice, vol. 3, plate III and 125-165.

³⁰ Wilson, “Monsters and Monstrosities,” 146, 154.

³¹ Auerbach, The Great Exhibition, 92.

³² Wilson, “Monsters and Monstrosities,” 153.

In his critique of political economy (the first volume of which was published in 1867), Marx asserted that, under modern capitalism, labour and its products assumed a fantastic form that was different from their concrete reality:

The form of wood, for instance, is altered if a table is made out of it. Nevertheless the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will.³³

For Marx, what turned a mere material thing into a commodity was the process of its monetization. In a market fuelled exclusively by exchanges of money, the actual labour that went into the production of goods became concealed from view. Value came to be falsely vested in the object itself, rather than in the labour expended to make it or the concrete uses to which it could be put. Thus, the real social relations between people were transmuted into a delusional relation between seemingly autonomous things.³⁴ To explain the strangely double quality of the monetized commodity, Marx borrowed from contemporary ethnology the term of “fetish.”

Capital was only translated into English in 1886. By then, however, the concept of the fetish was already common currency across a wide field of literature. It was given

³³ Quoted in Tomoko Masuzawa, “Troubles with Materiality: The Ghost of Fetishism in the Nineteenth Century,” in Religion: Beyond a Concept, ed. Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 647.

³⁴ Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, trans. Ben Fowkes, introduction by Ernest Mandel (New York: Penguin, 1976, reprint 1990), vol. 1, 164-165.

particular prominence at the turn of the 1870s, in two works by Matthew Arnold and Edward B. Tylor—respectively Culture and Anarchy (1869) and Primitive Cultures (1871).³⁵ In an attempt to define culture by what it was not, both authors used fetishism to characterize a state of primitive delusion about the nature of reality. Arnold and Tylor wrote from opposing perspectives—the one providing a humanistic definition of culture, the other an anthropological one; Arnold locating primitivism among his own contemporaries, and Tylor among African tribes. But both attributed to fetishism a similar meaning, viewing it as the tendency of an uncultured being to project his affects and thought onto lifeless objects, and thus (unwittingly) to explain the world in terms of himself.³⁶

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, fetishism also remained a prominent, if vexing, object of discourse in the science of religions. Proposed by Auguste Comte as the origin of all religious feeling in his widely-read Cours de philosophie positive (1830-42, translated into English in 1853),³⁷ fetishism was quite rapidly discredited as a scientific category. The term was too general to be useful, and was rooted in an ignorance of actual primitive religious practices; yet the notion itself stubbornly refused to die away.³⁸ While it proved inadequate to describe the religious rites of primitive peoples, it seemed to capture a type of relationship with things that was all too familiar to observers of the Victorian scene.

³⁵ Peter Melville Logan, Victorian Fetishism: Intellectuals and Primitives (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 3-4.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, 4.

³⁸ Masuzawa, “The Ghost of Fetishism,” 648-649.

Thus, in a series of lectures delivered at Westminster Abbey in 1878, the noted Oxford historian of religions F. Max Müller strenuously argued against the idea of fetishism as a primeval form of worship. In his view, all religion was rooted instead in the sense of an invisible and immaterial second self.³⁹ Even where images were worshipped, it was only as an icon or idol bearing a resemblance or material kinship to another, spiritual power.⁴⁰ The fetish, however, was something altogether different. In Müller's view, fetishism was a low, corrupted and mistaken form of worship, in which power was transferred from the idol's indwelling spirit to the thing itself.⁴¹ Müller claimed that all fetishes were intrinsically "rubbish"—grossly material and finite objects, thrown into one's path by happenstance.⁴² Nevertheless, the tendency to create and worship such things was a universal one, because it was rooted in psychological needs:

Much, no doubt, may be said in explanation, even in excuse of fetishism, under all its forms and disguises. It often assists our weakness, it often reminds us of our duties, it often may lead our thoughts from material objects to spiritual visions, it often comforts us when nothing else will give us peace.⁴³

According to Tomoko Masuzawa, the concept of fetishism persisted throughout the second half of the nineteenth century because "things," as a whole, had become

³⁹ F. Max Müller, "Is Fetishism a Primitive Form of Religion?," in Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Religions of India (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1882), 91.

I am grateful to Dr. Martin Bressani for directing me to this source.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 66.

⁴¹ Ibid, 108, 114, 123-124.

⁴² Ibid, 65.

⁴³ Ibid, 120.

problematic. With the progress of modernity, all that was material came to be seen as a realm increasingly separate from the human subject, who alone now was endowed with individuality and agency.⁴⁴ But paradoxically, in the process of becoming “dead,” things also became available in new ways, as a medium for phantasms and dreams. Indeed, if Müller could speak of the fetish in such familiar terms, as a safe haven for one’s weaknesses, it is no doubt because he recognized its workings in the interiors of his own age.⁴⁵

4.3 A last Medieval Court

4.3.1 Furniture that speaks (1856-58)

Begun in the same year in which the opening volume of the Dictionnaire raisonné du mobilier français first appeared in print, Burges’s earliest pieces of painted furniture can be understood, like Viollet-le-Duc’s encyclopaedic work, as an attempt to resurrect the medieval world by making it inhabitable at all scales—from the building’s outer shell to the hand-held utensil. But whereas Viollet-le-Duc envisioned cabinet-making as part of a repertoire of constructive gestures, illustrating the art of joinery through structural sections and axonometric diagrams, Burges approached furniture above all as an iconographer. He undertook to revive medieval craft by making it speak, emblazoning it with “words” drawn from secular poetry and Classical or Christian mythology.

⁴⁴ Masuzawa, “The Ghost of Fetishism,” 667.

⁴⁵ See Martin Bressani, “Empathie, entropie et la maison sensorielle,” manuscript of conference. Entropic Territories, Phyllis Lambert International Seminar. École d’architecture, Université de Montréal, 20 March 2010. Here Bressani discusses notions of fetishism and empathy as specifically nineteenth-century modes of engagement with the domestic interior.

Commissioned in 1858 by Herbert George Yatman, the brother of a clergyman for whom he had recently restored a small church in Somerset, Burges's first set of painted furniture comprised three major pieces: an escritoire, an upright cabinet, and a wine cooler.⁴⁶ Carried out by hired artists,⁴⁷ the painted ornament that covered the furniture's pine structure and mahogany panels, inside and out, consisted of elaborate sequences of images that comically exalted their everyday purpose. Thus, the cabinet for plate bore personifications of the various metals mythically created by the sun's rays, and forged by the Cyclops and Tubal-cain;⁴⁸ the wine cooler, scenes from the medieval poem Le martyre de Saint Bacchus alongside personifications of various wines;⁴⁹ the escritoire, scenes from the myth of Cadmus (who was supposed to have invented the Greek alphabet) as well as allegories of inscription (an Assyrian sculptor at work on clay tablets), composition (Dante writing the Divine Comedy) and publication (a modern printer setting his letterpress).⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Crook, William Burges, 224-225, 295-296. See also Crook, ed., Strange Genius, 73-74, catalogue items B.1 and B.2; Charles Handley-Read, "Notes on William Burges's Painted Furniture," The Burlington Magazine 105 (1963), 496, 500-502. According to Burges's "Abstract of diaries," his first commission for Yatman was a small casket made in 1856.

⁴⁷ The ornament on the escritoire (and possibly the Sun cabinet) was the work of E.J. Poynter, that on the wine cooler by Nathaniel Westlake and Thomas Morten. See Crook, William Burges, 295-296.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 296.

⁴⁹ Sarah Towne Hufford, "The 'St Bacchus' sideboard: A new piece of furniture by William Burges," The Burlington Magazine 128 (1986), 411.

⁵⁰ J.B. [John Burley] Waring, Masterpieces of Industrial Art and Sculpture at the International Exhibition 1862 (London: Day & Son, 1862), vol. 2, 18.

Narrative representation of this kind was familiar to mid-Victorian viewers, who expected to be able to “read” paintings, and to seamlessly translate image into word.⁵¹ In the Yatman furniture, however, it could be argued the sheer excess of speaking ornament served to estrange the object from its surroundings. A similar role was played by the vibrantly coloured background to the painted panels : on the *escritoire*’s main body, alternating bands of red and deep blue were stencilled with diapers of flowers, leaves or animals picked out in gold; the relief of wooden tiles above was painted in a chequered pattern of red, yellow and dark green (**fig. 39**).⁵² The cabinet’s status as a fitting within a room was further brought into question by the architectural miniatures grafted onto its plain wooden structure: oversized finials; squat, freestanding columns that supported the upper compartment; and dormer windows let into the cabinet’s gable, that functioned as day-and-month calendars.⁵³

In formal terms, the Yatman furniture drew on a small number of surviving examples of medieval furniture, such as the painted *armoires* in the cathedrals of Bayeux and Noyon, both reproduced by Viollet-le-Duc in the Dictionnaire raisonné du mobilier français: the gabled roof and exposed iron straps on the panels of the *escritoire* are directly derived from them (**fig. 40**).⁵⁴ Thus, the whole enterprise of reviving painted

⁵¹ Flint, The Victorians and the Visual Imagination, 199, 207-216.

⁵² Waring, Masterpieces of Industrial Art, vol. 2, plate 155.

⁵³ *Ibid*, vol. 2, 18.

⁵⁴ Viollet-le-Duc, Dictionnaire raisonné du mobilier français, vol. 1, 7, 10, plate I. Though the *armoire* at Noyon was reproduced first by Didron, in Annales Archéologiques 4 (1846), 369-375 (see Handley-Read, “Burgess’s Painted Furniture”, 500), Viollet-le-Duc’s Dictionnaire raisonné du mobilier français provided a first colour illustration of it. The *armoire* at Bayeux was also reproduced in César

furniture could be viewed as part of an antiquarian project to recreate the interior of the medieval church as it really had been. In an article written in 1867, Burges condemned the abstract, machine-tooled ornament to be found in modern High Victorian churches as a denial of art. In his view, the “prettinesses of large fluor spar cannon-balls, inlaid dots of marble, incised stone...” were mere “shams and vanities.”⁵⁵ The real glory of the church had consisted instead in its fusion of narrative art with common objects:

In the middle ages, what are called pictures, as we understand them, were comparatively unknown: all the small paintings that have come down to us formed part of furniture, either domestic or sacred. It is almost impossible for us who have never seen a period specimen, to conceive of the effect of a first-class piece of medieval sacred furniture, covered with burnished gilding engraved and punched into patterns, enriched with paintings by an artist like Giotto, and glittering with mosaics of gilt and coloured glass.⁵⁶

In practice, however, Burges’s interest in painted furniture seems to have originated instead in an impulse to create framed and self-contained interiors. Several years before his designs for Yatman, while working on the unrealized competition scheme for Lille cathedral (1855-6), he developed the idea that furniture might function as a separate narrative within a larger cycle—that of the building’s material fabric. On the outside, the cathedral’s sculptured portals and stained glass windows materially embodied

Daly’s Revue générale de l’architecture (see Waring, Masterpieces of Industrial Art, vol. 2, 18), as well as in Nesfield, Specimens of Mediaeval Architecture (1862), plates 8 and 9. Burges’s own acquaintance with the armoire at Noyon may have stemmed from his “long journey” on the continent in 1853-54 (see Burges, Abstract of diaries; Handley-Read, “Burges’s Painted Furniture”, 501).

⁵⁵ William Burges, “Why We Have so little Art in our Churches,” The Ecclesiologist 28, N.S. 25 (1867), 133.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

the story of Christ and Humanity.⁵⁷ Inside, however, another story took place: dominating the nave from above, the organ's wooden casing was cut out to represent a fortress, and painted with stylized allegories of Music drawn from Classical, Christian and Old Testament mythology (**fig. 41**).⁵⁸ The fortress, moreover, referred to secular furnishings, in the shape of a cast Burges had in his possession of a fourteenth-century ivory mirror-case representing knights and ladies engaged in battle in the fortress of love.⁵⁹

Burges later justified such discrepancies by arguing that the medieval church had always been a medium for both sacred and secular histories:

... a very great part of our ancient domestic buildings have perished, and even of those which have been spared by time or man, none possess their original decoration. Consequently [those who view medieval art as a strictly ecclesiastical art] almost refuse to believe in any scheme of secular painting and decoration of the thirteenth century, still less what they consider as the reprehensible interchange of secular and religious subjects; such as the series of Scripture history in the King's Chamber (probably answering to our drawing room) at Westminster, or the secular series of the labours of the year, and the signs of the Zodiac in ecclesiastical buildings as at Salisbury, &c.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ According to Didron's analysis of its iconography (*Annales archéologiques* 16 [1856], 206), the scheme's sculptures portrayed "La divine liturgie," its north rose window "La vie humaine." See Crook, *William Burges*, 173.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ The mirror-case was part of a collection of antiquarian specimens Burges displayed during the 1850s and 1860s at meetings of the Royal Archaeological Institute. See *Archaeological Journal* 14 (1857), 96; quoted in Crook, *William Burges*, 77.

⁶⁰ William Burges, "Our Future Architecture," *The Builder* 25 (1867), 386.

While he argued that there had been an easy continuity in Medieval art between the realms of the secular and the sacred, the flat wooden structure of his fittings for Lille and the poetic origin of their ornament lent them in fact a wholly distinct status from that of their container. Where Burges drew the cathedral's vessel as a material reality (stone stacked upon stone, in the manner of the geometrical drawings laid out on the walls and floors of medieval churches), the cathedral's furniture transgressed all archaeological realism. Thus, while the building itself stood in the middle of a nineteenth-century town, its painted furnishings belonged to an "unreal," imaginatively recovered time. As historian Stefan Muthesius perceptively noted, Burges's furnishings for Lille were objects in metamorphosis, whose status was undecidable:

Although simple in outline and carpenter-like in construction, through indications of battlements and pinnacles these pieces of furniture seem to suggest shrines or castles, in which the painted stories are happening. In this they depart entirely from the Puginian rational principles that the architecture should be 'construction' or—in Ruskin's words—should be 'real' as distinct from the illusion of the pictorial representation.⁶¹

Like the organ case for Lille, the Yatman furniture too was conceived as a series of self-sufficient pieces, independent of any overall decorative scheme. Indeed, it seems that Burges envisioned them as buildings in their own right: the inside panels of the *escritoire* bear portraits of Burges and E.J. Poynter,⁶² identifying them as the work's makers in much the same way as a medieval mason would have worked his effigy into a cathedral's sculpted program. Indeed, following upon Burges's extended travels on the continent in 1854-55, painted furniture was the primary medium in which he actually

⁶¹ Muthesius, *The High Victorian Movement in Architecture*, 157.

⁶² Crook, ed., *Strange Genius*, 73, catalogue item B.1.

undertook to build. Its fusion of carpentry and easel painting was a means to materialize the medieval interior, turning it into it a world that he could imaginatively inhabit.

4.3.2 William Morris's furniture for Barbarossa

During the late 1850s and early 1860s, a parallel attempt to hybridize art and furniture was made by William Morris. As with Burges, this project played out essentially between the walls of Morris's home. For a short time, the two men shared a common drive to transform their homes through ornament, a common medium in painted furniture, and a common inspiration in schemes that severed the interior from its material shell. The Lille competition seems to have provided the occasion through which Burges and Morris first met: in 1856, in a brief attempt to train as an architect, Morris articulated at Oxford under G.E. Street, and travelled to Lille to view the exhibition of the competition's results.⁶³ Thus, it is likely that Burges's design for the cathedral's painted organ case stimulated Morris to launch his own experiments in painting on wood.

Late in life, Morris advocated an art that would be so thoroughly woven into the fabric of everyday life as to become indistinguishable as a separate realm.⁶⁴ His earliest schemes for furniture, however, issued from a very different conceit. Upon moving from

⁶³ Linda Parry, ed., William Morris (London: Philip Wilson and the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996), 356.

⁶⁴ In a lecture entitled "The Lesser Arts" (1877), Morris argued already that "art has such sympathy with cheerful freedom, open-heartedness and reality, so much she sickens under selfishness and luxury, that she will not live thus isolated and exclusive ... on such terms I do not wish her to live." See Christine Poulson, ed., William Morris on Art and Design (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 176. The idea that art might one day not even be identified by a distinct word later resurfaced in Morris's novel News from Nowhere (1890). See Parry, ed., William Morris, 33.

Oxford to London in 1856 in order to become an artist, Morris became a part of the circle grouped around D.G. Rossetti, and shared lodgings with the painter Edward Burne-Jones at 17 Red Lion Square. The rooms soon began to serve as a stage for the production of objects of a new kind: a hybrid of rough carpentry and easel painting. Based on medieval or Oriental precedent, the wooden furniture was plain in outline, yet aggressively awkward and unaccommodating to use; all of its surfaces (including those meant for sitting) were covered in paintings by Morris, Burne-Jones, or Rossetti.⁶⁵

Responding to Ruskin's eulogy to the "wildness" of Gothic art, Morris's aim was to produce furniture that was similarly barbaric. Described by Rossetti as "tables and chairs like incubi and succubi"⁶⁶ (or as furniture issuing from a dream), one aspect of the pieces' barbarism was that they functioned as autonomous artworks: with their garish colours, narrative imagery, and bold, over-scaled massing, they overwhelmed the rooms that contained them. The furniture in Red Lion Square was also barbaric in the sense that it was conceived for kings: like a state throne, its purpose was to magnify and transfigure those who sat in it.⁶⁷ The pair of high-backed chairs Morris had made for the rooms were crudely fashioned, without veneer or upholstery. Rather, they were ennobled by the vividly coloured figures, derived from his own poetry, with which Burne-Jones and

⁶⁵ Parry, ed., William Morris, 36, 136.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 36.

⁶⁷ In "The Lesser Arts of Life" (1882), Morris made a distinction between "necessary work-a-day furniture" and "state-furniture." Even at this late date, he still conceived of the latter as "furnishings to be made as much for beauty's sake as for use, we need not spare ornament on these, but may make them as elegant and elaborate as we can with carving, inlaying or painting; these are the blossoms of the art of furniture, as picture tapestry is of the art of weaving..." See Poulsen, ed., Morris on Art and Design, 130.

Rossetti proceeded to cover the unfinished wooden surface.⁶⁸ The commodity was exalted through the labour and skill of trained painters, and the artwork estranged and re-energized through its grotesque fusion with the human body. As symbolic thrones, Morris's chairs transformed the three painters into sovereigns of a new world, in which life would be heightened by art.

The idea that applied ornament could extend and exalt the experience of life was further developed in Morris's short-lived project for a home at Red House in Kent, to which he moved shortly after his marriage, in the late summer of 1860. In the same way as Burges's furnishings for Lille proposed the cathedral's interior as a realm of fantasy, Red House too really consisted of two projects. Designed by architect Philip Webb, the house itself referred to the unassuming model of Pugin's parsonage houses of the 1840s.⁶⁹ its rooms were laid out organically around a kitchen garden, and its construction was stripped of cladding or applied ornament, so as to reveal its massive brick walls, the relieving arches set above windows, hearths and doorways, and the roof's heavy timber framing. In Morris's mind, however, this intensely material structure was to have an ornamental double: an overlay of paint, tapestry and embroidery that would cover its walls, ceilings and furniture, and that would be realized, like the murals in the Oxford

⁶⁸ The figures illustrated scenes from "Gwendolen in the Witch-Tower" and "The Arming of a Knight." See Charlotte and Peter Fiell, William Morris (1834-1896) (Cologne: Taschen, 1999), 56-57.

⁶⁹ Sheila Kirk, Philip Webb: Pioneer of Arts and Crafts Architecture (Chichester: Wiley-Academy, 2005), 28, 30.

Union, by the collective of artists grouped around his recently established firm of interior design (Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.).⁷⁰

The logic behind the decoration of Red House was one of imaginative self-displacement, both backward in time and across the boundaries between painting, literature and life. Its centrepiece was to have been a cycle of mural paintings by Burne-Jones on the walls of the upstairs drawing room.⁷¹ Possibly borrowed from a fresco by Giotto in the Arena chapel at Padua, the mural was meant to portray Morris and his wife Jane Burden as a medieval knight and his bride at their wedding feast.⁷² Similar transpositions recurred at the scale of the domestic object: the Prioress's Wardrobe (Burne-Jones's wedding gift to the Morrisses) staged Jane Burden as the Virgin Mary in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales,⁷³ while her jewel casket (painted by Rossetti and his wife Elizabeth Siddal) bore miniature panels of medieval courtship and marriage.⁷⁴

In the move to Red House, the encounter of art and commodity took on new overtones. Through Morris's unconventional marriage outside his own social class, the extension of the original circle of artists to include their wives, the inclusion of the traditionally feminine arts of tapestry and embroidery into the house's fabric, and

⁷⁰ According to Sheila Kirk, the principal participants in the decoration of red House were Morris and his wife Jane Burden, D.G. Rossetti and his wife Elizabeth Siddall, Edward and Georgiana Burne-Jones, and Charles Faulkner. See Kirk, Philip Webb, 20.

⁷¹ Parry, ed., William Morris, 137-138.

⁷² Ibid, 103, catalogue items G.11 and G.12.

⁷³ Ibid, 156-157.

⁷⁴ Fiell, William Morris, 70.

Morris's undertaking to live as a craftsman,⁷⁵ the décor inside Red House came to symbolize an ideal of collaborative labour that cut across lines of class, gender, or matrimony. For all its theatricality, the obsessive self-portrayal of the Morris and their circle as heroes and queens was understood by them as symbolically real.⁷⁶ The regalia that filled the house invested its occupants with a subversive form of bohemian nobility, projecting them into a world of mythical heroes, who rose above the strictures of conventional morality.

The purpose of the furniture and fittings inside Red House, it might be argued, was to provide material shelter to a phantasm: a way of living that was believed to have existed in the Middle Ages, and might exist once again in the future, but that was at odds with the world outside its doors. In the 1893 Kelmscott Press edition of his utopian novel News from Nowhere, Morris represented his ancient house of Kelmscott Manor in Oxfordshire as the setting in which the “new society” after the Revolution was to play out, in the fictional form of a dream vision (**fig. 42**).⁷⁷ In Morris's mind, the décor inside Red House had a similar function: however unsubstantial, it promised redemption for the world outside. In practice, Morris's vision of a painted house remained largely unrealized

⁷⁵ Parry, ed., William Morris, 15-16, 34-35.

⁷⁶ I borrow the notion of symbolic reality in Morris's ornament from David Brett, Rethinking Decoration: Pleasure and Ideology in the Visual Arts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 115-124. Though Brett's discussion focuses on the representation of nature in surface pattern, he stresses that Morris valued ornament insofar only as it pointed to a world beyond itself.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 71, catalogue item E.12.

or incomplete; instead it survived in the form of single pieces of furniture that, over the years, followed Morris from house to house as material fragments of the ideal home.⁷⁸

4.3.3 William Burges's furniture for lesser men (1859-62)

The imaginative role that painted furniture played for Burges is illustrated by one of the first pieces he had made for his rooms in Buckingham Street, where he lived and held office from 1856 to 1878. Built to house his collection of art books, and thus conceived as a repository of culture and myth, the Great Bookcase (1859-62) was symbolically related to the founding of his architectural practice.

Like the Yatman *escritoire*, the blocky structure of the Great Bookcase was crowned by a cantilevered gable, resting on a peristyle and cathedral-like portal (**fig. 43**). Below, its painted panels comprised three hierarchically ordered sequences of images. The portals and arches in the bookcase's gable contained personifications of Art, Religion and Love, flanked by the Muses. On the panels beneath, historical figures representing the Christian and Pagan arts were arrayed to either side (St Augustine standing opposite Plato, and St Cecilia opposite Orpheus). Personifications of architecture and poetry occupied the upper compartments on the panels, painting and sculpture the lower ones, and music and philosophy those on the bookcase's sides. The bookcase's base, lastly,

⁷⁸ Both made for Red House, the Prioress's wardrobe and Webb's medieval settle reappear in photographs of the drawing room at Kelmscott House in London, taken at the time of Morris's death in 1896. See *ibid*, 159.

carried a pageant of monstrous figures representing the metamorphoses of Nature: the Sirens, Arachne, the Pierides, Syrinx, and the Harpies.⁷⁹

Contrary to the Yatman pieces, however, which Burges commissioned out to individual painters, the Great Bookcase was conceived quite explicitly in the manner of a Gothic church. A surviving working drawing for the bookcase shows a plain, material scaffold of wooden uprights, stretchers and iron hinges, enclosing—like window tracery—blank spaces left available for figures (**fig. 44**). These were to be later filled in with painted images, whose subjects were pencilled onto the drawing's sheet.⁸⁰ An accompanying schedule to the working drawing indicates that, from the outset, each figure was attributed to a different artist, and that each was conceived as a fragment of a total narrative cycle.⁸¹ Several of the artists employed by Burges for the piece (there were at least thirteen in all) were already well-established as painters,⁸² but, by subordinating them to pre-ordained themes and locations, Burges relegated them to the status of medieval craftsmen. Indeed, in iconographic terms, the finished piece could be read, like a cathedral, as the total representation of a finite medieval world. The bands of stencilled ornament framing the panels on each of the bookcase's stacked compartments embodied

⁷⁹ E. W. [Edward William] Godwin, "The Home of an English Architect," *The Art Journal* (1886), 301-302; Handley-Read, "William Burges's Painted Furniture," 502-503; Crook, ed., *Strange Genius*, 75, catalogue item B.6; idem, *William Burges*, 321-322; idem, "A Vanished Interior," 53-54.

⁸⁰ RIBA Drawings collection, London.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² The schedule for the Great Bookcase's painted ornament at the RIBA mentions, among others, the painters Albert Moore, Simeon Solomon and Edward Burne-Jones. It is also possible that one of the panels was painted by D.G. Rossetti (see Crook, *William Burges*, 321), though this attribution has been questioned (see Handley-Read, "William Burges's Painted Furniture," 503).

distinct physical realms—the Seas, the Earth and the Skies—by means of conventionalized images of natural life: shells, fishes, flowers, and birds.⁸³

In several ways, then, the Great Bookcase was the material embodiment of a fantasized architectural practice. As the joint product of cabinetmakers, painters and architect, the bookcase functioned as the miniature re-enactment of a medieval building site. Its lowly building materials were exalted and made precious through paint, gilt and inlays of marble. Together with the piece's complex iconography, this fragile ornamental skin identified the architect primarily as a purveyor of collective cult objects.

But even here, in what was no doubt Burges's most exalted recreation of a medieval furnishing, there were intimations that it belonged to an unreal and inverted world. Burges's colleague E.W. Godwin recalled in the 1880s that, in addition to its celebratory allegories of art, the bookcase's iconography also contained illustrations of Aesop's Fables and "The History of Cock Robin"⁸⁴—jarringly relocating the piece to a realm of childhood fictions.

A fetish, Peter Melville Logan has argued, is intrinsically ambivalent. Its material presence comforts its owner by keeping deeply-held fears at bay; but the fact that it is necessary also confirms that these fears are real.⁸⁵ It is the product of a split ego, in which "credulity and disbelief" coexist.⁸⁶ By investing his rooms with furniture patterned after sacred objects, and by re-enacting medieval craft processes in their making, Burges

⁸³ Godwin, "The Home of an English Architect," 302.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Logan, Victorian Fetishism, 132-133.

⁸⁶ Emily Apter, Feminizing the Fetish: Psychoanalysis and Narrative Obsession in Turn-of-the-Century France (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 13; quoted in Logan, Victorian Fetishism, 133.

sought to reinstate as reality a vanished world, in which made things were intrinsically meaningful. By putting these objects to mundane uses, however, and by inserting into them references to the everyday, he also obeyed an opposite impulse: that of bringing the sacred down to earth. Burges, it seems, already suspected that there was no real audience in Victorian England for a cathedral conceived as a museum of all the arts. (By this time, he had already lost the commission for the cathedral at Lille, and was on the point of losing that for the Crimean Memorial church in Constantinople.) Instead, he proceeded to construct its ironic travesty in the space of his own rooms.

In the Architecture cabinet (1858), a piece nearly contemporary with his Great Bookcase, Burges reworked the painted armoire in the sacristy at Noyon into a container for business letters, contracts, and architectural scrapbooks.⁸⁷ Provided with shelving and a fold-out desk below, and a gabled compartment for pigeonholes above, the cabinet was ironically distinguished from its ecclesiastical predecessor by its painted ornament. Now adorned with grotesque personifications of the “disagreeables” of the trade, it embodied a comically debased realm of modern practical knowledge:

“... viz. Contract, represented as a hideous monster cut to pieces, because contracts are often broken; Measuring and Valuing, a monster with a rule; Arbitration, a monster showing an empty oystershell; Specification, a monster writing; Extras, a mermaid playing on a shell ... ; Law, a monster, his tail interlaced with pieces of money ...”⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Godwin, “The Home of an English Architect,” 301. See also Crook, “A Vanished Interior,” 53.

⁸⁸ The Building News 19 (1870), 352, 354, 376, quoted in Crook, William Burges, 320-321. See also idem, ed., Strange Genius, 76.

According to Godwin, it was this satirical piece, rather than the Great Bookcase, that Burges “kept at his elbows all the best years of his life.”⁸⁹

In a similar fashion, beginning in 1862, Burges reworked his pared-down designs for altar plate for the church of St Michael’s and All Angels in Brighton into a series of elaborate silverware vessels for his own use.⁹⁰ Unlike their liturgical models, the vessels he created for his rooms in Buckingham Street were encrusted with jewels, cameos and ancient coins. In their material complexity, they were far closer to the medieval chalices Burges had recorded in his topographical scrapbooks; but they were diverted now, in a transgressive manner, to serve as drinking cups and wine jugs (**fig. 45**).⁹¹

On a liquor cabinet he designed in 1859 (now known as the Wines and Beers sideboard), Burges emblazoned the piece’s contents across the front panels in the shape of a pictorial battle between French and English armies: the former led by a Christianized and haloed god of wine, the latter by a crowned king bearing a crest of corn and barley. To either side, he then added portraits in quatrefoils bearing likenesses to Morris, Rossetti and J.M. Whistler.⁹² Invoked here as personifications of drink, the painters’ presence

⁸⁹ Godwin, “The Home of an English Architect,” 301.

⁹⁰ Crook, William Burges, 212-213; idem, ed., Strange Genius, 106-107, catalogue items C.36 to C.40. Burges’s plate for St Michael’s include a silver flagon (1862), alms-dish, candlesticks and silver-and-ivory cross, all probably by Hart, Son, and Peard; two gilt silver chalices (1862 and 1863-64) by John Hardman & Co.; and a gilt silver dossal (1867), by Barkentin and Krall.

⁹¹ Crook, William Burges, 314-315; idem, ed., Strange Genius, 111, catalogue items C.45 and C.46. Burges’s drinking cup was made by Hart in 1862, his twin decanters, designed 1863-64, by George Angell and Josiah Mendelson in 1865.

⁹² Crook, William Burges, 295; idem, ed., Strange Genius, 77, catalogue item B.8; Parry, ed., William Morris, 356-357; Matthew Williams, “A Buffet made for Bacchus,” Country Life 194 (1999), 117.

conceptually linked Burges's furniture to Rossetti's bohemian household at Tudor House, and through it to Morris's experiment in alternative living at Red House. The relationship, however, had become one of carnivalesque inversion: if Morris and Rossetti understood themselves as Arthurian once and future kings, then Burges proposed to be their buffoon.

Though they mimicked medieval iconography in their visual wealth, the narrative cycles with which Burges adorned his furniture were semantically shallow. He used myth, history and art as vehicles for grim humour, always pointing back to the material nature of his pieces, and to his own material circumstances as maker. In the narrow sense given to it by Victorian design theorists, Burges's painted furniture was from the outset grotesque.

4.3.4 Pieces for an exhibition

Burges's sense of living in an increasingly narrow world became manifest in the second Medieval Court, a display of artworks and furnishings that he mounted with architect William Slater on behalf of the Ecclesiological Society, at the International Exhibition of 1862 in London.⁹³ The Court of 1862 was conceived by its sponsors as a showcase for modern church art, and thus as a pendant to Pugin's earlier Medieval Court at the Great Exhibition. However, Burges transformed it instead into a show of polemically anachronistic home furnishings. Alongside ecclesiastic furniture and

The cabinet in question was made by Harland and Fisher, with paintings by E.J. Poynter, for James Nicholson, a family friend of the Burgeses. According to Williams, Burges also worked similar devices (now including a portrait of Edward Burne-Jones) into another, undated wine cabinet that was exhibited at the Medieval Court in 1862. Because the portraits on both pieces are untitled, their identification remains conjectural.

⁹³ "The Medieval Court at the Great Exhibition," The Ecclesiologist 23, N.S 20 (1862), 73.

sculpture by prominent Gothic Revival architects such as G.E. Street, William White and S.S. Teulon, Burges inserted into the display eighteen pieces of painted and inlaid furniture intended for use in private homes (**fig. 46**).⁹⁴ In addition to Burges's Yatman escritoire, Great Bookcase and Wines and Beers sideboard, these included a gabled, Gothic bookcase and desk made by Richard Norman Shaw for his own use,⁹⁵ as well as painted chests by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. and architect J.P. Seddon.

The latter two are particularly revealing, in that they embodied above all the personal mythologies of their creators. Designed by Seddon, the King René cabinet (1861) was in fact a collaborative venture among painters, involving Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Morris and Ford Madox Brown.⁹⁶ The four panels on the cabinet's front were allegorical depictions of architecture, painting, sculpture and music, illustrated by incidents in the honeymoon of the king of Anjou. They confronted the viewer with a world that was doubly unreal: displaced to the Middle Ages, the scenes were also representations of a purely fictional work—Walter Scott's Anna von Geierstein.⁹⁷

Designed by Philip Webb, the Legend of St George cabinet (1861-62) was likewise used by its painter, William Morris, as a neutral canvas on which to project a fictional life. The cabinet's painted panels followed a distinct logic from that of their

⁹⁴ William Burges, "The International Exhibition," The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Review N.S. 13 (1862), 4-5.

⁹⁵ Parry, ed., William Morris, 169, catalogue item J.12.

⁹⁶ The International Exhibition of 1862 (Victoria and Albert Museum / Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1962), catalogue item 26.

⁹⁷ Ibid. Smaller panels also represented "lesser arts": gardening, pottery, weaving, ironwork and glass blowing: see Parry, ed., William Morris, 170, catalogue item J.13.

wooden support, dividing it into arbitrary compartments and proposing imagery unrelated to the piece's actual use as a linen chest (**fig. 47**). Uneasily wedged between the four uprights on the chest's front, and framed by the ebonized surfaces on its back, sides and top, Morris's five paintings formed a narrative sequence representing the sacrifice, rescue and wedding of a king's daughter.⁹⁸ The knight's traits were recognizably those of Morris, the middle-class artist, and the face of the rescued princess, that of his wife, an Oxford innkeeper's daughter. Created for public display at the Exhibition, the cabinet nonetheless remained as intensely mythical as any of the pieces made for Red House.

Taken as a whole, Burges's Medieval Court participated in a specifically Victorian experience of the grotesque, or of things "not [being] where you expect to find them."⁹⁹ Contrary to the Great Exhibition, where Pugin's court had offered a concentrated vision of modern Gothic manufactures across all material media, such artefacts were now dispersed throughout the exhibition hall. George Gilbert Scott's electroplated chancel screen straddled one of the building's transepts. A "first-class kitchen" in the medieval style by Benham and Sons could be found in the South Court,¹⁰⁰ alongside displays of ecclesiastical silverware (by Skidmore, John Hardman, and Hart and Sons) in the section for Iron and General Hardware,¹⁰¹ and stained glass by Lavers and Barraud in that of Glass, for Decorative and Household Purposes.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Parry, ed., William Morris, 172-173, catalogue items J.17 and J.18.

⁹⁹ Wilson, "Monsters and Monstrosities," 147.

¹⁰⁰ Official Illustrated Catalogue: International Exhibition of 1862 ([London?]: Printed for Her Majesty's Commissioners, [1862?]), vol. 2, part 12, 6-9.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 110, 112-113.

¹⁰² Official Illustrated Catalogue, vol. 2, part 13, 75.

Next to these manufactured wares, the exacerbated archaism of the painted furniture in the Medieval Court conveyed an impression of oddness rather than heightened authenticity. Though generally sympathetic to the aims of the Gothic Revival, Charles Eastlake noted in a review how remote the court's furnishings seemed from present time:

It is a curious and interesting epidemic this 'moyen age' mania in our island at the present time: when and where did it arise? ... It is pointing our windows, and inlaying our cabinets, and gothicizing the plates we eat from, the chairs on which we sit, the papers on our walls. It influences the bindings of our books, the colour of our carpets, the shape of our beer-jugs, picture frames, candlesticks—what not? As we strolled in to the court devoted to messrs Morris & Co.'s medieval furniture, tapestries, &c., who could believe that it represented manufactures of the 19th century—the age, par excellence, of cog wheels and steam rams and rifled cannons? Six hundred years have passed since the style of yon cabinet was in vogue.¹⁰³

In Burges's own estimation, the real Medieval Court at the 1862 Exhibition was to be found in the exhibit of Japanese wares. Displayed on a grand scale for the first time to a Western audience, they stemmed, in his view, from a living tradition of craft knowledge, quite different from the one that had been laboriously and artificially resurrected in England.¹⁰⁴

But what most attracted the ire of the artistic and architectural press was that painted furniture produced itself as a fiction. It made little use of cabinetmakers' skills, yet could not be easily reproduced; and despite its high costs of production, it offered

¹⁰³ "The Great Ex," London Society 2 (1862), 106. Written under the pseudonym "Jack Easel," the review has been attributed to Eastlake by Clive Wainwright. See Parry, ed., William Morris, 358.

¹⁰⁴ Burges, "The International Exhibition," 10-11.

little use-value in return. Burges himself wrote that the life of such furniture lay entirely in its outer layer of paintwork and gilding; once it was gone, the furniture became little more than firewood.¹⁰⁵ Thus, according to the Art Journal, the furnishings on show in the Medieval Court seemed not only stranded between ages, but between the condition of a commodity and that of a dream:

The very best things in this Mediaeval Court are mere parodies of something which refuses to be parodied successfully. They belong neither to one period nor to another. They are allegories of cabinets and organs, of carpets and draperies—allegories, however, that are endowed with only a very shallow significance.¹⁰⁶

As the Art Journal saw things, the function of a Medieval Court had in any case been superseded by the public collections of decorative art in the South Kensington Museum; that of 1862, therefore, would prove to be “the last as well as the second of its race.”¹⁰⁷ Burges’s painted furniture was in fact awarded a medal in its class by the 1862 Exhibition’s jury, and his Wines and Beers sideboard was acquired the same year by the South Kensington Museum.¹⁰⁸ By 1873, however, such work had indeed come to appear completely at odds with the museum’s rationalist ethos. In Christopher Dresser’s Principles of Decorative Design, the Yatman cabinet now resurfaced as an example of all that was “essentially bad and wrong” in the construction of furniture: its architectural gables and dormers absurd in a structure exposed to no rain and requiring no light; its iron

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 3; Burges, Art Applied to Industry, 71.

¹⁰⁶ Charles Boutell, “The Mediaeval Court,” in The Art Journal Illustrated Catalogue of the International Exhibition, 1862 (London, New York: James S. Virtue, 1862), 198.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 207.

¹⁰⁸ Waring, Masterpieces of Industrial Art, vol. 2, 18.

straps indicating a want in structural strength; its pictorial ornament excessively naturalistic, and therefore untruthful.¹⁰⁹

4.4 A palace of things

4.4.1 In bachelor's rooms (1862-1870)

In the aftermath of the Medieval Court, Burges's production of decorative furniture and objects became almost exclusively centred on his own lodgings in Buckingham Street, located on the second floor of a seventeenth-century house near the Thames.¹¹⁰ Although the lodgings were documented by at least one photographic survey in the early 1870s, their exactly layout is difficult to determine. They are, however, thought to have contained six separate rooms.¹¹¹ Of these, the three most private (Burges's study and bedroom, and a smaller study for a clerk) were partially invested during the 1860s with painted decoration on the walls and ceilings.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Christopher Dresser, Principles of Decorative Design (London: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, [1873]), 50-65.

¹¹⁰ Exceptions to Burges's decorative investment in Buckingham Street at this time include the altar plate for the church of St Michael's and All Angels in Brighton (1862-67), furniture and interior fittings for Thomas Garnett's house of Oakwood in West Yorkshire (1864-65), as well as smaller commissions: a bookcase for Warrington Taylor (1862), a wardrobe for Gayhurst Manor and an escritoire for W.G. Saunders (both 1865). See Crook, William Burges, 77 (n.62), 300-302, 312 (n.77); Nicholas Taylor and Anthony Symondson, "Burges and Morris at Bingley: A Discovery," Architectural Review 144 (1968): 35-38.

¹¹¹ Crook, ed., Strange Genius, 83; idem, "A Vanished Interior," 50.

¹¹² William Burges, "Photographs, Own Furniture," RIBA Photographic collection, London.

The walls of Burges's study carried a frieze depicting the Virgin Mary in a bower among birds and monkeys, above a band of painted hanging drapery (possibly 1861) (**fig. 48**).¹¹³ The walls in the clerk's study were decorated by a frieze of quarries and banded columns, between which were placed painted depictions of stained glass windows. The room's ceiling carried roundels illustrating a joust between knights riding the beasts of the Zodiac (1871);¹¹⁴ convex mirrors hanging from the frieze and let into the carved woodwork lower down the walls made it possible to take in this small room's décor as a whole (**fig. 49**). Lastly, the bedroom's ceiling was painted with a scene representing Theseus and the Minotaur in the labyrinth (1862);¹¹⁵ a continuous frieze was later added below, in which a painted peristyle of squat columns and round arches opened onto an underwater scene of sirens and mermen in battle with sea-monsters (ca. 1863-64) (**fig. 50**).¹¹⁶

Rather than a coherent scheme, the painted decoration in Buckingham Street was experimental in nature, prefiguring Burges's later interior designs for Cardiff Castle, Knightshayes and Castell Coch, all carried out after 1868. The décor was in no way illusionistic: the drapery and quarry patterns were systematically treated so as to reveal the flatness of the underlying plaster. Nonetheless, the figured archways and windows functioned as a conceptual web, breaking up the wall surface and opening the rooms onto

¹¹³ Burges, Abstract of diaries. The entry for 1861 mentions "Decoration own room" and "Picture over mantelpiece in own room." The latter likely corresponds to the mural decoration in Burges's study.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. The entry for 1871 mentions "Ceiling of little room done."

¹¹⁵ Ibid. The entry for 1861 mentions "Theseus and Minotaur done."

¹¹⁶ Ibid. The entry for 1863 mentions "Figures of fish own Bedroom"; for 1864, "Mermaids for Bedroom."

imaginary expanses that were as distant in space (a garden, an ocean) as they were in time. In this sense, the architectural elements of the friezes functioned in much the same way as the stencilled and floriated borders in the Yatman furniture, setting up a closed frame in which mythical histories could play out.

But the rooms in Buckingham Street were significant mostly for their furniture. Between 1862 and 1870, the Architecture cabinet, the Great Bookcase and a small wardrobe designed by Burges around 1859 were completed by close to ten additional pieces of painted furniture, as well as numerous pieces of decorative silverware or crystal.¹¹⁷ In formal terms, these later pieces departed from the explicit architectural references of the Yatman furniture: gables, arches, columns and finials were replaced by simpler, blockier and seemingly more functional outlines. The plain pine-and-mahogany body of the earlier pieces was gradually invested with more varied and costly materials: marble or mosaics of semi-precious stones, gilt, inlays of silver or painted vellum or tin, and bronze fixtures. A greater place was also given to stencilled and conventionalized ornament: where the Great Bookcase was covered top to bottom in allegorical, historical or metamorphic figures, in the later furniture figurative imagery became confined to relatively small and heavily framed panels. Indeed, the Great Bookcase was the last instance in which Burges attempted to recreate a cathedral-like collective of painters

¹¹⁷ Ibid. As recorded in the entries of his diary, Burges's process of accumulation summarily plays out thus: "My own cup," "Elephant Inkstand & Foot of jade vase" (1862); "Jade vase & Elephant made up," "Drew decanters" (1863); "Designed decanter" (1864); "Began to collect armour" (1865); "Bought jade vase," "Fluorspar dishes made" (1866); "Cat cup" (1867); "Cat cup made," "Fish teapot bought" (1868). Later entries mention no additional pieces, but as photographs taken at Buckingham Street during the 1870s attest, his rooms contained in fact much more silverware, crystal and porcelain, both bespoke and acquired.

around a single piece of furniture: from then on, at most two artists were involved in the making of any one piece.¹¹⁸

The most important change, however, was one of subject and setting. Although the painted decoration on certain pieces of furniture still referred to Classical and medieval mythology—in particular the Narcissus washstand (1865-7, repainted 1872) and the Zodiac settle (1869-71),¹¹⁹ overall the furniture in Buckingham Street encapsulated a realm of the mundane, registering minute and intimate features of a bachelor's everyday life. Built sometime between 1862 and 1869, the so-called Dante bookcase was explicitly conceived as a figuration of The Divine Comedy, with stacked representations of Paradise, Purgatory and Hell (**fig. 51**). In fact, it is perhaps more notable for the apparition on the lower panels—those of Hell—of portraits of Burges's male friends in a gallery of mythical creatures: Cerberus, Nessus, the Minotaur and Geryon.¹²⁰ Likewise, Burges's dressing table, built in 1867, was adorned with pivoting mirrors, the back of which carried painted portraits of three sisters with whose family he was acquainted (**fig. 52**).¹²¹ Rather than an allegorical paean to love or beauty, the depiction of the Crocker sisters on the piece of furniture where Burges left his boots was as much a notation of daily life as were the painted portraits of his deceased pets on the Dog cabinet of 1869.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Handley-Read, "William Burges's Painted Furniture," 504.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 504-505; Crook, ed., Strange Genius, 77, 83, catalogue items B.9 and B.23; idem, William Burges, 318, 326-327.

¹²⁰ Crook, ed., Strange Genius, 82, catalogue item B.20; idem, William Burges, 323-324.

¹²¹ Crook, ed., Strange Genius, 79, catalogue item B.14; idem, William Burges, 325-326; idem, "A Vanished interior," 58-59.

¹²² Handley-Read, "William Burges's Painted Furniture," 506; Crook, William Burges, 324.

The shift in focus from abstract narrative to concrete realities can be traced in one of the most visually discreet fixtures in Buckingham Street: Burges's wardrobe, built in 1859.¹²³ The original paintings on the wardrobe's outer doors were allegorical figures of stuff: leather, silk, linen and wool, personified by a cobbler, a seamstress, a spinner and a shepherd. But in a frieze that was added on later (probably in 1870), allegory gave way to material things. Here, bobbins, pincushions, scissors and a flatiron stood merely for themselves; indeed, in an ironic exaltation of the modern commodity, they sprouted arms and legs and grew into animated companions (**fig. 53**). A later wardrobe, built in 1875, at the end of Burges's tenure in Buckingham Street, featured a similar procession of grooming implements running along its base; here too, heroic allegory, embodied in the figure of naked Adam, was contradicted by the intrusion of London tradesmen furnishing him with clothes.¹²⁴

The animated but headless commodities Burges had painted on his wardrobes were related to his discovery of Japanese manufactures at the Exhibition of 1862—in particular, the garishly coloured caricatures he found in ukiyo-e woodblock prints, portraying animals dressed as humans, everyday objects endowed with arms and legs, or men with penises in place of a head (**fig. 54**).¹²⁵ Where J.M. Whistler and Christopher

¹²³ Crook, *William Burges*, 327.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 324.

¹²⁵ William Burges, "Polychromy, 18 October 1858," album of drawings with signed autograph manuscript list of contents. Prints and drawings collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Close to twenty Japanese woodcut prints are pasted in at the back of the album. The list of contents makes no mention of such prints, making it very likely that they were added later.

Dresser admired Japanese prints and porcelain for their abstract formal qualities, Burges was nourished instead by the grotesque profusion of life he found in the banal.

In addition to the painted pieces framing his most intimate acts—bedstead, washstand, wardrobe and dressing table—over the years Burges’s private rooms came to contain a constellation of commemorative objects he had made for his own use by various London silversmiths.¹²⁶ All were conceived as filigree webs of precious metal, that supported, encased and wove together pre-existing materials acquired from antique dealers: cabochon gems, ancient coins, crystal and agate bottles, Chinese porcelain, Indian bronze, or carved Japanese jade. They included a silver goblet, possibly conceived as a personal trophy for the making of the Medieval Court (1862); twin decanters, one made in celebration of the publication of Art Applied to Industry, the other in remembrance of the unrealized Crimean Memorial church in Constantinople (1865);¹²⁷ a crystal cup, in remembrance of the unrealized scheme for the New Law Courts competition (1867);¹²⁸ and a silver and porcelain decanter, in honour of the publication of Architectural Drawings (1870).¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Ibid, 314-315.

¹²⁷ One decanter carries the inscription “WILLIELMUS BURGES EX HONORARIIS LITERARIIS MDCCCLXV,” the other “WILLIELMUS BURGES ME FIERI FECIT ANNO DI MDCCCLXV [...] VEX NON SECULAE CONSTANTINOLITANAE MDCCCLXV.” Crook, ed., Strange Genius, 111, catalogue items C.45 and C.46. C.48 and C.55.

¹²⁸ Inscribed “WILLIAM BURGES IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE LAW COURTS COMPETITION AD MDCCCLXVII.” Ibid, 112, catalogue item C.48.

¹²⁹ Inscribed “WILLIELMUS BURGES EX LIBRO SUO ANO DNI MDCCCLXX.” Ibid, 114, catalogue item C.55.

Significantly, the events to which these quasi-sacred objects alluded can be read as personal losses rather than public achievements: competitions lost, commissions denied, or publications long deferred. Where the Yatman furniture can be conceived as supports for socialization in public rooms, the furniture at Buckingham Street circumscribed instead a realm of memory and self-contemplation, that was centred on Burges's bedroom.

4.4.2 Furniture as a dream object

At the turn of the 1840s, Pugin envisioned medieval scholarship and Catholic liturgy as means by which to stabilize the modern manufacture. The house in particular seemed to him an area under threat. Here, the banal—in the form of decorative metalwork, wallpaper, or draperies—was taking on the fantastic form of turrets, pinnacles and tracery, and turning Gothic art into its own caricature:

If a clock is required, it is not unusual to cast ... the whole front of a cathedral church reduced to a few inches in height ... But this is nothing when compared to what we see continually produced by those inexhaustible mines of bad taste, Birmingham and Sheffield: staircase turrets for inkstands, monumental crosses for light-shades, gable ends hung on handles for door porters, and four doorways and a cluster of pillars to support a French lamp; while a pair of pinnacles supporting an arch is called a Gothic-pattern scraper, and a wiry compound of quatrefoils and fan tracery an abbey garden-seat. Neither relative scale, form, purpose, nor unity of style, is ever considered by those who design these abominations ...¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Pugin, A. [Augustus] Welby, The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture (New York: St. Martin's Press / London: Academy Press, 1973; reprint of the first edition, 1841), 27-29.

Ten years later, therefore, when Pugin put the product of his collaboration with manufacturers such as Minton and Hardman on display in the Great Exhibition's Medieval Court, he originally intended to raise a massive cross, complete with figures of Christ, St John and St Mary, over the entire exhibit.¹³¹ The cross was to function as a talisman, warding off the threat of the grotesque, and inscribing all of his creations—including such oddities as tiled Gothic stoves for the home¹³²—within a fixed and unequivocal canon of forms, uses and symbolic meanings.

By the 1860s, however, the figment of a Gothic home had ceased to seem so threatening. On the contrary, because so little tangible evidence survived of what it had actually been, the idea of a medieval interior came to function as a void onto which one could project all one's desires or fantasies. In Art applied to Industry, a collection of lectures on the decorative arts that he delivered following the Exhibition of 1862, Burges argued that, in the absence of material remains, one had to proceed instead from literary

¹³¹ Alexandra Wedgwood, "The Medieval Court," in Pugin: A Gothic Passion, eds. Paul Atterbury and Clive Wainwright (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1994), 238-239. Designed by Pugin for St Edmund's College, Ware, the Great Rood was ultimately relocated to a more discreet position within the Court, without the figures, in response to the controversy surrounding the Catholic church's attempt in 1850 to re-establish a hierarchy in England, and the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill of 1851. See Rosemary Hill, God's Architect: Pugin and the Building of Romantic Britain (London: Allen Lane / Penguin Books, 2007), 447-450, 455-456.

¹³²M. [Matthew] Digby Wyatt, Industrial Arts of the XIXth Century at the Great Exhibition (London: Day & Son, 1853), vol. 2, plate CVI: "Stove in the Medieval Style, Designed for Pugin by Hardman of Birmingham."

sources, such as the painted chronicles of daily life contained in illuminated manuscripts, or the written inventories of princely estates.¹³³

Quoting at length from such enumerations of possessions and rooms, Burges claimed to impress on his audience the visual splendour of the medieval household he was seeking to recreate. What he described in fact was a discontinuous and fragmented décor, made up of a potentially endless procession of freestanding things: “gobelets, haps, pots d’argent, cups, flagons, dishes and plates for meat, saltcellars, basins, épreuves, fountains, nefs, and ewers.”¹³⁴ Each of these objects, moreover, was so grotesquely deformed as to constitute its own small and separate world:

They were made of the most extraordinary shapes, and enriched with a good deal of enamel, and sometimes precious stones... The following will give some idea of what those ewers were like:—

’78. A lady, half of whose body is that of a woman, the other half that of a savage beast with two legs; upon a terrace enamelled with blue, with little trees, and stags and greyhounds, and mouldings below; and from the lap of the said lady issued a head of an ox, of which she holds the horns in her hands, and in the said head is a spout; and from the ears of the aforesaid head, and from the sides of the said lady, and from the ends of her dress, hang by chains the escutcheons of the arms of the Archbishop of Rouen and Marigny...¹³⁵

Indeed, the language of form that Burges developed in producing furniture for Buckingham Street drew on precisely those disturbing displacements of meaning, proportion and setting that Pugin had condemned as lexical errors in True Principles.

¹³³ Burges, Art Applied to Industry, 70.

¹³⁴ Burges, Art Applied to Industry, 61.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 62-63; Burges quotes here from the inventory of the plate of the Duke of Anjou.

Independently of their painted ornament, pieces such as the Architecture cabinet or Upright cabinet (1869)¹³⁶ could be apprehended as buildings in their own right, incongruously relocated to a London flat: the one through the addition of carved arches, columns and dormers, the other through its enormous crowning gable (**fig. 55**). Burges also imbued his furniture with a sense of unsteady and perilous balance, perching heavy cantilevered compartments on exaggeratedly long and slender legs. In his later pieces, moreover, he emphasized the chimerical nature of his furniture by giving it human or animal-like features. Painted with the faces of women on the back of its mirrored roundels, the dressing table became a Hydra-like monster; the protruding inlaid wood knobs built in to the posts of his bedstead (1865-67) transformed it into a many-eyed Cerberus (**fig. 56**).¹³⁷

Looking back on the furniture that Burges relocated from Buckingham Street to Tower House in the late 1870s, E.W. Godwin claimed that it had become progressively simpler over time, gradually ridding itself of its architectural excrescences and overgrowth of painted figures.¹³⁸ But even Burges's simplest, box-like pieces remained exercises in excess. Outwardly a plain, carpenter-like construction, his *escritoire* (1867-68) was endowed with outsize hinged flaps, which opened both outwards and down, visually spewing its contents into the room (**fig. 57**). (Muthesius used an engraving of this

¹³⁶ Handley-Read, "William Burges's Painted Furniture," 505-506; Crook, *William Burges*, 318; idem, ed., *Strange Genius*, 82, catalogue item B.22; idem, "A Vanished Interior," 54.

¹³⁷ Crook, *William Burges*, 326; idem, ed., *Strange Genius*, 78, catalogue item B.10 and B.11; idem, "A Vanished Interior," 56. The head of the bed was fitted with a painted panel by Henry Holiday representing "The Sleeping Beauty."

¹³⁸ Godwin, "The Home of an English Architect," 301-303.

piece to illustrate Burges's fatal lack of taste.)¹³⁹ In addition to letters and writing materials, the pigeonholes in the piece's upper compartment contained drawers that could likewise be pulled out to reveal yet more things within.

In material terms, the *escritoire* functioned as its own *mise en abyme*: a cabinet for further cabinets. The same is also true of the piece's painted ornament. By this time, the narrative "stories" to which Burges had initially attributed such importance had ceased to matter as such. Instead, the *escritoire* endlessly described itself:

The drawers [inside] have pictures on them that have reference to various modes of conveying intelligence—an Assyrian carving a cuneiform inscription, Sappho with her lyre, a printer working at his press, and a young woman at the telegraph ... Externally the pictures refer to the act of writing. On one side an urchin is learning to write; while the monk, his instructor, is punishing him for slow progress by pulling his ear. In front, a young man who has written a letter to his lady-love is represented as kissing it before depositing it in the trunk of a tree; a merchant is seen in his counting house writing up his ledger; and on the side an old man is in the act of making his will.¹⁴⁰

Such references to use have been interpreted in the past as evidence of Burges's functionalism.¹⁴¹ But in a deliberate act of overwriting, Burges also found place on the *escritoire* for such unrelated incidents as figures illustrating the social order of the Middle

¹³⁹ Muthesius, *Das Englische Haus*, vol. 3, 76.

¹⁴⁰ R.P. [Richard Popplewell] Pullan, ed., *The House of William Burges, A.R.A.* (London: s.n., 1885), 7. See also Godwin, "The Home of an English Architect," 310-303; Crook, ed., *Strange Genius*, 81, catalogue item B.19; idem, *William Burges*, 311-312; idem, "A Vanished Interior," 54.

¹⁴¹ Crook, ed., *Strange Genius*, 68; Parry, ed., *William Morris*, 356-388.

Ages (“King, Priest, Warrior, Merchant and Labourer”), emblems of “History and Poetry,” and “the portraits of two dogs.”¹⁴²

Thus, the role that painted ornament played in Burges’s rooms in Buckingham Street may be likened to that of the grotesquely elaborate descriptions, or *pièces montées*, in nineteenth-century Realist novels. Where plot generates a continuous flow of simulated time and action, Mieke Bal notes in a recent essay, descriptions do the contrary. They interrupt, slow down time, and introduce heterogeneity.¹⁴³ It is this disparate and sprawling quality of descriptions, Bal adds, that lends to the novel its capacity to create worlds. While it may seem pointless per se, Flaubert’s description of a tiered wedding cake in *Madame Bovary* first creates the stage on which the novel’s events can happen and its characters can exist.¹⁴⁴ But paradoxically, while descriptions provide the novel with its foundation, they also contain the threat of its eventual dissolution into pure texture:

Like education for slaves, [description] opens doors that no violence, no rules, can ever close again. Descriptions are endless, and they betoken the endlessness of the novel.¹⁴⁵

In the end, dissolution was precisely what Burges sought for in his endless production of domestic things.¹⁴⁶ What played out in his densely furnished rooms was an

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Mieke Bal, “Over-writing as Un-writing: Descriptions, World-Making, and Novelistic Time,” in Franco Moretti, ed., *The Novel*, vol. 2 (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 572.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 598.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 606-7.

attempt to invest a dead language with his own energy and sentience, progressively moulding it to the shape of his fantasies. For all their explicit references to Gothic art and craft processes, the pieces of painted furniture and jewelled silverware that accumulated in Buckingham Street during the 1860s no longer issued from an actual historical past. Drenched in colour, stretched out of proportion, and pregnant with protuberances and disparate quotations, made to seem unusable and impossible in the real world, his pieces of furniture had turned into inchoate and unachieved objects, seemingly still entangled in their maker's imagination. Far from closing the interior in on itself, the clutter of things that overfilled Burges's rooms opened it instead onto an inexhaustibly fertile landscape of dreams (**fig. 58**).

4.4.3 The interior as fiction

Why live in fiction? For his own part, Burges seems to have conceived of his dreamlike interior not in terms of choice, but of a practical impossibility to exist otherwise:

... no one would dare to defy fashion, public opinion, and, above all, his tailor, as to appear in public with a costume different from the very ugly one at present worn; but the interior of our own house, at least, is at our disposal ...¹⁴⁷

While ostensibly speaking of medieval furnishings, Burges may indirectly have been alluding to Morris's and Rossetti's public challenges to conventional morality, within

¹⁴⁶ I owe the notion of the nineteenth-century interior as a process of dissolution, dispersal and exhaustion of the self to Bressani, "Empathie, entropie et la maison sensorielle." If objects become sentient and animated, Bressani argues here, it is because their owner transfers to them his own energy.

¹⁴⁷ Burges, Art Applied to Industry, 78.

their respective households of Red House and Tudor House. Moreover, if he chose to portray himself as a fool in relation to Morris and Rossetti, rather than as a nonconformist hero, it may be because his own sexuality lay beyond the pale of contemporary toleration. Marrying across class expectations (like Morris), openly living with one's model (like Rossetti), or committing adultery (like Burden with Rossetti)¹⁴⁸ could entail serious social consequences, especially so for women.¹⁴⁹ Only sodomy, however, was a crime punishable by jail or, until 1861, by death.

Even if such sentences were far from systematically enforced, England remained “an unusually punitive jurisdiction” for homosexuals.¹⁵⁰ But the real price that homosexuals paid in the nineteenth century, Graham Robb contends, was that of their inward dissociation between themselves and the rest of society. In practice, punishment or public shaming was far outweighed by the psychological strain of isolation, concealment, or internal conflict.¹⁵¹ Referring to his own experience, the poet and critic John Addington Symonds (1840-93) wrote of “a perpetual discord between spontaneous appetite and acquired respect for social law.”¹⁵² Moreover, if homosexuality was only tolerated if lived out furtively and in silence, then in order to live in society one had to

¹⁴⁸ Fiell, William Morris, 32, 34.

¹⁴⁹ Under the English Divorce Act of 1857, adultery on the part of a woman was a ground for divorce, though not so for men; for women, such a divorce could bring social ostracism and financial ruin. See Graham Robb, Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 24.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 17-20.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 30.

¹⁵² Ibid, 65.

become an actor, perpetually performing in front of an audience: “Our life is an enigma to others,” the novelist Astolphe de Custine wrote of such sustained deception in 1829, “but their lives are an enigma to us, and our attempts to communicate with them are futile.”¹⁵³ To create an interior, and to people it with the products of one’s imagination, was a way to momentarily suspend such feelings of exile: to paraphrase F. Max Müller, one sought peace in one’s things because it was to be found nowhere else.

There is no positive evidence that Burges was homosexual but rather a web of suggestions that this may have been the case. At different times, he frequented artists and writers who came to be publicly associated with homosexuality—either because of criminal charges (Simeon Solomon’s public career as a painter was ended by his arrest in Paris in 1873, for indecent exposure and “attempted sodomy”);¹⁵⁴ because of their polemical embrace of sexual scandal (with Poems and Ballads (1865), A.C. Swinburne crossed the bounds of acceptable discourse by evoking “not only ... heterosexual love, but lesbianism, hermaphroditism, necrophilia and sado-masochism;” the volume was withdrawn shortly after publication amid calls for the poet’s prosecution);¹⁵⁵ or because of their theatrical celebration of the self. (Recorded in Burges’s abstract of diaries as one of the last visitors to Tower House before his death, Oscar Wilde had the reputation of an

¹⁵³ Astolphe de Custine, Aloys ou le religieux du Mont-Saint-Bernard (Paris: Éditions Philippe Sénart, 10/18, 1971); quoted in Robb, Strangers, 87.

¹⁵⁴ Prettejohn, Rossetti and his Circle, 36; Colin Cruise, Love Revealed: Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites (London, New York: Merrell Publishers, 2005), 9; Robb, Strangers, 171.

¹⁵⁵ Rikki Rooksby, A.C. Swinburne: A Poet’s life (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997), 132-133, 135-137.

aesthete in part for on his lectures on the House Beautiful,¹⁵⁶ but also for the transformation of his home and family life into a “deliberate artistic composition.”¹⁵⁷

Burges’s bachelor furnishings also allude to his being condemned to interiority. Inscribed on the Dante bookcase, the transposition of his male social circle into monsters of Greek mythology suggested a shared mode of existence that could not be expressed in the street, or for that matter anywhere in present time. Partly repainted in 1870, his wardrobe of 1859 featured a panoply of miniature portraits of heroines and queens on its inside panels, alongside painted portraits and quotes from Chaucer and Tennyson (**fig. 59**);¹⁵⁸ yet the literary sources to which these referred did not in fact celebrate love and marriage, but pointed indirectly to their impossibility. In Chaucer’s “Tale of Good Women”, the narrator’s encomiums to women are imposed on him by Cupid as a penance for his earlier disparagement of their faithlessness.¹⁵⁹ In Tennyson’s poem “A Dream of

¹⁵⁶ Charlotte Gere, The House Beautiful: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetic Interior, with an essay by Lesley Hoskins (London: Lund Humphries, 2000), 90, 92-93.

¹⁵⁷ William Butler Yeats, Autobiography (London, 1916), 80; quoted in *ibid*, 104.

¹⁵⁸ The left inside panel of Burges’s wardrobe contains the following line from the Prologue to Chaucer’s “The Legend of Good Women”: “Thou shalt while that thou livest, yere by yere, the most partie of thy time spende, in making of a glorious legende, of good women, maidens, and wives.” That on the right carries a quote from Alfred Lord Tennyson’s “A Dream of Fair Women” (from Poems, 1832): “No memory labours longer from the deep / Gold-mines of thought to lift the hidden ore / That glimpses, moving up, than I from sleep / To gather and tell o’er.”

¹⁵⁹ Geoffrey Chaucer, The Legend of Good Women, translation and introduction by Ann McMillan (Houston: Rice University Press, 1987), 79. McMillan points out here that “Cupid and Alceste accuse the narrator of defaming women and romantic love. Their accusations and the penalty they exact force the narrator to praise women beyond the bounds of reason and, in some cases, against the evidence of the very

Fair Women,” the narrator’s dream is interrupted before he can reach the expected edifying conclusion, “that Love can vanquish Death.”¹⁶⁰ Instead, the poem recounts only the unintended, absurd or horrific consequences of feminine beauty: “Beauty and anguish walking hand in hand / The downward slope to Death.”¹⁶¹

Irrespective of his sexual practices, Burges transgressed Victorian conceptions of manhood on two counts: by channelling his sense of self into the home, and by acknowledging that this interior might be substantially different from what he projected abroad. The interior, Ruskin argued in a series of lectures of 1862, was the domain in which women—not men—might rightfully lay claim to grandeur of purpose. Complementary to, and as necessary as, men’s engagement in the world outside, a woman’s task was to ensure the house remained a tightly sealed preserve:

This is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home; it is then only a part of that outer world that you have roofed over, and lighted fire in.

And wherever a true wife comes, this home is always around her.¹⁶²

sources they have told him to use.” The parodic nature of Chaucer’s poem is further underlined by the inclusion, in his catalogue of virtuous women, of figures such as Cleopatra and Medea. See *ibid*, 4, 28-29.

¹⁶⁰ Alfred Tennyson, ed. Adam Roberts, *The Oxford Authors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 59.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 52.

¹⁶² John Ruskin, “Of Queens’ Gardens,” Sesame and Lilies, ed. Deborah Epstein Nord (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 77-8.

Paradoxically, while such domestic comforts might provide a man with momentary respite, they could not be over-indulged in. Victorian masculinity could be forged and sustained only through confrontation, conflict and voluntary hardship, in a “world away from women.”¹⁶³ From a masculine perspective, defining oneself through a display of material things was equally problematic, because it contradicted the Victorian myth of an unmediated or “natural” male identity: a man was a gentleman only if surface and substance were perfectly matched.¹⁶⁴

Mid-Victorian critics generally dismissed Burges’s furniture as an expensive and vacuous entertainment, and they did so because it denied meaning where meaning was sought: in its speaking surface. While it may not have been Burges’s intention to do so, his domestic interior revealed what the Victorians—men and women alike—were in the process of becoming: essentially theatrical creatures, whose real and assumed identities were known to themselves by the material things they owned.

¹⁶³ James Eli Adams, Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 12, 58-59.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 14, 207.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SELF, THE CITY AND THE MAKING OF TOWER HOUSE

5.1 Introduction

In the fragments of the Arcades Project, as well as in the brief essay “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” Walter Benjamin portrayed the bourgeois interior in dialectical terms. Beginning with the Romantic generation of the 1820s and 1830s, the interior became the object of a form of overinvestment, in which wealth, commodities and historical imagination were all channelled into the creation of exotic and opulent environments for living: inside his drawing room, the bourgeois could imagine himself as a medieval monk or a Persian prince.¹ Despite the seeming freedom and creativity of this relation to history, the exotic interior constituted in fact a kind of gilded prison—a perfectly fitted sleeve or “etui” which simultaneously comforted, protected and asphyxiated its occupant.² The world of work, Benjamin noted, was banished from the home, and exiled to a distant office or factory, while technology, in the form of gas lighting, was present everywhere in the home but at its symbolic core: the drawing room.³

¹ Walter Benjamin, “[L’]intérieur, la trace]” and “[Maison de rêve, musée, pavillon thermal],” in Paris, capitale du XIX^e siècle: Le Livre des Passages, translation by Jean Lacoste (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1989), 230-246, 423-433; idem, “Paris, capitale du XIX^e siècle,” in Oeuvres, vol. 3, trans. Maurice de Gandillac et al., Collection Folio/Essais (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 44-66.

² Benjamin, Le Livre des Passages, 234, 239.

³ Benjamin, “Paris, capitale,” 56; idem, Le Livre des Passages, 230-231.

If the bourgeois interior was a machine for seeing, then what one saw was a concealment of the real.

The nineteenth-century interior, then, would seem to be the very antithesis of modernity. But if one follows Benjamin's reasoning to the end, one realizes that the rise of the interior as a separate domain heralds in fact the formation of a distinctly modern consciousness. While Benjamin describes the bourgeois interior in intensely material terms (for him, it is epitomized by the purple plush upholstery of the Parisian salon), it was in essence less a construction than a secretion of the self, proceeding from inside out. What the domestic interior provided was an imaginary space in which the distance between subject and object might be momentarily suspended. It did not consolidate the self but on the contrary hollowed it out—dissolving it into an outward landscape of things, colours and perfumes. Insofar, one might argue that the interior offered the bourgeois an experience of disorientation rather than comfort.

Paradoxically, the proliferation of material things that characterized the century's second half facilitated this project. The loss of aura that Benjamin associated with reproductive technologies allowed things to draw nearer to their human maker, to invade his sense of self, and indeed to become an integral part of him. It was in the interior, and particularly in its heightened incarnation as dream space, that this process was most intense:

What we once called art begins only at a distance of two metres from the body. But with kitsch, the world of things draws close to man; it lets itself be touched, in the end drawing its figures in human interiority. The new man carries within him all the quintessence of ancient forms, and what takes shape in the confrontation with an environment issuing

from the second half of the nineteenth century, in dreams as well as in the writings and images of certain artists, is a being one might call “furnished man.”⁴

To create an interior, then, may have been a way to reconstruct oneself in a new guise—to become, in Benjamin’s words, a person inhabited by objects.

Burges built his own home of Tower House late in his career, between 1875 and 1878. In the years before his death in 1881, he progressively filled it with the collection of painted furniture, jewelled silverware and ancient armour that he retrieved from his earlier lodgings and office near the City. Like Burges’s public architectural projects and domestic objects, Tower House was part of a larger project, which aimed at a universal revival of medieval art and craft practices. From a contemporary perspective, the house does not look modern in any obvious way; this chapter, however, examines three ways in which William Burges’s late home of Tower House might indeed be considered a modern work.

One of the ways in which Tower House engaged with the modern world was in its mediation by photography. The first section of this chapter retraces Burges’s use of this nascent technology as a means to record and imaginatively re-assemble his own works. Here, I argue that the very idea of a house first appeared to Burges in the space of the

⁴ “Ce que nous appelions l’art ne commence qu’à deux mètres du corps. Mais voilà qu’avec le kitsch, le monde des objets se rapproche de l’homme; il se laisse toucher, et dessine finalement ses figures dans l’intériorité humaine. L’homme nouveau porte en lui toute la quintessence des formes anciennes, et ce qui se constitue dans la confrontation avec un environnement issu de la seconde moitié du XIX^e siècle, dans les rêves comme dans les phrases et les images de certains artistes, c’est un être que l’on pourrait appeler l’« homme meublé ».” [Author’s translation.] Walter Benjamin, “Kitsch onirique,” in *Oeuvres*, vol. 2, trans. Maurice de Gandillac et al., Collection Folio/Essais (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 7-10.

photographic album. A further aspect of Tower House's modernity lay in its confrontation with the changing social and physical landscape of Victorian London. Thus, a second section examines Tower House's place among the painters' houses and artistic suburbs of the 1870s. Here, Tower House is framed as a rejection, rather than an embrace, of the "new London" that was then emerging: while physically in the city, the house was conceptually removed from it. In the concluding section, I examine Tower House's relation to the artistic interiors and painted rooms created in London during the 1870s. Because of the narrative nature of its décors, it is easy to view Tower House as somewhat archaic in comparison to the colour compositions of J.M. Whistler or E.W. Godwin. However, as I seek to demonstrate, Tower House represented in fact a more complete achievement—less a pure interior than an architectural threshold between the city and the self, and between actuality and dream. One way in which one could be modern in the nineteenth century was to live on the edge of the real and the virtual.

5.2 A photographic project

5.2.1 A genesis in photography

It has been known for a very long time that Burges used photography to document his domestic interiors. Both his rooms and the furniture within them were the subject of extensive photographic surveys: first at Buckingham Street, over a period of several years in the early 1870s, and again circa 1878, when the interiors of Tower House were just about completed. In 1885, a few years after Burges's early death at the age of 54, photographs from these sets were selected, assembled and published by his brother-in-law, the architect R.P. Pullan, as a monograph entitled simply The House of William Burges, A.R.A. Photographs of some of the silverware from Burges's home were also

included by Pullan, alongside other decorative works, in a separate publication, The Designs of William Burges, A.R.A.⁵ Ever since, these photographs have formed the basis for almost all accounts and interpretations that have been made of Tower House.

Other than Pullan's monographs, the earliest documented interpretation of Burges's photographs is an artistic obituary written by architect E.W. Godwin that appeared in 1886 in two distinct issues of The Art Journal.⁶ This periodical was an elite publication that focused primarily on painting rather than architecture: unlike contemporary architectural periodicals, which mostly used inexpensive wood engravings copied from photographic prints, it employed instead the more expensive and technically challenging medium of photolithography. Godwin may in fact have chosen the journal for that very reason: because they captured the furniture's surface detail rather than mere outlines of form, photographs were critical to his argument that the artist's character could be deciphered in the carved and painted ornament on his furnishings.

Entitled "The Home of an English Architect," Godwin's article was less a description of Tower House than of some of the objects it contained, nearly all of which were created for Buckingham Street: Burges's inkstand, escritoire, Great Bookcase, Philosophy cabinet, and Red bedstead. Godwin viewed the inkstand in particular—one of the smallest objects inside the house—as emblematic of Burges's process of eclectic assemblage. Fashioned from a Japanese ivory toggle carved with human figures, an upturned cloisonné enamel teacup, the mid-section of a green porcelain vase, and a bronze Chinese incense-burner in the shape of an elephant, adorned with chains, rings and

⁵ R[ichard] P[opplewell] Pullan, The Designs of William Burges A. R. A. (S.l.: s.n., ca. 1885).

⁶ See Godwin, "The Home of an English Architect," 170-173, 302-305.

beads of enamel and semi-precious stones, the composition was held together by a silver framework that evoked the machicolation, finials and gargoyles of a medieval tower (**fig. 60**). The inkstand's various pieces were devised so that they could move independently of one another around a central pivot.

Even as Godwin celebrated the vital process of generation at work in Burges's interior, he was at pains to rationalize its grotesque implications. In spite of the inkstand's hybrid provenances, materials and figurative themes, he insisted, it was nonetheless endowed with an intrinsic unity: that of thirteenth-century Gothic art. More potent was Godwin's visual argument that the inkstand was safely contained within the larger order of a house: scrolling across the twin columns of the article's title page, his description of the unruly object framed a photograph showing the compact masses and sheer brick walls of Tower House, as viewed from Melbury Road (**fig. 61**). Both the leading photograph and the article's title suggested that the house partook in a reality as reassuringly stable and physically consistent as Burges's own body; the two were consubstantial.

But as Godwin's account of Tower House indirectly demonstrated, there was a tension between the house as container and the objects with which it was filled. Moreover, this tension was registered in the photographs themselves: in the uncertainty of their actual setting, the frequent concealment of background, and the focus on singular fragments rather than general views. Rather than a record of Tower House as it was, the photographs published by Pullan and Godwin offer a record of its genesis—that is, how Burges came to integrate his disparate furnishings and painted décors into a coherent work. In the 1860s, when Burges was producing painted furniture for the Medieval Court and the rooms in Buckingham Street, the idea of the domestic interior as a visually coherent space had not yet coalesced. In the following pages, I argue that the very

possibility of such an environment first appeared to Burges in the space of the photograph. In other words, the painted room was an unforeseen artefact of the camera.

5.2.2 Photography is incidental

Why did Burges use photography so extensively, and how does this fact change the way we might read his house? Burges's own writings offer little explanation: though he wrote extensively on drawing, photography was a subject he broached only rarely, confining it to the role of an incidental and dispensable architectural aid. In an essay of 1865, he argued that photography functioned essentially as an external and lesser substitute for memory:

.... there is no way at all of learning all about a building equal to that of drawing it out, for it is obvious that the possession of a number of photographs by no means ensures a knowledge of what they teach ... Somehow or other, when the photograph has been returned to the portfolio, one remembers very little about it ...⁷

In other words, though the photograph constituted an accurate record of things seen, it was not in itself instructive or productive. The photographic process did not measure, probe, or force the viewer into an intimate exploration of the building at hand, and because of this, the information it contained could be neither remembered nor appropriated.

He qualified this position in a lecture before the students of the Architectural Association in London, also from 1865, in which he advocated the replacement of printed pattern books by a photographic architectural library:

⁷ Burges, "Measured drawings," 557.

... Photographs are now so common thanks among other causes to the Architectural Photographic Society that they are so to speak at any mans [sic] door. I should however be by no means sorry to see a collection formed for general reference & deposited in the proper place viz the library of our institute [i.e. the Institute of British Architects], properly pasted in books so as to fade less & carefully divided with age and country it would be the most useful and valuable aid to students.⁸

In other words, like the plaster cast, the photographic image brought the viewer closer to the reality of the original work than could an engraving or lithographic print. Nonetheless, this view still restricted the purpose of photography to the production of facsimiles, and denied the mediation implicit in even this limited application. Indeed, through the late 1850s and early 1860s, photographs of medieval monuments appear sporadically in Burges's bound albums of topographical drawings, alongside chromolithographs and engravings. All these photographs adhere to the period convention of showing the building in general views, either in elevation or perspective; thus, they seem to have served a purely accessory function, as contextual adjuncts to Burges's own more haptic studies of the material artefact.

The assumption that photography provided an accurate and unmediated record of reality was widely held at this time. The first travel book published in Great Britain to be illustrated with photographic prints—William and Mary Howitt's Ruined Abbeys and Castles of Great Britain (1862-4)—made the claim that photography's superiority lay in the mechanical nature of its reproductive process:

⁸ Burges, "Early Middle Ages," folio 34.

[Photography offers] the genuine presentment of the object under consideration... so that we shall be able to feel, when reading of new scenes and lands, that we are not being amused with pleasant fictions, but presented with realities.⁹

But the subject of the Howitts' book also made clear the medium's limitations. Well into the 1860s, architectural photography remained associated with a relatively narrow field of subjects—landscapes, ruins, country houses and historical monuments—derived from the earlier, aristocratic pastime of the personal sketchbook.¹⁰ The same themes recurred in the short-lived project of an Architectural Photographic Association. Founded in 1857 by a group of prominent architects (including Charles Barry and Anthony Salvin), the association aimed to create a permanent collection of architectural photographs taken by professionals. Rather than modern work, however, the collection mostly illustrated ancient monuments of different styles. Thus, despite the technology's novelty, the more or less annual exhibitions held by the association between 1858 and 1861 yielded results that were little different from contemporary drawings of medieval monuments: one medium tended to reiterate the other.¹¹

Overall, the use British architects should make of photography roused little debate in the 1850s. A rare exception was G.E. Street's condemnation, in an 1859 issue of the architectural periodical The Builder, of the picturesque conventions that dominated the

⁹ William and Mary Howitt, Ruined Abbeys and Castles of Great Britain, The Photographic Illustrations by Bedford, Sedgfield, Wilson, Fenton and Others, 2 v. (London: A.W. Bennett, 1862-4); quoted in David Harris, "Photography and Topography: Tintern Abbey," in British Photography in the Nineteenth Century: the Fine Art Tradition, ed. Mike Weaver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 95.

¹⁰ Elwall, Photography Takes Command, 12-13.

¹¹ Ibid, 15-16.

nascent medium. Street argued that photography should portray what the drawing could not: that is, the details and sculpture than individuated the building, rather than its general outline.¹² His argument suggested that what photography might do best was to capture a building's living surface.

According to historian Robert Elwall, the conventions of architectural photography only began to shift in the 1860s, as the building boom that marked the decade opened a market for the first commercial firms specializing in “the recording of the contemporary architectural scene.”¹³ One such company, Bedford Lemere and Co. would remain dominant in London into the 1890s. It must be pointed out however, that the company's driving force, Harry Bedford Lemere, was active only after 1881; moreover, until the introduction of gelatine dry-plates and shorter exposures in the late 1870s, the use of photography to document contemporary interiors remained relatively rare.¹⁴ In this context, Burges's practical investment in the photographic recording of his own home is all the more unusual.

5.2.3 Photography becomes intentional

Though Burges remained completely silent on the matter, towards the middle of the 1860s he started using photography in a more intentional fashion, as a means to record and represent his own work. One context in which these photographs appear are his albums of ornamental designs: large scrapbooks into which he pasted the detailed working drawings he sent to cabinetmakers or goldsmiths for estimates and orders. In a

¹² Ibid, 17-18.

¹³ Ibid, 20.

¹⁴ Ibid, 21-22.

number of these albums, photographs of the final manufactured object—or of several variations on the same pattern—were later pasted onto the original working drawing.¹⁵ Thus the photographs may have served a number of practical purposes: as a record of the building site, in the case of architectural ornamentation; as a visual guide to craftsmen, in the case of silverware to be produced from a previously used pattern; or as a catalogue of design ideas to submit to aristocratic and ecclesiastical patrons.

But the consistent use of a specific type of view, focusing on a single isolated object, suggests that these photographs also served an imaginative purpose. This appears most clearly in an album now in the RIBA photographic collection, entitled “Photographs, Own Furniture.”¹⁶ Pasted into the album each to a single page, the prints were the result of a systematic campaign to document the furniture and silverware in Buckingham Street. The nature of this undertaking was unique: so far as I have been able to establish, the resulting album is the only instance in the 1860s or 1870s of an architect using photography as a means to represent his own domestic interior. Few of the objects portrayed in the album are contextualised: smaller items of porcelain and silver were arranged in a mode reminiscent of museum or exhibition displays, either singly on a stand before a blank backdrop of velvet, or in large groups according to genre, on a trestle table pulled away from the wall (**fig. 62**).¹⁷ Where possible, the furniture was arranged into abstract groupings in the centre of the room; larger pieces were conceptually removed

¹⁵ This is especially the case with two albums entitled respectively “Orfèvrerie Domestique” and “Orfèvrerie Ecclesiastical,” RIBA drawings collection, London.

¹⁶ William Burges, “Photographs, Own Furniture,” RIBA photographic collection, London.

¹⁷ Although only one of these photographs was included in the monograph on Tower House, many more are to be found in an album held in the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.

from their surroundings by dark patterned hangings placed against the walls (**fig. 63**). In the case of painted furniture, multiple views were taken in order to capture the ornament on both sides of the same panel, or to highlight pictorial details that were no longer legible in the larger frame.

Contrary to the topographical photographs, which Burges collected during his travels, the visual syntax of the photographs in the “Own Furniture” album situates them in a genre of “archaeological fragments,” promoted in the 1850s and 1860s by the photographic campaigns at the South Kensington Museum and, to a lesser degree, the British Museum.¹⁸ This connection is further reinforced by the photograph’s probable author: Francis Bedford. With rare exceptions, the photographs of Burges’s interior in Buckingham Street are undated and unsigned; nonetheless, a few can be attributed with certainty to Bedford, and it seems likely that he collaborated over a long period of time to Burges’s photographic projects.¹⁹ In the 1860s, Bedford was established as a landscape and architectural photographer in the picturesque tradition; active largely in Wales and Western England, he could easily have been the author of the photographs recording Burges’s remodelling of Cardiff Castle, from 1868 on.²⁰ In addition to this, he was a well-

¹⁸ John Hannavy, Victorian Photographers at Work (Princes Risborough, UK: Shire Publications, 1997), 41; Anthony J. Hamber, “A Higher Branch of the Art”: Photographing the Fine Arts in England, 1839-1880 (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1996), chapters 6, 7 and 8.

¹⁹ Prints bearing Bedford’s signature are to be found in at least two albums connected to Burges: the “Photographs, Own Furniture” album in the RIBA Library Photographs collection, London, and the album of prints in the photographs collection of the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.

²⁰ Photography as Art and Social History: pt. 1. The Francis Bedford topographical photographs (Marlborough: Adam Matthew Publications, 1993), microform.

known producer of art reproductions: in 1853, he undertook a photographic survey of the collection of decorative art at Gore House in London, on behalf of the Department of Science and Art (the overseer of the South Kensington Museum);²¹ in 1857, he made photographs of works in the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition that later served as models for their lithographic reproduction.²²

Burges's initial encounter with Bedford probably took place in 1851, when both men were contributors to Wyatt's The Industrial Arts of the Nineteenth Century—Burges as research assistant, and Bedford as illustrator.²³ Unlike contemporary albums that portrayed the Crystal Palace as an interior landscape, the Industrial Arts portfolio focused instead on the single exhibit.²⁴ Bedford's reproductions followed a systematic protocol, in which each object was abstracted from its context of use or provenance, set against a neutral background, and lighted so as to bring its surface detail into high relief (**fig. 64**). Although the medium used for this project was chromolithography, the syntax of representation was clearly derived from photography. When Henry Fox Talbot began experimenting with photographic processes in the late 1830s, the lengthy exposures meant that they could only record what was perfectly still. By necessity, photography was an art of display:

²¹ Hamber, Photographing the Fine Arts, 377.

²² Ibid., n.33, 444.

²³ Wyatt, The Industrial Arts of the Nineteenth Century, v. 1, ix-xii.

²⁴ The representation of the Exhibition as a picturesque landscape is exemplified by the views in Dickinsons' Comprehensive Pictures of the Great Exhibition of 1851, From the Originals Painted for H.R.H. Prince Albert, 2 v. (London: Dickinson Brothers, 1854).

Talbot observed that ‘the whole cabinet of a Virtuoso’ might be photographed, ‘the more strange and fantastic the forms..., the more advantage in having their pictures given instead of their description... However numerous the objects—however complicated the arrangement—the Camera depicts them all at once.’

Outside [Talbot’s home of] Lacock Abbey, temporary shelves, draped in black velvet, supported arrangements of objects relocated from indoors ...²⁵

5.2.4 An interior made of photographs

In the context of the Great Exhibition, the reproductive techniques of photography and chromolithography conferred on the commonplace what they robbed from the work of art: its heightened presence and aura of singularity. By emulating the manner of the South Kensington Museum’s and British Museum’s official photographers, Burges’s photographic survey of his rooms in Buckingham Street may have been intended as a rhetorical device—a means to reframe his ornamental designs as works of art in their own right.

More importantly, however, photography may have suggested to Burges new ways of envisioning the interior. As optical devices, the photographs of Buckingham Street focused the viewer’s eye on the singular object in a way the rooms’ actual layout did not necessarily allow. For instance, Bedford’s method of framing typically occluded all modern features in Burges’s lodgings, such as the machine-made carpeting and wall-paper that clothed his parlour, or the Georgian mouldings that crowned its ceiling. Insofar, the act of photography would seem to dissolve the interior into a pure accumulation of freestanding things. But it generated in fact a new imaginative space: the

²⁵ William Henry Fox Talbot: Photographs from the J. Paul Getty Museum (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2002), 78.

purely tonal syntax of photography leached Burges's furniture of their vibrant colours and gilded reflections, lending them instead the mortuary and distanced quality of antiquities. In the photograph, Burges's creations became indistinguishable from the medieval originals on which they were patterned; the impression of "hybrid medievalism" they had aroused in the Medieval Court was overcome by presenting them in a closed frame.

The idea of an imaginary interior was developed further in Burges's exploration of photographic montage. Besides the "Own Furniture" album, he produced at least two additional undated albums, in which he played with various combinations and sequences of photographs, of different provenances and representing different projects.²⁶ Elizabeth Anne McCauley's description of the nineteenth-century photographic art monograph as a "musée imaginaire" is particularly apposite to this process.²⁷ Apart from the absence of letterpress, the format of Burges's albums closely resembles that of the albums of Old Master reproductions published in France in the 1850s and 1860s, by photographic editors such as Blanquart-Évrard, Bisson frères and Braun et compagnie.²⁸ The photographic scrapbook allowed Burges to bring disparate works—located in different places, created for different patrons, and serving different purposes—into artificial proximity, within a bounded, fictional realm. The only point of junction of these works was a shared conceptual time: that of their imaginative origins in the art of thirteenth-century France.

²⁶ Respectively the Canadian Centre for Architecture and National Museum of Wales albums.

²⁷ Elizabeth Anne McCauley, Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris, 1848-1871 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 270.

²⁸ McCauley, Industrial Madness, 271-3.

When exactly were the photographs of Burges's furnishings in Buckingham Street taken? According to J. Mordaunt Crook, the entire survey was carried out in 1876, and completed two years later by another set of photographs showing the furniture in its new location in Tower House.²⁹ This late date and short time span, subsequent to the beginning of construction work on Tower House, would suggest that the undertaking was purely instrumental: a sort of index for plotting the furniture's integration into a new house.

But Burges's use of photography to record his own work began much earlier and developed over a far longer period. One clue to this is provided by a photograph reproduced by Pullan in The Designs of William Burges and representing the Jenner crosier, designed in 1866-7: commissioned by a New Zealand clergyman, the object must have been recorded before leaving Great Britain. The photographs in the album for church plate also likely date from 1862-4, when Burges was actively designing chalices and patens for the church of St Michael and All Angels in Brighton. As for the furniture in Buckingham Street, Crook's claim is contradicted by two photographs in the "Own Furniture" album, alongside which are pasted their engraved reproductions in The Building News, dated respectively 1870 and 1874.

These last dates are especially significant, because they situate the photographs prior to any of the known drawings Burges produced for his later house, whether on Melbury Road or on the other two sites he envisaged in early 1875. Moreover, they frame the photographic survey of Buckingham Street within a lengthy hiatus in Burges's production of furniture, between 1870 and 1875. At this point, Burgee seems to have

²⁹ Crook, "A Vanished Pre-Raphaelite Interior," 51. Crook provides no substantiation for this date.

turned from the physical creation of a domestic décor to its phantasmagorical reconstruction in the space of the album.

Thus, the relation between Burges's photographic albums and the construction of Tower House is at once deeper and more diffuse than has previously been acknowledged. If the photographs taken in Buckingham Street prefigure the construction of Tower House, then it is only in the sense that dreams or desires may prefigure reality. Contained within its cardboard and leather binding, the "Own Furniture" album constituted an interior in its own right—one different from, and independent of, the actual rooms in which it was produced. Within its pages, Burges's lodgings were purged of voids: there was no longer any discrepancy between their intensely decorated furnishings and the bare walls of their public rooms. They were also purged of scale: even the smallest and most intricate object—such as the elephant inkstand—became as present as the most massive piece of furniture. Finally, they were purged of walls: instead of the discrete compartments into which Burges's lodgings were actually divided, the album presented a single and seamless stage.

Alluding to the dust that settled in every cranny in the overfilled bourgeois interior, Walter Benjamin once noted that grey had become the colour of dreams:

Dreams no longer open onto azure horizons. They have turned grey. The coating of grey dust that covers all things makes up their greater part. Dreams are now like paths across a field that lead only to the banal.³⁰

³⁰ "Le rêve n'ouvre plus sur des lointains d'azur. Il est devenu gris. La couche de poussière grise sur les choses en est la meilleure part. Les rêves sont à présent des chemins de traverse menant au banal." Benjamin, "Kitsch onirique," 7 [author's translation].

In the dust-filled space of the dream, Benjamin added, the commonplace was transformed: in his clumsy and childlike state, the dreamer took hold of the ordinary, unnoticed and outworn things around him, distorting what he handled and robbing it of scale and context. For a brief moment, material things took over the dreamer's imaginative horizon, regaining the magical power of the fetish. The grey that Benjamin associated with dreams might equally apply to the silvery tones of the photographic print. What Burges discovered in the process of assembling the photographs of Buckingham Street was a perfect refuge for his ill-fitting self: a space from which all external intrusions were expunged, and so completely filled with his own creations as to leave no place for anything else. After twenty years in bachelor's rooms, this discovery acted as a conceptual hinge, inciting Burges to build a house at last.

5.3 Into the suburbs

5.3.1 The sorting out of London

For all the intensity of their medieval décor, Burges's chambers in Buckingham Street were tightly woven into a pre-existing Georgian London. Located south of the Strand, they were situated on an urban estate that had remained largely unchanged since the seventeenth century.³¹ Until their progressive rebuilding from the 1860s on, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century quarters to the west of the City were gregarious in a way the new, specifically Victorian suburbs built after 1850 were not: commercial and residential activities were intimately interwoven, and segregation between rich and poor took place at the scale of the house or the individual street, rather than at that of the

³¹ Donald J. Olsen, The Growth of Victorian London (London: B.T. Batsford, 1976), 128.

neighbourhood.³² As a series of rented rooms in a tall row house, Burges's bachelor chambers also reflected the promiscuity that often attended on earlier London homes. Unlike Paris, there were nearly no purpose-built flats in London before the 1860s; instead, houses initially built for single families were haphazardly parcelled out into apartments, all of which shared a common entry, staircase and servants' quarters.³³ To build a house, then, was to participate in what urban historian Donald J. Olsen has called "the systematic sorting-out of London into single-purpose, homogenous, specialized neighbourhoods."³⁴

Paradoxically, the extensive reworking of London in the nineteenth century was shaped by institutions and practices inherited from an earlier era: the concentration of land-ownership in the hands of ducal estates; the persistence of the leasehold structure and its attending covenants on building and repairs; and the practical alliance between ground landlords and small speculative builders, who were given the right—and often financial incentives—to develop unoccupied, underused or devalued urban land by erecting rows of nearly identical houses for largely anonymous buyers.³⁵ Enabled by the abundance of new housing and by new networks of metropolitan transport, gas lighting and policing, from the 1850s on the middle and artisan classes of London moved away from their work and from each other. But while their terrace houses or semi-detached villas embodied an ideal of privacy and individuality, they were not in fact conceived or

³² Ibid, 19.

³³ Ibid, 117-118.

³⁴ Ibid, 18.

³⁵ Ibid, 127, 155-157.

built by their occupants; indeed, they were very frequently rented rather than owned.³⁶ To build a house oneself, to a different design from that of one's neighbours, remained the minority privilege of the rich.³⁷

Thus, Burges's decision to design and build his own house confronted him with questions he had never yet faced, and for which contemporary London presented relatively few models: where to settle, and how to articulate the relation of this new home to the city abroad? In early 1875, he is known to have envisaged three different plots as possible sites for his house, respectively in Bayswater, Victoria Road and Melbury Road. All were located near Kensington Gardens, on the western edge of built-up London, in new suburbs that were subdivided and built up for the most part between 1850 and 1875. In addition, all were associated with the establishment of artists' houses: the first studio houses in Bayswater were built in 1829 in Porchester Terrace, at a time when the area was still semi-rural.³⁸ Victoria Road was the centre of a development begun in the early 1840s and known as Kensington New Town. Its occupation by painters and sculptors began in 1843,³⁹ and by the late 1850s was sufficiently commonplace for dedicated studio houses to be incorporated into the Italianate terraces built there by Charles Freaque, one of Kensington's most important speculative builders.⁴⁰ But of the three sites Burges envisaged, the one he decided on was the most recent and unusual. Though it lay close to

³⁶ Ibid, 245.

³⁷ Ibid, 227.

³⁸ Giles Walkley, Artists' Houses in London 1764-1914 (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994), 31-33.

³⁹ Ibid, 35-37.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 43.

areas already settled by painters in the early 1850s,⁴¹ the area around Melbury Road was laid out progressively after 1864 on the southern edge of the small estate of Holland House. It embodied both a new type of building—the studio as freestanding house—and a new type of urban settlement—the colony inhabited exclusively by artists.

5.3.2 Painters' houses

The multiplication of artists' houses in London in the 1860s and 1870s was a direct consequence of their owners' rising material fortunes.⁴² Though commissions for monumental paintings remained rare, the royal patronage of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert provided painters as a class with new social respectability, even as technical and commercial developments at mid-century provided them with new sources of revenue.⁴³ The acquisition of modern British art became fashionable among middle-class buyers, and painters responded by producing small-scale easel paintings better suited to modest dwellings. New printed media such as Punch and the London Illustrated News also hired professional artists to provide them with illustrations. But above all, painters benefited from the revival of the print trade in the 1850s and the widespread reproduction of oil paintings across a variety of media: engravings, lithography and photography. Print dealers paid artists not only for the right to reproduce a painting, but also for the right to exhibit it in their private galleries, where the public was charged a fee for viewing. A

⁴¹ Ibid, 37-40. William Powell Frith established his house and studio in Notting Hill around 1853; William Holman Hunt and Richard Martineau together took up a rented studio house in Campden Hill in 1856.

⁴² Mark Girouard, "The Victorian Artist at Home," Country Life 152 (1972): 1278-81, 1370-4.

⁴³ Walkley, Artists' Houses, 42.

painter might earn as much money from copyright as from the actual sale of a painting; in the case of a highly successful painting, the sums involved could be very important.⁴⁴

As much as the northern shipbuilders who erected houses in the metropolis to assert their self-made wealth, painters now belonged to London's "nouveaux riches."⁴⁵ But the houses they built were becoming increasingly different from the town houses of other professionals of equal income. Prior to 1850, painters had provided studios for themselves either by converting rooms in an existing house, or, much less frequently, by adding on a painting-room and gallery at its back.⁴⁶ By 1864, however, when the painters Frederic Leighton and Valentine Prinsep began to build the first two houses on the Holland House estate, the studio had become a room as important in status as the great hall of a country house.⁴⁷ Both houses reflected this new convention. In order to provide for a diversity of light sources (high north-facing windows to one side, and either top-lighting or a glasshouse), Leighton's and Prinsep's double-height studios were located on the upper floor, relegating living spaces and bedrooms alike to the ground floor. And because they served as much for receiving patrons as for the production of works, their studios were given two distinct modes of access, with a ceremonial staircase for public previews, and a back stair to be used by models.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Ibid, 43. Hunt's Finding the Saviour in the Temple earned its dealer £4000 from viewing, £5000 from print sales, and an additional £1500 when the painting was finally resold.

⁴⁵ Andrew Saint, Richard Norman Shaw (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 152-153.

⁴⁶ Girouard, "The Victorian Artist at Home," 1278.

⁴⁷ Saint, Richard Norman Shaw, 157.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 157; Girouard, "The Victorian Artist at Home," 1280.

Contrary to Freaque's terraced studio houses in Kensington, the Leighton and Prinsep houses were now resolutely anti-urban in character. They offered relatively blank, red brick walls to the street, and their studios' large windows gave instead onto the garden and the pastoral setting of neighbouring Little Holland House. Moreover, at a time when the terraces of west London were still uniformly being given stuccoed Italianate facades, Leighton and Prinsep looked to more unconventional models. Though the facades of the Leighton house were relatively undistinguished, the interior was conceived by its architect George Aitchison as that of a Pompeian villa, with mosaic floors and painted friezes in its central hall. Designed by Philip Webb, Valentine Prinsep's house was a more compact reworking, on an urban site, of the rural vernacular of Morris's Red House. As in the earlier house, its plain brick walls were relieved solely by the pointed arches and steeply pitched gables over the studio's tall, twinned windows.

If houses such as these served as an advertisement for their owners, it was not only because of the studio's public function or the material success implicit in their cost. Erected as informal, freestanding structures in a small number of exclusive suburbs, the rhetorical distance of the artist's house from the surrounding city embodied a heightened claim to individuality. Indeed, a recurrent theme in the architectural criticism and tourist guides of the latter half of the century was that London was no city for poets or painters: the repetitive layout of its suburban streets and the stereotypical frontage of its terraced houses was inimical to an artistic sensibility. In attempting to explain why Hampstead—as opposed to Brompton—was still frequented by artists in 1876, the Building News attributed the reason to the area's singular topography:

One of the few localities about London which has become the favoured haunt of artists, and which has defied the rule of speculative builders, is Hampstead. By nature irregular

and hilly, it has resisted to a certain extent those elements of uniformity and monotony which characterize the flatter districts of the West-end. Here, it is impossible to build a row of houses that shall be at once regular in height and uniform in feature....there is an irregularity which has particularly favoured the artistic penchant, and those in search of the picturesque.⁴⁹

By the second half of the 1870s, one of the stranger manifestations of London's increasing fragmentation was that one could broadcast what kind of artist one was by setting up house in a particular street. In 1875, Little Holland House was demolished to make way for the new Melbury Road. Laid out next to the Leighton and Prinsep houses, the street was rapidly occupied by an additional group of painters: G.F. Watts at no.6, Marcus Stone at no. 8 and Luke Fildes at no. 11.⁵⁰ For the relatively young Fildes and Stone, having one's house designed by architect Richard Norman Shaw and building it close to Frederic Leighton's was a means to establish a professional reputation and to vie, through these connections, for admission to the Royal Academy.⁵¹ At this time, Shaw was regularly involved in the Academy's annual architectural exhibitions, even acting for a short time as its treasurer; soon after, Leighton became its president.⁵²

If Melbury Road represented a move into the artistic establishment, then Tite Street, laid out on the newly built Chelsea embankment, embodied an intentional estrangement from it. In a manner similar to Leighton's role in Holland Park, the long-standing presence in Cheyne Row of the socially reclusive painter and poet D.G. Rossetti

⁴⁹ Olsen, Victorian London, 232.

⁵⁰ Girouard, "The Victorian Artist at Home," 1280.

⁵¹ Ibid, 1281.

⁵² Saint, Richard Norman Shaw, 316.

attracted London's artistic avant-garde to Chelsea. In 1877, E.W. Godwin—the later biographer of Tower House—designed two studio houses there: one for Whistler as well as his mistress and students, the other for the painter Frank Miles and his housemate Oscar Wilde. On the outside, both houses proposed unconventionally blocky forms, spare and asymmetrical openings, and boldly coloured materials, that constituted a counterpoint to the subtle colour harmonies within.⁵³ Wilde remained in Tite Street after his marriage, and in 1884-5, he once again commissioned Godwin to supervise the decoration of his house, so that its interior would reflect his own, publicly “progressive taste.”⁵⁴

5.3.3 The New London

Given the social topography of London's artistic suburbs in the 1870s, Burges's decision to build in Melbury Road was in many ways an odd one. Firstly, the house he built there was not “new” in the manner of the deliberately informal painters' houses by Webb and Shaw next door. Tower House was clad with the same red bricks and roof slates, but it remained rooted in the Revivalist experiments of the preceding decade. Though its compact plan was based on the design for the McConnochie house in Cardiff, completed the previous year, Burges gave it a more emphatically Gothic appearance, placing its narrow gable facing the street and bracketing its entrance with a blank, turreted

⁵³ Aileen Reid, “The Architectural Career of E.W. Godwin,” in E.W. Godwin: Aesthetic Movement Architect and Designer, ed. Susan Weber Soros (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1999), 165-7; Susan Weber Soros, “E.W. Godwin and Interior Design,” in E.W. Godwin: Aesthetic Movement Architect and Designer, 208-13; Girouard, “The Victorian Artist at Home,” 1370-2.

⁵⁴ Soros, “E.W. Godwin and Interior Design,” 216.

tower. More vertical, more fragmented and more forbidding than its model, Tower House looked backward to the Clock Tower at Cardiff Castle.

Secondly, unlike its neighbours, Tower House was not a studio house at all. In the layout and functional specialization of his rooms, Burges—though unmarried and childless—re-enacted the same segregation between masters’, servants’, and children’s spaces that one found in a conventional suburban villa of the 1850s. Moreover, in the move from Buckingham Street to Melbury Road, he left behind precisely those spaces that were most associated with his work as an architect: his study and that of his clerk. After moving in 1878, Burges may in practice have used one of the upstairs rooms ironically dubbed the ‘Day Nursery’ and ‘Night Nursery’ as a workspace; yet the fact remains that Tower House conspicuously excluded the kind of public functions that took place in the mid-Victorian painting-room.

Lastly, Burges’s move to Melbury Road placed him in a milieu in which he was doubly an outsider: not merely an aspiring academician, like the painters of genre scenes who built next to him, but a social and professional stranger to them. The artists and architects that Burges frequented during the 1860s—such as William Morris, D.G. Rossetti and E.W. Godwin—were now likely to be found living or working in Chelsea or Hammersmith, not in Holland Park. The only painter in Melbury Road with whom Burges ever worked was Frederic Leighton, and in professional terms, even this connection was tenuous. It dated back to the very beginning of Burges’s career in 1853:⁵⁵ Leighton had then begun work on a panoramic canvas entitled Cimabue’s Celebrated

⁵⁵ George Aitchison, “The Late William Burges, A.R.A.,” RIBA Transactions 1st series, 34 (1883-84): 204-209.

Madonna is carried in Procession through the Streets of Florence (1855), and commissioned Burges to develop historically allusive decorative designs to be incorporated into the painting.⁵⁶

Thus, despite appearances, it seems unlikely that Burges conceived of his move to Holland Park in the middle of life as a way to win a position in London's cultural establishment. On the contrary, the building of Tower House may well have represented a form of internal emigration, motivated by a growing sense of disenchantment and alienation from the city in which he lived. In its geographical remoteness, its pretension to artistic aristocracy, and the physical seclusion of its houses, Melbury Road was about as far as one could get from London without actually leaving the city.

Burges's writings of the late 1860s give some insight into the unrealized ambitions that finally drove him from Buckingham Street. As they make clear, he once envisioned the Gothic Revival as a means to remake the city—giving a legible shape to its sprawl, and placing the wealth generated by trade and industry in the service of public art. Even though his role in the making of it was a small one, Leighton's Cimabue may have provided Burges with a concrete image of what the Victorian city might become. The painting represented Florence in a moment of change—its medieval artworks still celebrated and embedded in the daily life and religious rituals of the city's people, yet already giving way to new cultural forms (**fig. 65**). Prefiguring the Renaissance celebration of the singular genius, Cimabue walks laurel-wreathed before his Madonna;

⁵⁶ Conserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (VA 737-1896, 741-1896 and 757-1896), Burges's sketches for Leighton reappear in the finished painting in three prominent locations: the embroidered vestments of the bishop at the head of the procession, the enamelled gold candlesticks to either side of the Madonna, and the elaborately patterned hanging adorning a balcony in the left foreground.

perched on the hill in the background, the Romanesque church of San Miniato points to the coming recovery of Classical heritage. To walk the streets of modern London, Burges imagined, might likewise be akin to a celebratory procession through historical time.

Commenting in 1865 on the rebuilding taking hold of London as the 99-year leaseholds in its Georgian neighbourhoods began to expire, Burges argued that this great commercial city now deserved an architecture of permanence, magnificence and expense. Only if London's buildings were made to last would it be possible to invest them with art, adorning their facades with "painting and sculpture that everybody can see all through the day, and in their daily walks."⁵⁷ The way forward lay in emulating the monumental scale and material heft of London's docks, bridges and railway stations.⁵⁸ This New London, he believed, might be at once modern and entirely Gothic—a metropolitan landscape of spires and domes, whose interiors would be filled with gleaming handcrafted ornament:

We must ... replace our churches ... by edifices like St. Front, at Perigueux, glowing inside with marbles and mosaics ... and, when the New London shall have been so built that there will be no greater treat to the artist than a walk down Cheapside, we may still keep one or two specimens of the hideous Victorian architecture ... as frightful examples of what was once the fashion.⁵⁹

Two years later, in the aftermath of the Law Courts competition, Burges restated his case, now arguing that London's smoky and acrid atmosphere required more durable materials, and that the wealth and number of its population demanded ever greater

⁵⁷ William Burges, "Sketches versus Measured Drawings," *The Building News* 12 (1865), 606.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 605.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 606.

buildings. In both these respects, the new availability of costly materials and powerful mechanical means had yet to be fully exploited:

... we should build thick and high walls ... so thick that they should bear vaulting or domes, and so high that they would overtop the huge warehouses which surround them. In them we should place great columns and slabs of precious marbles brought from afar and polished by that real slave of the lamp, the steam engine.⁶⁰

By this time, however, Burges's evocation of civic monuments towering over the City had taken on an elegiac quality. He was no longer describing what might be built, but a cityscape that was likely never to see the light of day. Modern London, he wrote the same year, was in practice still being raised by engineers, surveyors and speculative builders, and an architect could count himself lucky if he received some first significant work in his middle years. In fallow times, an architect might find consolation by turning his knowledge to the making of small and beautiful things, such as "a piece of goldsmith's work or ivory carving..."⁶¹ Given the absence of collective rituals or a collective desire for beauty, it was only in the private realm of the house that architecture and its allied lesser arts could display their potential glory.⁶² To build a house for oneself was not a crowning achievement but the admission of a setback, if not defeat.

In his essay Under the Sign, Stephen Bann sought to apply to the figure of John Bargrave, a seventeenth-century collector of curiosities, Freud's observation that the grief caused by personal loss might be overcome by transferring one's attachment to a new

⁶⁰ William Burges, "Why we have so little Art in our Churches," The Ecclesiologist 28, N.S. 25 (1867), 151-156.

⁶¹ William Burges, "Our Future Architecture," The Builder 25 (1867), 385-387.

⁶² *Ibid*, 155.

material object.⁶³ Exiled from England, Bargrave had been deprived of his country, his family and his inheritance. Each successive loss gave rise to the opening of a new drawer in his cabinet, in which he placed an object that, though not necessarily valuable, he nonetheless viewed as unique. The building of Tower House seems to have played an analogous, consolatory role for William Burges. The house was itself a cabinet—a container for all the things that he had created to compensate for earlier losses: the topographical albums that made up for a missing style; the silver vessels that commemorated lost commissions and competitions; the painted furniture that externalized his frustrated sexual desires. If, beyond this, Tower House had a public function in the landscape of London, then it was to provide its owner with a simulacrum of social status.

In a series of silver drinking cups made between 1861 and 1863, Burges repeatedly alluded to his unstable condition as an artist in the world of middle-class traders and professionals from which he stemmed.⁶⁴ All three are engraved with extracts from a Latin hymn entitled “De natura hominis.” Inside their bowls, they all carry a hierarchical representation of the world, in which the three classes of beasts—those of the sea, the earth, and the air—dwell in separate compartments placed one above the other. The first of these cups, which seems to have been made for Burges himself, carried the following inscription: “The rose depicts our situation; it is the just symbol of our

⁶³ Stephen Bann, Under the Sign : John Bargrave as Collector, Traveler, and Witness (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 81-83.

⁶⁴ Burges inherited his private fortune from his father, an engineer and industrialist who made a career building lighthouses and docks. See Crook, William Burges, 38-39.

condition; the text of our life.”⁶⁵ The last, made for the lead merchant and family friend of the Burgeses James Nicholson, bore a series of figures around the base representing the stations of man—knight, priest, king and peasant—alongside a legend that ran: “A faithful expression of our life; our death; our status; our class.”⁶⁶

If only in imaginative terms, Tower House allowed Burges to find a place in the equally stratified and inhospitable world of his own times. Designed to shelter an inexistent family, with nurseries in the attic and separate rooms for husband and wife (the sculpted chimneypieces and pictorial emblems over the doorways identified the library and drawing room respectively as the domains of Learning and Love),⁶⁷ the house compensated by its physical presence for the loneliness and social marginality of Burges’s bachelor existence. Tower House also constituted an isolated fragment of the city that Burges had never been allowed to build. The panels on the closed bookcases that surrounded the library on all four sides represented the persons and trades involved in the thirteenth-century building world, placed in alphabetical order. The initial panel, for the letter A, portrayed Burges himself in medieval dress, standing compass in hand before the

⁶⁵ “NOSTRUM STATUM PINGIT ROSA. NOSTRI STATUS DECENS GLOSA NOSTRAE VITAE LECTIO” [author’s translation]. The cup is on display in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

⁶⁶ “NOSTRAE VITAE. NOSTRAE MORTIS. NOSTRI STATUS. NOSTRAE SORTIS. FIDELI SIGNALCULUM” [author’s translation]. Crook, ed., *Strange Genius*, 110.

⁶⁷ Pullan, *The House of William Burges*, 7-9; Mrs. [Mary Eliza] Haweis, *Beautiful Houses: Being a Description of Certain Well-known Artistic Houses* (New York: Scribner and Welford, 1882), 16.

model of a gabled and turreted structure very much like Tower House.⁶⁸ Here at least, in this fictional *mise en abyme*, the architect reigned supreme.

5.4 A modern house

5.4.1 The artistic interior

Beginning in the middle of the 1870s, a new type of domestic interior began to appear in London—one that was commonly known in the last decades of the nineteenth century as the Artistic or the Beautiful house. According to Judith Neiswander, what distinguished the interiors of the late 1870s and 1880s from earlier ones was the fact that their decoration had come to be viewed as a medium for self-expression.⁶⁹ Until then, popular publications on decoration had laid emphasis on the domestic interior's conformity to common standards of taste: the accurate reproduction of historically codified styles of ornament, or the accepted distinctions of class and gender between the various rooms of the middle or upper-class house.⁷⁰ In contrast, the flood of publications on home decoration that began to appear after 1875 (in the form of handbooks, articles in women's magazines, or retailers' catalogues) stressed individuality and variety as an interior's foremost qualities.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Preparatory drawings for the panels by Fred Weekes were published serially in The British Architect and Northern Engineer in 1878 as non-paginated supplements. RIBA Prints and drawings collection, London.

⁶⁹ Judith A. Neiswander, The Cosmopolitan Interior: Liberalism and the British Home, 1870-1914 (New Haven and London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art / Yale University Press, 2008), 34.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 33-34.

⁷¹ Ibid, 34-36.

The burgeoning literature on the home was largely addressed to women, reflecting their growing empowerment as individuals.⁷² For a group that had long been deprived of legal status as persons, the appearance of the home became a means to assert one's tastes, ideas and skills. But while the literature on home decoration reached out to a wide audience, the model it proposed for emulation was in fact highly exclusive. When in 1882 Mary Eliza Haweis (then one of London's better known writers on decoration) undertook to produce for her readers a description of the city's artistic houses, she turned to Holland Park, devoting the first chapters of her book respectively to the homes of Frederic Leighton and William Burges. If such houses were noteworthy, she explained, it was because they bore the imprint of a singular imagination:

Originality is neither rare nor hard to obtain, fearful as are many people to lay claim to it. Originality is like a house built of bricks taken from many places—it is the new disposal of the old bricks which makes the house an original one.

I have, therefore, selected for study and admiration the following houses, of various and distinctive characters, houses that reflect no well-defined period in art, but which are typical of certain minds, and arranged with exquisite feeling, devotion, and knowledge, or at least with all the skill that money and thought command in the nineteenth century.⁷³

When Haweis visited the Leighton house at the beginning of the 1880s, she described her experience of its interior in painterly rather than architectural terms. She was aware that the original building (extended in 1876-79) had been modelled after a Renaissance palazzo, with rooms ordered around a columned central hall; indeed, the

⁷² Ibid, 91-96; Reid, "The Architectural Career of E.W. Godwin," 168-169.

⁷³ Haweis, Beautiful Houses, iv-v.

house's main feature was the "gradual progress and ascent to the studio" by way of the hall's winding staircase.⁷⁴ But what really captured Haweis's attention was the allusive succession of colours, on objects, floors and walls, as she moved from room to room. These alone, she suggested, were sufficient to project the visitor through historical time and across geographical space. If the colours in the Leighton house evoked history, moreover, it was in the doubly mediated form of its owner's reminiscences of travel (to Italy, North Africa and the Middle East) and his acquaintance with ancient art:

As we enter the fine red-brick mansion in Holland Park Road ... we find ourselves in a vestibule of calm tone ... which at once strikes the note of the nineteenth century ... The second hall is spacious but not vast; and here the richness of colours carries us back to the antique. It is, as it were, the memory, not the fact—a vivid impression projected from a nineteenth-century mind.

... hall opens out of hall, reviving now antique, now mediaeval, now Renaissance Italy, from Florence to Rome, down through regal Naples, on to Cairo itself; and yet it is not Rome, nor Sicily, nor Egypt, but a memory, a vision seen through modern eyes.⁷⁵

What took shape in such heightened interiors as that of the Leighton house was an attempt to establish a system of sensory correspondences between a room's appearance and its owner's mood or thoughts—thus suspending any distance between the architectural object and the subject who dwelled within it. If painting seemed such an apt metaphor for an interior of this kind, it was because it evoked a framed and self-contained world, into which external reality could not intrude. It suggested, furthermore, a space that had been imagined wholly from within, rather than built prior to occupation. And

⁷⁴ Ibid, 3.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 2-3.

indeed, by 1880, it had become an established practice to remake the house quite literally by repainting it.

5.4.2 The interior as painting

At the same time as William Burges was busy filling his chambers in Buckingham Street with *décorative* objects, between 1862 and 1865 his peer in the Gothic Revival E.W. Godwin undertook to empty of furnishings his own Regency home in Bristol, stripping its interiors back to bare floors and plain coloured walls. Godwin conceived of domestic comfort as a state of psychological and physical well-being, which could be achieved only by making material things recede into the background.⁷⁶ The spiritual form of beauty he was seeking for, Godwin claimed, was to be found in the faded patterns of second-hand Turkey carpets, and in attenuated colours that he associated with great antiquity: “certain yellows of a tone akin to old satin wood ... light red or Venetian red brightened by white and pure, or nearly pure, white itself.”⁷⁷

Upon returning to London in 1867, Godwin undertook over a period of five years a similar exercise in his chambers in Albany Street, now producing his own furniture so that it would melt away into the atmosphere of his rooms. The furniture’s material framework was made as light as possible, so that it might be perceived against the walls as a “mere grouping of solid and void and ... a more or less broken outline...”⁷⁸ In the dining room, the golden highlights painted onto the furniture’s ebonised mahogany surfaces served to dissolve their status as autonomous things, establishing instead a

⁷⁶ Soros, “E.W. Godwin and Interior Design,” 186.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 187.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 189.

continuous chromatic harmony with the brass and yellow porcelain accessories scattered around the room.⁷⁹ Susan Weber Soros has described Godwin's remaking of his domestic interiors in formal terms, as the beginning of a "great cleaning up" of the Victorian home.⁸⁰ However, the impulse that underlay Godwin's painted rooms was in fact to dissociate the interior from the material support of the house, as well as from the city outside. Rather than a container for art, the painted room produced itself as an artwork in its own right—one that now enclosed and offered spiritual shelter to its maker.

That the interior had become a form of canvas was repeatedly stated during the following decade. In 1874, the painter James McNeill Whistler held an exhibition at the Pall Mall gallery in London, in which he sought to demonstrate that "the painter must also make of the wall upon which his work is hung, the room containing it, the whole house, a Harmony, a Symphony, an Arrangement, as perfect as the picture or print which became a part of it."⁸¹ Two years later, Godwin published an article in The Architect entitled "My Chambers and What I Did to Them," in which he related the transformation of his rooms in Albany Street into a unified colour field.⁸² By 1877, Godwin and Whistler had begun to collaborate on a number of decorative schemes, including a stand for the furniture manufacturer William Watt for the 1878 Exposition Universelle in Paris, which combined

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 186.

⁸¹ Elizabeth Robins Pennell and Joseph Pennell, The Whistler Journal (Philadelphia, 1921), 299; quoted in Linda Merrill, The Peacock Room: A Cultural Biography (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art / New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 150. The Pennells were both friends and biographers to Whistler.

⁸² Soros, "E.W. Godwin and Interior Design," 189.

painted wall panels, painted furniture and coloured tiles.⁸³ However, the most public affirmation of the sought-for fusion between painting and architecture was the creation by Whistler of the Peacock Room, in the Kensington home of Frederick Leyland, a shipping magnate and art collector from Liverpool.

The initial aim of this latter undertaking was to adapt the décor of Leyland's dining room to the collection of Chinese porcelain he displayed there, and to a painting he had recently acquired from the same artist: La princesse du pays de la porcelaine (1863-4).⁸⁴ Only the painting itself was new to the room: a few years earlier, the porcelain collection had been fitted by architect Thomas Jekyll into a series of floor-to-ceiling wooden cabinets, set against the room's facing side walls.⁸⁵ At the outset, Whistler's commission was therefore limited to choosing a different colour for the ceiling and the upper parts of the walls, and painting the cabinets to match.⁸⁶ However, the project's scope rapidly escaped the control of both painter and patron. Over a period of two years, in 1876 and 1877, Whistler progressively covered all the room's surfaces—including its antique leather wainscoting, doors, wood floor and window shutters—with a decorative scheme based on Japanese motifs of clouds, chrysanthemums and peacocks, and colour harmonies of blue, green and burnished gold.⁸⁷

⁸³ Ibid, 205, 207; Merrill, The Peacock Room, 261.

⁸⁴ Merrill, The Peacock Room, 43, 184-187.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 189, 195-197.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 210-211.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 235-238.

As Linda Merrill has noted, Whistler's intervention altered the room's original scale, turning it from a partly enclosed pavilion into a sealed lacquer box.⁸⁸ But it also transgressed the idea of the private home in fundamental ways. The painter's transformation of a minor commission into an extension of his own studio forced Leyland to relocate to the Midlands for months on end. In 1877, when his patron at last refused to invest more money into the project, Whistler opened the house to the public in the absence of its owner. The broadsides he had printed for the occasion ascribed a title to the room ("Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room") as if the entire space had become a painting, at once mirroring and subsuming his original canvas within its three-dimensional frame.⁸⁹ When Leyland finally reintegrated his house in Palace Gate, his dining room had been subjected to the same kind of public review as an art exhibition in a gallery. Though acknowledged as "as an exquisitely unified aesthetic interior," the room's décor was now so intense that some reviewers wondered whether it could still fulfil its original purpose as a space for living.⁹⁰

One of the difficulties illustrated by the making of the Peacock Room was the potential for conflict between patron and designer. But the sense of discomfort and disorientation reported by the Peacock Room's reviewers also points to a specifically architectural problem that Whistler's scheme failed to negotiate. How to pass from one world to another, or from the house as a real locus in the city to the reveries painted on its

⁸⁸ Ibid., 237.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 251.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 254-255.

walls? The project of creating an interior that mirrored the mind turned the architecture of the house, by necessity, into an art of thresholds.⁹¹

5.4.3 The house and its double

The building after which Burges patterned his home in London—the McConnochie house in Cardiff—referred to medieval domestic architecture by its steep gables and dormers, pointed arches and window tracery. Yet it was nonetheless conceived as an essentially modern structure. In the watercolour perspective by Axel Haig exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1872, the house was portrayed as an integral part of the late nineteenth-century city: surrounded by Georgian and Gothic Revival townhouses, its gate, entrance porch and loggia opened onto a lively scene peopled by carters, playing children and middle-class citizens in contemporary dress (**fig. 66**).⁹² The Cardiff house was also modern through its association with industrial wealth: its owner James McConnochie was Chief Engineer at the Bute Docks in Cardiff, first laid out in the 1840s by the second Marquess of Bute as a shipping port for the coal mines on the family's South Wales estates. Moreover, before being employed by the Bute estate, McConnochie worked in Cardiff for the marine engineering firm of Burges and Walker, in which Burges's father was a controlling partner.⁹³ In this sense, the McConnochie house seemed to perfectly

⁹¹ My thanks to Dr. Martin Bressani for suggesting the notion of the threshold as a way of qualifying the relation of decor to material shell in the nineteenth-century house. The threshold as a locus in its own right is also explored in Georges Teyssot, "Mapping the Threshold: A Theory of Design and Interface," AA Files no. 57 (2008): 3-12.

⁹² Williams, William Burges, 17. The engraving reproduced here is a simplified version of Haig's watercolour, which is held in a private collection.

⁹³ Crook, William Burges, 305.

mirror Burges's own social origins, as well as that of the inherited fortune that enabled him to build a home in London.

However, descriptions of Tower House as it was at the time during Burges's lifetime indicate that the house seemed removed from its own age in a way its model in Cardiff was not. Haweis wrote that the "house [was] built on medieval precedent, even to the thirteenth-century round tower that mark[ed] it..."⁹⁴ Pullan likewise stated that its architect had "devoted all the resources of his great genius to the production of a model residence in the style of the Thirteenth Century."⁹⁵ And indeed, when he imported the McConnochie house to Melbury Road, Burges subjected its design to a series of subtle spatial and semantic shifts. These altered its relation both to its surroundings and to the rooms within, turning it into a medium for travel between different worlds and historical eras: on one hand, the concrete reality of late nineteenth-century London, and on the other, the fictionally remembered time embodied in Burges's medieval persona.

The most obvious transformation that Burges made to his earlier design for Cardiff was to rotate its plan through 180 degrees. Tower House now turned a blank face to the street and opened instead onto a garden, and beyond, the woods of the Holland House estate (**fig. 67**). In Pullan's photographic essay, the garden front of Tower House was implicitly recognized as its main façade, appearing immediately after the house's floor plans and before the front on Melbury Road. Even though the underlying order of the book was that of a visitor's promenade around, into and through the house, it was in

⁹⁴ Haweis, Beautiful Houses, 14.

⁹⁵ Pullan, The House of William Burges, 3.

the garden and not on the street that this journey began. In the photographic album, Tower House lay behind the garden, not the opposite (**fig. 68**).

This way of apprehending the house is significant, because it reversed the relationship with the modern city that had existed in Cardiff: at the time, there were no surrounding structures on the garden side of Tower House. More importantly, the walled structure of the garden relocated the adjacent house to a fictional past. Laid out as a closed room, framed by marble exedra, paved in mosaic, and surrounded by raised brick flower beds, the garden was modelled after an illuminated medieval manuscript of the Roman de la Rose that Burges had studied in the reading room of the British Museum.⁹⁶ The prominent presence of this anachronistic construction in the photographs of Tower House was a narrative device akin to the figures in medieval dress that Burges placed in his perspectives of the Clock Tower at Cardiff Castle or the West front of Cork Cathedral. To enter the house, it suggested, was to re-enact a story playing out in distant time.

If Tower House as a whole was effectively severed from the street, the same was true of its individual rooms. The spatial figures that in Cardiff had served to open the house's public rooms onto Park Street, the castle and the crowds of the central city were now pulled inside. Relocated to the garden front, the drawing room at Tower House no longer had a loggia but an interior, interstitial space lodged between the room's window piers (**fig. 69**). In formal terms, this shallow space did not really belong to the adjacent room at all: the timber framing and sculpted compartments of the drawing room's ceiling came to a stop flush with the piers' inner face. Fitted with built-in settles for reclining, the space was physically inside the house, yet it also allowed one to observe its painted and

⁹⁶ Ibid, 5.

carved décors at a conceptual remove. The interstice next to the drawing room was a unique spatial event in Tower House: the only place where one could be simultaneously inside and out. Yet it also announced a formal theme that Burges proceeded to reiterate throughout the house: that of two distinct architectural shells, or dwellings, that no longer quite coincided.

Certainly in material terms, the interiors of Tower House were clearly differentiated from their outer shell. The exterior of Tower House, Godwin noted in 1886, was “singularly void of decorative features,” its only colour that of its dark red bricks and the limestone dressings of its square-headed windows.⁹⁷ In contrast to this plain and constructively “real” masonry structure, however, the walls of the rooms were faced with thin superadded claddings: slabs of marble, wood panelling, painted tiles, sheets of embossed hessian, or layers of painted plaster. Supported on stone corbels projecting from the walls, the heavy timber beams that framed the ceilings inside were also kept visually separate from the masonry bearing walls that supported them.

An additional way in which the idea of a double house manifested itself at Tower House was in the treatment of its openings. Here, Burges exploited the thickness of the house’s outer walls to create shallow masonry arches on their interior face: invisible from the street, these arches dropped down like curtains from the wall in front of the window plane, veiling both views and light from outside (**fig. 70**). In the drawing room, the deep stone piers placed between the windows were themselves pulled apart, into inner and outer wythes framing open niches. Thus, precisely where the house met the outside world, the walls seemed to peel away from their outer facing.

⁹⁷ Godwin, “The Home of an English Architect,” 172.

Built-in cabinets integrated into the walls of the library and drawing room further emphasized the suggestion of distinct shells and of an intervening depth. In the drawing room, the wall cabinets were created by dismantling the doors of the Upright cabinet that had stood in Buckingham Street: fitted directly into the thickness of the wall, its painted panels now functioned as alternate windows, opening onto a mediated reality of topographical albums, books and art objects.

But the splitting of Tower House into distinct realms rested on more than a perceptual separation between inside and out: the house was also fragmented from within. In adapting the design of the McConnochie house to Melbury Road, Burges eliminated the staircase that had filled its entrance hall and seamlessly connected its various floors, moving it instead into a recessed tower. The resulting void at the centre of the house served to conceal and separate its various rooms: the staircase was hidden from view behind a screen of superposed masonry arches resting on marble shafts, and the upper rooms by the cantilevered gallery that projected into the void of the hall at the level of the first floor. Finished in plaster and painted with a quarry pattern simulating heavy stone masonry, the walls that surrounded the hall on all sides likewise suggested that one still stood here on a threshold to the house (**fig. 71**).

Tower House's hall, Haweis and Pullan both noted, functioned as a pictorial index, pointing the visitor toward the functionally segregated rooms of a modern Victorian house:

Over each of the various doors a directing sign is stencilled. One door leading to the garden has a flower, the main door a great key, the dining-room door the sign of good cheer, the library door the sign of learning, the drawing-room the sign of love ...⁹⁸

This index, however, also had a fictional dimension, inviting the visitor to imaginatively enter the stories painted or carved into the walls of the house's rooms. According to Pullan's monograph, the architect of Tower House had composed the decoration of each room around a distinct iconographic theme:

In the Entrance Hall—Time has formed the “motif,”

In the Dining Room—the realisation of Chaucer's “House of Fame,”

In the Library—Literature and the liberal arts,

In the Drawing Room—Love, its fortunes and misfortunes,

In the Guest Chamber—the Earth and its productions,

And in Mr. Burges's own Bedroom—the Sea and its inhabitants.⁹⁹

That these different “motifs” were understood by Burges as more than mere pictures to be looked at is strongly suggested by the massive chimneypieces that he built into each room, and whose carved figures evoked elaborate narratives. The most interesting of these were located on the ground floor, respectively in the drawing room and library, where they faced one another from either end of the house's cross axis.

In the drawing room, the mantel over the hearth was carved into the shape of a medieval pleasure garden, with the friends of love dancing among its trees, love's enemies peering through openings in its encircling walls, and the allegorical figure of

⁹⁸ Haweis, Beautiful Houses, 16.

⁹⁹ Pullan, The House of William Burges, 4.

Idleness letting these last in through the garden's door.¹⁰⁰ This miniature garden performed as a threshold onto a larger experience of the room as fiction. Derived from Chaucer's version of the Roman de la Rose, the chimneypiece's theme of a garden of Love was taken up again in the painted bower that hovered above the room's occupants. Carved roundels on the ceiling represented Cupid successively as pilgrim, conqueror and king; in the frieze above the dado, mythical pairs of lovers endlessly re-enacted tragic separations.¹⁰¹ Fitted with sliding doors that closed it off from the library in the winter, and sheltered from the exterior by its deep, recessed window bays, the drawing room could be dwelt in as if it were a summer pavilion recreated indoors—a more purely imaginative locus, in a sense, than the medieval garden beneath its windows.

The climax of Tower House's speaking ornament, however, was to be found in the facing library. Not only were the bookcases lining its walls painted with the illustrated alphabet of a thirteenth-century architect, but the sculpted frieze on the chimneypiece embodied language in the shape of all its personified components (**fig. 72**). Representing "The Dispersion of the Parts of speech at the time of the Tower of Babel," the figures carved into the mantelpiece transposed the Book of Genesis into the imaginary space of a miniature medieval fortress:

... Queen Grammar, issuing from a gate with a portcullis, is seen sending forth the Parts of speech on their journey ... First in the procession come the Pronouns blowing trumpets, then Queen Verb, ... followed by two pages—the Articles, who precede a porter with a bale on his shoulders—the Noun, bearing the burden of the sentence. On the left hand of Grammar there are two figures, symbolizing Adjective and Adverb; two lovers,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 9.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

arm in arm, signifying Conjunction and Preposition; and then Interjection, a man who seems shocked at their proceedings ... The rich corbelling which supports these figures has all the letters of the alphabet interwoven with it with the exception of the letter H, which has unfortunately dropped onto the slab below ...¹⁰²

If the function of Tower House's narrative décors was to entice the viewer into the world of the work—vicariously experiencing the drawing room as a pleasure garden, the library as a fortress of words, or the bedroom as an undersea world—then the detail of the dropped letter forcibly reminded him of the frailty of such fictional constructs. Inlaid in the onyx slab on the floor in front of the hearth, the dropped letter transgressed the formal unity of the chimneypiece's sculpted frieze—the self-contained story had now begun to leak. And insofar as it acknowledged nineteenth-century Cockney pronunciation (in which the “H” was not breathed), it transgressed both the historical time of the Old Testament and that of the Middle Ages in which Burges had embedded it. In this single, small moment, the viewer was wrenched back to the reality of Victorian London.

Within the walls of Tower House, then, it was possible to experience each room as its own double: the one materially real, the other figurative. In spite of their opulent colouring, the rooms' polychrome wall claddings and stencilled beams nonetheless constituted a relatively mute and explicitly material casing. Above and between this framework, however, painted friezes and carved ceiling compartments opened the rooms onto imaginary vistas: gardens, distant landscapes, or the deep of the sea. Each room in Tower House could be apprehended in distinct ways and within distinct narrative times: as the locus of an everyday action to be carried out in a modern house, and as a theatrical

¹⁰² Ibid, 8. See also Haweis, *Beautiful Houses*, 17-18.

set that projected its inhabitant into a fictional thirteenth century, and that transformed living into a form of dream.

5.4.4 Living in costume

In adapting the masonry shell he borrowed from Cardiff to fit his new home, Burges lent it the quality of a labyrinth. The intricate layering of wall and ceiling surfaces inside Tower House provided his painted décors with a material support; the house's spatial inversions—from front to back, and outside to inside—sheltered them from the city at the door. The image of the maze, moreover, was inscribed at the house's very heart, in the form of a mosaic pavement on the floor of the entrance hall. The mosaic represented the Labyrinth at Knossos, with the Minotaur at its centre giving battle to Theseus. Clad in the armour of a medieval knight, Burges's Theseus relates neither to the actual time of the house, nor to that of the Greek myth in which he takes part. What can this figure have meant for its maker?

That the labyrinth was intended as a metaphor of time is supported by the decorative theme that Pullan attributed to the room as a whole. Its prominent location in the house also recalls another symbolic pavement, which Burges designed in 1871 for the Summer Smoking Room at Cardiff Castle. Patterned after a pavement in Westminster Abbey, the tiled floor at Cardiff represents a seemingly consistent pre-Copernican cosmology, in which the Earth lies at the centre of ten moving celestial spheres, and the life spans of its creatures measure out that of the world. But like the medieval knight on Tower House's floor, the Cardiff pavement is suspended between times: the map in the floor's centre also includes a nineteenth-century Australia, and inlaid brass inscriptions

identify it as “the perfectly rounded sphere, year of our Lord 1871.”¹⁰³ Burges believed that Gothic artists had—like Villard de Honnecourt—actualized earlier Classical themes in their designs.¹⁰⁴ Thus, he may have attributed to the Cretan maze a meaning similar to that of the labyrinthine pavements in medieval cathedrals, viewing it as a symbolic representation of the pilgrim’s journey through life. Located on the threshold to Tower House, the maze seems to have been intended by Burges as a reflection on the house’s complicated relation to the present. To live in such a house was like attempting to dwell in history: it meant that each day one moved back and forth in time, between modern London and a past populated by specimens, manuscripts and poetry.

Only a few fragmentary testimonials survive of how Tower House was actually used during Burges’s lifetime, but these too suggest that the house served as a medium through which he could project himself into other places and other times. During his late burst of building activity in the 1870s, E.W. Godwin was no longer as close an associate of Tower House’s architect as he had been in the previous decade; yet he recalled its garden being used for collective re-enactments of princely banquets:

Here on a summer’s afternoon, Burges would delight to give tea to a few friends, who lounged on the marble seats or sat on Persian rugs and embroidered cushions round the pearl-inlaid table, brilliant with tea service composed of things precious, rare, and quaint; one thing alone wanting to complete the picture—a fitting costume.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Matthew Williams, “Summer Smoking Room,” typescript, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, June 1993.

¹⁰⁴ William Burges, “The Importance of Greek Art and Literature to the Practice of Gothic Architecture,” *The Builder* 34 (1876), 619-20..

¹⁰⁵ Godwin, “The Home of an English Architect,” 172.

In a letter commenting on Burges's death, the writer Edmund Gosse recalled a similar interweaving of everyday events and theatrical transpositions taking place in Burges's rooms in Buckingham Street. Here too, decorative objects constituted the vehicle for this imaginative displacement:

He used to give the quaintest little teaparties in his bare bachelor chambers, all very dowdy, but the meal served in beaten gold, the cream poured out of a single onyx, and the tea strictured in its descent on the account of real rubies in the pot.¹⁰⁶

Gosse's recollection of Buckingham Street is particularly compelling, because it underlines the discrepancy between Burges's elaborate historical recreations and the material framework in which they took place. Like a dress rehearsal on an empty stage, his displays of objects summoned forth the presence of history, only to expose it as artifice. In this sense, what Tower House represented was perhaps not the climax of the nineteenth-century historicist interior, but an ultimate comedic parody before its final dissolution.

Burges created interiors out of compulsion, as a refuge for his fantasies, and in this respect it is tempting to think of Tower House as a kind of prison. But he may have viewed the house as something far less substantial and enveloping—an imaginative enlargement of his old lodgings in Buckingham Street, rather than a closure, and a workshop rather than a home. When he moved to Tower House, Burges left his study behind but brought his bedroom instead, symbolically establishing continuity between the old locus and the new (**fig. 73**). He reintegrated the furniture that had filled the earlier

¹⁰⁶ Evan Charteris, The Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1931), 145; letter to Austin Dobson, 23 April 1881.

room, recreated the frieze of sea-monsters that had crowned it within the miniature space of a gilt brass mazer bowl, and placed at the bowl's centre a double of the large mermaid figure that was carved into the new room's chimneypiece (**fig. 74**). Borrowed from the poetry of Tennyson, the mermaid was a recurrent feature of Burges's decorative work: sexual, self-absorbed, and issuing from the deep, it represented sleep as an infinitely productive realm. Placed next to his bed, it was a sign that proclaimed, "The poet is at work."¹⁰⁷

Tower House was really two things: a necessary abode in London, that spoke of Burges's family origins, professional status and material conditions; and a fictional construct through which these limitations could be momentarily overcome. From the weathervane atop the staircase tower's turret, the figure of the mermaid also crowned the house as a whole. It displaced the symbolic core of the house from the drawing room to the bedroom, and from day to night, thus placing the entire structure under the sign of the imagination.

Some fifty years after Burges's death, as he reflected on the environments brought forth in the second half of the nineteenth century, Walter Benjamin wrote that dreams and hallucinations had been the only spaces in which life had then really been possible. In spite of its distance from reality, the dream had played a critical function: it weakened the structures of discourse that defined, imprisoned and alienated the self, and it was only through such breaks in meaning—through misunderstandings, nonsense and slips of the tongue—that communication with the world of the other could be established. For the

¹⁰⁷ Attributed to the French Symbolist poet Saint-Pol-Roux in André Breton's Manifeste du surréalisme, the phrase was reworked by Walter Benjamin into his own, later essay on Surrealism (see following note).

Symbolist poets of the fin de siècle, dreams had represented a kind of poetic process, which opened onto new modes of being:

Life only deserved to be lived on the threshold between wakefulness and sleep, which was carved within each person by the ebb and flow of an immense tide of images, and where sound and image, image and sound, fit together so happily, with such automatic exactness, that there remained not the slightest crack into which one might drop a penny of ‘sense.’ Precedence is given to images and language.¹⁰⁸

In Burges’s case, I would suggest that photography proved to be this unconscious mechanism of liberation. It transgressed the physical confines of his house and let him be known to others, as well as to himself, by the images he had crafted in his sleep. Something was happening here: a photograph taken in 1868 shows the architect receding into the wall behind him, and taking on the patterns of his own décor (**fig. 75**). By the time the photographs of Tower House were taken, he had entirely vanished. Burges had become a man made of furniture—an individual entirely subsumed in his own creations, and whose only utterances now came from outside himself.

¹⁰⁸ “La vie ne semblait digne d’être vécue que là où le seuil entre veille et sommeil était en chacun creusé comme par le flux et le reflux d’un énorme flot d’images, là où le son et l’image, l’image et le son, avec une exactitude automatique, s’engrenaient si heureusement qu’il ne restait plus le moindre interstice pour y glisser le petit sou du « sens ». La préséance est donnée à l’image et au langage.” [Author’s translation.] Walter Benjamin, “Le surréalisme: Le dernier instantané de l’intelligentsia européenne,” in *Oeuvres*, vol. 2, Collection Folio/Essais (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 115.

CONCLUSION

No matter how much the men of his age sought for authentic modes of expression, Thomas Carlyle wrote in 1831, they always found themselves reverting to false and theatrical comportments:

The old ideal of Manhood has grown obsolete, and the new is still invisible to us, and we grope after it in darkness, one clutching this phantom, another that; Werterism, Byronism, even Brummelism, each has its day.¹

Because of its exacerbated attention to outward signs, dandyism in particular embodied for Carlyle a certain type of relation to history. It was the manifestation of a world in crisis, rendered asunder by Revolution and not yet made whole: a “spectral Necropolis, or rather City both of the Dead and the Unborn.”² It also encapsulated for him a predicament particular to the nineteenth-century artist. Severed by historical and cultural change from the stable world of his forefathers, the challenge for the artist was to legitimize his voice in a world whose symbols were being emptied of essential meaning.³ Upon moving from Scotland to London in order to become a writer, Carlyle likened himself to a John the

¹ Thomas Carlyle, “Characteristics” (1831); quoted in Adams, Dandies and Desert Saints, 1.

² Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, introduction by Peter Sabor and Kerry McSweeney, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 188. On Carlyle’s conception of history and Dandyism, see Bernard Howells, Baudelaire: Individualism, Dandyism and the Philosophy of History (Oxford: LEGENDA, 1996), xx-xxi, 105-122.

³ “Once sacred Symbols fluttering as empty Pageants, whereof men grudge even the expense; a World becoming dismantled: in one word, the CHURCH fallen speechless, from obesity and apoplexy; the STATE shrunken into a Police-Office, straitened to get its pay!” Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, 177-178.

Baptist, girding himself in skins in order to preach in the modern, peopled wilderness of the city.⁴ Thus, while striving for a whole and autonomous self, he remained shadowed by ironic self-awareness and the threat of his own theatricality.

In some ways, William Burges partook of an imaginative world that was akin to Carlyle's, labouring under similar anxieties about audience, the legitimacy of tradition and the authenticity of his own voice. His early training took place in an architectural practice associated with historical reconstructions such as Walter Scott's Abbotsford or Samuel Rush Meyrick's Goodrich Court. Spun from small and heterogeneous historic fragments, these houses were intended as convincing portrayals of history; in physical terms, they mirrored their owners' undertaking to recreate a vanished past—as a writer of historical novels, or as a scholar of British antiquities.

Thus, Burges's intellectual roots are to be found above all in the traditions of antiquarian learning and Romantic, atmospheric draftsmanship. His earliest topographical studies, from the late 1840s, evince a similar cult of the material fragment of history, or specimen: they are precise, orthographic drawings of surviving medieval buildings or ornament, scaled and dimensioned so as to confer a rhetorical authenticity onto larger imaginative recreations, such as historical paintings or architectural restorations.

However, Burges soon began to question the underlying conventions of such Romantic reconstructions. In its detailed evocation of medieval crafts and historical depth, his pictorial restoration of the shrine of St Edward at Canterbury (1852) sought to outdo both the work of his former master, Edward Blore, and Pugin's renderings of the medieval church as a fixed and unchanging locus. But the fact that this achievement took

⁴ Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints*, 22-23.

the form of a finished picture, complete in itself, also signalled a number of creative difficulties. How to transpose the evocative power of painting to a building? And how to articulate a productive link between archaeology and an architecture of the present?

Made late in life, Burges's claim that the publication of his architectural drawings had been superseded by that of the first volume of the Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française (1854) speaks less of a similarity of aims between himself and Viollet-le-Duc than of an awareness, early in career, that his own mode of engagement with history had come to seem outdated. From 1853 on, Burges's topographical sketches constitute the primary locus in which he confronted the challenges posed by new forms of archaeological scholarship, new conceptions of authorship, and new ways of harnessing historical knowledge to the production of architecture.

In an attempt to emulate the dynamic conception of history embodied in the Dictionnaire raisonné, Burges intentionally broke with the tradition of picturesque drawing. He began instead to carry out extremely detailed studies of medieval building and craft processes, focusing now on how things were made. Compiled in 1858, shortly after the founding of his own practice, his albums functioned as a closed body of empirical knowledge—a surrogate for the living tradition of architecture which his master had failed to pass on to him. From then on, he would seek authenticity by re-enacting past works which he had seen or touched for himself.

Yet Burges never completely resolved his conflict with the antiquarian tradition in which he was trained. His insistence on the “newness” of the architect's sketchbook was a means to distance himself from his elders and come to terms with new forms of historical imagination; but in following years, he gradually reintegrated into his albums precisely

the kind of material fragment, freighted with the life and presence of the past, around which Abbotsford was first built.

A quest for authenticity also underlies Burges's project, from 1860 on, to rebuild a graphic manner or style of his own in the space of the "Vellum Sketchbook." To a certain extent, his preoccupation with the album of the medieval draftsman Villard de Honnecourt was fed by the earlier writings of French medievalists and architects, for whom understanding the process of stylistic genesis was crucial to lending a new life to medieval art in the nineteenth century.

By situating Villard's work in the middle of the thirteenth century, the medieval archaeologist Jules Quicherat turned his drawings into a case study of stylistic change, from Romanesque to Gothic: like languages, he speculated, architectural styles too contained both the memory of their predecessors and the germ of their future development. In turn, the architect J.B. Lassus saw in Villard's album a chance to rebuild a national tradition of building, whose transmission and growth from one generation to the next had been broken during the Renaissance. For him, the album represented both a new canon, and the proof of Gothic architecture's rationalism and modernity. For Viollet-le-Duc, finally, what was significant in Villard's album was not the content of the drawings, but the witness they bore of a creative mind. Villard's curiosity, openness to all things new, and embedment in a collaborative of builders turned him into an imaginative counterpart to Viollet-le-Duc's own undertakings as an architect in modern France.

Aside from the medievalist Robert Willis, Burges was the only contemporary architect in England to show real interest in Villard's album. Unlike his French counterparts, however, he did not so much write about it as seek to relive it, taking it apart at the seams, internalizing the logic of its making, and casting it once more into the world.

What Burges valued in Villard's drawings was precisely their graphic inaccuracies and abbreviations. The incompleteness of the sketchbook's representations opened a void in which imagination was compelled to take over from the archaeological record, thus lending a new life to exhausted architectural conventions. Rather than any rational interpretation of the nature of Gothic, the idea that only material re-enactment could provide a substantive relation to the past constitutes the real link between Burges and Viollet-le-Duc.

By drawing like Villard, Burges aspired to a state of imaginative innocence that would let him experience history as if it were still new and in the process of happening. But paradoxically, this imaginative process did not open for him onto an architecture that was at once rooted in the past and at home in its own age. On the contrary, in the process of drawing as another, Burges discovered the possibility of imaginatively relocating his works, and himself as well, to other times and locales that he viewed as inherently more authentic and fertile than his own. Villard's pictorial universe provided him with a counter-world to the modern England in which he lived and practiced. It was a world in which there existed only one natural style; in which images, rather than words, gave expression to shared beliefs; and in which public buildings and works of engineering were viewed as legitimate objects for ornament and expense.

Burges's "Vellum Sketchbook" participated in an array of proliferating representations of his own architectural and decorative works, in which they are portrayed as temporally and symbolically unstable: their ornament opens onto multiple possible meanings, and onto many possible times. His loosening, in the space of the sketchbook, of any necessary link between ornament and meaning seems to have been related to the painterly experiments of D.G. Rossetti and his circle from the late 1850s on, with whom

he was in contact through a web of acquaintances, patronage, and institutions such as the Hogarth Club. Rooted at first in the intense naturalism of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Rossetti gradually began to dismantle the connections established by Ruskin between the work of art, the artist's character and the external world. Instead, in his later work, Rossetti affirmed that the painting possessed a meaning and formal integrity that was embedded in its colouring and design: it was, in a sense, untranslatable.

By the end of the 1860s, as Burges brought the "Vellum Sketchbook" to a close, it is as if authenticity had ceased to qualify his relation with the world at large, referring instead to a capacity for autonomous imaginative expression. What he likely valued in Rossetti's paintings was their power to create closed, decorative, and erotically charged worlds; likewise, what he explored in his sketchbook was the condition of architecture as pure ornament. The creation of beauty, in his mind, had now become radically divorced from technology, and so its integration into the modern building work could only take the form of a grotesque—a collision between the products of industry and inherited representations of nature, culture, and myth.

This conception of ornament and substrate as clashing worlds also coloured Burges's self-understanding as an architect. In his eyes, Villard represented neither a master nor an ancestor, but a theatrical persona that embodied the disjunctions between the Victorian architect and the age in which he lived. Likewise, Burges's stubborn engagement with Villard's thirteenth-century Gothic was not—as it had been for Lassus—a commitment to a rational language of form, but to an exuberant and wholly internalized realm of fantasy.

The grotesque imagination that came to expression in the "Vellum Sketchbook" also nourished Burges's production of painted furniture and of the interiors he erected

around it—first in Buckingham Street (ca. 1858-1870) and later at Tower House (after 1875). In much the same way that Viollet-le-Duc's Dictionnaire Raisonné shook Burges's confidence in the legitimacy of his visual records of medieval architecture, his experience of the debased commodities on display at the Great Exhibition challenged his belief that the past might be meaningfully rebuilt in the present. In particular, the Exhibition of 1851 subverted the familiar syntax of the medieval specimen, lending the aura of the ancient and singular to wares that were commonplace and new.

Thus, Burges's early experiments in painted furniture, from 1856 to the Medieval Court of 1862, can be understood in part as a defensive reaction against the proliferation of simulacra. For Burges, the only way to maintain the privileges of history was to place his Gothic creations within increasingly narrow frames, and to continually heighten their visual intensity and effect of strangeness. In part, this took the form of an ever more exacting re-enactment of medieval craft methods. Burges turned to medieval treatises, reviving forgotten decorative techniques; he dismantled medieval objects in order to faithfully reproduce their mode of assemblage; and he foraged for surviving secular objects and imagery in order to recreate an ever fuller medieval "world." Indeed, with the Great Bookcase (1859-1862), Burges turned the production of painted furniture into the miniature recreation of a medieval building site, bringing architect, painters and cabinetmakers together around a common artistic undertaking.

Even in his early pieces, however, one gets the sense that—as in the "Vellum Sketchbook"—Burges's furniture could not be taken as coextensive with the larger world into which he inserted them. Perceptually estranged from their surroundings by their intense colours, speaking ornament, and architectural excrescences, they were also contaminated from within by intrusions of absurd and clownish humour. In its incarnation

at the Medieval Court of 1862, painted furniture was primarily a vehicle for personal mythologies: built for the home rather than the church, it transformed the domestic interior into a realm in which nonconforming identities might be externalized.

For William Morris and the acolytes grouped around his firm, the early fusion of easel painting and carpentry into barbaric and kingly chairs, at Red Lion Square, transfigured those who sat in them into sovereigns of a new world. Developed further in the project for decorating Red House, the use of furniture by Morris's circle as a means to portray themselves as knights and heroines gave a concrete shape to their sense of redeeming the world outside: through the ideal of collaborative labour, but also by transgressing conventional class, gender and matrimonial roles.

In contrast to Morris's interiors, Burges's rooms in Buckingham Street convey no such sense of heroic redemption. In the decade after the Medieval Court, the jewels and painted ornament with which he covered his furniture and silverware turned on the contrary into a burlesque registry of the minute features of his bachelor existence, commemorating his pets, his painterly acquaintances, his professional setbacks, and the most mundane features of material life in Victorian London. The derisive buffoonery of Burges's ornaments is suggestive of a weak self—one that was divided from within, and that could only come to expression in fractured, ironic, and indirect ways. While there is no positive evidence of Burges's homosexuality, the web of allusions to it in his abstract of diaries and his furniture would explain why he felt the need to shelter behind a dense accumulation of ornament and material things.

That Burges conceived of the interior as a refuge against the world can perhaps be taken as a sign of psychic frailty, yet it is also the source of his furniture's extraordinary vitality. Over the course of the 1860s, the impulse to the grotesque that Burges witnessed

at the Great Exhibition resurfaced in his own decorative creations. Laying aside the strictures that Pugin had placed upon “truthful” Gothic furnishings two decades earlier, he revelled in imbalance, distorted proportions, anthropomorphic and architectural allusions, and the endless proliferation of images and hidden compartments. What had initially seemed to him a threat—that all objects, not merely antiquities, were now being invested with sentience—proved in the end a form of salvation. In the process of fetishizing his things, using them as channels for his fantasies and erotic urges, Burges ended up delineating something intensely real: his furniture became a self-portrait.

Portraiture of a kind also lies at the heart of Burges’s late project of a house for himself in London. Toward the beginning of the 1870s, he ceased to produce furnishings for his rooms in Buckingham Street, focusing instead on their photographic representation and their reassembly in the space of the album. Now conserved in the photographic collection of the British Architectural Library, Burges’s “Photographs, Own Furniture” album is a unique artefact—to the best of my knowledge, the only contemporary instance in Britain of an architect using photography to portray his own interior.

That this project was deliberate in nature—something more than a useful inventory—is strongly suggested by the way in which Burges prepared his furnishings for the camera: pulling smaller pieces away from the walls and into the light, placing them in incongruous compositions, leaving their drawers and flaps hanging open. In addition, wherever possible, he abstracted his furnishings from their surroundings, setting his silverware against a blank background of velvet cloth, and occulting with dark hangings those walls of his rooms that were still bare of painted ornament. Like the photographer Burges employed for at least some of these photographs (Francis Bedford), the mode of

display he chose harkened back to the experience of the Exhibitions. Cast into light, and removed from context and use, his furnishings were transmuted into pure dream objects.

Photography was also an extension of the temporal devices that Burges first introduced into the “Vellum Sketchbook.” Primarily associated in the 1860s and 1870s with the documentation of ruins and historic monuments, the photograph distanced his furnishings from present time by stripping them of the colour of life. The spectral tones of the photographic print—indeed, their impermanence under daylight—recast his modern productions as issuing from the past.

The idea of a house, I have argued in preceding pages, first appeared to Burges in the space of his photographic album: the manner in which the furniture was closely framed, shutting out any bland intrusion of plaster, wallpaper or carpeting, suggested to him the possibility of fusing his objects into a seamless container. The difference between the rooms in Buckingham Street and the later Tower House was not one of content or intention, but rather of completeness. While only part of the rooms in Buckingham Street ever seem to have been invested with painted ornament, within Tower House ornament invaded all available surfaces. Each of its walls and ceilings could be read as its own double—as a sheltering and supporting material scaffold, and as a purely literary locus, as distant from London in space as it was in time.

Inscribed in mosaic on the floor of its entrance hall, the image that imaginatively founded Tower House was that of the Labyrinth. The house as a whole functioned as a threshold, leading its occupant from the Victorian street into a garden modelled after a medieval illumination, and from there into the more purely imaginary garden painted on the walls of its drawing room. It daily led its architect back and forth in time, from the nineteenth century into an age that was artificially remembered, but filled to bursting with

monstrous imagery. Above all, the house was a threshold between day and night, embodying for its owner the fragile claims of the imagination over a disenchanted and disenchanting city.

For Burges, the experience of history was ultimately one of desire checked by exile. Any attempt to recapture the past in its fullness of being, he wrote in 1864, proved in the end to be as much a source of grief as of pleasure. It reminded one of all that had been lost, and of the material limitations of one's existence in time:

One of [the uses of antiquarian studies] is to enable us to conjure up as if by the magician's wand the dress, furniture, architecture, &c., of past ages, so that we can live, as it were, in many centuries at almost the same moment. This is a very great and very pleasant species of knowledge, but it is not particularly useful in this work-a-day world; and it sometimes like any other knowledge, renders its possessor far from happy ...⁵

Thus, for all their visual density, Burges's historicising interiors were in fact ironic constructs: different from the real, and indeed striving to keep it at bay, but also exposing their own frailty to view. The relationship between his painted decors and their material shell was akin to that of the dismal garret to the poet's reverie in Baudelaire's prose poem "La chambre double." In the dream of Baudelaire's poet, the garret's furniture shimmers with colours and scents, fills with an obscure life, and reflects back to him the contents of his liberated imagination. But this imagined room is also a space on the verge of collapse, which the merest intrusion of life—in this instance, a bailiff knocking at the door—brings crashing back to earth:

La chambre paradisiaque, l'idole, la souveraine des rêves, la Sylphide, comme dirait le grand René, toute cette magie a disparu au coup brutal frappé par le Spectre.

⁵ Burges, Art Applied to Industry, 13.

Horreur ! je me souviens ! je me souviens ! Oui ! ce taudis, ce séjour de l'éternel ennui, est bien le mien.⁶

Burges's photographs capture his furniture and interiors in a similarly intermediate state: suspended in the paradoxical time of a reconstructed past. They bear witness to multiple worlds, at once visionary and real: his passionate collecting of singular artefacts and pieces of history; his disturbing encounters with the manufactures and displays of the Exhibitions; his fantasies of a spiky, glittering, and monumental London; and a submerged realm of eroticism. Even though Burges himself eventually framed ornament as an autonomous endeavour—severed from the city, technology, and use—his interiors speak to us precisely because they transcend the aesthetic.

In Truth and Method, Gadamer asserted that the occasional work of art—that which points to events or persons beyond the frame—is no less an achievement than the work conceived as a pure object of contemplation. On the contrary, it offers something more. In a portrait, the sitter is present as “untransformed material,” and each new representation constitutes for him “a new event of being.”⁷ The portrait's claim to meaning, Gadamer adds, is independent of whatever we may later uncover that

⁶ Charles Baudelaire, “La chambre double,” Petits Poèmes en prose (Le Spleen de Paris), ed. Robert Kopp, NRF Poésie/Gallimard (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 28-30. My thanks to Dr. Martin Bressani for indicating this source to me.

⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Sheed and Ward / Continuum Publishing Group, 2004), 138-139, 141. My thanks to Dr. Alberto Pérez-Gómez for pointing me to the passage of this work entitled “The Ontological Foundation of the Occasional and the Decorative.”

contradicts its status as fact.⁸ I suggest that the same holds true of William Burges's theatrically anachronistic creations. Embedded in a past largely of his own invention, each jewelled cup was for him a new act of self-presentation, each piece of painted furniture an additional way to exist in an inhospitable world.

⁸ Ibid, 140.

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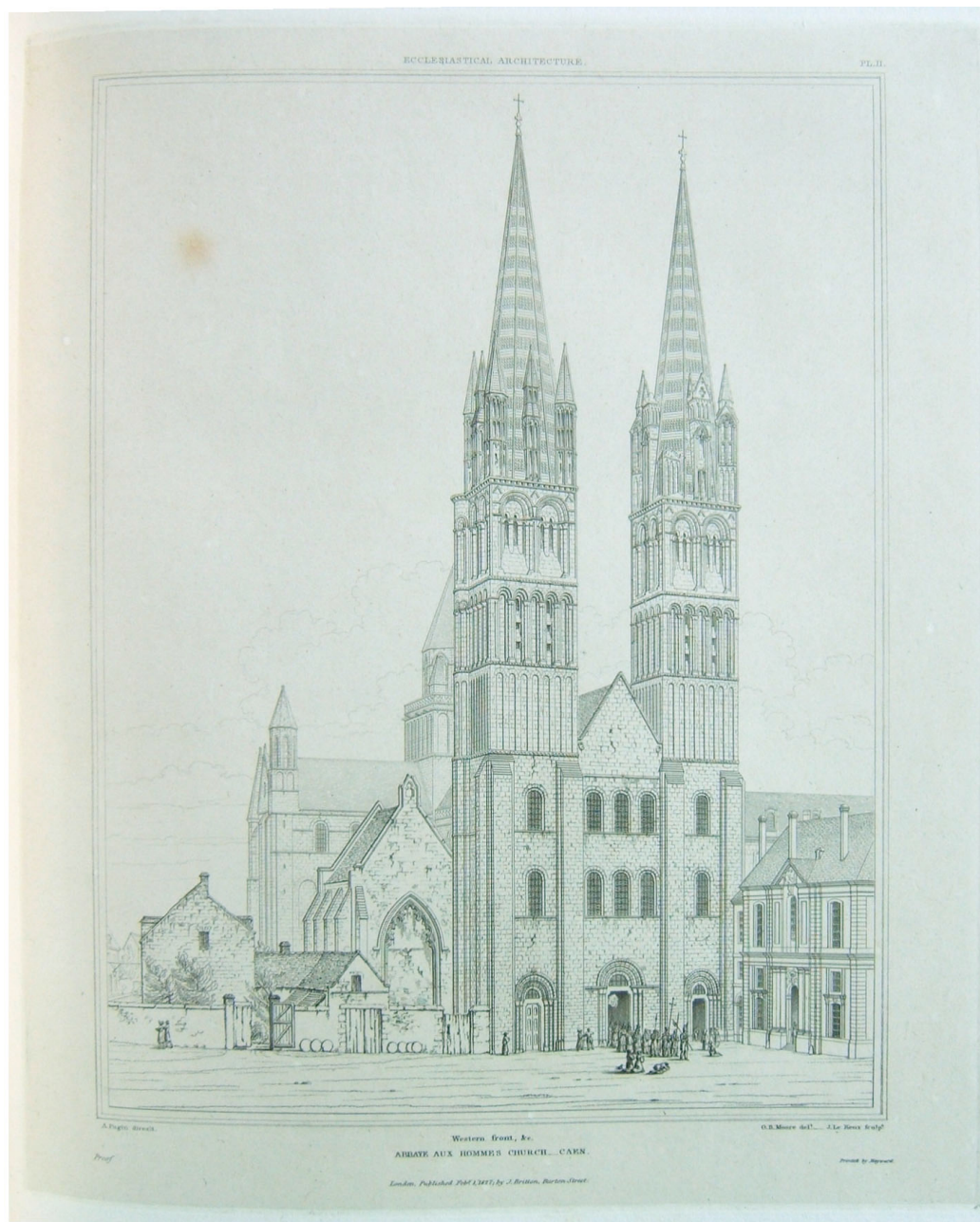


Fig. 1: John Britton, Specimens of the Architectural Antiquities of Normandy (1828):
 “Western front, Abbaye aux Hommes Church, Caen.” Canadian Centre for Architecture,
 Montreal.



Fig. 2: John Britton, Specimens of the Architectural Antiquities of Normandy (1828):
 “Interior view of the church looking east, Abbaye aux Hommes, Caen.” Canadian Centre
 for Architecture, Montreal.



Fig. 3: John Britton, Specimens of the Architectural Antiquities of Normandy (1828):

frontispiece by A.C. Pugin. Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.



Fig. 4: Henry Shaw, The Decorative Arts Ecclesiastical and Civil of the Middle Ages (1851): “A Silver Reliquary in the Collection of H. Magniac, Esq.” Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.



Fig. 5: Edward Blore, design for a house for George Cranstoun, Corehouse, Lanarkshire (1824): view of the hall. RIBA Library Drawings collection, London.

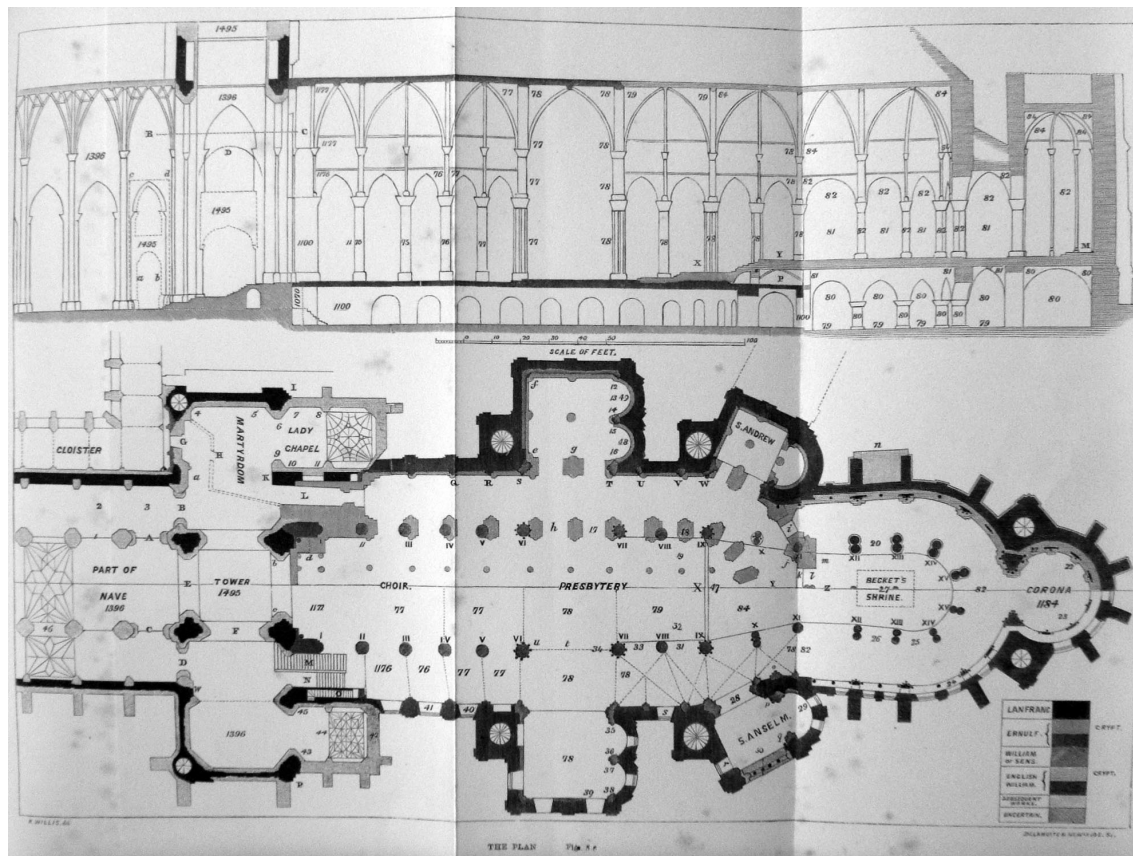


Fig. 6: Robert Willis, The Architectural History of Canterbury Cathedral (1841): section and plan showing structural evidence of successive building campaigns. Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.



Fig. 7: John Ruskin, Examples of the Architecture of Venice (1887), plate 1: “The Ducal Palace, Twentieth Capital.” Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.

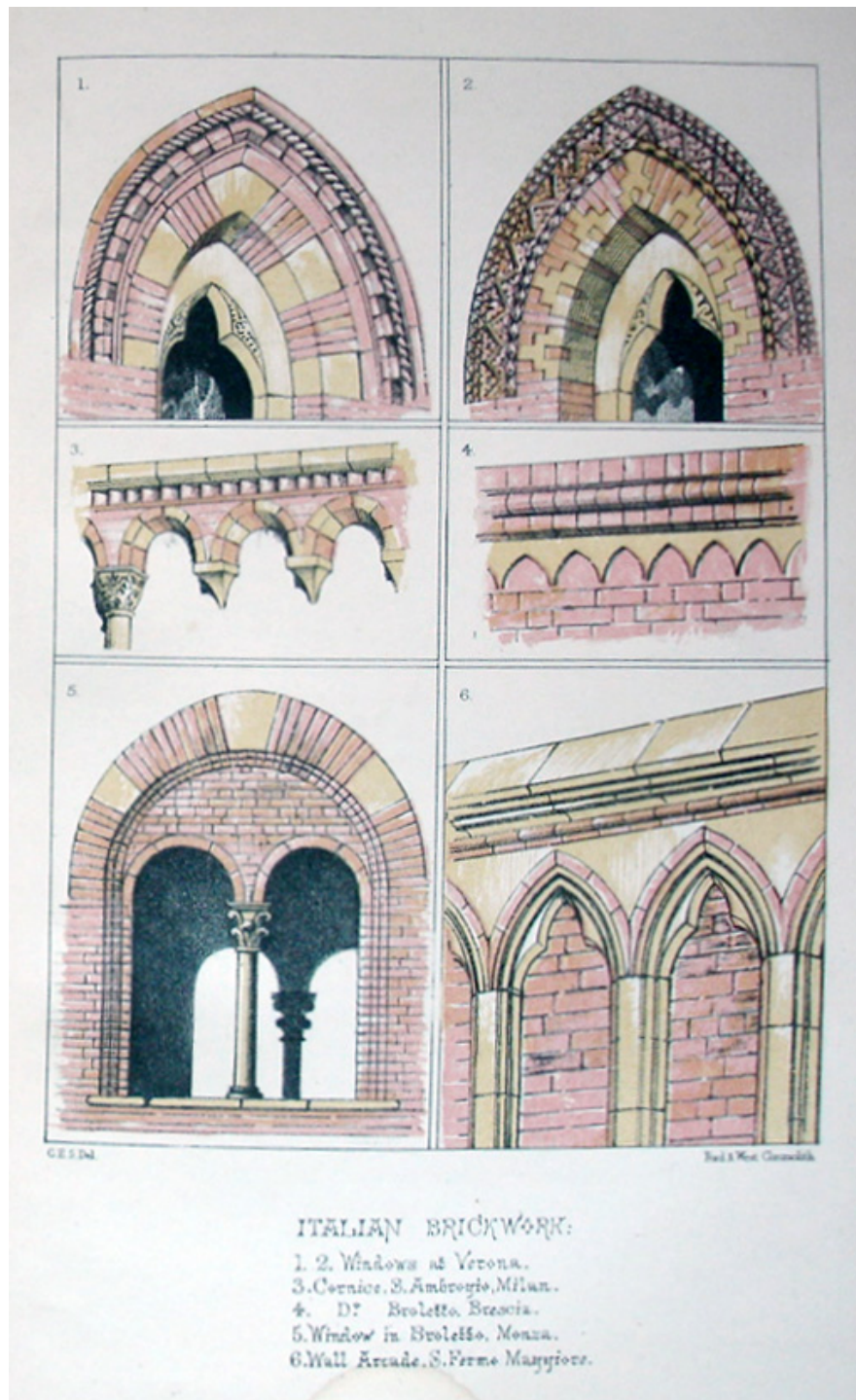


Fig. 8: George Edmund Street, Brick and Marble in the Middle Ages (1855): “Italian brickwork.” Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.

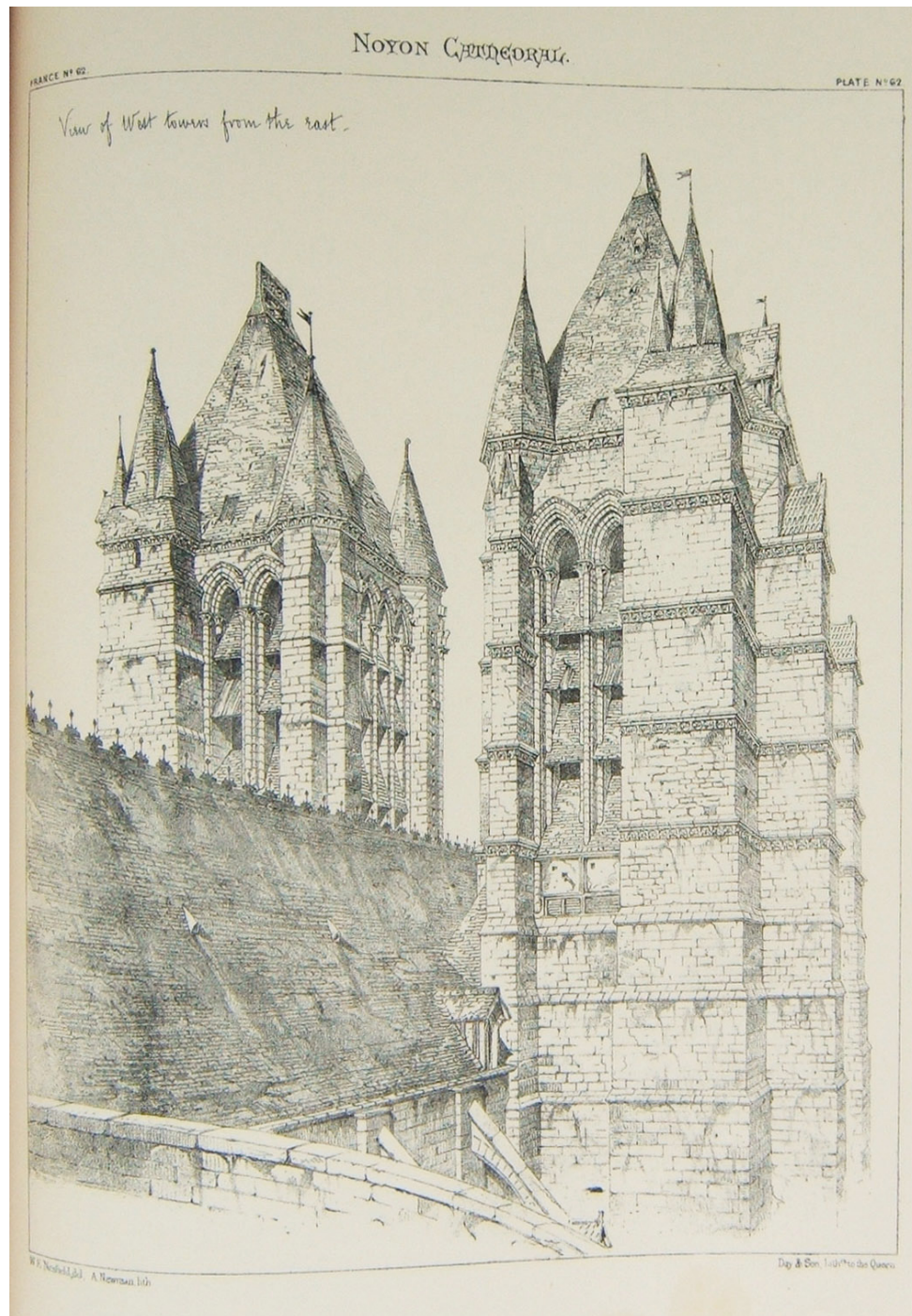


Fig. 9: W. Eden Nesfield, Specimens of Mediaeval Architecture (1862), plate 62: “Noyon Cathedral: view of West towers from the East.” Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.



Fig. 10: William Burges, “Reconstruction of the Feretory of Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey” (1852). RIBA Library Drawings collection, London.



Fig. 11: A.W.N. Pugin, The Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament (1841): frontispiece.

Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.

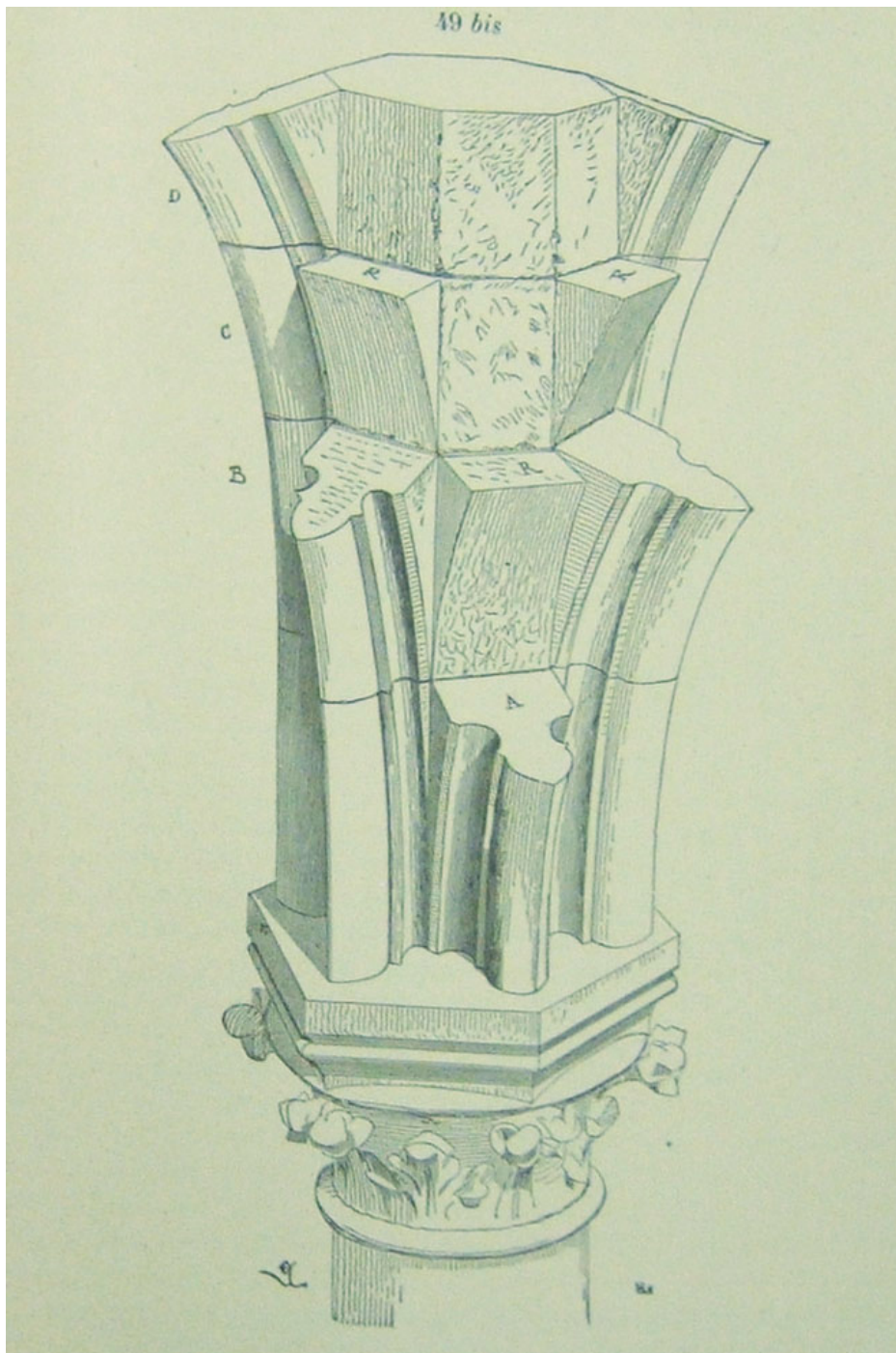


Fig. 12: E. Viollet-le-Duc, “Construction, voûtes,” Dictionnaire raisonné de l’architecture française du XI^e au XVI^e siècle (1875), vol. 5: springing of vault ribs from a shaft. Private collection.

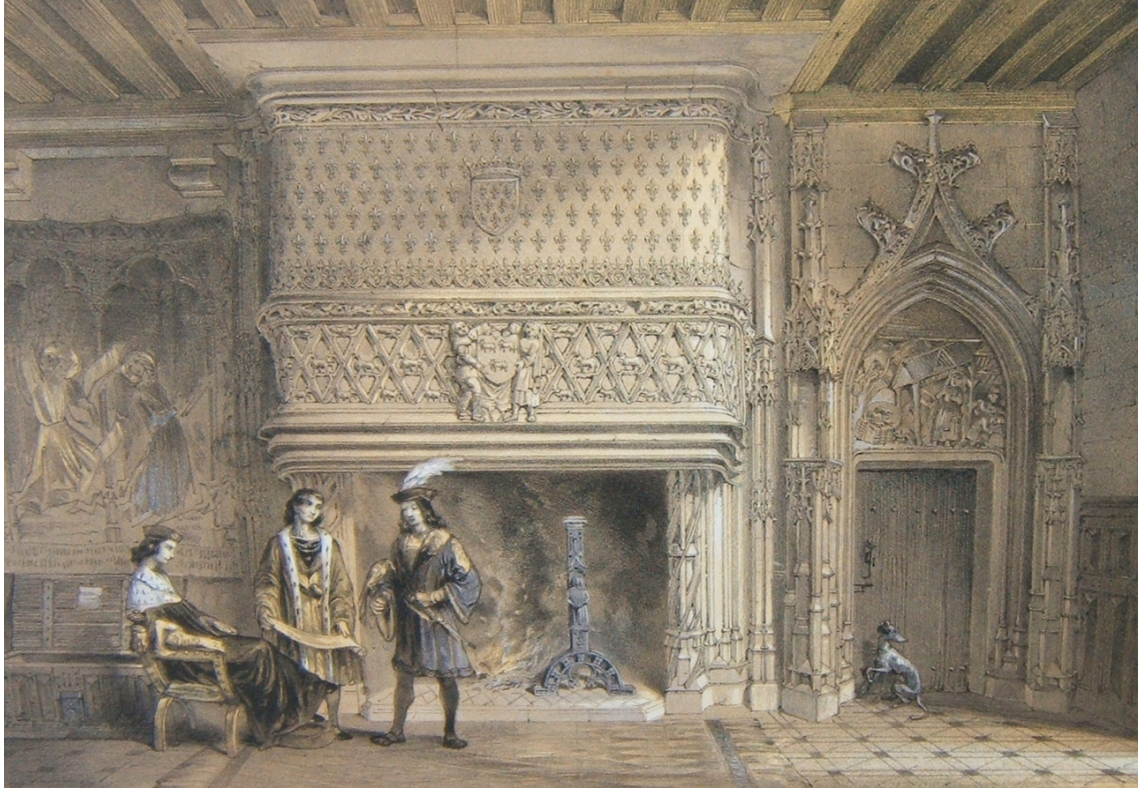


Fig. 13: William Burges, “Interior of an Apartment, Ancient Hotel de Ville, Bourges,” in Henry Clutton, Remarks on the Domestic Architecture of France (1853). Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.

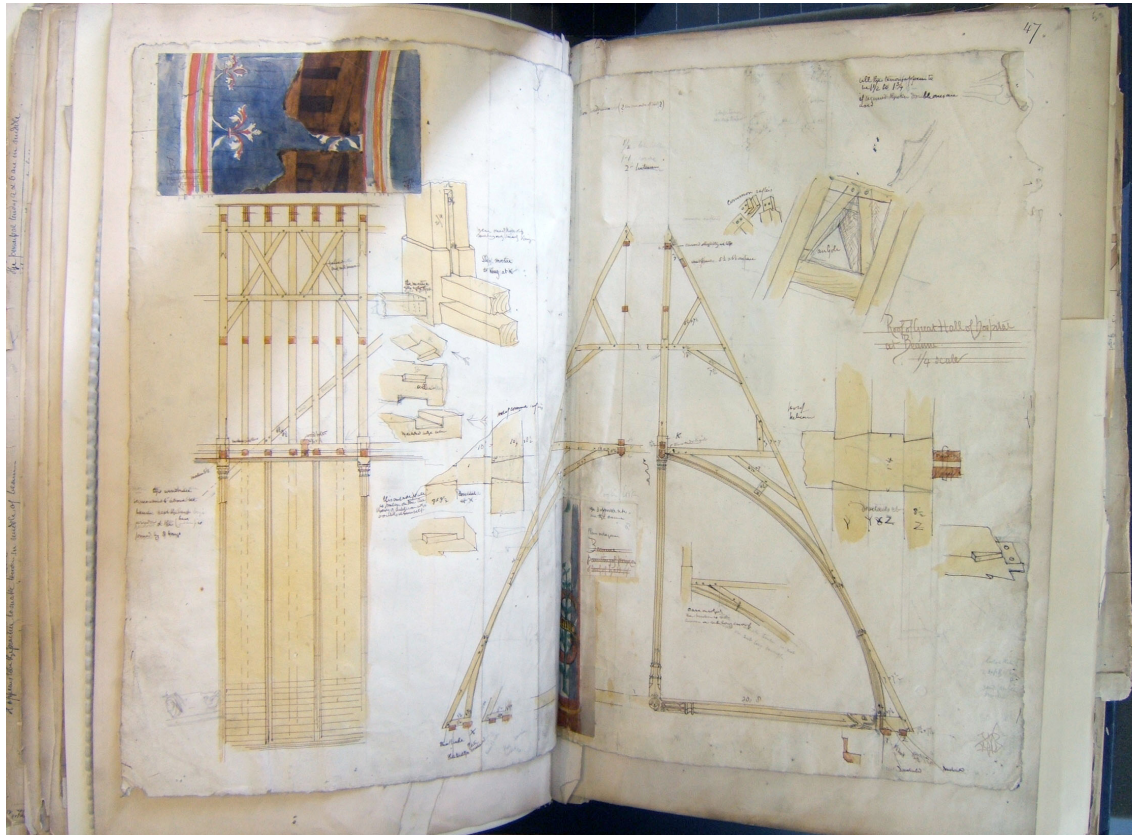


Fig. 14: William Burges, “Carpentry and Woodwork, 11 May 1858”: “Roof of Great Hall at Hospital at Beaune, 1/4 Scale” (1853?). Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

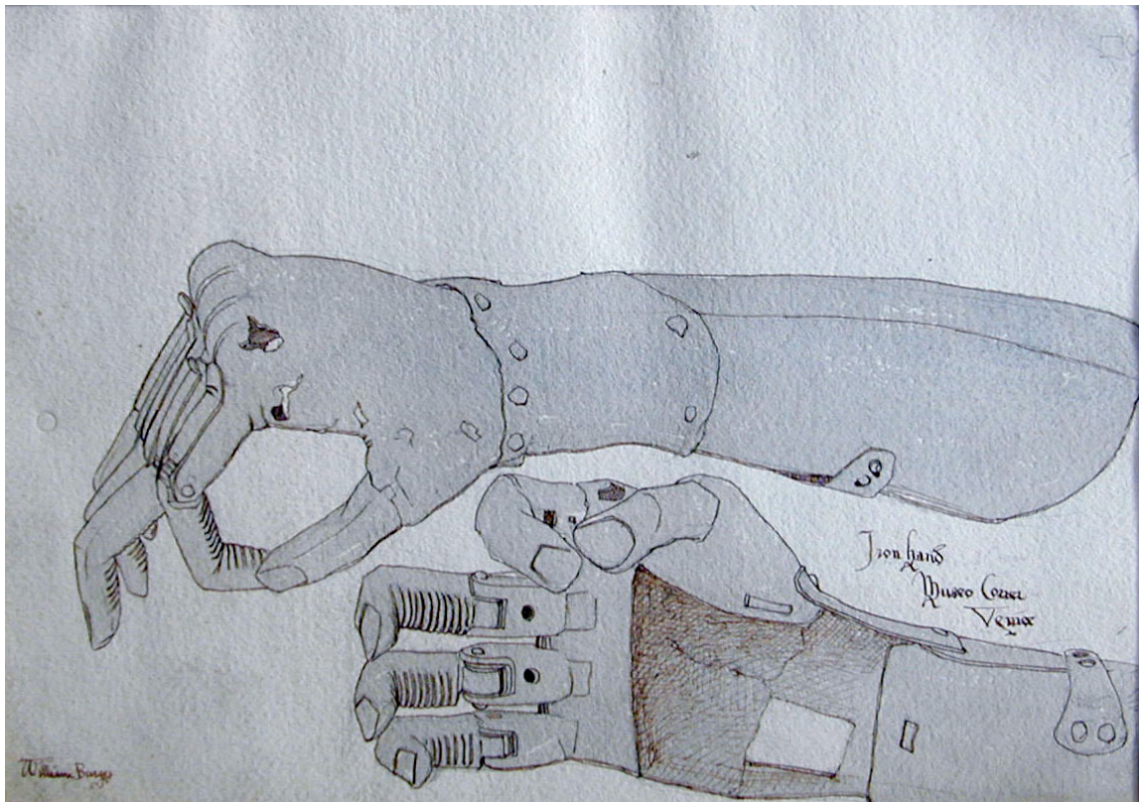


Fig. 15: William Burges, “Ironwork, Brasswork, 12 March 1858”: “Iron Hand, Museo Correr, Venice” (undated). Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

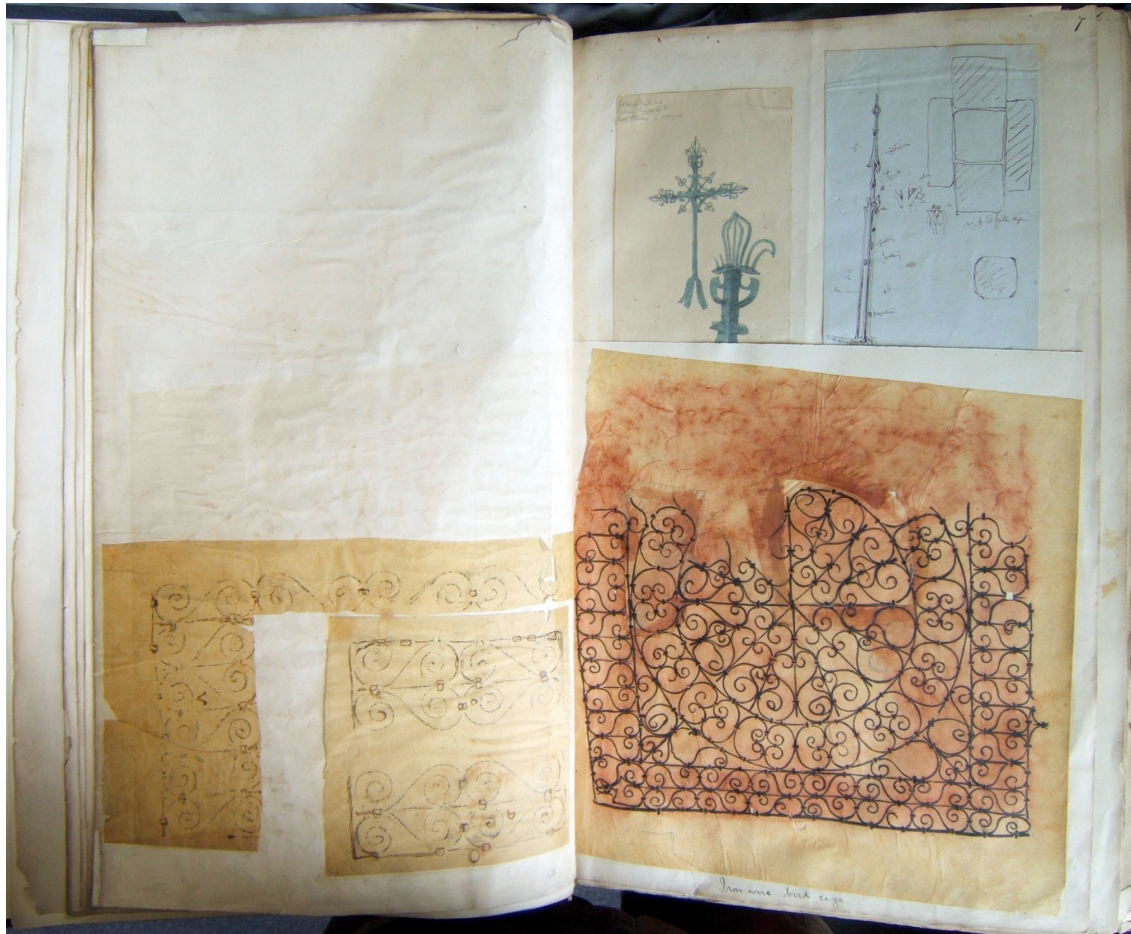


Fig. 16: William Burges, “Ironwork, Brasswork, 12 March 1858”: assembled rubbings and sketches. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

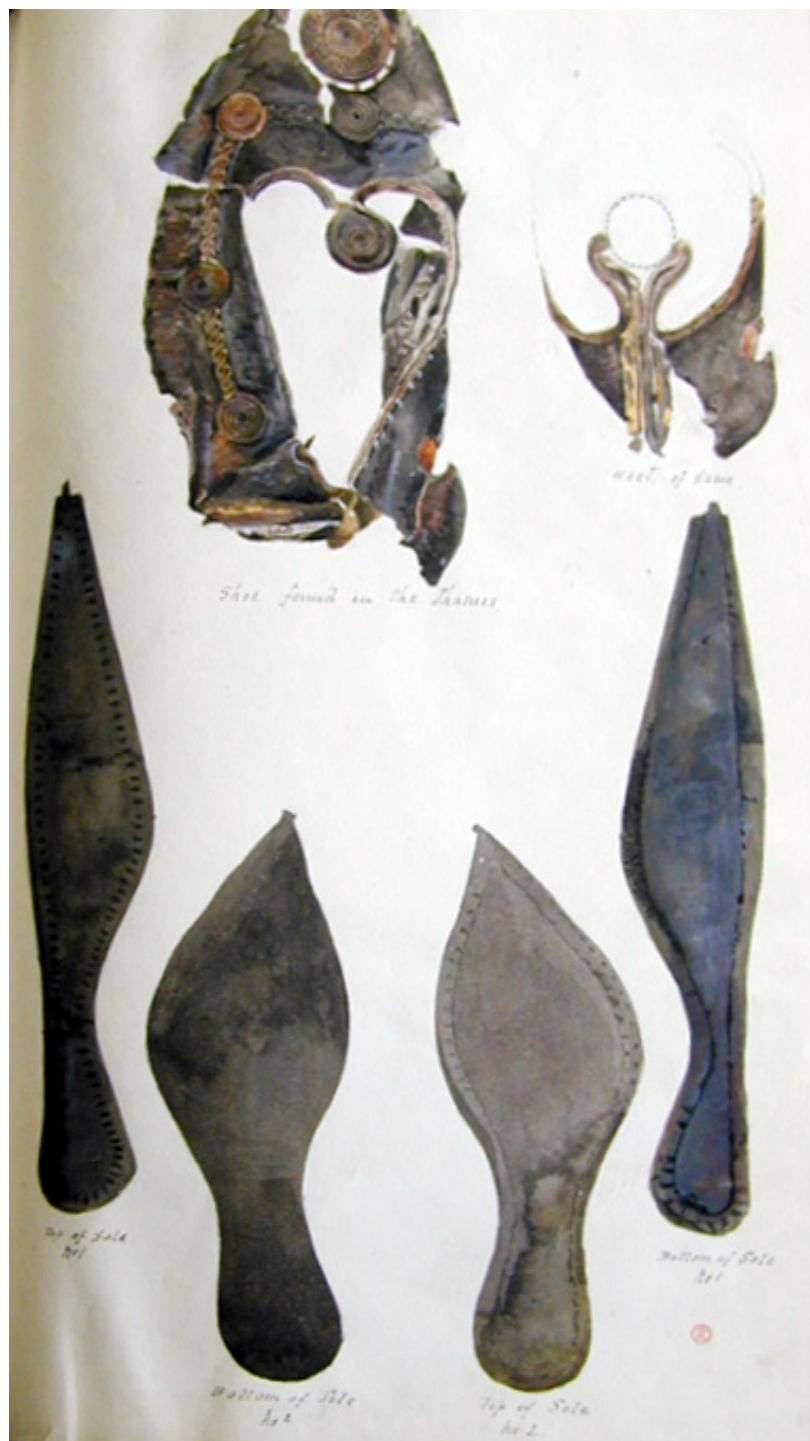


Fig. 17: William Burges, “Figures and Costume” album: “Shoe found in the Thames.”

Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 18: William Burges, “Photographs, Own Furniture”: Architecture Cabinet (1858).

RIBA Library Photographs collection, London.

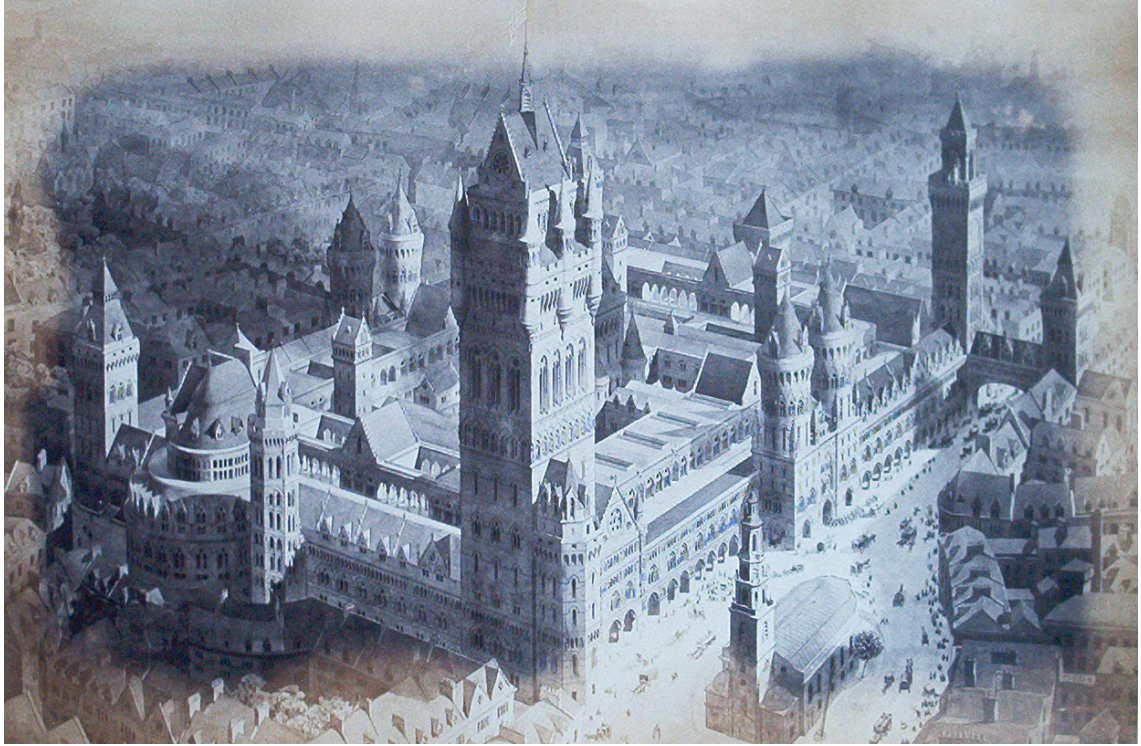


Fig. 19: Axel Haig, bird's eye view of Burges's design for the New Law Courts competition, in William Burges, Report to the Courts of Justice Commission (1867).

Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.

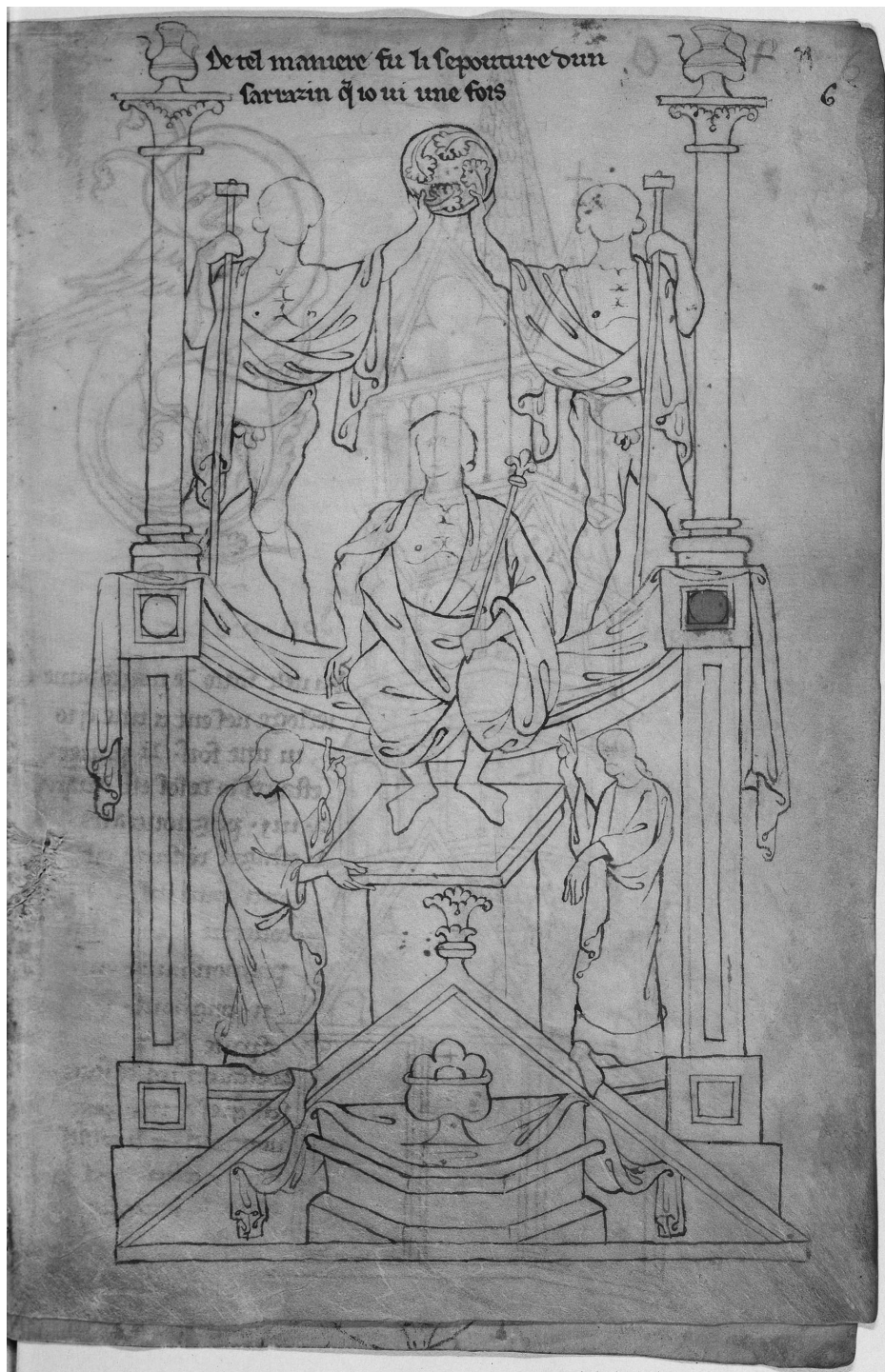


Fig. 20: Album of Villard de Honnecourt, folio 10: Roman sarcophagus. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

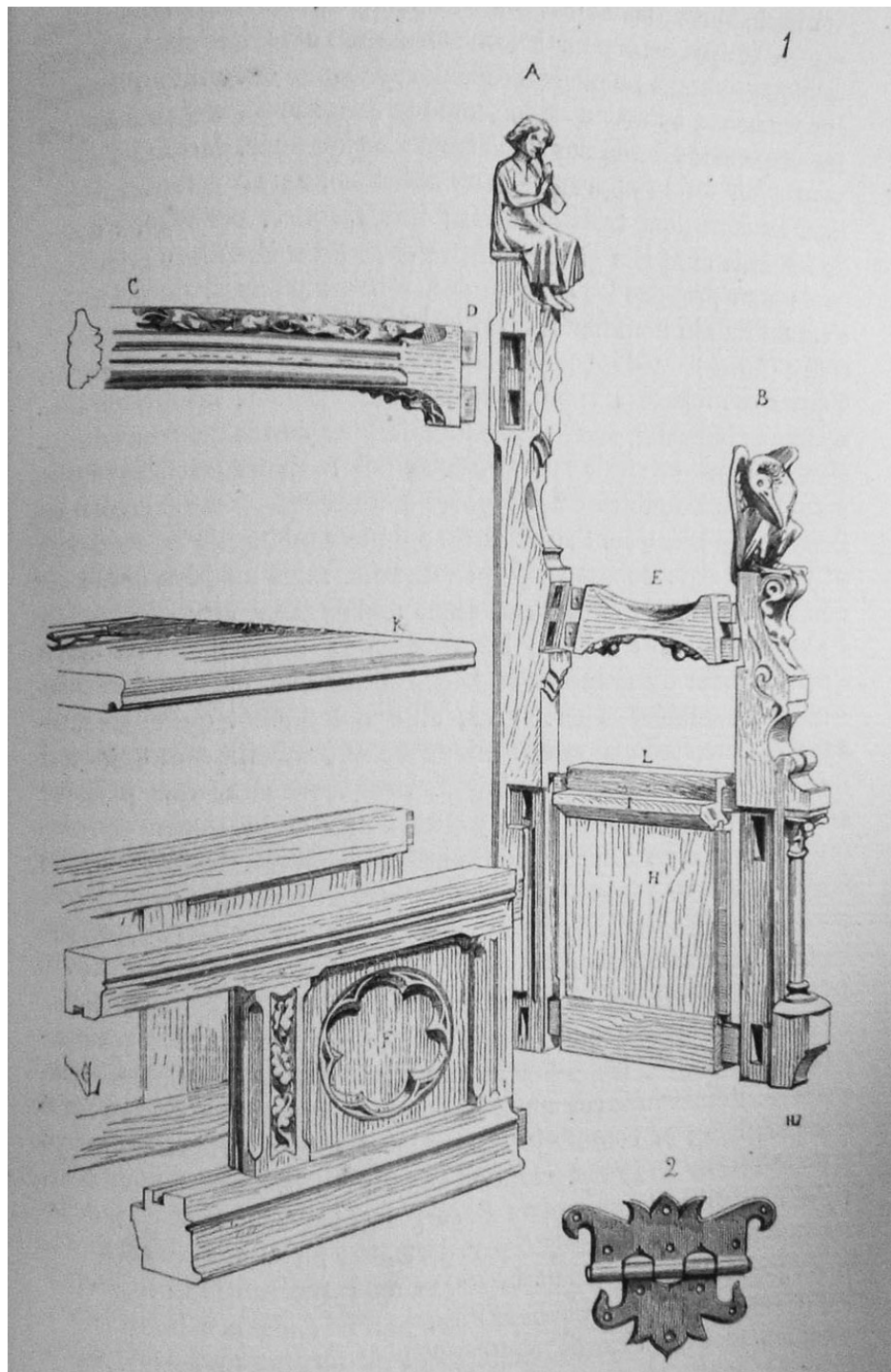


Fig. 21: E. Viollet-le-Duc, “Fabrication des meubles,” Dictionnaire raisonné du mobilier français, vol. 1 (1872): constructive diagram of a bench. Private collection.

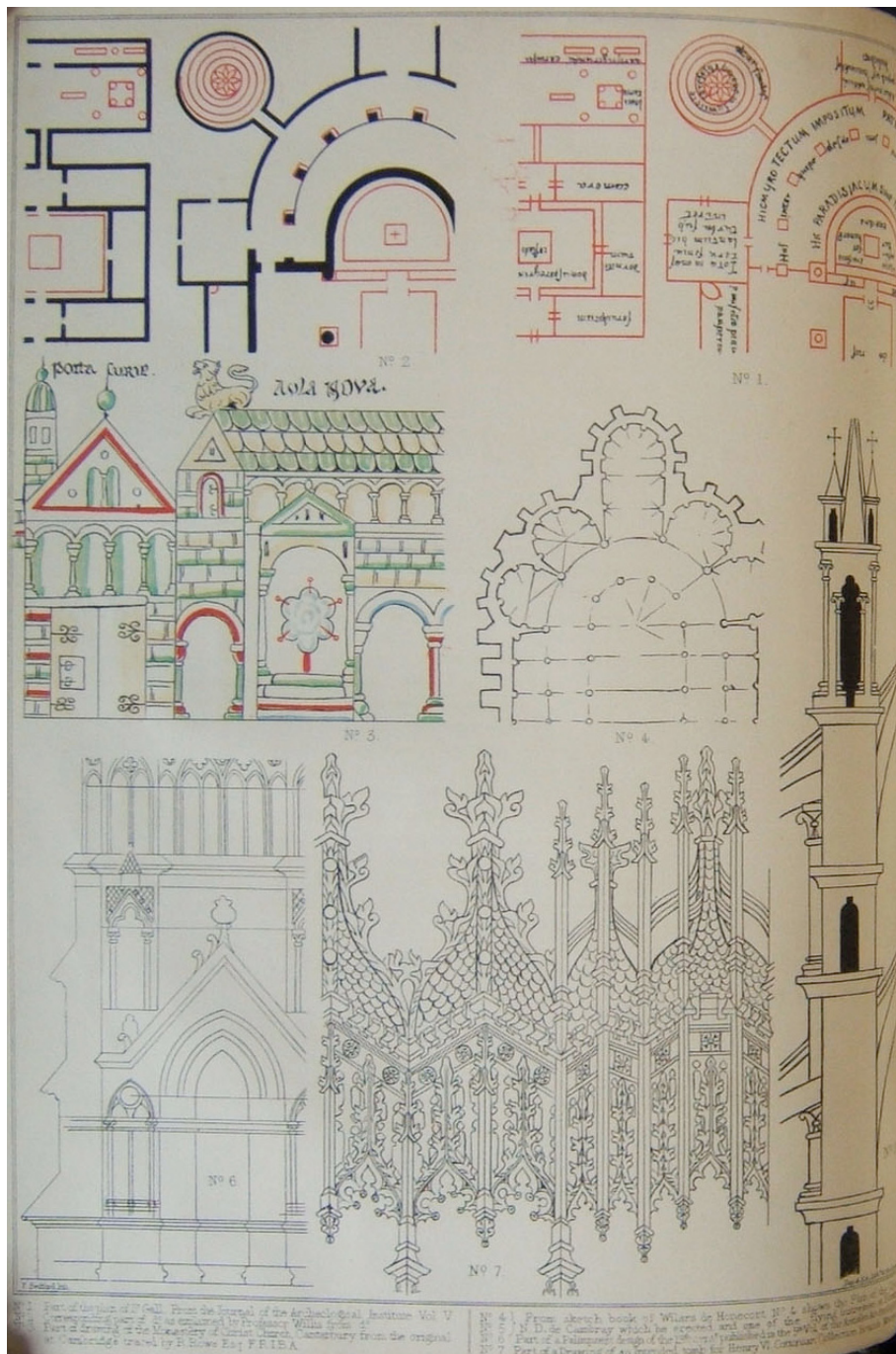


Fig. 22: William Burges, “Architectural Drawing,” Papers Read at the Royal Institute of British Architects (1860-61): examples of medieval draftsmanship. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

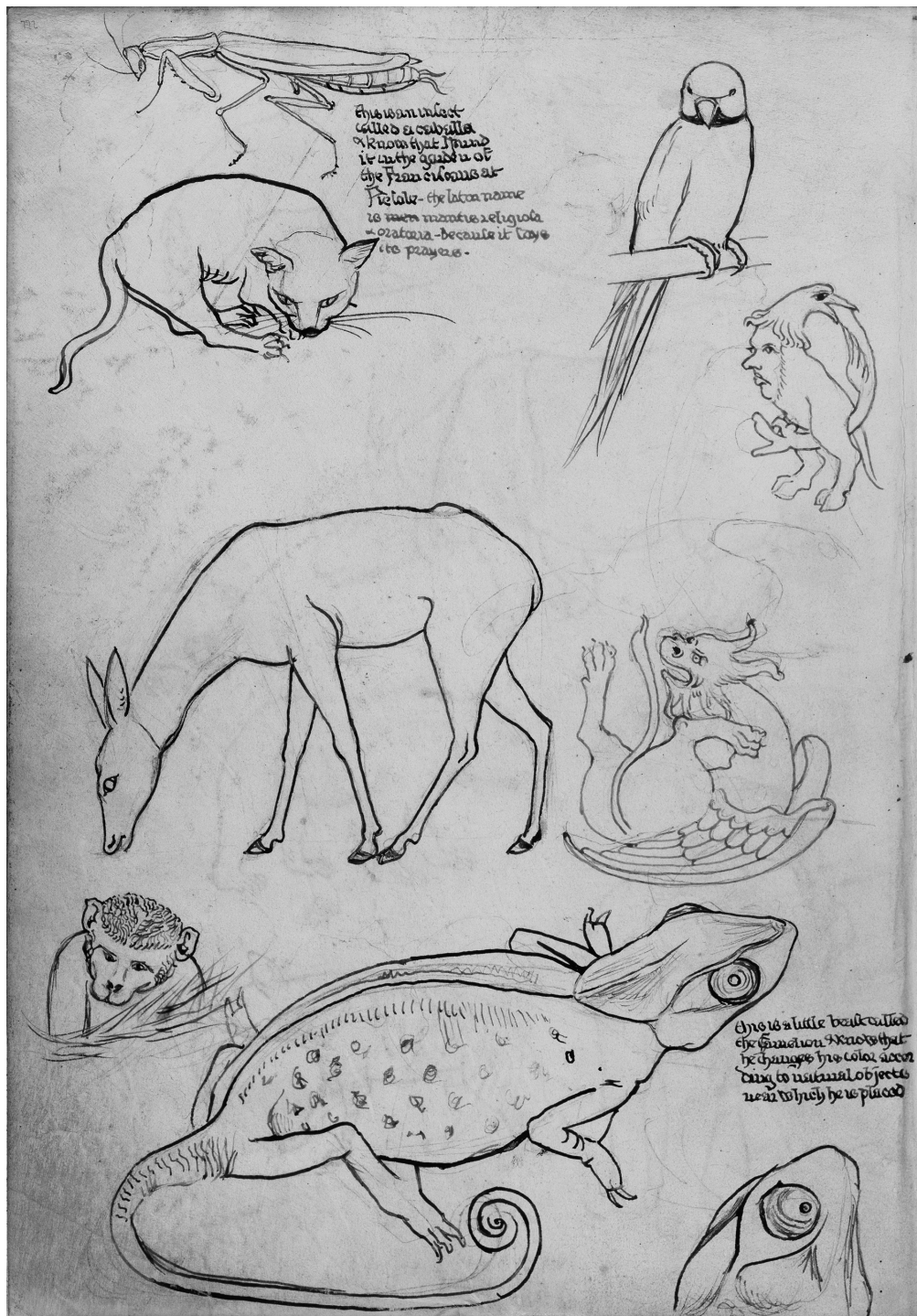


Fig. 23: William Burges, Vellum Sketchbook, folio 1 verso. RIBA Library Drawings collection, London.

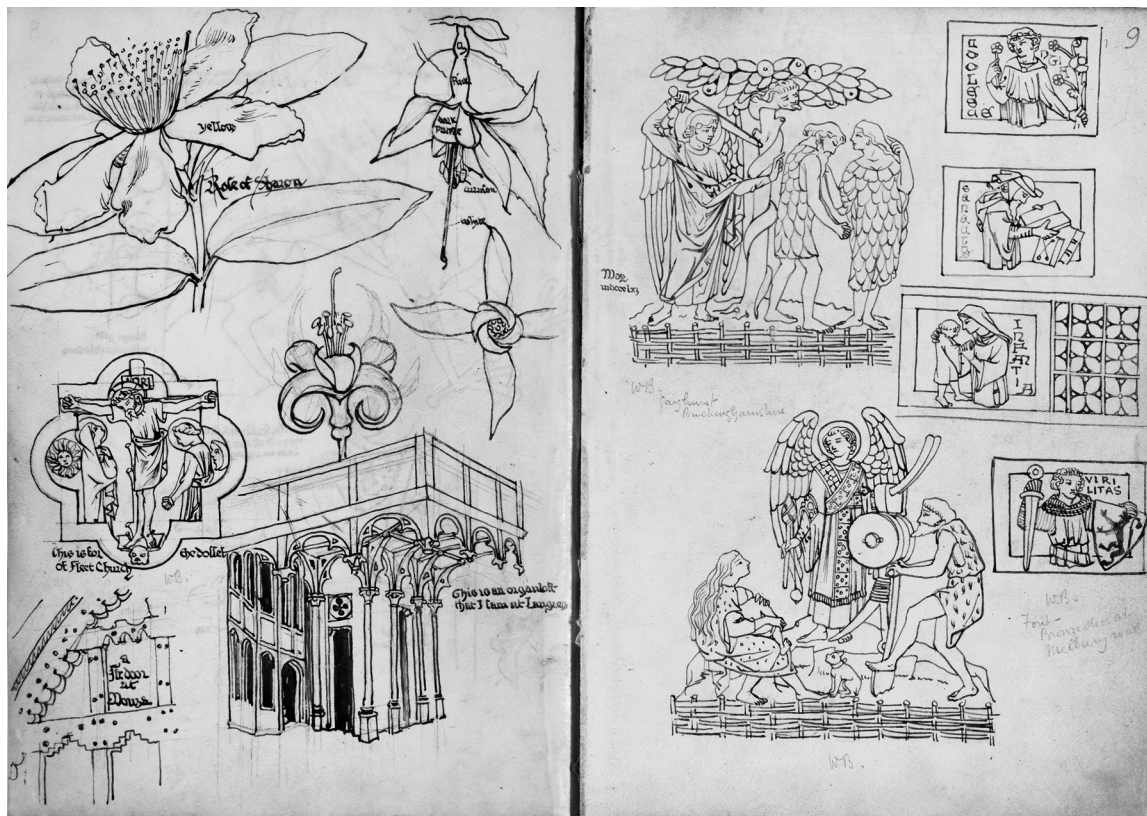


Fig. 24: William Burges, Vellum Sketchbook, folio 8 verso and 9 recto. RIBA Library

Drawings collection, London.

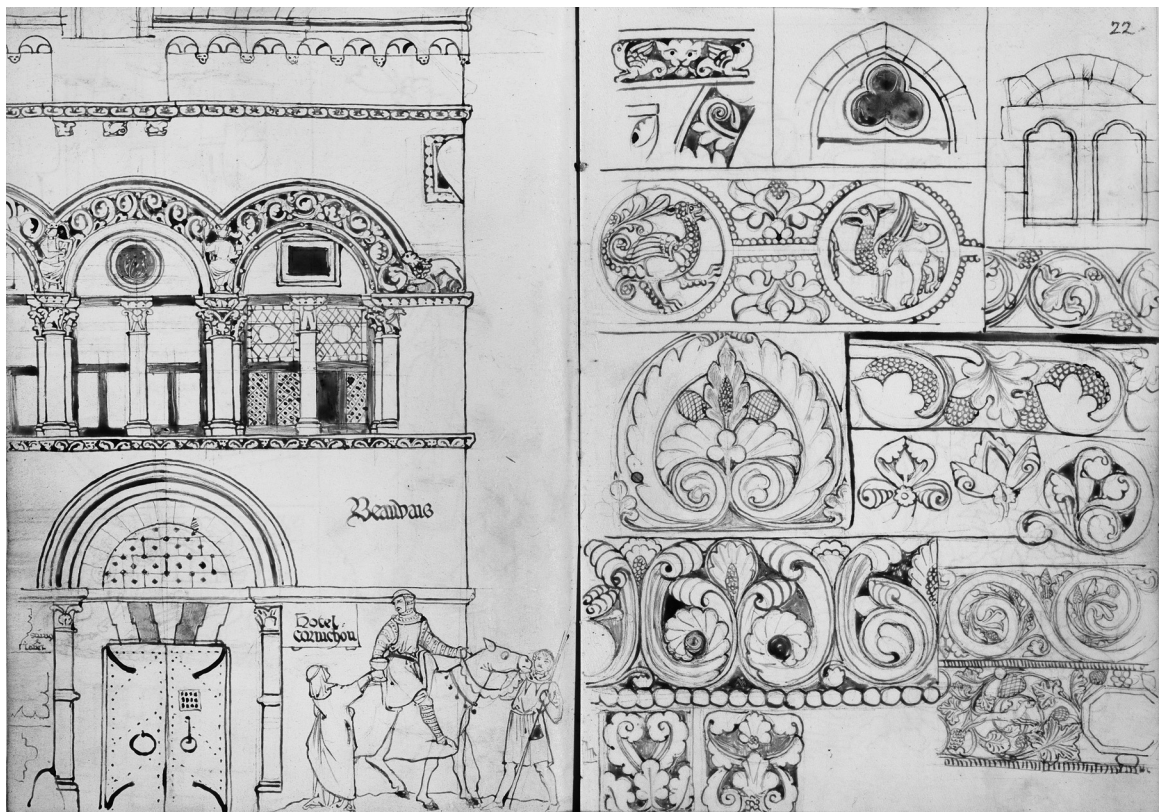


Fig. 25: William Burges, Vellum Sketchbook, folio 21 verso and 22 recto. RIBA Library Drawings collection, London.

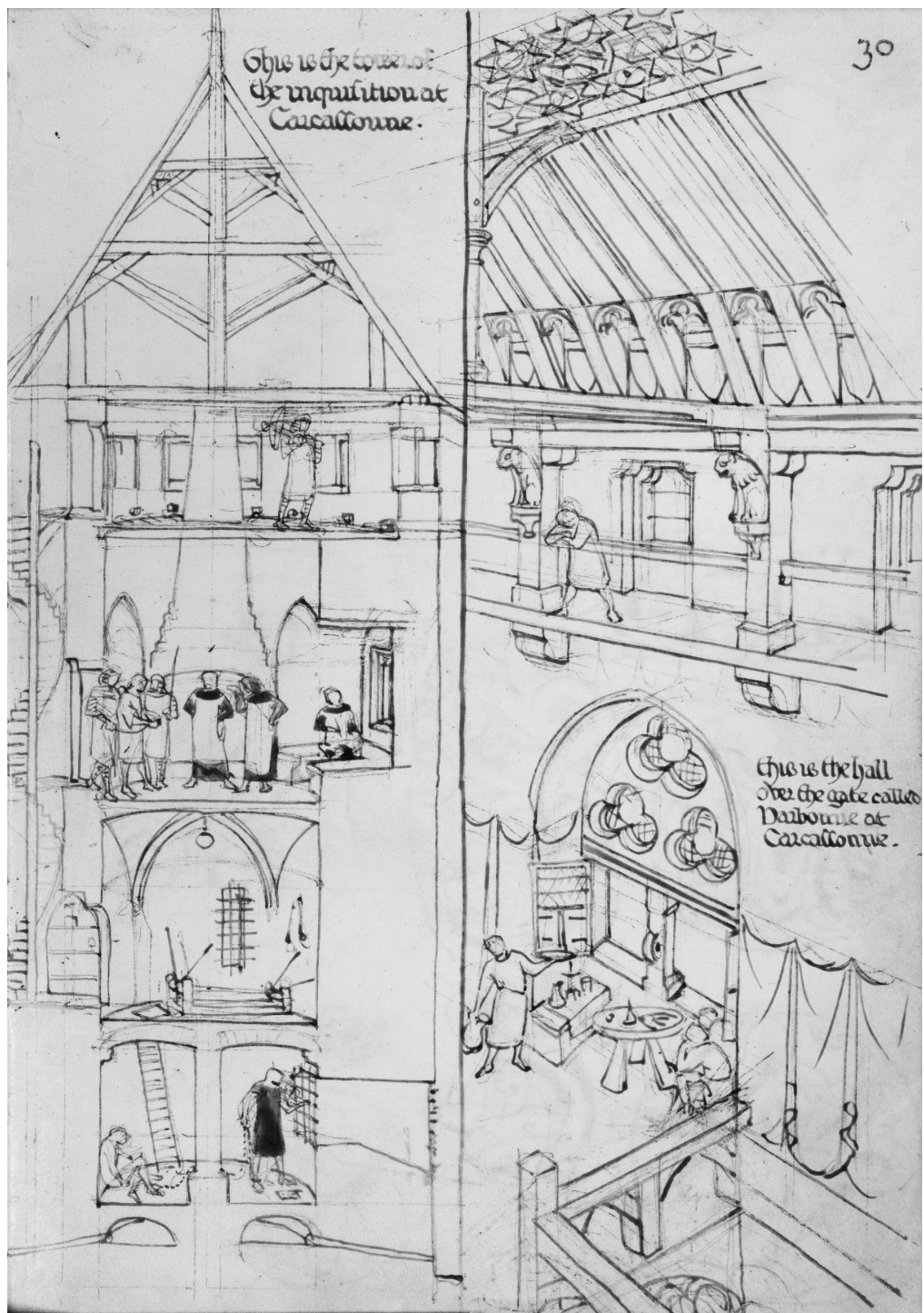


Fig. 26: William Burges, Vellum Sketchbook, folio 30 recto. RIBA Library Drawings collection, London.



Fig. 27: William Burges, Vellum Sketchbook, folio 20 verso. RIBA Library Drawings collection, London.

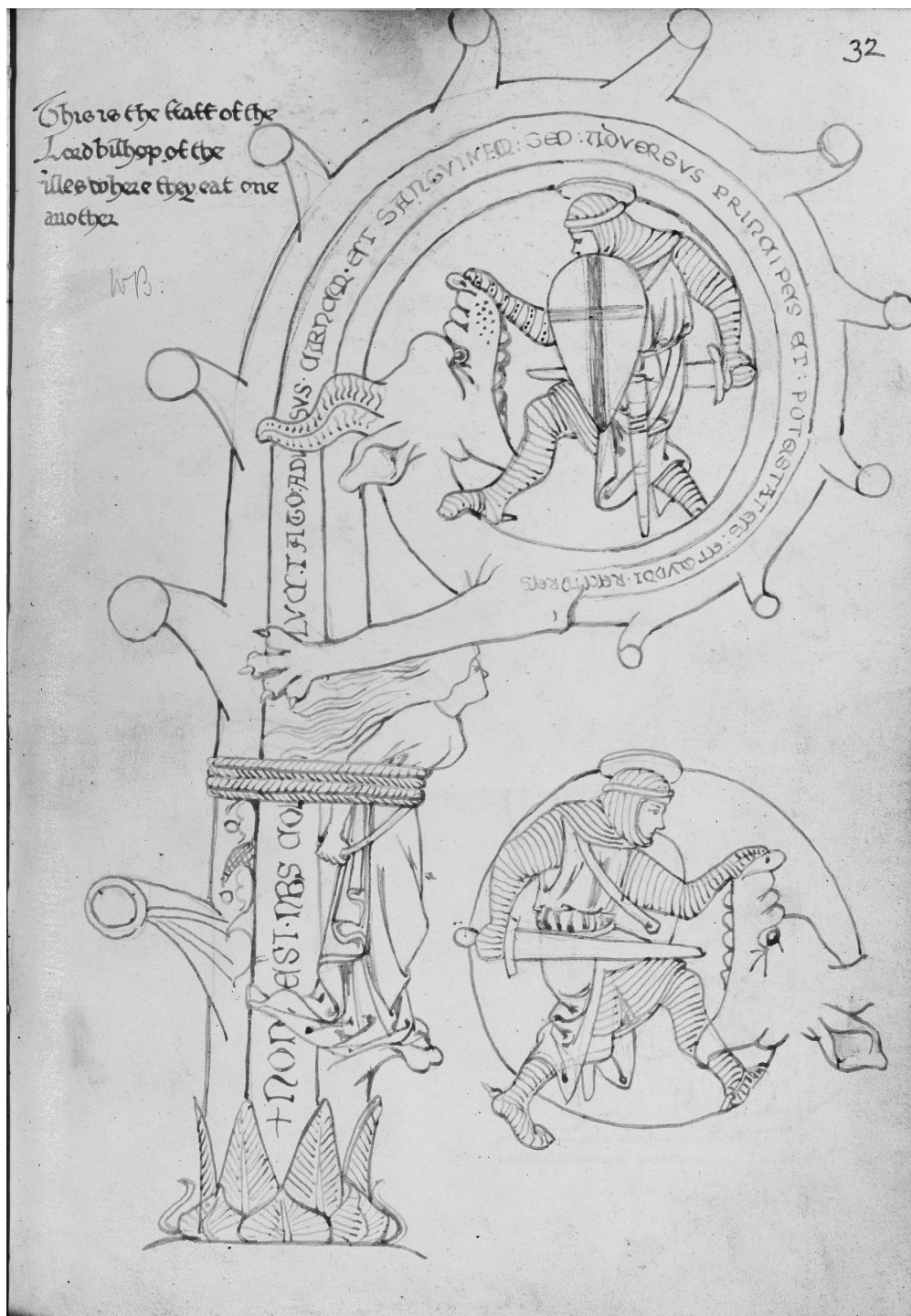


Fig. 28: William Burges, Vellum Sketchbook, folio 32 recto. RIBA Library Drawings collection, London.

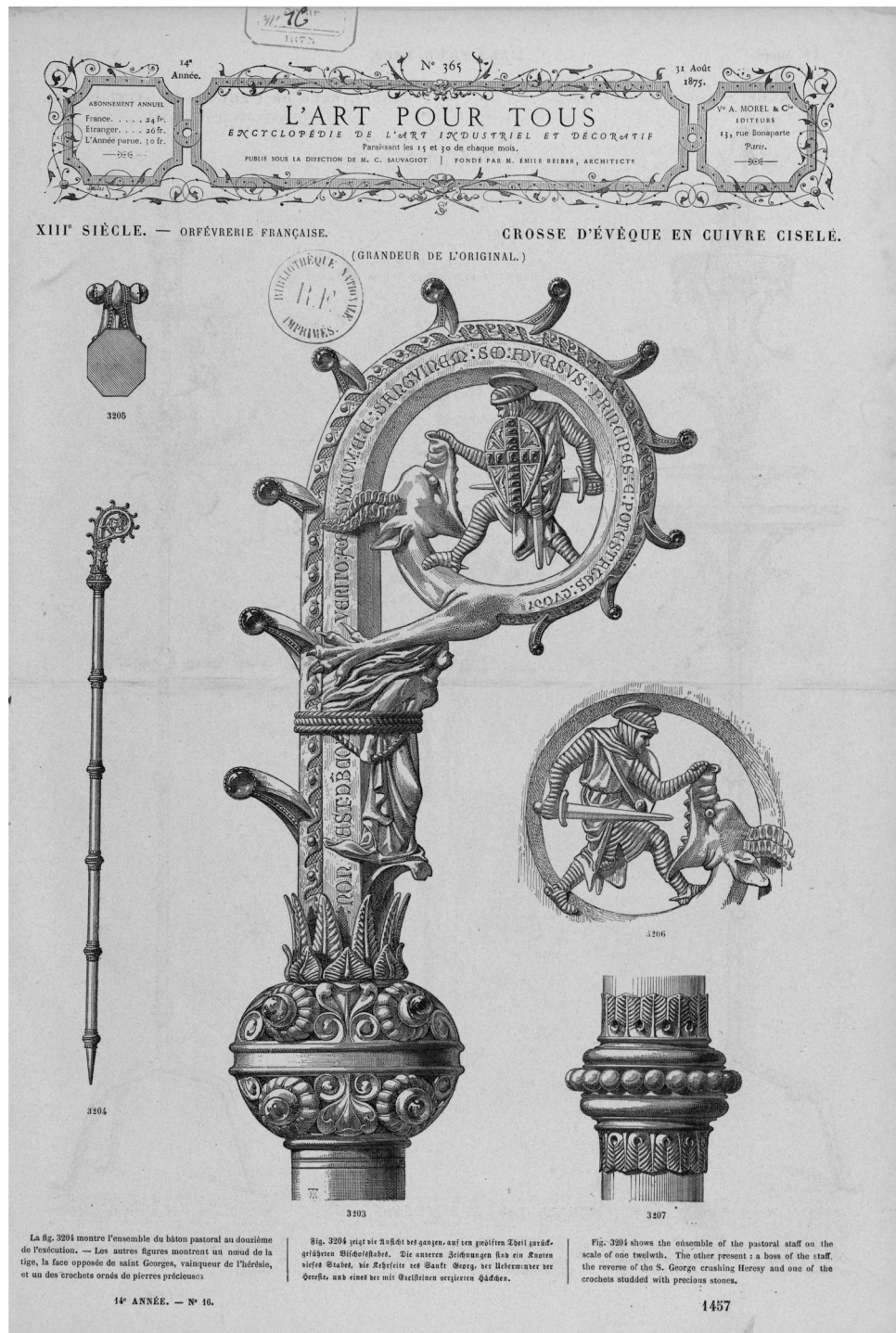


Fig. 29: L'art pour tous 14 (1875): “XIII^e siècle.—Orfèvrerie française. Crosse d’évêque en cuivre ciselé.” Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.



Fig. 30: R. P. Pullan, The Designs of William Burges, A.R.A. (ca. 1885), plate 14:
pastoral staff. RIBA Library Photographs collection, London.



Fig. 31: William Burges, drawing of the West front of Cork Cathedral (photographic reproduction). Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.



Fig. 32: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Bocca Baciata (1859).

Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Fig. 33: William Burges, Vellum Sketchbook, folio 24 recto (detail). RIBA Library

Drawings Collection, London.



Fig. 34: William Holman Hunt, “The Lady of Shalott,” in Alfred Lord Tennyson, Poems (London: E. Moxon, 1857). Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Fig. 35: J.B. Waring, Masterpieces of Industrial Art and Sculpture at the International Exhibition, 1862 (1863), volume 2, plate 113: “Portion of the Hereford screen.” Designed by George Gilbert Scott, manufactured by Skidmore & Co., Coventry. Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.



30.

CHAIR IN PAPIER MACHÉ. MESSRS. JENNENS AND BETTRIDGE.

Fig. 36: Official Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue: Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, 1851 [1851], volume 2: the “Day dreamer” papier mâché easy chair. Designed E. Fitz Cook, manufactured by Jennens and Bettridge, London and Birmingham. Private collection.

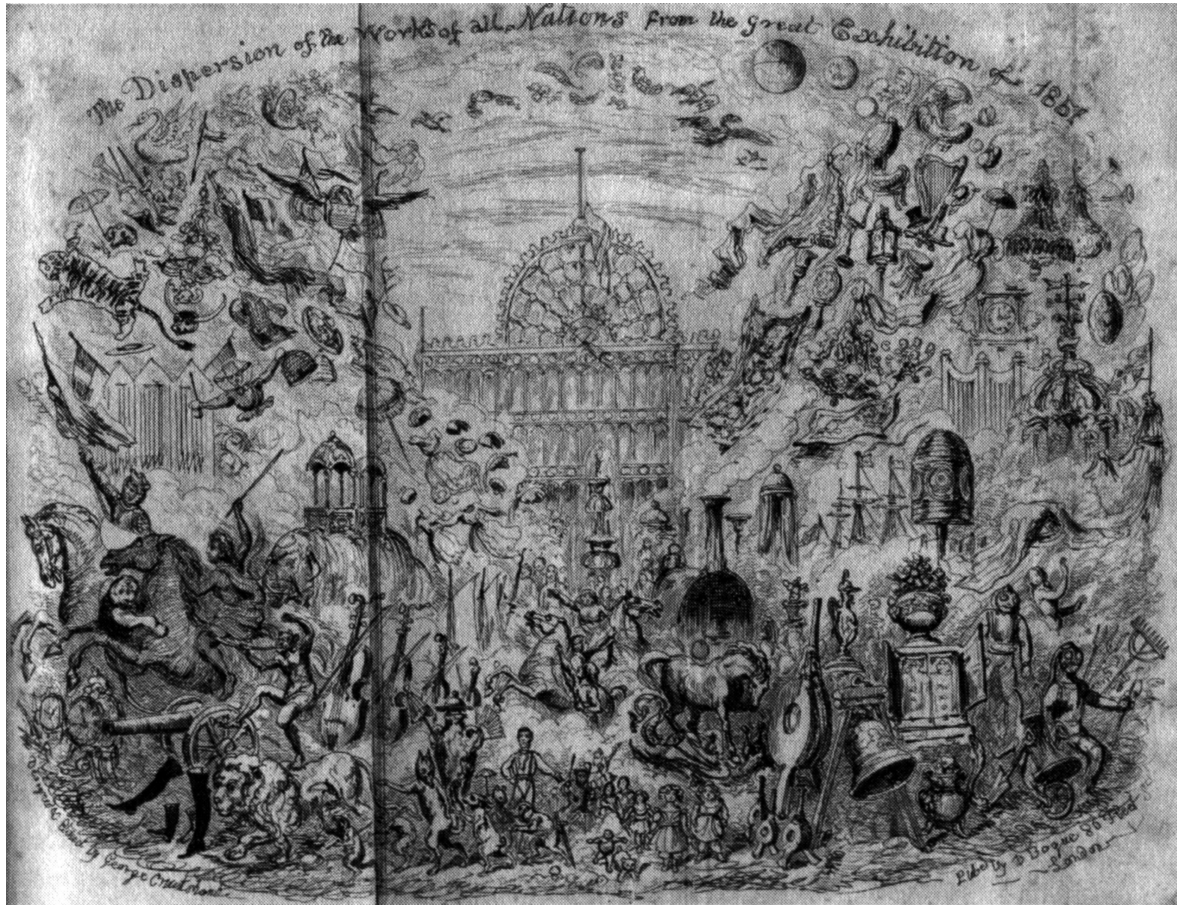


Fig. 37: George Cruikshank, “The Dispersion of the Works of All Nations from the Great Exhibition of 1851,” in Henry Mayhew, 1851: or, The Adventures of Mr. and Mrs. Sandboys and Family, who came up to London to “enjoy themselves,” and to see the Great Exhibition (London: D. Bogue, [1851]). University of California Libraries.



Fig. 38: Dickinsons' Comprehensive Pictures of the Great Exhibition of 1851, from the Originals Painted for H.R.H. Prince Albert (1854), volume 2: "The British Nave."

Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.



Fig. 39: J.B. Waring, Masterpieces of Industrial Art and Sculpture at the International Exhibition, 1862 (1863), volume 2, plate 155: “A cabinet by Messrs. Harland & Fisher, London” [Yatman escritorio]. Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.



Fig. 40: E. Viollet-le-Duc, Dictionnaire raisonné du mobilier français de l'époque carlovingienne à la Renaissance (1872), volume 1: detail of painted ornament on the armoire of Noyon. Private collection.

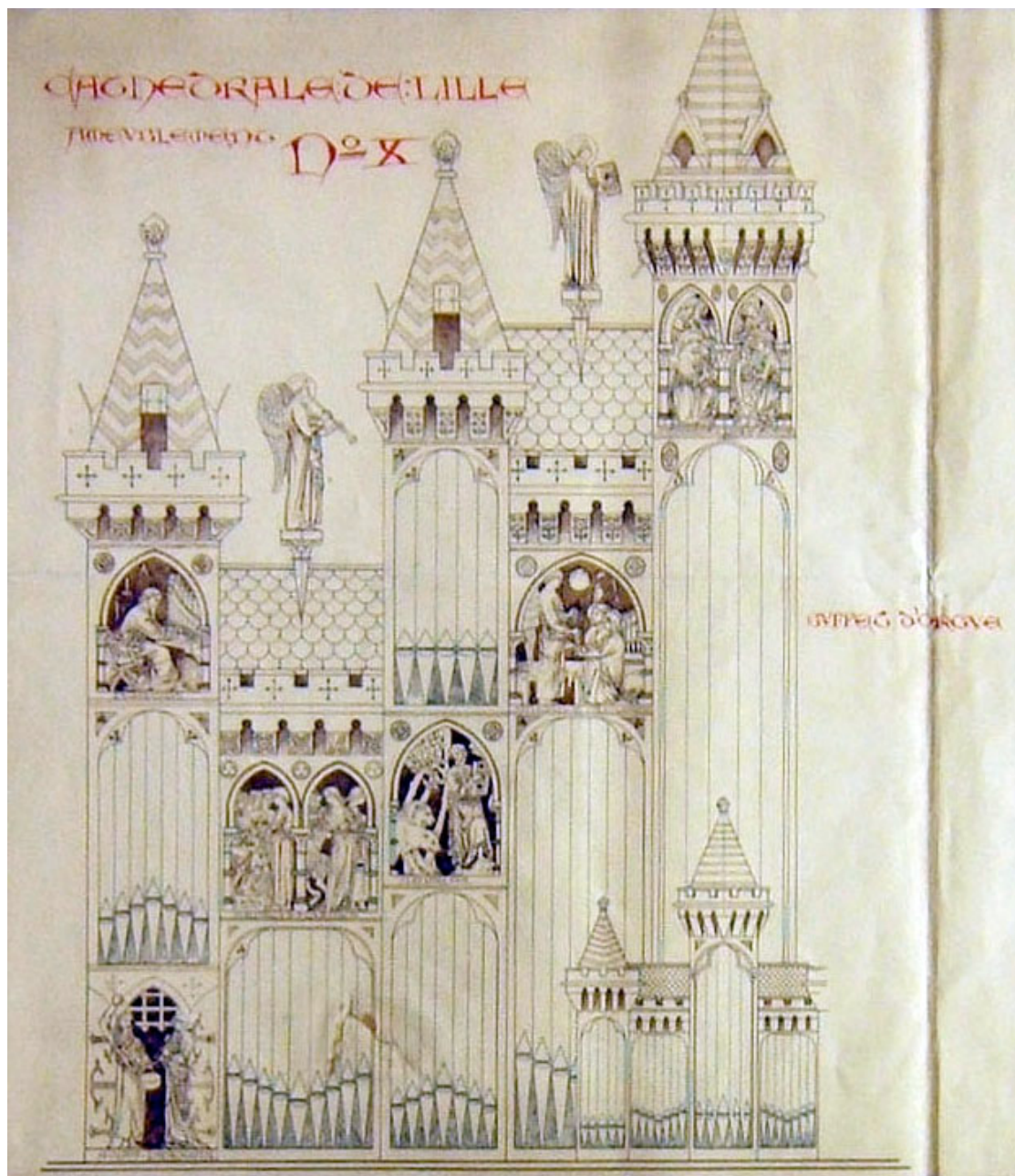


Fig. 41: William Burges and Henry Clutton, elevation of the organ case for Lille cathedral (scheme for an architectural competition, 1855-56). Archives diocésaines, Lille.

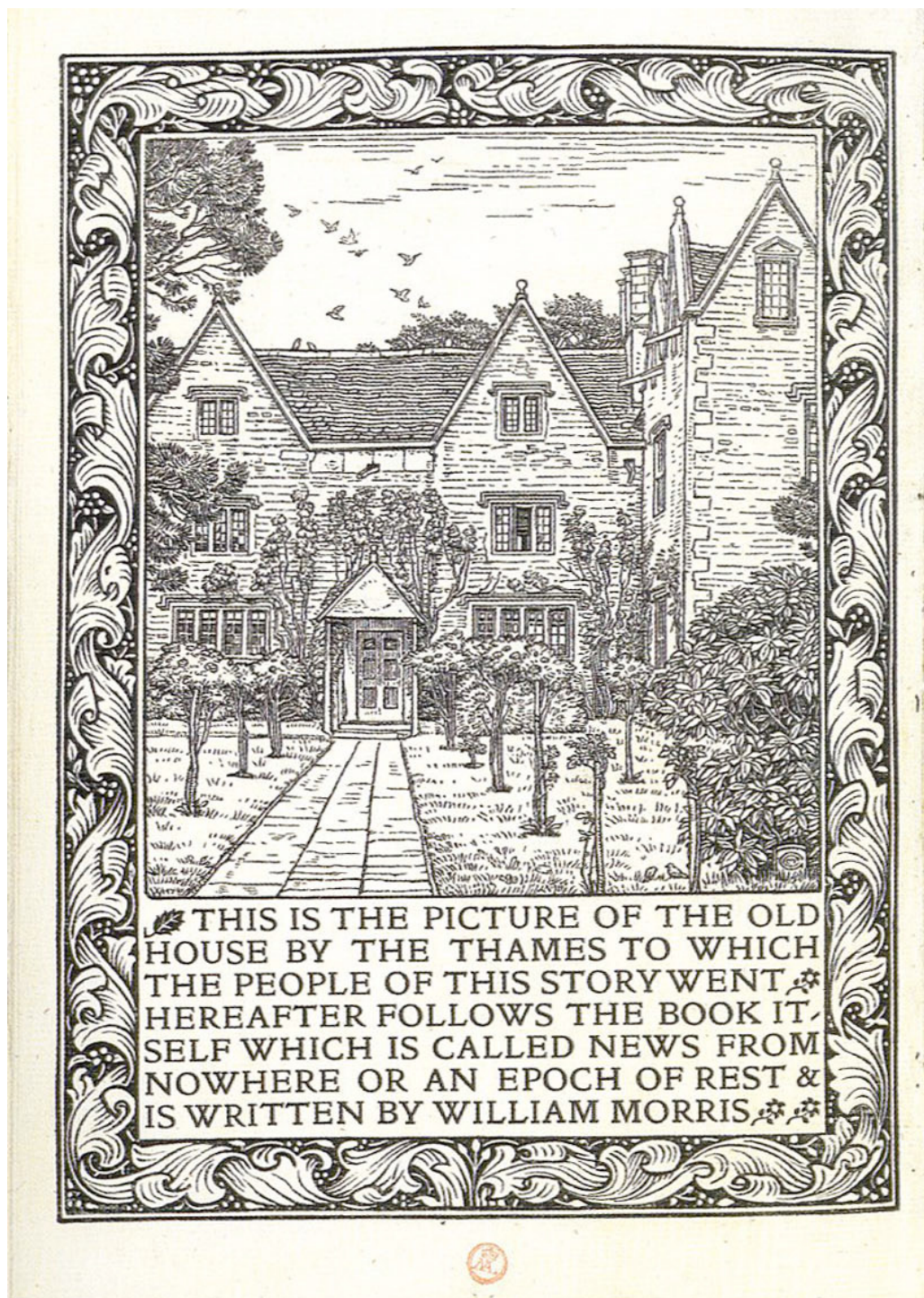


Fig. 42: William Morris, frontispiece to the Kelmscott Press edition of News from Nowhere (1893). Photograph © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

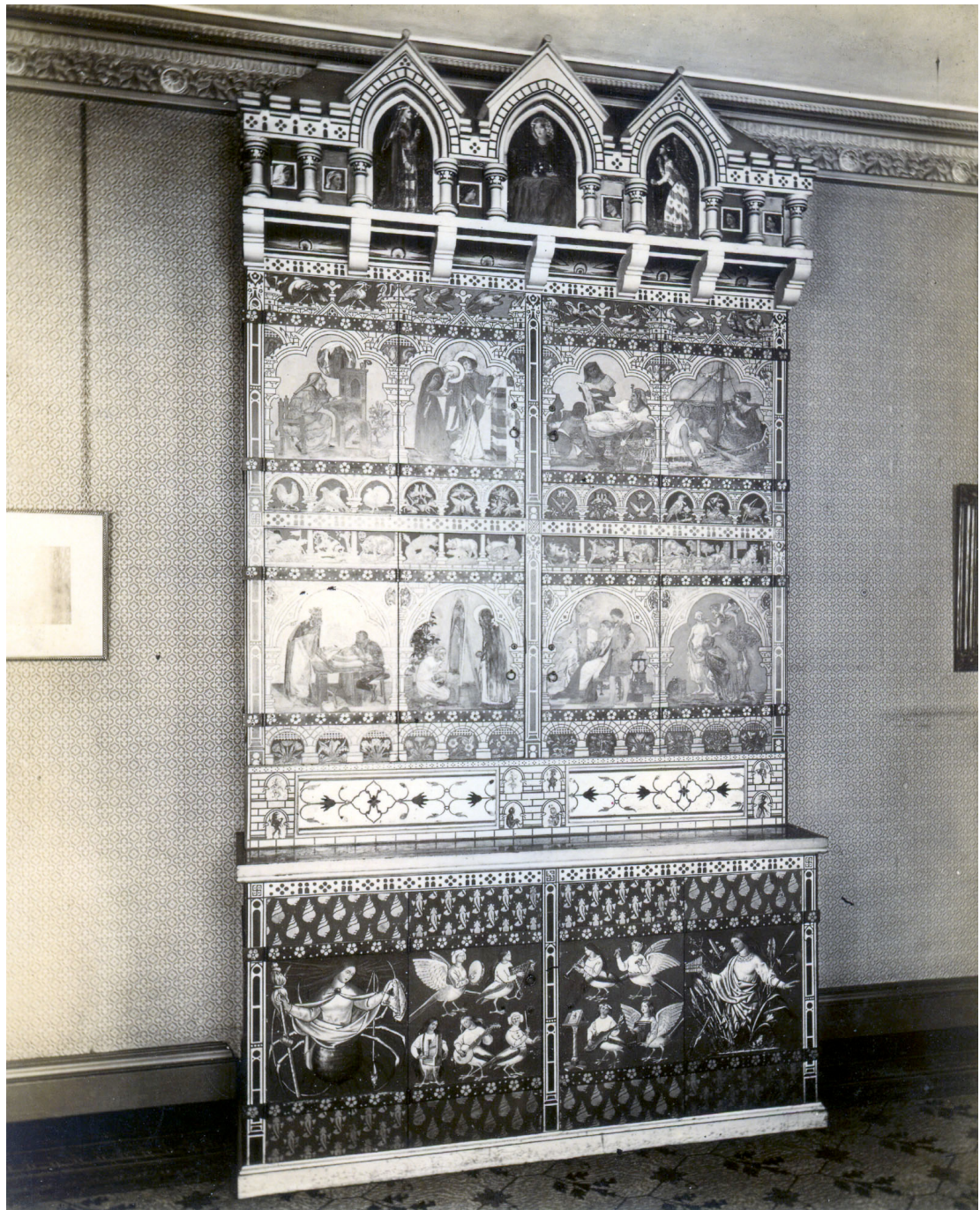


Fig. 43: R.P. Pullan, The House of William Burges, A.R.A. (1885), plate 14: the Great Bookcase (1859-62) at 15 Buckingham Street, London. RIBA Library Photographs collection, London.

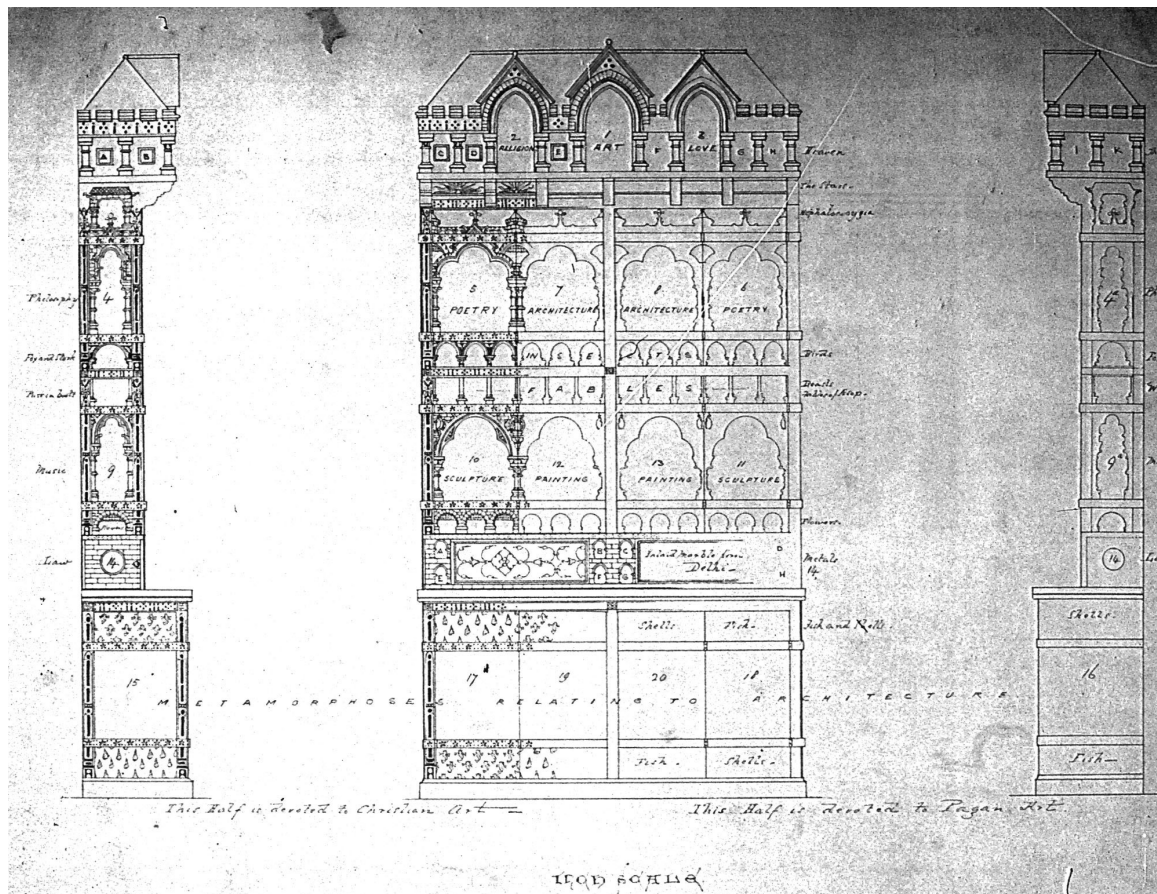


Fig. 44: William Burges, working drawing for the Great Bookcase's iconography (undated). RIBA Library Drawings collection, London.

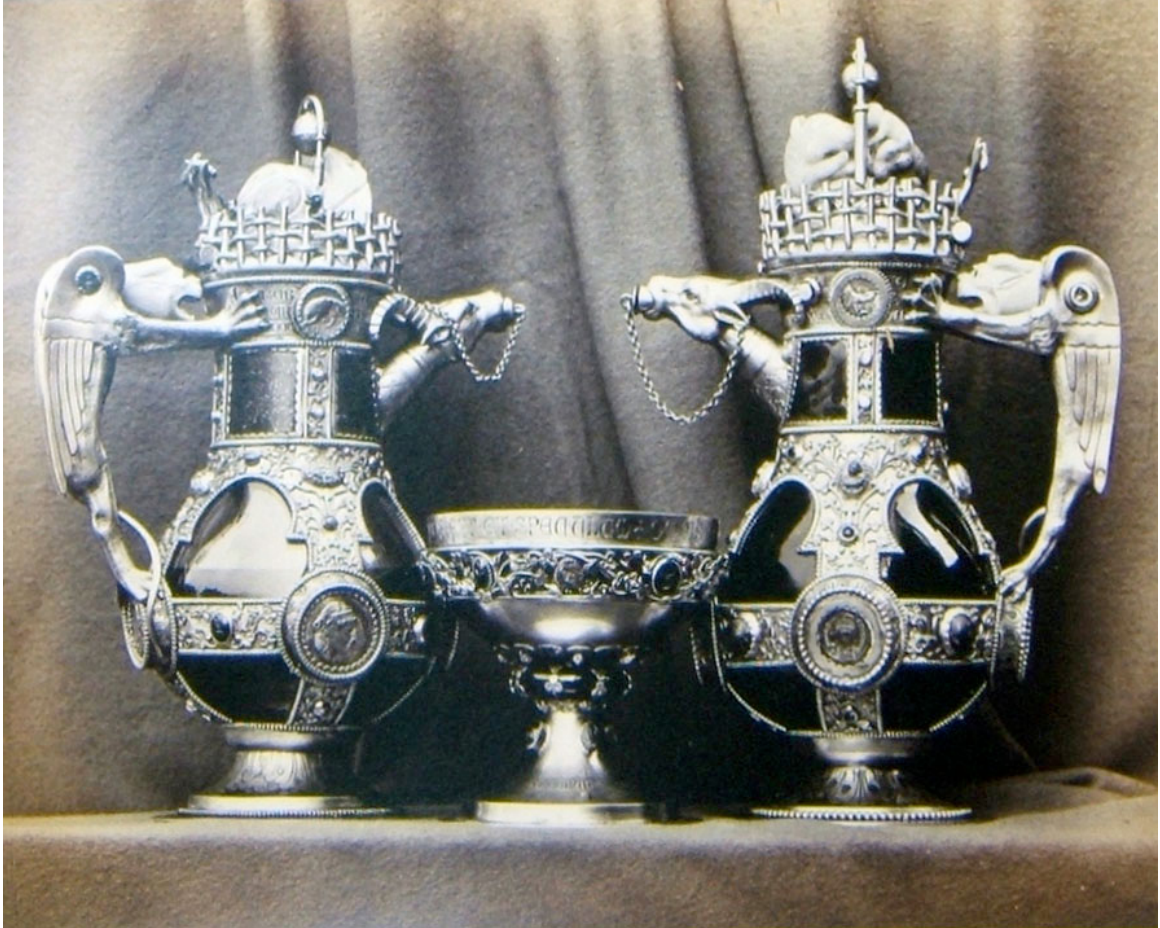


Fig. 45: R.P. Pullan, The Designs of William Burges, A.R.A. (ca. 1885), plate 17: the drinking cup (1862) and decanters (1865) of William Burges, at 15 Buckingham Street, London. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

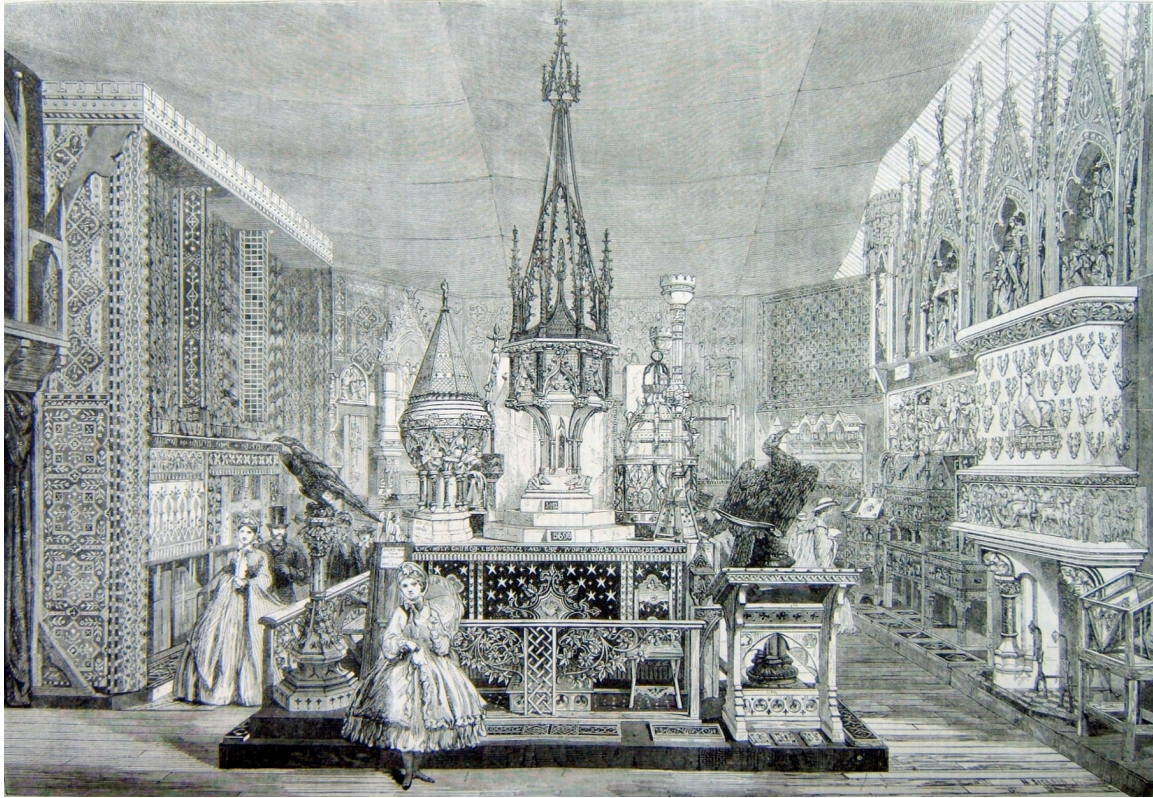


Fig. 46: The London Illustrated News 41 (1862), 248: the Medieval Court at the International Exhibition of 1862 in London. Private collection.



Fig. 47: The Legend of St George Cabinet (1861-62). Designed by Philip Webb, painted by William Morris, manufactured by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. Photograph © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 48: William Burges, “Photographs, Own Furniture”: Burges’s study at 15 Buckingham Street, London. RIBA Library Photographs collection, London.



Fig. 49: William Burges, “Photographs, Own Furniture”: the clerk’s study at 15 Buckingham Street, London. RIBA Library Photographs collection, London.



Fig. 50: William Burges, “Photographs, Own Furniture”: the Mermaid frieze and Minotaur ceiling in the bedroom at 15 Buckingham Street, London. RIBA Library

Photographs collection, London.



Fig. 51: William Burges, "Photographs, Own Furniture": the Dante bookcase (ca. 1862-69) in the study at 15 Buckingham Street, London. RIBA Library Photographs collection, London.



Fig. 52: William Burges, “Photographs, Own Furniture”: the dressing table (1867) in Burges’s bedroom at 15 Buckingham Street, London. RIBA Library Photographs collection, London.



Fig. 53: William Burges, “Photographs, Own Furniture”: a wardrobe (1859, as altered 1870) at 15 Buckingham Street (detail), London. RIBA Library Photographs collection, London.



Fig. 54: William Burges, “Polychromy, 18 October 1858”: Japanese ukiyo-e woodblock print. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

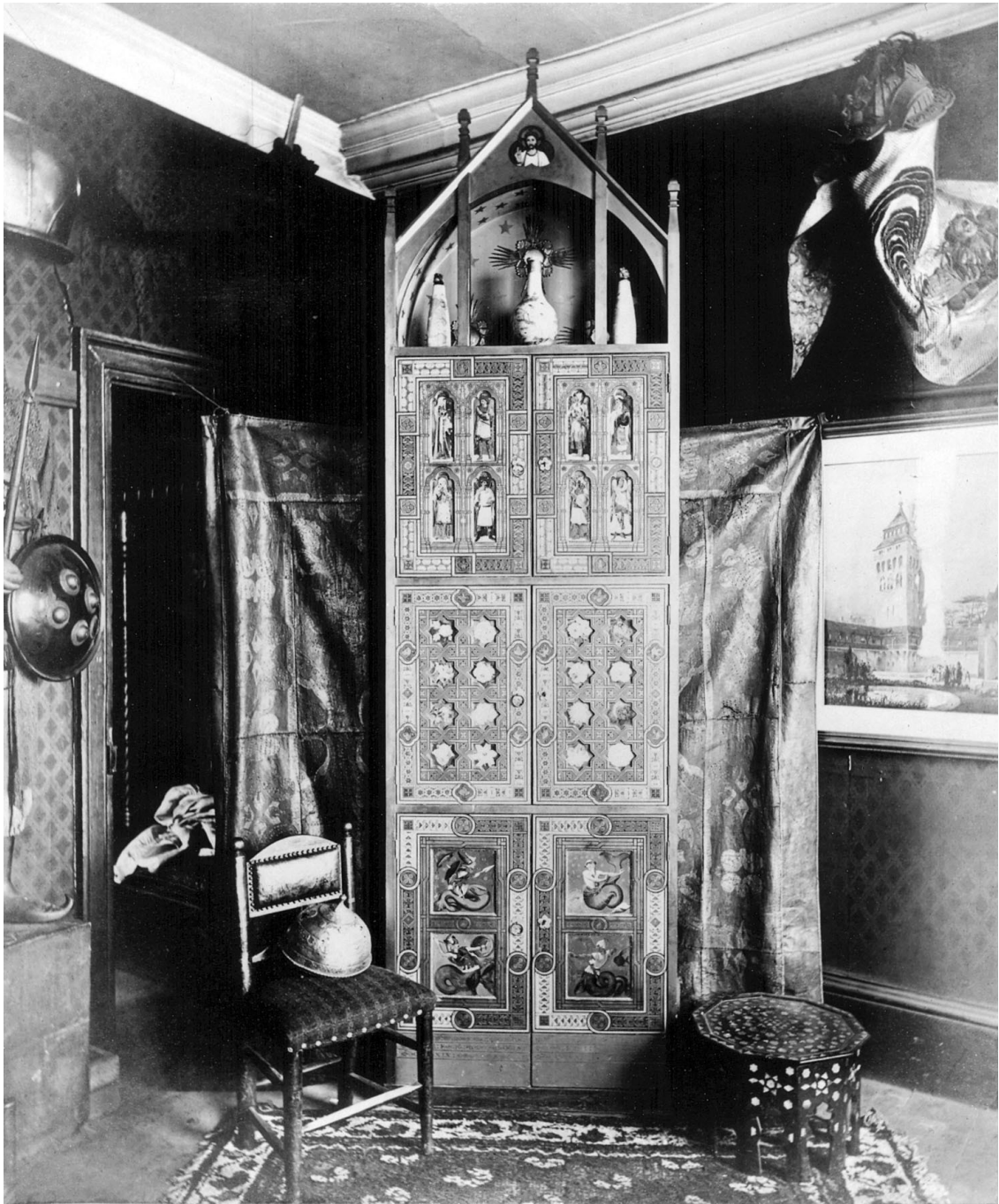


Fig. 55: R. P. Pullan, The House of William Burges, A.R.A. (1885), plate 19: the Upright cabinet (1869) at 15 Buckingham Street, London. RIBA Library Photographs collection, London.



Fig. 56: William Burges, “Photographs, Own Furniture”: the red bedstead (1865-67) in the bedroom at 15 Buckingham Street (detail), London. RIBA Library Photographs collection, London.



Fig. 57: William Burges, “Photographs, Own Furniture”: the escritoire (1867-68) at 15 Buckingham Street, London. RIBA Library Photographs collection, London.

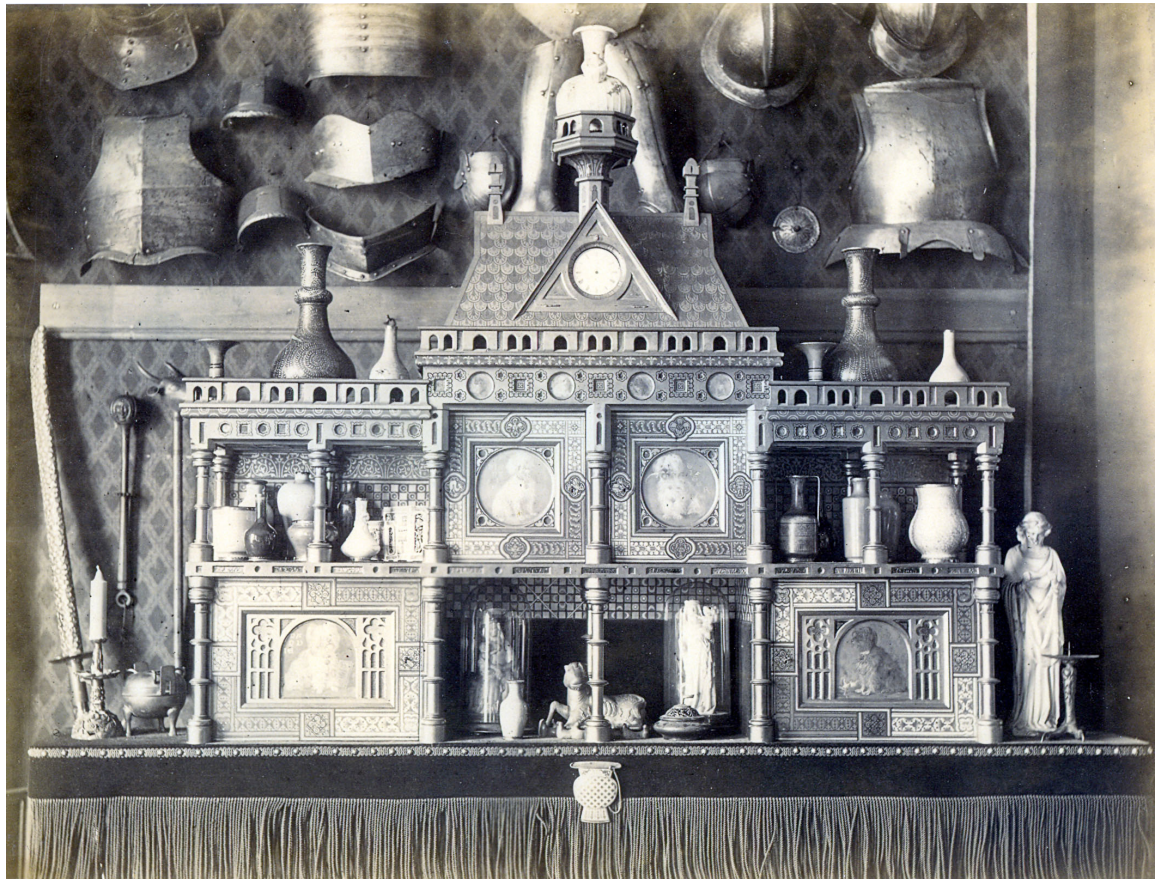


Fig. 58: R. P. Pullan, The House of William Burges, A.R.A. (1885), plate 38: the Dog cabinet (1869) with armour, porcelain and silverware, at 15 Buckingham Street, London.

RIBA Library Photographs collection, London.

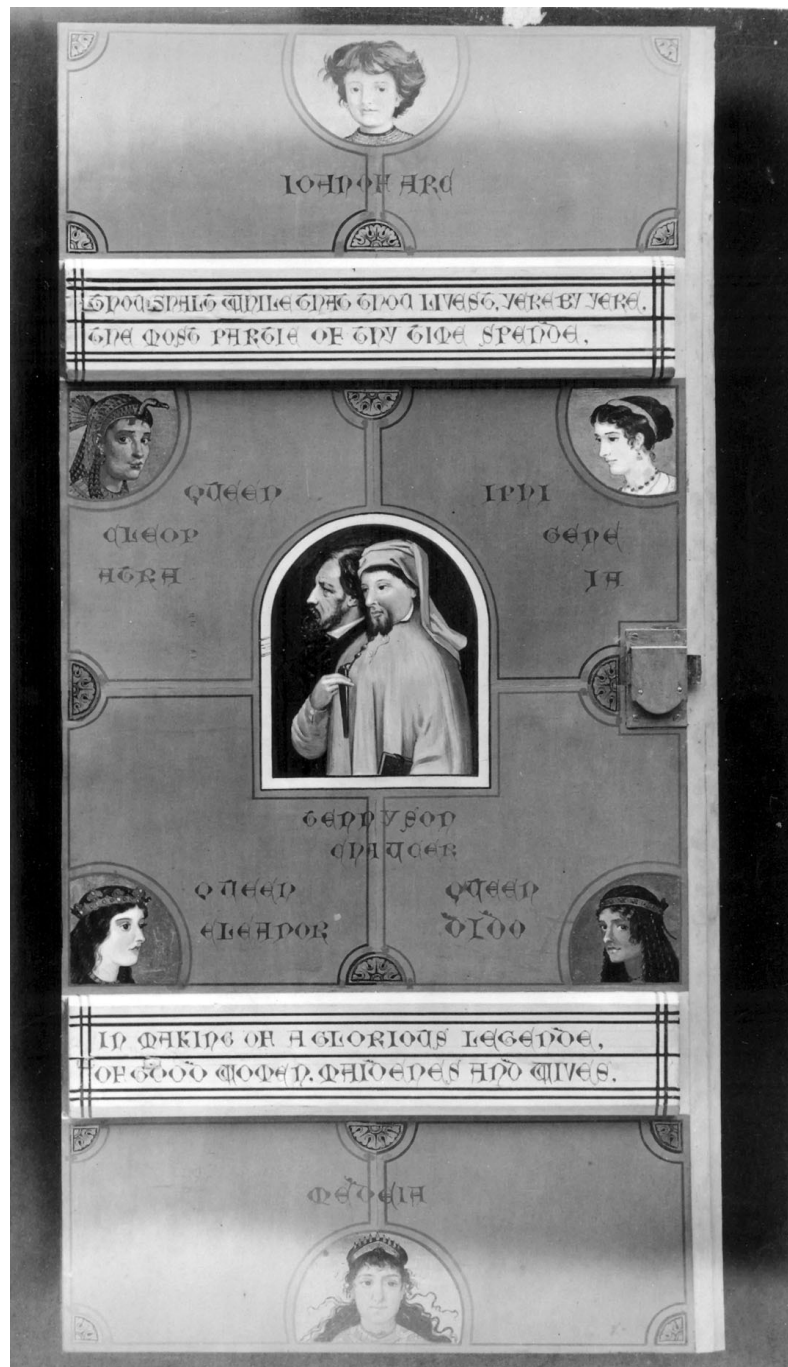


Fig. 59: William Burges, “Photographs, Own Furniture”: interior panel of a wardrobe (1859, as altered 1870) at 15 Buckingham Street, London. RIBA Library Photographs collection, London.



Fig. 60: R. P. Pullan, The Designs of William Burges, A.R.A. (ca. 1885), plate 20: the Elephant inkstand. RIBA Library Photographs collection, London.

THE HOME OF AN ENGLISH ARCHITECT.

DO you desire to make an inkstand?

Take a Chinese bronze elephant incense-burner, with dumpy legs that are hardly more than feet, remove the pierced howdah-like cover, and in its place put a low circular tower of green porcelain, domed with a *cloisonné* cup reversed, and crowned with a Japanese *netzuki*. Combine these things with metal mouldings and machicolated parapets fashioned after the manner of the thirteenth century; arrange the ivory finial, the dome and tower so that each may turn on a pillar at the back, uncovering receptacles for matches, red ink, and black; mount the whole on a slab of marble and suspend chains, and rings, and seals from tusks and trappings, and you have the inkstand Burges had made for himself, which occupied the centre of his writing table all the years I knew him, and reminds me of him more than anything he ever achieved.

Observe the power of adaptation: the things he is dealing with are Chinese and Japanese, but the whole is thirteenth century—Burgesian. A few pieces of metal in his favourite style to unite them, and lo! this strange group of Eastern things fall into their places as if they had been originally devised for the purpose they now fulfil. As one looks at it in admiration of its rich colour, its usefulness, its elephantine strength, one never thinks of its lovely dome as a cup reversed, or of the ivory figure group that crowns it as a Japanese button. But it is in the bronze elephant itself that we are chiefly interested. This short-legged, thick-set beast exhibits the power of conventionalising a natural object in a very remarkable degree. The thing is so like and yet so unlike; so false in detail, so true in essence. It was this power of the artist, whether exhibited in Chinese bronze or Egyptian granite, in Pentelic marble or Caen freestone, that Burges was

so quick to recognise, to appreciate, to enjoy. And it was this mastery in conventional treatment, this power of governing natural form so that it should best serve the artificial purpose for which it was selected, that he possessed in a remarkable degree. Nesfield, Shaw, and Street, each in his own way, has produced architectural designs more beautiful and far more graceful than any building Burges ever designed or could design; but no one of the century in this country, or any other that I know of, ever possessed that artistic rule over the kingdom of nature in a measure at all comparable with that which he shared in common with the sculptor of the Sphinx and the designer of Chartres.

I often regretted that the Chinese bronze elephant, admirable as it was for an inkstand, should have so grown into his life that almost everything he touched partook of its thick-set, heavy proportions. Nor was mine a silent regret, for I spoke in no uncertain tones in those days when neither of us had much to do and when we saw a good deal of each other. That he was conscious of it I knew, for I well remember his delight one evening when he elicited unqualified praise on showing me a cup which had just come home, and chiefly remarkable because he had designed



The Front of the Melbury Road House.

it with more graceful lines and on a lighter scale than usual. His head was slightly more inclined to one side than usual as he thrust the cup close to my eyes with the words: "There! is that light enough for you?" This heaviness might have been in a measure due to his short sight. How far the bronze elephant operated, or how much, if any, of this feeling of sturdiness may be regarded as having been inherited from his father, who was an engineer of eminence in his day, I am not prepared to say. The architec-

Fig. 61: E.W. Godwin, "The Home of an English Architect," *The Art Journal* (1886):

view of Tower House from Melbury Road. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 62: R. P. Pullan, The Designs of William Burges, A.R.A. (ca. 1885), plate 21: group of silverware at 15 Buckingham Street, London. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 63: William Burges, “Photographs, Own Furniture”: the Architecture cabinet (1858)
at 15 Buckingham Street, London. RIBA Library Photographs collection, London.



Fig. 64: M. Digby Wyatt, Industrial Arts of the XIXth Century at the Great Exhibition (1853), volume 1, plate XLI: “A Group of Church Plate by Skidmore of Coventry.”

Canadian Centre for Architecture.



Fig. 65: Frederic Leighton, Cimabue's Celebrated Madonna is carried in Procession through the Streets of Florence (1855). The Royal Collection © 2011, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.



Fig. 66: Axel Haig, view of the McConnochie House [or Park House], Park Place, Cardiff, seen from the west (1872). RIBA Library Drawings Collection.

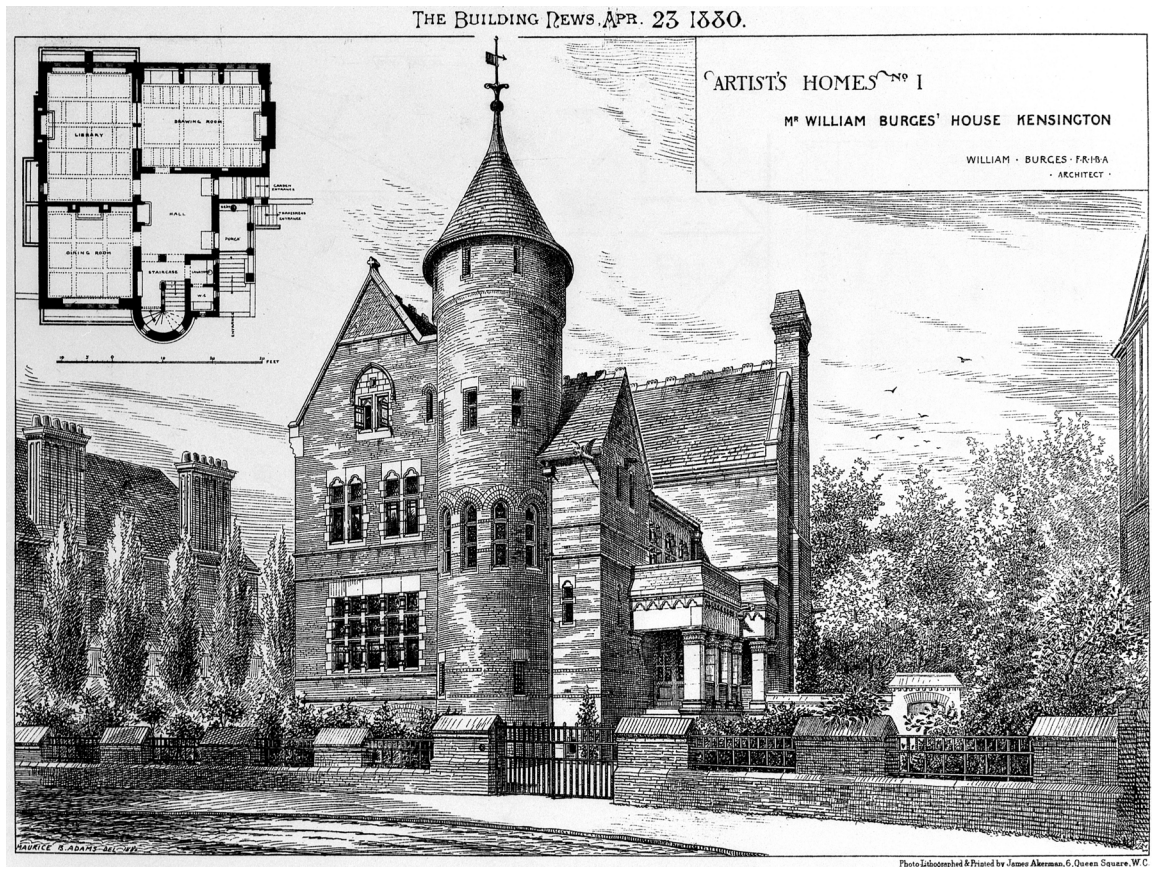


Fig. 67: Maurice B. Adams, Artists' Homes: a Portfolio of Drawings including the Houses and Studios of several Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects (London: Batsford, 1883), plate 1: "Mr William Burges' House Kensington." RIBA Library Photographs Collection.



Fig. 68: R.P. Pullan, The House of William Burges, A.R.A. (1885), plate 5: Tower House, view of the garden front. RIBA Library Photographs Collection.



Fig. 69: R.P. Pullan, The House of William Burges, A.R.A. (1885), plate 15: Tower House, view of the drawing room. RIBA Library Photographs Collection.



Fig. 70: R.P. Pullan, The House of William Burges, A.R.A. (1885), plate 9: Tower House, view of the dining room. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 71: R.P. Pullan, The House of William Burges, A.R.A. (1885), plate 7: Tower House, view of the entrance hall. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 72: R.P. Pullan, The House of William Burges, A.R.A. (1885), plate 12: Tower House, view of the library. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 73: R.P. Pullan, The House of William Burges, A.R.A. (1885), plate 26: Tower House, view of William Burges's bedroom. RIBA Library Photographs Collection.



Fig. 74: R. P. Pullan, The Designs of William Burges, A.R.A. (1885), plate 22: the Mermaid bowl. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 75: Portrait of William Burges (ca. 1868), photographer unknown. Photograph ©
National Portrait Gallery, London.