In the mid-1880s *The Builder*, an influential British architectural journal, published an article characterizing Renaissance architecture as a corrupt bastardization of the classical architecture of Greece and Rome. By the turn of the century, however, the same journal praised the Renaissance architect Filippo Brunelleschi as the ‘Christopher Columbus of modern architecture.’ *Victorian Perceptions of Renaissance Architecture* examines these conflicting characterizations and reveals how the writing of architectural history was intimately tied to the rise of the professional architect and the formalization of architectural education in late nineteenth-century Britain. Drawing on a broad range of evidence, including literary texts, professional journals, university curricula, and census records, *Victorian Perceptions* reframes works by seminal authors such as John Ruskin, Walter Pater, John Addington Symonds, and Geoffrey Scott alongside those by architect-authors such as William J. Anderson and Reginald Blomfield within contemporary architectural debates. Relevant for architectural historians, as well as literary scholars and those in Victorian studies, *Victorian Perceptions* reassesses the history of Renaissance architecture within the formation of a modern, British architectural profession.

*Katherine Wheeler is Assistant Professor of Practice, University of Miami, USA.*
The aim of this series is to support and promote the study of the history and practice of art historical writing focusing on its institutional and conceptual foundations, from the past to the present day in all areas and all periods. Besides addressing the major innovators of the past it also encourages re-thinking ways in which the subject may be written in the future. It ignores the disciplinary boundaries imposed by the Anglophone expression ‘art history’ and allows and encourages the full range of enquiry that encompasses the visual arts in its broadest sense as well as topics falling within archaeology, anthropology, ethnography and other specialist disciplines and approaches. It welcomes contributions from young and established scholars and is aimed at building an expanded audience for what has hitherto been a much specialised topic of investigation. It complements the work of the *Journal of Art Historiography*.
Victorian Perceptions of Renaissance Architecture

Katherine Wheeler
*University of Miami, USA*
This book is dedicated to my Dad, W. Bruce Wheeler.
## Contents

*List of Illustrations*  ix  
*Acknowledgments*  xi  

**Introduction**  1  

1   The Sins of the Renaissance:  
    John Ruskin and the Rise of the Professional Architect  19  

2   Embracing Decadence:  
    Walter Pater’s and John Addington Symonds’s Renaissance  49  

3   “It is Time to be Rational”:  
    William J. Anderson’s *The Architecture of the Renaissance in Italy*  69  

4   The Renaissance as an English Style:  
    J. Alfred Gotch, Reginald Blomfield, and the English Renaissance  101  

5   Experiencing the Renaissance:  
    Geoffrey Scott’s *The Architecture of Humanism*  125  

**Conclusion**  155  

*Bibliography*  161  
*Index*  185
List of Illustrations

1 The Sins of the Renaissance: John Ruskin and the Rise of the Professional Architect

1.1 “A Modern Art Professor.” Caricature of John Ruskin drawn by Sir Reginald Blomfield while he was a student at Oxford University, c. 1877

1.2 Oxford Natural History Museum, Oxford University, 1859, Deane & Woodward. RIBA16796

1.3 Royal Architectural Museum, Tufton Street, London, 1870s. Image by Bedford Lemere. RIBA33811

2 Embracing Decadence: Walter Pater’s and John Addington Symonds’s Renaissance

2.1 Drawing of semi-detached villa in Bedford Park, London, c. 1877, Richard Norman Shaw. RIBA10255

3 “It is Time to be Rational”: William J. Anderson’s The Architecture of the Renaissance in Italy

3.1 Portrait of William James Anderson, c. 1890. RIBA46479

3.2 Napier House, 638–46 Govan Road, Glasgow, Scotland, William James Anderson

3.3 “Houses in Sienna by Baldassare Peruzzi,” Plate XVI in Architectural Studies in Italy (1890), William J. Anderson

3.4 “Palazzo Albergati by Baldassare Peruzzi,” Plate XXX in Architectural Studies in Italy (1890), William J. Anderson

3.5 “Cortile of the Palazzo Fava,” Plate XXXII in Architectural Studies in Italy (1890), William J. Anderson

3.6 “Plan of Cortile of Palazzo Massimi, Rome,” Plate VI in Architectural Studies in Italy (1890), William J. Anderson

4 The Renaissance as an English Style: J. Alfred Gotch, Reginald Blomfield, and the English Renaissance

4.1 Henry VII’s tomb in Westminster Abbey. Plate II in J.A. Gotch, Early Renaissance Architecture in England (1901)

4.3 John Belcher’s entry for the South Kensington Museum competition, exterior perspective, 1891. RIBA4066

4.4 John Belcher’s entry for the South Kensington Museum competition, interior perspective, 1891. RIBA13420

4.5 Institute for Chartered Accountants, Moorgate Place, London, 1893, John Belcher and Arthur Beresford Pite. RIBA10915

5 Experiencing the Renaissance: Geoffrey Scott’s *The Architecture of Humanism*

5.1 “Portrait of G.S.” Caricature of Geoffrey Scott by Cecil Pinsent, 1912. RIBA21109

5.2 Mappin House, Oxford Street, London, 1906–8, John Belcher and John James Joass. Courtauld Images 155888

5.3 British Medical Association, the Strand, London, 1907–08, Charles Holden and Percy Adams. RIBA5798

5.4 British School at Rome, Rome, Italy, Sir Edwin Lutyens
Acknowledgments

While not a life’s work, this book has somehow consumed a large swath of my life, and there are many people and institutions without whom it would have been a lot more arduous if not downright impossible. First among these are countless number of archivists, librarians, and staff who found, delivered, and suggested sources, including those at the British Architectural Library, the RIBA Drawing and Photo archives, the Paul Mellon Centre Library, the AA Library, the Royal Academy of Arts, King’s College, London, University College London, the Victoria and Albert Museum Special Collections, the British Library, the Huntington Library, the Getty Library, the British School at Rome, the Wolfsonian, the University of Liverpool Archive, the Glasgow School of Art Archive, the University of Miami, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Special thanks goes to Eleanor Gawne, Charles Hind, Edward Bottoms, Emma Floyd, Jonathan Makepeace, Adrian Allan, Chris Donnelly, and Gilda Santana. In addition to archivists and librarians, the patience and humor of the IT staff at the University of Miami in providing computer support has been invaluable; much appreciation to Ruddy Cornielle, Manuel Paulino, and Manny Paulino, Jr.

Travel to all the many archives was only possible with the generosity of institutions such as the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, the Huntington, the University of Miami, the Institute for Historical Research at the University of London, the Renaissance Society, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In addition, I would like to thank the Society of Architectural Historians Great Britain for their generous support of the costs of the images and copyright permissions.

My work on this book began some years ago, and I owe a great deal of gratitude to Mark Jarzombek, David Friedman, Arindam Dutta, and Gail Fenske for their insightful comments in the early stages. While at the University of Miami, Dean Elizabeth Plater Zyberk has been very supportive throughout.

Many friends and family, both new and old, always managed to appear at the right time. There is no way to truly show the gratitude for all those
who helped, made me laugh, and supported me throughout. Some of these folks include Scott Hoffert and Brian Potter, for their love, support, laughs, and fold-out sofa; my adopted English family, the Bevitts, who truly made me feel at home; the entire staff of the Paul Mellon Centre, who along with coffee, tea, and biscuits brought joy and intellectual discovery; Olivia Horsfal Turner for reading with a keen eye and a warm heart; others who read and commented with deftness and kindness on various bits of it along the way, including Kristen Block, Lydia Soo, Vladimir Kulic, Gray Read, and David Rifkind; the wonderful conversations with and work of Alan Powers and Frank Salmon gave me a high standard to work to; Erin Hurley, who managed to decipher my handwritten notes; John Stuart and Joel Hoffman, for their friendship and support throughout; Mark Jeynes, Jonathan West, and Elite Kedan, who reminded me that there is life outside the book; all the Michaels, including Mikael Kaul, Mike Poupore, and Ganesha Michael Shapiro; Sara Griscom and Ken Wells, who reminded me to stay aligned mentally and physically; Linda Wheeler, who inspired me on the next stage of the journey; and Jose Grave de Peralta and Hollis Church, who helped me to live my dream of this book, as I watched them live their dreams.

Much gratitude also to Nancy Later and Andrea Gollin, who took valiant stabs at straightening out my writing in different phases of the process; a tricky task if there ever is one. Thanks also to Carla Yanni, whose advice was always on-target. Lastly, the entire project would not have come to publication without the patience and diligence of Margaret Michniewicz and all the editors and proofreaders at Ashgate.

But most of all thank you to my Mom, who was always there for me in every way possible, and my Dad, whose love, many readings, constructive comments, and support bolstered me throughout.

Thank you all. Any errors and omissions are my own, and not the fault of any of the above.
Introduction

The truth is, that in many senses we are still in mid-Renaissance. The evolution has not been completed.¹

In 1885 one of the most influential architectural journals in Great Britain, *The Builder*, published an article characterizing Renaissance architecture as a corrupt and decadent bastardization of the classical architecture of Greece and Rome. The author, referring to the renewed interest in Renaissance architecture as a source for revival, implored, “If we are going to imitate, let us imitate the best forms, not the corrupt ones.”² By the early decade of the next century, however, the same journal praised the Renaissance architect Filippo Brunelleschi as the “Christopher Columbus of modern architecture.”³ While these are two isolated sentences in separate articles, they indicate the radical shift in the perception of Renaissance architecture that occurred in Great Britain between 1850 and 1914. How did the practice and pedagogy of architecture impact the writing about the history of Renaissance architecture in these years? Was architectural style the real issue? What was at stake in the acceptance of the Renaissance as a model?

The redemption of Renaissance architecture and its subsequent embrace as an appropriate model for a national British architecture involved a complex web of often opposing influences centered not in Quattrocento Italy but in contemporary British architectural culture. The debates that shaped this radical transformation in perception of Renaissance architecture were closely linked to the rise of architectural professionalism and the parallel formalization of architectural education. That these three facets of architecture—professionalism, education, and history—were so intimately linked should come as no surprise, but it is important to note how closely the shifts in attitude in one area affected the others.

Debates raged in Victorian and Edwardian architectural circles over the acceptance of Renaissance architecture, fueled in part by the radical advances in building technologies and materials generated earlier in
the century by the Industrial Revolution. Ultimately, the acceptance of Renaissance architecture laid the foundation for its continued importance in modern architecture.

Scholars consider the years 1860 to 1910 the “high tide” of interest in the Italian Renaissance. A sharp rise in these decades in the publication of histories and historical novels about the Renaissance sparked the imagination of the public and fed a growing curiosity in the art and artists of the period. But interest in the Renaissance did not permeate the architectural profession until the decline of the Gothic revival in the last decades of the century, which resulted in a rapid increase in publications on Renaissance architecture. In 1883 The Builder noted:

> It is one of the unmistakable signs of the turn which public taste in this country has taken, that books in illustration of the Renaissance period multiply so fast at present. The rapidity of the change is bewildering when we reflect how short a time since it is that Mediæval art was everything, and that men so popular and successful among modern architects as Pugin were pouring forth all the contempt that words could express against the period which produced St. Peter’s and the Florentine palaces.

The reevaluation of Renaissance architecture in these publications was a critical result of its acceptance within architectural practice and education. *Victorian Perceptions* traces changes in the perception and use of the history of Renaissance architecture in these publications along with changes in the architectural profession. This examination builds on the works of scholars such as Hilary Fraser and J.B. Bullen, who have charted this course for literature and art, as well as W.K. Ferguson and J.R. Hale, who have analyzed the historiography of the Renaissance in Italy and England, respectively. These authors have explored the rich nuances in the Victorian affinity for the Renaissance, and this work complements these studies by specifically addressing Victorian literature on Renaissance architecture in light of changes within the profession.

The appeal of Renaissance architecture to late Victorian architects was not merely as an alternative to other historical styles. At issue was the selection of a historical model for how the architectural profession would develop: what a modern British architecture would be, how to define the responsibilities of the professional architect, and what role history would play in the design process. The eventual choice of the Renaissance as a model for the theory and practice of architecture and for the education of architects continues to influence the profession today.

Nineteenth-century architectural journals resounded with calls for the creation of a British architecture appropriate for the times. Great Britain was then a clear leader in industrial development as well as an intimidating imperial force, and many architects thought its architecture should reflect the
country’s unique status. During the early decades of the twentieth century, this concern shifted focus to the search for a national alternative to continental Modernism, thereby slowing the acceptance of the movement in Britain. Renaissance architecture was a logical option. It provided an alternative to the moralistic and religious associations of the Gothic Revival and the eclecticism of the Queen Anne, which had gone out of fashion due to political and professional opposition. The Renaissance style also provided a unified architectural conception, while allowing for a great deal of design freedom within the constraints of classical rules. Architects such as Sir Reginald Blomfield (1856–1943) identified in the works of Sir Christopher Wren (1632–1723) and Inigo Jones (1573–1652) a national interpretation of the Renaissance and pointed to these as signs of the suitability of the style to British needs.

Likewise, architects promoted the Renaissance as a model for British urbanism. They viewed Renaissance classicism as providing cities with a necessary visual uniformity through a “consistent system of thought” that the Gothic and Queen Anne revivals lacked. Early programs in urban planning, such as the one headed by Charles H. Reilly (1874–1948) at the University of Liverpool, held that the study of Renaissance architecture and urbanism provided a coherent and harmonious image suitable for Britain. The Renaissance became the paradigm for all scales of design, from the smallest ornamental detail to the greatest industrial metropolis.

During these years, the definition and position of the British architect were in transition. The rapid increase in construction during the nineteenth century created new pressures on architects and new strains on the relationship between architects and builders, resulting in the public’s confusion as to what an architect actually did. The new professional journals reverberated with complaints about how the public neither understood the problems facing the architecture profession, nor conferred on architects their rightful status as professionals. In 1849, the architect John Burley Waring (1823–1875) asserted: “In no occupation are there more quacks than in architecture.” The public perception of the profession as one riddled with fraud and incompetence galvanized architects to establish professional qualifications, formal education, and a means of certification.

Many Victorian architects aspired to social status equal to that of physicians and lawyers, which was significantly higher than that of builders and artisans. In a period in which anyone could call himself an architect, the question of how to indicate professional status was a problem. Organizations such as the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), established in 1834 and awarded Royal Charter in 1837, and numerous local architectural societies attempted to promote a newly professional ideal.

For some architects, including many of those affiliated with the Arts and Crafts movement, the increasing drive for a greater professional status threatened architecture’s position as an applied or fine art. The image of
the professional Victorian architect was one of a man in complete control of all aspects of the design, which eclipsed the Arts and Crafts ideals of collaboration and the creativity of the craftsman. Even Philip Webb (1831–1915), who was often associated with the Arts and Crafts movement for his work on Red House for William Morris (1834–1896), drew every last detail of a building when given the opportunity, leaving little to the imagination of the artisans. Webb complained that the lack of skill among artisans was in part to blame for the “burden” of the architect needing to both design everything and coordinate all the building trades.

As was typical in Victorian intellectual debates, the factions developed historical models to buttress their arguments and lend legitimacy to their present-day positions. Gothic Revival architects, for example, created and reinforced the image of the architect as mythic medieval master builder, as put forth by John Ruskin. The medieval architect was romanticized as an artist-craftsman who delegated many of the intimate and ornamental details of the building’s design to his fellow artisans. In contrast, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, the ideal of the professional architect became synonymous with that of the equally mythic persona of the Renaissance architect. The notion of a singular creative genius as a scholar and master of the arts who enjoyed a high level of professional status in the community captivated the imagination of many Victorian architects.

The primary differences between these two conceptions were the issue of control of the overall design and the architect’s relationship to the construction process. The ideal of a unified architectural aesthetic implied a single architect, not a band of craftsmen fulfilling their own artistic desires. Neither in training nor in practice did the architect participate in the manual labor of construction. The Renaissance model presented the architect as an individual focused on the intellectual and humanist aspects of design, whereas the medieval model focused on the manual aspects. Because Victorian society perceived manual labor as inferior to intellectual labor, how the architect performed his work determined his status.

The distinctions in professional ideals between the Arts and Crafts movement and those of an architectural profession “closed” through a form of certification—either by diploma or examination—not only grew out of different historical models but also implied different forms of education. The primary means of architectural training in the first half of the nineteenth century was through “pupillage,” the apprenticeship to a practicing architect. As the position of the architect changed, many young men began to consider the preparation provided by pupillage to be inadequate, and some had the incentive to initiate evening lectures and discussions as a supplement to their education. Robert Kerr and a group of young men founded the Architectural Association in 1847 with just that intent and offered evening lectures on topics that were relevant to practice.
Travel on the Grand Tour provided additional training as well as important social connections. Attendance at one of the foreign art academies was a possibility as well, but even though the professional journals often reviewed the options for architectural education on the continent, few British students took advantage of them. The historian Richard Chafee stated that between 1800 and 1870 just seven British students attended the Ecole des Beaux Arts. An additional four worked in an Ecole-affiliated atelier, an independent studio headed by a master who would individually critique the students’ work. Students interested in a more technical approach could also attend the Ecole Speciale d’Architecture in Paris, a three-year program of ateliers, drawing courses, and lectures. In Germany, young architects trained through workshops, Technische Hochschulen, or in the art academies: scholars have yet to address the influence of the German programs on the formation of British architectural education. Architectural education in the United States was quick to develop after the Civil War, with the first university program established at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1868.

At home in Britain, the young man could study at the Royal Academy of Arts, although it offered few lectures specifically for young architects. He could also study engineering in the military academies. But none of these systems—apprenticeship, art academies, or engineering—in and of themselves fully addressed the needs and desires of the nineteenth-century architect seeking both an artistic and a technical education. Architects striving for status comparable to that of doctors and lawyers favored a university education and developed programs at University College London, King’s College London, and the University of Liverpool, among others. University programs did not exist, however, until almost the end of the century, with the first full-time day school of architecture established at the University of Liverpool in 1895.

As noted, the establishment of the university programs of architectural education in Britain was inextricably linked to the increasing interest in the image of the Renaissance architect, the role of history in design, and the canonization of the history of Renaissance architecture. The depiction of the Renaissance architect as grounded in historical scholarship enhanced and reinforced the ideal of the university-trained Victorian architect. In both periods, history was the force by which designers could create something new. With equal parts originality and knowledge of the past, the Victorian architect, like his Renaissance counterpart, based his designs on the past but was not bound by classicism’s strictures.

The gradual establishment of the canon of Renaissance architectural history was an outgrowth of the core importance of history to both the rise of architectural professionalism and the advent of formalized education. The authors who wrote the first histories of Renaissance architecture actively promoted architecture’s professionalism and education; they infused
their writings with their biases, and took positions on the contemporary architectural situation. William J. Anderson (1863–1900), practicing architect and director of the architecture program at the Glasgow School of Art, wrote *The Architecture of the Renaissance in Italy* (1896) as a response to his students’ requests for a book to supplement his lectures. Anderson refuted the criticisms of earlier writers such as John Ruskin and James Fergusson, who condemned the Renaissance as sinful and imitative. Anderson’s history quickly became a textbook for the students in the new university programs on architecture, reinforcing the central position of history in architectural education.

The Renaissance was a style and an ideology that could be easily adapted to the new educational system, which was turning away from the single master approach of apprenticeship and toward the formalized education of larger groups of young men (the students were almost exclusively men) in studios and lecture courses. Study of the Renaissance provided a set of rules in the classical Orders and yet implied a degree of originality that the more archaeologically correct approaches did not. Just as the Renaissance architect had taken liberties with classical antiquity to better suit his contemporary needs, the Victorian architect could do the same with the Renaissance. The Renaissance model then was one not only of style but of approach—an interest in, but not a rigid reliance upon, the past. Most importantly, it placed the architect in complete control of the design process while simultaneously removing him from the manual labor of the building site.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, however, architects reversed their position and began to blame the dependence on history and in particular the use of historic ornament for the lack of a style appropriate for the time. In his 1907 report to the Board of Architectural Education, Sir Reginald Blomfield urged a closer alignment between the board’s syllabus and the Royal Institute of British Architects’ examinations. Specifically, he protested the emphasis in the examinations on ornament and architectural style in lieu of technical knowledge. With some wrangling by the board, the RIBA made revisions to the examinations, causing the schools to adjust their curricula accordingly and put less emphasis on history and ornament. Although courses on history did not disappear entirely from schools’ curricula, exercises focused less on the design of buildings within given historical styles.

When the forms of design shifted away from ornamental detail and the revival of historical styles in favor of general principles, theory replaced history as a subject of study. Theory, through works such as Geoffrey Scott’s *The Architecture of Humanism* (1914), became the accepted means by which to teach architecture’s past within the design studio. Theory could be less stylistically driven, as it was grounded in larger compositional principles such as symmetry and proportion, a language that Renaissance architecture spoke fluently. This shift of focus from details to principles marked a change in history’s status from being integrated into design to an autonomous discipline.
Ultimately, the redemption of Renaissance architecture in late nineteenth-century Britain aligned with and reinforced the new definition of architecture as a profession and, by association, of the architect as a professional. The processes of commissioning, designing, tendering, and constructing buildings had changed radically over the course of the nineteenth century as a result of transformations wrought by the Industrial Revolution. These changes impacted the architect’s social status, his place in the building hierarchy, and his education. The Victorians actively looked to history as a way to frame the present, and they bolstered their decisions with historical models. By selecting both Renaissance architecture as the model for a modern architecture and the Renaissance architect as the model for the Victorian architect, architects shaped the history of Renaissance architecture and, by extension, the trends in and practice of modern architecture. This pivotal and fertile period is well worth study to better understand the forces at play in the Victorian era and to recognize how those forces have impacted our own time.

Victorian Perceptions examines six pivotal texts representing different phases in the perception of the Renaissance: John Ruskin’s *The Stones of Venice* (1851), with its rejection of Renaissance architecture on moral as well as stylistic grounds; Walter Pater’s *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) and John Addington Symonds’s *Renaissance in Italy* (vol. 1, 1875), both indicators of the gradual acceptance of the period; William J. Anderson’s *The Architecture of the Renaissance in Italy* (1896), the first narrative history of the period’s architecture written in English as a textbook for young architects; Reginald Blomfield’s *A History of Renaissance Architecture in England* (1897), for its acceptance of the Renaissance through its English (i.e., national) interpretation; and finally, Geoffrey Scott’s *The Architecture of Humanism* (1914), exemplifying the transition from history to theory in positioning the Renaissance. The analysis of the books within the frameworks of increasing architectural professionalism, the formalization of architectural education, and the writing of architectural history brings the changing nature of the interpretation of Renaissance architecture in Victorian and Edwardian Britain more clearly into focus and reveals the intimate relationships among these different aspects of the profession.

Ruskin’s writings became the anti-Renaissance attack against which later authors had to contend, with each writer making a unique contribution to the incremental shifts in perception that resulted in the Renaissance’s acceptance. Although Ruskin, Pater, and Symonds were not architects, their works were well known within architectural circles. The turning point of the acceptance of the Renaissance within the profession was exemplified by the writings of the architect-authors Anderson and Blomfield. Scott’s book solidified this trajectory and guaranteed that the Renaissance was studied at a time when history was moving out of the design process. Scott recast the importance of the Renaissance beyond architecture history and within architectural theory.
Taken together, these texts chart the trajectory of English views of Renaissance architecture from damnation to redemption.

The chapters that follow explore several themes. First, there were multiple definitions of “Renaissance architecture,” as the period either included or excluded the architecture of the Middle Ages or the Baroque. Interestingly, each author identified the origin and/or endpoint of the Renaissance differently in order to reframe the period, including and excluding specific buildings, architects, and characteristics as per their argument. Ruskin defined the Renaissance in opposition to the Middle Ages, cleaving the two periods into distinct and separate societies as well as styles. In contrast, Pater located the beginning of the Renaissance in the twelfth or thirteenth century in France, thus deepening its connection to the medieval. Pater’s definition of the Renaissance was less about dates, or even the revival of interest in classicism, than it was a celebration of an attitude about life and art.

The endpoint of the Renaissance was equally fluid. Some authors proposed that the Renaissance was alive and well through the 1830s, with major architects like C.R. Cockerell as “proof” of its continued existence. In this historical formulation, the Renaissance was a contemporary, vibrant, and ongoing modern style. Early courses, the RIBA membership examinations, and histories of architecture reinforced this sense of continuity in that they often called the period after the Middle Ages “modern.” The Renaissance was not just the beginning point of a new era (as promoted by Symonds) but synonymous with the present day.

Second, closely related to the questions of the origin and endpoint of the Renaissance is that of its historical authority. Specifically, which period—the Middle Ages or the Renaissance—would provide a more appropriate and fruitful point of reference for contemporary architecture? Whereas Gothic Revivalists argued that English medieval architecture was a better and more nationally appropriate model than the Renaissance, which they branded a “foreign” style, architects such as Reginald Blomfield in the 1890s held that the Renaissance as interpreted in England by Inigo Jones and Sir Christopher Wren could satisfy modern needs for commercial and domestic architecture at an urban scale.

A third theme concerns the language used to characterize Renaissance architecture. Ruskin, who was morally opposed to the Renaissance as a model for contemporary architecture, often referred to the period and its architecture in distinctly negative, and often sexual, terms. Good architecture was beautiful because it was “chaste” and “restrained.” In comparison, he described the early Renaissance ornament in which “excitement and interest are sought for by means of violent and continual curvatures wholly unrestrained, and rolling hither and thither in confused wantonness.” Similarly, the architectural historian James Fergusson characterized Renaissance architecture as a “contagion” and a “sham,” claiming it as the immoral seed of the downfall of
modern architecture. The associational value of descriptive language must remain at the heart of this investigation.

Until the late nineteenth century, the term Renaissance was still elastic, and writers were often unclear in their architectural descriptions. Not sure what stylistic term to assign, the Renaissance became an umbrella under which were gathered a variety of architectural characteristics. For example, in response to the announcement that the architects Leeming & Leeming had won the 1884 competition for the Admiralty and War Offices in London, *The Times* was at a loss for what to call the style of the winning entry:

> For the style it is difficult to find the right adjective. It is not Gothic, nor French, nor can it be described as Palladian ... Nor is it a mixture of styles ... In describing a modern building it is generally the most elastic term that fits best, and the most elastic term in architecture is, by common consent, the term Renaissance.

This elasticity extended geographically. Even though architects recognized the various national interpretations of the style, they did not always clearly distinguish one from the other in their writings. Buildings that were revivals of the Flemish, English, Italian, or French Renaissance, or any combination thereof, were simply called "Renaissance."

A fourth theme that emerges within the chapters concerns ethnography. Victorian writers used ethnography to argue the authority of Renaissance architecture as an appropriate model for study. In 1855 James Fergusson expressed the beliefs of many of his colleagues when he argued: "as far as I can judge, I believe that architecture is in all instances as correct a test of race as language." The close connection between architecture and race created a conundrum for architects who viewed Renaissance architecture as an appropriate model for Britain, as writers such as Fergusson clearly differentiated the Italian race from the Anglo-Saxon. Others wove intricate lines of reasoning to justify the Renaissance’s racial suitability for Britain. William J. Anderson, for example, recognized the architecture of Italy as the product of a single European race, the Romano-Germanic people, thus combining England and Italy within one culture, if not nation. Other writers, such as Blomfield, looked instead to the national interpretation of the style to validate the acceptance of the Renaissance. Both racial and national affiliations, therefore, became reasons for either the rejection or acceptance of architectural styles.

The themes of periodization, historical authority, language, and ethnography pervade each work under consideration in this book. They function as barometers, indicating the changes in perception of the Renaissance architect and Renaissance architecture in late nineteenth-century Britain, and they reveal the complexity of the issues at stake. This interweaving of themes and texts present how the changing perceptions of the Renaissance
occurred and why they were so closely tied to the practice and pedagogy of architecture.

From 1851, when Great Britain celebrated her industrial and imperial prowess at the Great Exhibition, to the beginnings of the Great War in 1914, Britain underwent profound and intense transformations in technology, infrastructure, city life, science, and communication, as well as architecture. Although it is not the purpose of this book to provide a full history of these decades, it is important to understand the context within which the changes in perception of the Renaissance occurred. Queen Victoria ascended to the throne in 1837, an 18-year-old girl; by mid-century the country she ruled had risen to industrial dominance, its urban centers experiencing rapid increases in population. England’s forays into India (Queen Victoria received the title of Empress of India in 1876) and later into Africa, coupled with its industrial advances, gave rise to intense feelings of nationalism across all social classes.

London became not just the nation’s capital but the world’s capital, and it sought an appropriate urban architecture to properly represent its new stature. By the turn of the twentieth century, London was the largest city in the world with more than six million inhabitants creating new demands and opportunities in construction as well as services. Increased population in London, and other urban centers, led to overcrowding, slums, and poor sanitary conditions.

Both fiction and non-fiction writers alerted the middle class to the horrors of urban squalor, as evidenced in the serialized novels by Charles Dickens (1812–1870); non-fiction writings included the Rev. Andrew Mearns’s *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883) and Charles Bath’s *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1886); and Gustave Doré’s *London: A Pilgrimage* (1872), illustrated with moody engravings of poverty-stricken areas of the city. But to reform the city in such a way to fully express national and imperial power required imagining and constructing a majestic city on a grand scale. Writers who promoted the image of an imperial London included such prominent voices as Birmingham manufacturer and Member of Parliament Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914); popular journalist, novelist and poet Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936); Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881); Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke (1843–1911); and Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881). Architects sought to resolve these dilemmas through the selection of a representative style that would be national, urban, and appropriate for domestic as well as civic architecture.

The increased pace and extent of change resulting from the Industrial Revolution during this period was dramatic. Railways altered not only landscape and development patterns, but also perceptions of space and time. The strategic insertion of the underground railway in London beginning in 1863 changed how one traveled through and experienced the city. Communication sped up with the post and the telegraph, and electricity succeeded gas for
domestic as well as commercial use. These advances accompanied equally important ones in medicine and science. The inventions and discoveries made in the second half of the nineteenth century touched virtually every aspect of Victorian life.

Despite, or maybe because of, these changes, Britain maintained a fascination with history, its own but also that of Italy, rekindled in part by the unification of Italy in 1870. The English welcomed Italian military hero Giuseppe Garibaldi during his April 1864 visit to London with large, cheering crowds. The visit was organized primarily as a gathering of the working classes without the usual upper-class reception, but the image of Garibaldi as a romantic figure had swayed Britons of all classes. Italy’s past, specifically that of the Imperial and Renaissance periods, fascinated the Victorians. Englishmen traveled to Italy in record numbers in the late nineteenth century following the completion of the rail lines across the Alps in 1868 and the advent of travel companies such as Thomas Cook to manage all the details. The British went to Italy for culture, commerce, business, health, religion, weather, fashion, escape from Victorian mores, and simply to get away. From 1870 to 1914 an estimated 2,000 English wintered in Rome each year, and this number did not include the more permanent expatriate communities in Italy’s major cities.

Services popped up throughout Italy to address uniquely Anglo requests. In his guide Walks in Rome (1882, eighth edition), the travel writer Augustus Hare mentioned the English house agent, the English dairy, the time the English mail left, and the hours of the services of the English church just outside the Porta del Popolo. There were also English tearooms, reading rooms, booksellers, and grocers, as well as English doctors and chemists. Rome alone had several English-language newspapers, most notably the Roman Times and the Roman Herald. For the English who died in Rome, there was a Protestant cemetery to the south of the city, just outside the city walls, with the most notable remains being those of the poets John Keats (d. in Rome 1821) and Percy Bysshe Shelley (d. in Rome 1822), and the painter Joseph Severn (d. in Rome 1879), the tombs of which were regular points of pilgrimage for the English traveler. Despite their embrace of Italian culture, the expatriate Richard Bagot scolded the British for their aloofness, observing that “The English colony in every Italian city is a little—a very little—England.”

The Italy the English were there to see was an Italy of the past, of the Imperial or Renaissance eras, and they found the country’s modernization disconcerting. As early as 1843 Charles Dickens recorded his surprise that, on his first impression, Rome was amazingly similar to London.

When we were fairly going off again, we began, in a perfect fever, to strain our eyes for Rome; and when, after another mile or two, the Eternal City
American author William Dean Howells echoed Dickens’s thoughts in his 1908 travel guide *Roman Holidays and Others*. Howells first visited Rome in 1864 and noted that, while he himself considered the physical transformations of the city over the subsequent 40 years as positive steps toward the city’s modernization, many English travelers saw the alterations as destroying the picturesque qualities of the city:

I do not see why a Londoner, who himself lives in a well-kept town, should join with any of my fellow barbarians in hypocritically deploring the modern spirit which has so happily invaded the Eternal City. The Londoner should rather entreat us to not be humbugs and should invite us to join him in rejoicing that the death-rate of Rome, once the highest in the civilized world, is now almost the lowest. But the language of Shakespeare and Milton is too often internationally employed in deploring the modernity which has housed us aliens there in such perfect comfort and safety.

British travelers wanted to experience historical Rome, of the Empire and of the Renaissance; a Rome to which they felt themselves to be the rightful inheritors. According to the historian John Pemble, the British had a “fundamental conviction … that they, rather than the French, were the true heirs to the ancient Romans.” Lady Eastlake, for example, claimed that she “felt that my nation was more truly the descendant of that matchless race than any other in the world.” This sense of connection to the ancient Roman past reinforced the Victorian interest in the Renaissance’s own recovery and celebration of classical antiquity.

Even when the Victorians chose to stay home, they surrounded themselves with the fine and decorative arts of the Renaissance and steeped themselves in its literature and history. They used their power as consumers to buy reproductions of Renaissance furniture for their homes, or to acquire plaster casts of Renaissance sculptures, such as Michelangelo’s *David*, by companies like Brucciani. To see the “real thing,” they visited the new collections of Renaissance sculpture and painting in the South Kensington Museum. They might also read one of the many books on Renaissance art published prior to mid-century. Classical literature provided the foundation for English public education, equipping most educated men a literary familiarity with Italy’s past. As Hare noted in the introduction of his guide:

An arrival in Rome is very different to that in any other town of Europe. It is coming to a place new and yet most familiar, strange and yet so well known.
When travelers ... arrive at Rome and go to the Coliseum [sic], it is to visit an object whose appearance has been familiar to them from childhood.48

The familiarity was also through fiction as Victorians read works such as George Eliot’s Romola (1863) and faux histories including J. Henry Shorthouses’s John Inglesant: A Romance (1881). Historical novels and romances, then as now, have the advantage of placing the reader in the location and period through details, many of them architectural. These books brought the past to life, and that past was made more tangible because people could visit the places they had read about. Fiction functioned as a form of travel log, and travel authors often excerpted these writings in their guides.49 It connected past and present, fiction and history, fluidly in the readers’ minds.50 Italy, both ancient and Renaissance, was part of the Victorian cultural imagination, conjuring up feelings of reverence and nostalgia.

Victorian Perceptions is not a focused history of either Victorian architecture or nineteenth-century architectural education, as those topics have been ably explored elsewhere.51 Instead, this book aims to reveal how professionalism and the rise of architectural education influenced the acceptance of Renaissance architecture and shaped it into more than just a stylistic model. Looking at the profession through the inherent “feedback loops” of influence among architectural practice, education, and the writing of history reveals the prejudices and agendas that influenced the acceptance of Renaissance architecture.

This book traces the changes in perception of the Renaissance in nineteenth-century architectural culture. In doing so, it builds on publications in the fields of literature, architectural history, Victorian studies, and the historiography of the Renaissance. The renewed interest of historians in the nineteenth-century development of the Renaissance as a concept has progressed in the fields of literature and history.52 Historians Hilary Fraser, J.B. Bullen, and Jack Lynch have shown clearly how the changing perceptions of the Renaissance have informed our understanding of the Victorian period. This book reinforces the scholarship of these authors by showing how tensions inherent in the Victorian perception of the Renaissance are also evident in both the writing of the history of Renaissance architecture and in the development of the architectural profession.

Britain’s interpretation of its architectural origins received a good deal of attention in the 1980s but is ready for a fresh interpretation. David Watkin’s The Rise of Architectural History (1980), although providing an excellent beginning point for tracing ideas of “Englishness” in architectural history, took a decidedly post-modern, and anti-modern movement, stance.53 Watkin’s work did not follow the shifts in the perception of the Renaissance specifically, choosing instead to address British architectural history over a much broader swath of time. In terms of architectural practice and education, several key
works (published and unpublished) proved to be critical resources. First among these was Alan Powers’s seminal dissertation on British architectural education. It provided much of the source material for Mark Crinson and Jules Lubbock’s subsequent Architecture: Art or Profession? Three Hundred Years of Architectural Education in Britain (1994).\(^4\) When taken together, M.H. Port’s Imperial London: Civil Government Building in London, 1850–1915 (1995), Andrew Saint’s Architect and Engineer: A Study in Sibling Rivalry (2007), and Brian Hanson’s Architects and the “Building World” from Chambers to Ruskin: Constructing Authority (2003) covered the issues and debates surrounding architectural practice in the nineteenth century.\(^5\) The combination of these works with the texts under investigation and archival sources revealed the gradual and important process of the acceptance of Renaissance architecture.

These works provide the backdrop for the six key texts, supplemented by additional archival research. The amount of contemporary source material for the nineteenth century is staggeringly rich and delightful. The twice-daily delivery of mail and the flourishing of daily newspapers and weekly periodicals encouraged and preserved extended debates about architecture. From this individual and communal intelligence emerges a synthetic, nuanced view of the gradual acceptance of the Renaissance model for British architecture and practice.

The first two chapters address writings by non-architects and show how these influences outside the architectural profession provided material for architects to either reject or embrace. The process of professionalization of architecture meant that architects had to, in effect, create their own narrative history of not just buildings but also their profession. It is at this point that Anderson, Blomfield, Gotch, and the later architectural writers take up construction of the historical narrative.

Changing needs and interests in the profession in the nineteenth century drove the re-conceptualization of Renaissance architecture in both architectural practice and publication. In the process of its acceptance, study of Renaissance architecture changed from a focus on details to larger compositional principles, paralleling the move of history out of the design studio. What quickly becomes evident is that there were a multitude of Renaissances, each reflecting slightly different ways of how history, practice and education overlapped in architecture. How did this process of redemption create a Renaissance that is now perceived as the foundation of modern architecture?

Endnotes

2 “Classical Forms in Modern Architecture,” The Builder, XLIX (October 17, 1885), p. 524.


8 Reilly established the first program in town planning in Great Britain at the University of Liverpool in 1909. He called it the Department of Civic Design. Lionel B. Budden, ed., *The Book of the Liverpool School of Architecture* (London, 1932), p. 36.


12 Ibid., pp. 90–91.


14 Ibid., p. 54.


18 The atelier was a studio separate from the Ecole where students paid a master, a practicing architect, to give criticism of their work, typically the competitions and design problems set by the Ecole. The atelier differed from the British pupilage system in that the young man would not be in the office of the master and therefore not exposed to the ins and outs of architectural practice. Richard Chafee, “The Teaching of Architecture at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and its Influence in Britain and America” (PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1983), p. 199.


36 Ibid., p. 203.


42 Ibid., p. 80.

43 Pemble, *Mediterranean Passion*, p. 64. See also the historian Norman Vance, who notes that after the mid-nineteenth century, “It was Imperial Rome, initially pagan and a persecutor of Christians but progressively Christianized, which insistently proposed itself as a model and a warning in a Britain which had become a consciously if controversially imperial power.” Norman Vance, *The Victorians and Ancient Rome* (Oxford, 1997), p. 197.

44 Tracey Avery, “Re-branding the Renaissance: Reception and Re-conception of the Sgabello in the Nineteenth Century” (paper given at the Association of Art Historians Conference, Bristol, UK, 2005). There has been no substantive study of Domenico Brucciani (1815–1880) to date. His firm was the primary supplier of casts to the South Kensington Museum, and it also maintained a shop in Covent Garden that sold plaster reproductions to the public.


46 Fraser, *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy*, p. 62.

47 James Sully, *Italian Travel Sketches* (New York, 1912), p. 76: “The English wanderer in Rome, who remembers a decent quantity of his school and college lore will often experience little shocks of recognition which make him feel that he is not far from home.” See also Pemble, *Mediterranean Passion*, p. 116.

48 Hare, *Walks in Rome*, p. ix.

For a full analysis see Bullen, *The Myth of the Renaissance*.


Port, *Imperial London*; Saint, *Architect and Engineer*; and Hanson, *Architects and the “Building World”*. 
References
Aitchison, George. Architectural Education. The Builder, L (February 27, 1886): 331-335.
Allan, Adrian. Educating Students and Enlightening the Public: Museums and Teaching Collections in the Arts-Related Faculties. The University of Liverpool Recorder, 94 (January 1984): 277-283.
Architectural Association: The Obligatory Architectural Examination. The Builder, XV (June 18, 1881): 774.
Architectural Association Archive. Box A201; Box B401; Box B402; Box C101; Box C106; Box C206; Box F202; Box 1991.
The Architectural Profession in England and Germany. The Builder, XXXIX (December 25, 1880): 742-743.
Architectural Publication Society. Detached Essays and Illustrations Issued During the Years 1848-1853. London: Thomas Richards, 1853.
EDITORIAL. The Builder, XLI (548) (August 6, 1853): 497-498.
George, Ernest. "The Royal Institute of British Architects: President's Address to Students." The Builder, XCVIII (February 5, 1910): 136-139.
Gough, Hugh Roumieu. "Architecture: A Profession or an Art?" The Times, March 10, 1891.


LCC. London County Council School of Building, Prospectus and Time Table of Evening Classes. London, yearly.


Liverpool School of Architecture. The Builder, XCI X (July 16, 1910): 635-638.


Meetings. The Builder, LX (January 31, 1891): 81.


The New Public Offices. The Times, July 31, 1884.


Noble, Wilson. Architecture as a Profession or an Art? The Times, March 5, 1891.


The Obligatory Examination Scheme. The Builder, XL (May 14, 1881): 593-594.


Our Library Table: Something on Ruskinism. The Athenæum (May 17, 1851): 524.

Papworth, Wyatt. The Renaissance and Italian Styles of Architecture in Great Britain: Their Introduction and Development, Shown by a Series of Dated Examples; Together with Others Exhibiting the Contemporaneous Employment of Mediaeval Architecture; Also the Names of the Artists Employed; and the Titles of the Chief Publications on Art; During the Period 1450-1700, Compiled and Arranged According to Dates. London: B.T. Batsford, 1883. pamphlet.


Pater, Walter. Literature: J.A. Symonds; Renaissance in Italy; the Age of the Despots (Review). Academy, 8 (July/Dec. 1875): 105-106.


Prettejohn, Elizabeth. The Royal Institute of British Architects. The Builder, XXXIX (November 6, 1880): 552-554.


Pugin, A. Welby. The Proper Use of Modern Classical Architecture. The Builder, XLIV (February 17, 1883): 221.


Seth-Smith, W.H. Architecture as a Profession or an Art? The Times, November 24, 1891.


