

**NINETEENTH-CENTURY PAINTED DECORATIONS**

**IN BRITAIN AND AUSTRALIA:**

**AN APPROACH TO CONSERVATION**

in Two Volumes

Volume One

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The inspiration to undertake this study has derived from first-hand analysis of the interiors of public buildings in Sydney designed principally by the Colonial Architect James Barnet.

In 1978, during a period of building conservation work directed by the New South Wales Government Architect, there was a rapid awakening of interest in painted decorations. This began with the restoration of the interiors of the Supreme Court buildings in St James Square. Research, analysis and restoration work soon followed in other significant public buildings in the Government precinct along the eastern row in Macquarie Street. My own involvement in this work was substantial.

In 1985 I was awarded a Menzies Scholarship by the Australia-Britain Society for travel to Britain to study the background and origins of the work undertaken in New South Wales and Victoria by British, particularly Scottish-born, artists. At this time I was admitted to the University of York as a research student.

It is with gratitude that I acknowledge the direct and indirect assistance provided by the following group whose counsel and support has been vital to the research and successful completion of this work.

My sincere thanks go to Lynley Stirling and Elizabeth Stevens who first brought to my attention the work of the decorators Lyon and Cottier and who contributed grandly to the reconstruction of the outstanding examples of their decorative art in Government House and Parliament House in Sydney.

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## DECLARATION

Some of the information in this thesis is derived from work I have undertaken in other contexts. Parts of it have been published in other forms for limited circulation. However the major part of the thesis is being presented in this form for the first time.

Much of the material about New South Wales public buildings, including some of the case studies presented in the appendices, have been researched during the period of my employment with the New South Wales Public Works Department. Information regarding the use of pigments and paint materials in New South Wales during the nineteenth century was researched by that department as part of a grant-funded study undertaken for the Heritage Branch of the Department of Environment and Planning and the Australian Heritage Commission.

During the period of preparation of this study two of the sub-themes have been published as journal articles. The first, titled 'Scottish Influences in Nineteenth-century Decorative Art in Australia' appeared in Heritage Australia, Spring 1986. Another, titled 'The Reconstruction of Interior Decorations in Parliament House and Government House, Sydney', appeared in Icomos Information, September 1985.

Wherever possible the authorship of non-original material is acknowledged throughout the text.

The presentation of the information, the analyses and findings are my own.

## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

The thesis examines the nature and philosophy of use of painted decorations in the interiors of buildings in Britain and Australia during the nineteenth century. It concentrates on the work of a group of Scottish painters and decorators who developed new styles and techniques to combine with the exciting new furnishing fabrics produced in the innovative mills of the north.

During the second half of the century a good number of the decorators capitalised on the opportunities which existed in London and the developing cities of Australia and America.

The decorators developed techniques for reproducing, in paintwork, the effects of the rarer textiles and furnishing fabrics. They taught themselves to work within the known framework of colour and pattern to produce strikingly attractive and remarkably reposed interior decorations.

There is a recognisable consistency in the work of the Scottish-trained decorators, whether it is found in London, Sydney, Melbourne or Adelaide. Their artform is based on the principle of achieving harmony with the full range of decorating and furnishing materials and techniques. Decorative schemes were developed around the base selection of carpets and furnishing fabrics.

The thesis traverses the various art movements and influences on the decorative arts in Britain, comparing these with developments in Australia. It goes on to cover the techniques of execution and appropriate strategies for the conservation of painted decorations.

## INTRODUCTION

Painted decorations played a key unifying role in the architecture of interiors created by the affluent British society of the nineteenth century. Industrial wealth fuelled the ambition and delivered the means for society, even the middle classes, to embellish the interiors of their buildings with rich decorations. Industrial technology provided the means and structural framework around which sumptuous interior decoration could be constructed.

During the period 1850 to 1900, there was a return to the practices of the mediaeval and Renaissance periods in which there was a re-unification of the decorative, or applied arts and the high, or fine arts. The division between artisan and artist ceased to exist.

Decorative work was entrusted to artists who emerged from the ranks of the formerly humble trades of house-painting and glass-staining. The artistic fervour which burned in industrially rich cities, particularly those in the north of Britain, sustained several generations of highly talented decorators who mastered both the art and the technologies of the period. They established a tradition of decoration which has never been surpassed. They took on a new title in recognition of the artistic status of their work; Decorative Artist.

A significant number of the decorative artists learned the art of decorative painting in Scotland; in Glasgow in particular. Some moved south to London and others travelled further afield to the colonies. A small, but important, group moved to Sydney and Melbourne where their contribution to the art of the developing Australian nation was highly significant.

In Australia the growth of artistic awareness coincided with a sharp rise in community affluence. It began with the gold rushes of the 1850s and peaked in the boom years of the 1880s. This study concentrates on the decorative work produced during the second half of the nineteenth century and on the work of the Scottish-trained artists who were attracted by the opportunities created in the booming cities of the New World.

It is not surprising that so many established artists chose to move to America and Australia when the living and working conditions of the period in England and Scotland are considered. Much of the decorative work involved the use of paints and finishes containing poisonous materials and the health of every painter suffered in the cold damp climates of northern Europe. A significant number of important artists were enticed to move to the established cities of Melbourne and Sydney. The warmer conditions in Australia alone would have offered an incentive to the ailing artists. But the wealth of Victorian colonial society was especially appealing.

The task of conserving the surviving examples of the work of these artists is an ongoing challenge which must be met with sound conservation methodology and a clear understanding of the artform. It is essential to understand the value and the context of the work. It is therefore necessary to look at the influences which shaped the art of the decorators.

There is clear evidence that Australian decorators, particularly those who trained in Britain, remained very close to the mainstream of British and European decorative art. Although the colonies were geographically remote from Britain, the British Empire flourished with vigorous shipping traffic which kept even the most distant colonies in touch with the mainstream developments of Europe. The movements, the styles and the key figures in the revival



of the decorative arts in Britain are therefore relevant to understanding developments in Australia.

This study covers aspects of the house-painters trade from which nineteenth-century decorating techniques were derived. Four of the outstanding Scottish figures whose work was influential in elevating the humble trade of house-painting to a legitimate artform, albeit a mostly decorative artform, are central to this study.

David Roberts and David Ramsay Hay were apprenticed to an Edinburgh house-painter in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Both aspired to be artists but neither had the family support required to survive without a trade so they learned to sketch, to grind and mix pigments and to prepare canvases in the toxic environment of house-painters shops.

Roberts used the knowledge he gained during his apprenticeship to work and travel with the theatre, earning a living and a solid reputation as a scene-painter before surpassing even his own ambitions to become one of the great Scottish artists with a privileged place in history. His great contribution to the decorative arts was to persuade his lifelong friend David Hay to remain in the trade and to make it his very own artform.

Hay did more. He made house-painting into a science as well as an art. His theories were widely followed by succeeding generations of artists, house-painters and decorators who concerned themselves with the creation of artistic interior decorations.

Almost fifty years after Roberts and Hay were apprenticed together in Edinburgh, during the first decade of the nineteenth century, Daniel Cottier and John Lamb Lyon were apprenticed together in a glazier's shop in Glasgow. The trade of glass-staining provided essential training for

many of the decorators who came on the scene after the reconciliation of architecture and the decorative arts.

Glass-stainers were soon introduced to decorative painting just as decorative painters were introduced to glass-staining in the years following the re-discovery of the historical relationship between stained glass and painted decorations. This relationship, which had its origins in mediaeval painting, was the very essence of the period of revival and re-discovery. Cottier and Lyon might not have anticipated the opportunities which awaited them but they were both quick to capitalise on the training which equipped them with consummate skills in design, drawing and the use of colour in decoration.

Daniel Cottier is less well known than other significant decorators, mainly because he moved his decorating business to America before it became well known in London. He can be credited with having trained and inspired a dedicated group of young decorators whose contribution to the decorative arts in Scotland, England, America and Australia is immense.

John Lyon is the outstanding figure in this branch of art in Australia. He moved to Melbourne in the 1860s and later opened a business, in conjunction with Cottier, which was based in Sydney. The painted decorations executed by Lyon and the young men sent out to him by Cottier are the equal of anything produced in Europe.

However, in the main, painted decorations were not created by innovative and creative artists who became inspired when they took up a brush. Certainly there were many besides Hay, Cottier and Lyon whose experiments produced works of great beauty and skill. But the majority of the schemes of decoration were planned and executed in accordance with principles, traditions and orders established in history. Even the paint finishes were

contrived to conform with historic antecedents. For example a lot of time was invested in attempts to resurrect fresco techniques in Britain. There was also some success in formulating paint finishes which were plausible imitations of fresco finishes.

Some innovative decorators, notably David Hay, successfully patented imitations of other 'noble' finishes by exploring the outer limits of the versatility of the house-painting media. Hence this study traverses the nature and construction of decoration and the methods of preparation and application of painted finishes.

It is tempting in this study to imbibe the intoxicating spirit of the nineteenth century and dwell in the history and to become totally preoccupied with the characters involved in the revival of the decorative arts. Such a study might form another worthy contribution to our understanding today of this fascinating period. However, the aim of this study is to extend an appreciation of their efforts into considering the most appropriate means of conserving the precious physical evidence that remains. The most interesting evidence, it is argued, survives in the form of painted decorations which are today very vulnerable to destruction by environmental effects, the forces of fashion and modern day standards of living.

The concluding part of this study therefore addresses the issues of conservation. As always, these are complex. However, they are significantly more manageable when considered in the light of the preceding analysis. No conservation work should ever be undertaken without an understanding of the significance of the subject of the work. It is only with a historical perspective that it becomes possible to consider conservation measures involving intervention.

Nineteenth-century painted decorations are rare and valuable. They form part of a wider artform which is not evident to the casual observer. Painted decorations were used to draw together the various other elements of interior decoration - upholstery, floor fabrics and the like. Today it is rare to find an ensemble in which all of those elements survive. When the painted decorations do survive they are usually alone in an alien, anachronistic environment, divorced from their supporting elements.

It is because painted decorations formed part of a broader artform that it is inappropriate to conserve examples in a false archaeological context. Nevertheless, this is common due to the general ignorance of the integral significance of painted decorations. Accordingly a conservation approach is developed in this study which considers significance and context ahead of the more orthodox technical processes of preservation, restoration or reconstruction.

#### Addendum

This dissertation was first submitted in 1990. However, following advice from the examiners, the opportunity has been taken to re-work the concluding chapters and appendices to provide a more balanced summary in part Three, of parts One and Two, and to offer a more penetrating evaluation of the cultural significance of the work of the decorative artists.

In 1992 a rare opportunity was taken to inspect several more examples of significant works in England and Scotland, with the result that a new case study was added. The conservation works completed in 1991 at Garton-on-the-Wolds are so significant that it was felt that they must be covered. The work is summarised in Case Study number 1.

## PART ONE

### MOVEMENTS, STYLES AND KEY FIGURES IN THE REVIVAL OF THE DECORATIVE ARTS IN BRITAIN

#### CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND

##### 1.1 Introduction to the Nineteenth Century

Architectural taste during the nineteenth century moved rapidly through many phases. British society experienced profound changes in social behaviour and social interests which resulted in an increased interest and awareness in the domestic arts and decoration in particular. As style followed style a large cross-section of society became involved in the debates over styles and their relative values in both domestic and public artforms.

Attempts by modern scholars to analyse the changes and to synthesize the essence of nineteenth-century design have foundered on the complexity of influences on artistic taste. Most of the styles have been well researched, but the influences on decorative art<sup>1</sup> and design during the first decades of the nineteenth century are yet to be fully examined. The role of house-painters and decorative artists in the development of new styles is still to be assessed.

The main movements had their roots in the revival of Christian and mediaeval art. The introduction of industrially-produced materials and finishes led to the development of others. It can be established that there were some highly significant developments in the decorative arts, and especially in the house-painting

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<sup>1</sup>The term 'decorative art' embraces all of the arts associated with the decoration of buildings including painting, the manufacture of furniture, carpets, fabrics, wallhangings, metalwork and most items of domestic art.

trade,<sup>2</sup> which made it possible for later artists to realise high achievement in the expanding fields of the decorative arts. The acme was reached towards the end of the century when artists were able to freely combine furniture, furnishings and painted decorations in the rich harmonious interiors of the 'Art' movement, which reverberated throughout the english-speaking world.

The principal feature of nineteenth-century design was its wide appeal. Corresponding with the increased growth in urban populations there was a greater accessibility to the decorative arts which derived from the industrial manufacture and subsequent reduction in cost of decorative materials. More and more people took an active interest in the decorative arts.

#### **1.1.1 Differences in the Decorative Arts Between the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries**

A notable difference between eighteenth and nineteenth-century interiors is to be found in the improvements in house-painting practices and the application of artistic principles in the design, manufacture and deployment of the various elements of furniture, furnishings and decorations. Eighteenth-century designers were bound in no small measure by the hierarchies imposed by cost in the use of paint colours and finishes, and in the selection of upholstery fabrics and furnishings. The improvements in manufacturing processes and the consequent reduction in cost of furnishing fabrics in the nineteenth century meant that the constraints were eased at the same time as opportunities were widened.

The matter of style arose as a serious issue at several times during the nineteenth century as a result of

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<sup>2</sup>House-painting was undoubtedly a building trade or craft during the eighteenth century. The tradesmen made their own paints and applied them in accordance with traditional principles as directed by others, usually the architect. In the nineteenth century the trade emerged as a more sophisticated craft and an art when it was taken up by artists.

Victorian concern for appropriateness. Late eighteenth-century designers were not constrained by any moral dilemma in their choice of style. In architecture and the decorative arts the tolerant Georgian view was 'Classic for reason' and 'Gothic for romance'. Styles were freely mixed. Even the leading exponents of the classical styles; Adam<sup>3</sup>, Chippendale<sup>4</sup> and Hope<sup>5</sup>, turned to eastern or mediaeval examples of decoration when it suited their needs.

Robert Adam gave his name to a style of decoration which he based on classical details from his studies of Roman and Italian Renaissance art. His work belongs to the last four decades of the century and it is significant in the context of this study for its use of colour. Adam's design drawings reveal that colour and design motifs had equal importance in his interior decorations (*fig.1*). He used colour in a more creative manner than any other architect of the period.

Thomas Hope stands apart from other designers of the Georgian period. His Household Furniture was fundamentally a guidebook to his own collection (*fig.2*) but it shared with the works of Adam and Chippendale the distinction of shaping the mainstream of decorative art in the first years of the nineteenth century.

It is generally held that classical styles dominated in the closing decades of the eighteenth century and the opening decades of the new century. However there were significant numbers of exotic designs and a growing interest in Gothic styles. Versatile architects like James

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Adam (1728-1792) Scottish Architect, Designer and Decorator.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Chippendale (1718-1779) English Cabinetmaker who worked closely with Adam on commissions including Fawcett House. His Gentleman and Cabinetmaker's Director (1754) was the first trade catalogue of its type.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Hope (1768-1831) was a wealthy connoisseur and collector who travelled widely to study ancient remains. His Household Furniture and Interior Decoration Executed from Designs from Thomas Hope (1807) features a lot of symbolic decoration.

Wyatt made contributions in both classical and Gothic styles.<sup>6</sup> At the level of popular architecture a confused state of affairs existed.<sup>7</sup> However, classical styles continued to dominate public and domestic architecture. Gothic details, although acceptable as an alternative to classical in matters of decorative art, appeared in relatively few buildings. At Carlton House, London, the Prince Regent had the dining room finished somewhat experimentally in a Gothic style and the drawing room in a Chinese style.

In 1808 George Smith published a major work<sup>8</sup> in which he illustrated several examples of Gothic ornament applied to fashionable forms which he labelled Gothic. His book serves as a poignant illustration of the shallow level of understanding of Gothic at the time.

The Royal Pavilion, Brighton, the preferred residence of the Prince Regent, incorporated more examples of the Chinese style made popular through Sheraton's published illustration of the drawing room at Carlton House (*fig.3*). The decorators at Brighton, John and Frederick Crace,<sup>9</sup> repeated certain elements of Sheraton's design in their own work, an important example of the acceptance of exotic styles in the highest circles of society. However, overall Brighton Pavilion was a rather light-hearted and very romantic blend of styles. It was begun in the neo-classical style and continued (at least in the interior decorations) in the Chinese and Indian styles.

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<sup>6</sup>Patrick Connor, Oriental Architecture in the West, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979). Amongst Wyatt's listed works are the Oxford Street Pantheon, the Grecian Dodington Hall and Gothic Lee Priory and Fonthill Abbey.

<sup>7</sup>James Malton, An Essay on British Cottage Architecture, (London: 1798) p.10. "The peculiarities of every nation form a mongrel species in England".

<sup>8</sup>George Smith, A Collection of Designs for Household Furniture and Interior Decoration. Parts I and II (London: J.Taylor, 1804).

<sup>9</sup>Megan Aldrich, The Craces: Royal Decorators 1768-1899, (Brighton: John Murray, 1990). The Craces commenced their involvement with Brighton Pavilion when they began a wide range of decorating activities in 1802.



## 1.2 House-painting at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century

Any study of painted decorations must essentially commence with the art (or trade) of house-painting which, in common with the decorative arts in Britain, was at a low ebb at the end of the eighteenth century. Certain members of Society, whose taste had matured with the benefits of foreign travel or study of the Arts, were aware of the value of painted decorative finishes, and a small but significant number of artists were producing fine work for major buildings,<sup>10</sup> but most did not demonstrate such knowledge. Fine painted decoration was largely a product of artist's studios and discriminating patronage.

The house-painters of the day, some of whom possessed refined skills in *decorative* finishes, had little design control over the schemes they worked on. Architects or upholsterers coordinated the work of other contractors, including painters, and thus had executive control of most interior decoration. Some architects were only beginning to understand the need to pay attention to interior furnishing and decorations. Stencilling, the staple of later nineteenth-century decorators, was earlier known as 'slapdashing'. This derogatory term serves to illustrate the lowly place of house-painters in Georgian society.

The genuine artists (or studio painters) of the day stayed in their studios working on canvas. When called upon to undertake mural decorations they would usually execute them on canvas<sup>11</sup> in the studio. These would be later transferred to the walls or ceilings of the space to be decorated by pasting in the manner later described. There

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<sup>10</sup>Artists such as Charles Catton, a coach painter, worked with British and European painters to produce decorative paintings in buildings and in the studio. Catton supplied paintings for Greenwich Hospital Chapel (1779) and Somerset House (1780). Catton was one of the last practising members of the Painter-Stainer's Company as well as a foundation member of the Royal Academy, and thus a representative of the old and new orders.

<sup>11</sup>Irish linen and paper were also used for this purpose.

was no tradition of true fresco painting<sup>12</sup> in Britain, although serious attempts to establish a tradition were made later.

The painting skills of deception, in particular graining and marbling, were well established at the end of the eighteenth century. All house-painters of the early nineteenth-century received some training in the basic techniques. Painters like Thomas Kershaw<sup>13</sup> developed great skills in graining and handpainting which were highly sought after. The surviving examples of his work<sup>14</sup> leave us in no doubt about the high level of skill and deception which could be achieved with humble paint finishes.

Colour was the subject of earnest discussion throughout the nineteenth century. At the end of the eighteenth century colour had become the subject of scholarly research. It began to be written about in a more positive way. Attempts were made, by the study of natural philosophy, to achieve a more intimate understanding of the character of colour and to provide rules for its successful combination. These rules were soon applied in the decoration of building interiors.<sup>15</sup>

This development might be seen as the first indication of the 'intellectual' approach to house-painting as later practised by the Edinburgh house-painter D.R. Hay<sup>16</sup> whose

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<sup>12</sup>The term fresco, or *buon fresco* refers to the method of painting onto fresh plaster whilst still moist in such a way that the pigments are fixed by the carbonatization of the calcium hydroxide of the plaster ground.

<sup>13</sup>Thomas Kershaw (b.1819) served a traditional apprenticeship in house-painting and went on to teach himself the skills of graining, marbling and decorative painting. He did graining for leading London furniture makers.

<sup>14</sup>A number of Kershaw's sample boards survive and some are on permanent exhibition in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

<sup>15</sup>Ian Bristow, 'Interior House-painting from the Restoration to the Regency' (D.Phil. dissertation, University of York, 1984) Chapt. VIII, p.667

<sup>16</sup>Ian Gow, Edinburgh architectural historian, has brought to light new knowledge of the work of D.R. Hay. His dedication to Hay of the term 'The First Intellectual Housepainter' is very apt.

influence on nineteenth-century house-painting was to be felt throughout Britain and her colonies.<sup>17</sup>

In the concluding chapter of his study of house-painting of the period,<sup>18</sup> Ian Bristow identifies three stages of development which preceded the search for authentic house-painting colour and practice. The first stage was distinguished by the use of imported coloured motifs to lend 'authentic' character to a room.

The second stage involved the use of special house-painting techniques such as marbling or bronzing to reproduce effects found on archaeological prototypes. The third stage was the abstraction of colour from the same sources, which was then applied to walls and ceilings. Examples can be found in the use of 'Etruscan' and 'Pompeian' colours and motifs in decorative schemes.

Nathaniel Whittock attempted a full coverage of the house-painter's art in his Decorative Painter's and Glazier's Guide.<sup>19</sup> This work conveys a clear illustration of the three stages identified by Bristow. However, there is no evidence in Whittock's discussion of the styles of a scholarly archaeological approach. Clearly there was no need at the time to justify the selection, or explain the sources, of a style for a public or domestic interior when the choice was based on nothing more than a romantic impulse. However, within a decade this situation began to change when the highest standards of scholarship appeared

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<sup>17</sup> D.R. Hay trained a large number of house-painters who carried on his practices. The leading Edinburgh and Glasgow firms were all working in the manner of Hay during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The house-painters and decorators who went out to Sydney and Melbourne from Glasgow and Edinburgh were mostly trained in the Hay style.

<sup>18</sup> Ian Bristow, 'Interior House-painting' Chapt. VIII.

<sup>19</sup> Nathaniel Whittock, The Decorative Painter's and Glazier's Guide containing the most approved methods of imitating marbles; in oil and distemper; designs for apartments, in accordance with the various styles or architecture; with directions for stencilling ... also ... staining and painting on glass ..., (London: Sherwood, Gilbert and Piper, 1827).

in the works of Pugin,<sup>20</sup> the principal student of mediaeval decoration, and, Owen Jones<sup>21</sup> the translator of many classical and exotic styles.

The Gothic style which was to hold the middle ground in the succeeding debate over style was assessed quite simplistically by Whittock as;

*... the most beautiful and varied style of decoration ...suited for every kind of apartment, but more particularly for halls, dining apartments and concert rooms; and is superior to any other for places set apart for divine worship.*<sup>22</sup>

With equal facility Whittock regarded stencilling as;

*... the cheapest and most expeditious method of decorating rooms...and is...always done in distemper colour.*

Stencilling was no doubt cheap, and possibly most often done in the distemper medium, but this was certainly not always the case; certainly not so in the higher classes of work. The early use of stencilling to imitate printed wallpapers soon gave way to a more flexible and artistic use of stencilling on both flat and moulded surfaces.

Colour, on the other hand, was discussed by Whittock in house-painting terms in some depth. He described colours by common name (there are no colour plates) and further identified them by the liberal use of references to the means by which they could be mixed. There is only the most elementary discussion of the relationships between colours and very little consideration of their application in accordance with scientific principles other than the well-

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<sup>20</sup> A.W.N. Pugin, (1812-1852), was brought up on a diet of mediaeval design and ornament in his father's architectural office. During the 1830s and 1840s he published a number of thoroughly researched works on Christian architecture and mediaeval design and ornamentation.

<sup>21</sup> Owen Jones, (1809-1874), architect. Like Pugin spent a long apprenticeship exhaustively researching his subject before publishing a series of well illustrated and scholarly works.

<sup>22</sup> Nathaniel Whittock, The Decorative Painter's and Glazier's Guide, p.188

understood principles of complementary and contrasting colours.<sup>23</sup> It was left to David Ramsay Hay to develop and explain colour theory in his writings which appeared very soon after those of Whittock.

It was the introduction and use of colour theory which marked the transition from the traditional house-painting practices of the eighteenth century, to the new framework of room decoration in the nineteenth century. Colour theory was widely used by the 1830s.

David Hay deserves much of the credit for this since he presented his interpretation of colour theory in a way which made it comprehensible to his fellow house-painters. These publications by Hay make it possible for us to understand the application of colour theory today, long after the schemes of decoration have disappeared.

Most importantly Hay was able to fully exploit the new technologies to link paint colour to that of furnishing fabrics in carpets and drapes in a controlled way. The result of the application of these practices was the production of interiors of subtlety, harmony and repose although based on strong colours. This did not appear to have been possible up until that time.

In its simplest form Hay's colour theory involved the successful combination of contrasting and harmonising colours in a way which achieved balance and repose. Several colour theorists were aware of the natural laws governing contrast and harmony but they had not translated this knowledge into the practice of room decoration. An example of the theory which recurred in Hay's work was the use, in combination, of red and its contrasting tint,

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<sup>23</sup>At the time Whittock was writing, the house-painters would have all undergone an arduous apprenticeship, which involved long hours of physical labour, grinding, and mixing paint. Consequently the painters would have understood implicitly the exact colours described by Whittock in his references, without the need for colour plates.

green, with a harmonising tint of the second introduced to achieve harmony and balance.

The new nineteenth-century technologies of pigment production and fabric dyeing played a key role in the practical application of colour theory. The ever-growing range of colours in paint finishes and fabrics removed the traditional constraints on colour selection and made it possible for the first time to transpose colour from paint to fabric, or to achieve the same colours in both. No longer was it necessary to build schemes around contrasts which were the safe alternative to the harmonious disposition of near colours.

The wide application of colour theory in the 1830s was the first of several phases of scholarly development which led to the re-establishment of British decorative art above all other European developments. The successful revivals and the significant discoveries in decorative art which happened during the reign of Queen Victoria might not have amounted to much if the more scientific approach to interior decoration had not been introduced in the early decades of the century.

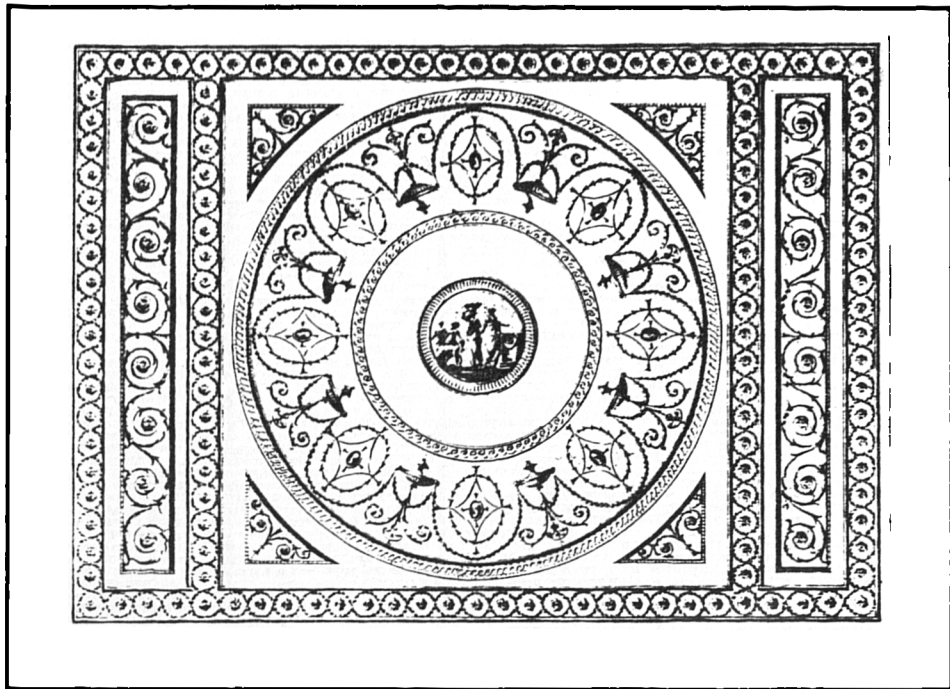


Fig. 1  
Design by Robert Adam for the Saloon of Headfort House, Co. Meath, Ireland, for the Rt. Hon. The Earl of Bective, 1772. The decoration consists of low plaster relief and subtle colour. Source: Soane Museum.

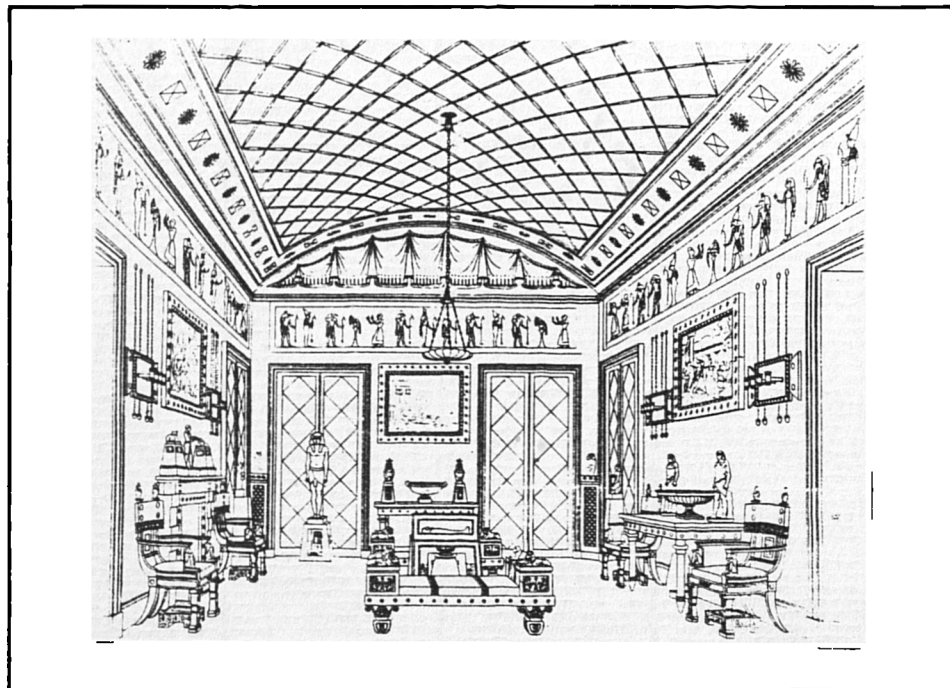


Fig. 2  
The Egyptian Room by Thomas Hope, from Hope's, *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration*, 1807. The room reflected his personal taste in the collection he put together to illustrate the potential of the style.

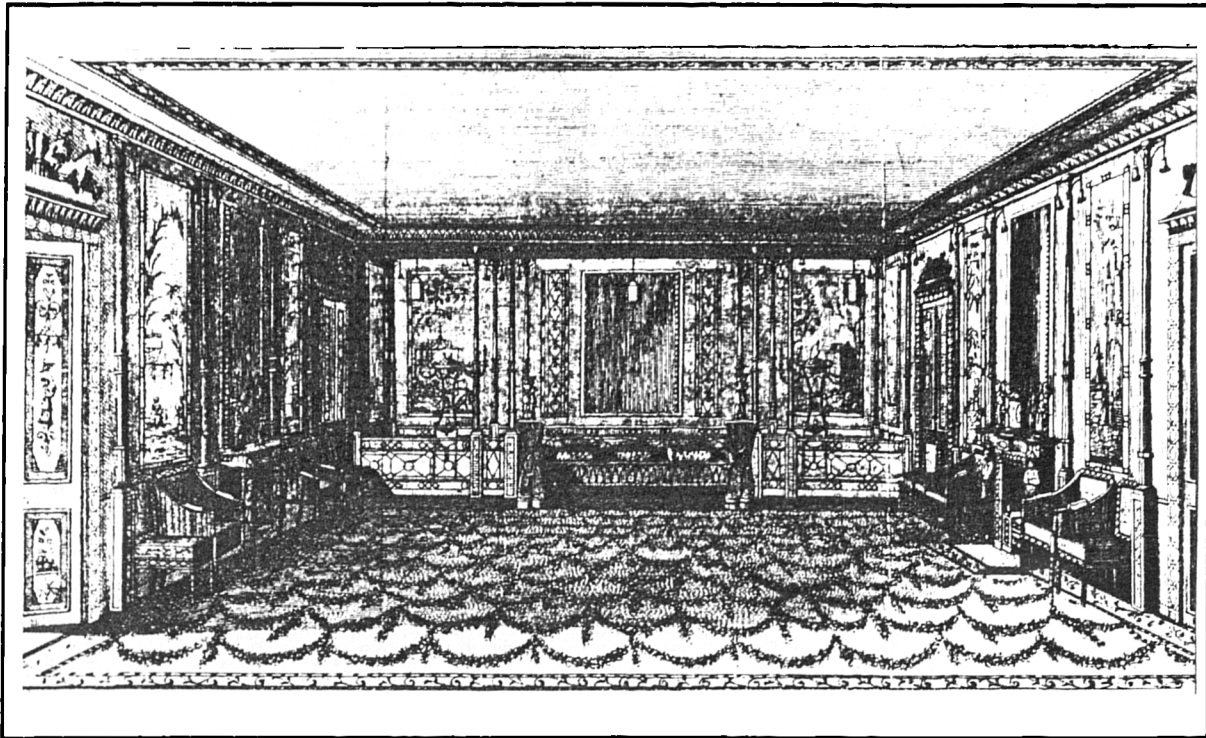


Fig.3  
Illustration of the Prince Regent's Chinese Drawing Room at Carlton House, reproduced from Thomas Sheraton's, The Cabinet-maker and Upholsterer's Drawing Book, 1793. Many of the design details were reproduced by John and Frederick Crace in their work at Brighton Pavilion.

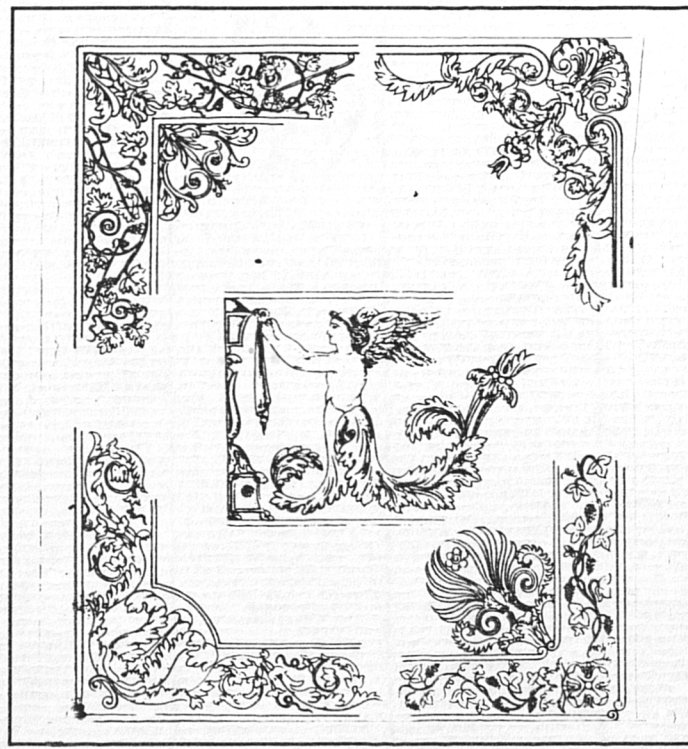


Fig.4  
An example of Arabesque panelling from Nathaniel Whittock's, The Decorative Painter's and Glazier's Guide, 1827.



## CHAPTER 2 EARLY VICTORIAN DEVELOPMENTS

### 2.1 D.R.Hay and an Artistic Approach to House-painting

The Edinburgh house-painter David Ramsay Hay occupies a place of supreme importance in the development of his trade. His theories and practices were adopted and applied in the decoration of interiors at home and abroad.

When, in the 1820s, Hay abandoned studio art to return to his original trade of house-painting the trade was ripe for improvement. Hay was encouraged in making the change by no less a figure than Sir Walter Scott who gave him the important commission of decorating his own new residence, Abbotsford, on the Tweed. This commission proved to be the turning point in Hay's career and an about-turn for the whole trade of house-painting. He refined and expanded the techniques and methods of the application of paint, and he introduced a new method of constructing decorative schemes.

In complete contradiction to the accepted late eighteenth-century practice, Hay's schemes took as the starting point the soft furnishings. These had, by then, become the most expensive element in interior decoration. Hay's genius is evident in the way harmony and balance were achieved with his selections of the newly fashionable rich and elaborate curtain arrangements, fitted carpets and upholstery silks. To these Hay added his own special painting techniques.

The employment and control of colour, or the art of harmonious colouring, was the outstanding feature of Hay's decorative work. However his work also featured many subtleties and unusual finishes which were not formerly within the house-painter's repertoire. Not only did he develop the art of graining to a very high level of sophistication, but he also developed techniques for imitating, in the most realistic way, a wide range of rich

finishes such as damask, gold embroidery and Morocco leather.

An explanation for this, and an impression of current (1847) practice is given by Hay in 1847:

*Plastering of ceilings and walls, with stucco ornaments in various styles, is now the almost universal mode of finishing the apartments of dwelling-houses and public buildings, and I have already observed, that the most effectual method of rendering plaster work durable, and the apartments in which it is employed truly wholesome, is to have it thoroughly painted.*

*In treating of imitations of woods and marbles, I have likewise observed, regarding the painting of plastered ceilings, that when constructed in imitation of any other material, they ought also be painted in imitation of it. When plainly finished however, they may be painted in any way, either in tints of colour or pure white.<sup>1</sup>*

Another lasting advance incorporated by Hay into his work was the use of canvas as a ground for painting in oil. It was a practice in Hay's studios in the 1820s to paint onto canvas in the studio. The practice allowed the painters to continue working during the winter months when conditions on most building sites were unsuitable for painting. The practice was commented upon by Campbell Bowie half a century later.<sup>2</sup>

#### 2.1.1 The Influence of Sir Walter Scott

Hay went to considerable lengths to ensure that the encouragement Sir Walter Scott gave him was not forgotten. In the mature years of his life he wrote a nostalgic account of his introduction to Scott which he published as an appendix to one of his promotional booklets.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>D.R.Hay, The Laws of Harmonious Colouring, pp.153-4

<sup>2</sup>The Journal of Decorative Art, an Illustrated Technical Journal for the House Painter, Decorator and all Art Workmen, (Manchester and London) August 1888.

At the expiry of his indentures he had turned his back on the humble trade of house-painting, to which he was bred, and laboured strenuously to gain a livelihood by painting pictures.

When he went to see Sir Walter Scott with a picture he had been commissioned to paint, Scott was led to make the suggestion that Hay might make a better contribution in the field of house-painting.

*I have thought for some time that were young men who had a genius for painting, and who were not possessed of sufficient patrimony to enable them to follow such a course of study as alone can raise them to eminence in the fine arts, to endeavour to improve those professions in which a taste for paintings is required, it would be a more lucrative field for their exertion.*<sup>4</sup>

He encouraged his protégé, by giving him his own house at Abbotsford to begin upon. From this auspicious beginning D.R. Hay's career moved forward in revolutionary style to re-shape and uplift the whole trade. Hay set the standard for others to follow. He overturned current house-painting practice and restored the painter's image. He achieved this successfully through scrupulous fidelity to specifications and through a more professional and intellectual approach to colour, texture and technique.

There can be little doubt that Hay owed Scott a great debt in launching his career. For the benefit of young painters who, like himself, may not possess the patronage or talent to embark on a career in fine art, but who might make a worthwhile contribution in their trade of decoration and house-painting he told the story of his own disaffection and return to the trade.

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<sup>3</sup> D.R.Hay, The Laws of Harmonious Colouring Adapted to Interior Decorations with Observations on The Practice of House Painting (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1847).

<sup>4</sup> D.R.Hay, Laws, p.181

Hay was the first in this formerly humble profession to establish smart business premises. His shop in George Street, Edinburgh had walls hung with pictures more common to galleries than paint shops. His aim was to attract the carriage trade.

When he encountered difficulties in explaining colour theory to a client who did not share his own facility with the language of colour he decided to publish a series of essays on his theories and techniques for imitating the best quality architectural finishes of exotic wood, stone and fabrics. The essays were attractively bound, and it is presumed that they were presented to valued customers and professional colleagues to assist in his promotion of the trade.

#### 2.1.2 Hay's Contribution to Loudon's Encyclopaedia

J.C. Loudon drew from the broad spectrum of trade practice in compiling his Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture,<sup>5</sup> which was widely distributed in Britain in 1836. It was available in New South Wales from 1837.<sup>6</sup>

Loudon featured several examples of Hay's work, acknowledging his influence.

*After consulting all the works that are considered the most valuable on the subject of house and ornamental painting, we think that by far the best, and indeed the only one that embraces principles, is a small work, entitled The Laws of Harmonious Colouring ... by D.R.Hay.*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John Claudius Loudon, Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture, (London: 1833).

<sup>6</sup> Joan Kerr and James Broadbent, Gothic Taste in the Colony of New South Wales (Sydney: The David Ell Press, 1980), p.16.

<sup>7</sup> J.C.Loudon, Encyclopaedia, p.1215, phrase 2387.

### 2.1.3 Hay's Successors

D.R. Hay was a clever operator who knew the value of quality in everything he did. He spared no effort in training the men who carried into practice his sound decorating principles.

It was this second generation of decorators who trained a significant number of men who in turn left their mark on the stately homes, churches and public buildings of the colonies, and most particularly on Sydney and Melbourne. Hay's influence is therefore significant in the work of these third generation decorators since he laboured hard over their training to ensure that his ideas carried on.

Hay served his apprenticeship alongside David Roberts, who later achieved great success in painting and remained friend and *confidant* to Hay throughout his life. So it was naturally to the art schools that Hay turned in search of trained staff, but with little success. He therefore resorted to training his own staff. Many budding artists used an apprenticeship in the humble trade of house-painting to learn about pigments, oils and the elementary principles of painting.

Many of the best accounts of his practices are handed down to us by his former pupils, some of whom can be counted amongst his most faithful admirers. It was Campbell Tait Bowie, apprenticed to Hay in the 1830s, who left the previously mentioned account of house-painting practices at Hay's during his time there.<sup>8</sup> Bowie, it should be noted, went on to be regarded as the foremost (and possibly the most representative) house-painter in Glasgow with a staff of up to 300 in the busy seasons of the 1880s.

After gaining his initial training in glass staining and japanning, Bowie set his sights on a career in the finer

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<sup>8</sup> "Campbell Tait Bowie", Journal of Decorative Art, August, 1888.

arts. He moved to the Royal Scottish Academy where he was advised by Sir William Allen, just as Hay had been advised in a similar way by Scott. Accepting this advice he was apprenticed to (the already famous) Hay.

The various accounts of the trade throughout the nineteenth century confirm that there was free movement of tradesmen. Bowie, like several other leading figures, left Hay to establish his own business, also in George Street, Edinburgh. This loss to Hay was offset when he made the propitious decision to employ Thomas Bonnar, a talented artistic decorator at the beginning of a significant career.<sup>9</sup>

Bonnar joined Hay as foreman in the 1840s and remained with him during the years of his noted decorating achievements in the great public rooms of Edinburgh, and many public buildings and town and country houses of Scotland, Ireland and England. Bonnar left Hay to join another former pupil, Robert Carfrae, in a large business (later amalgamated with Lithgow and Purdie) which was responsible for the training and development of decorators like George Dobie (trained by Lithgow and Purdie), George Fraser (trained by Purdie, Bonnar and Carfrae) and James Paterson who made his career in Australia.

The theories, techniques and practices, which Hay pioneered and developed in Britain appeared in Sydney and Melbourne, the Australian cities with the largest populations and greatest wealth, during the boom years of the late nineteenth century. The leading decorators in both these centres had learned their craft in Scotland. Colonial examples of decoration are perhaps not significant in number, but, are very important in determining the degree to which Hay's work had a lasting influence on the trade.

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<sup>9</sup> A.L.Simpson, "In Memorium; Thomas Bonnar", Edinburgh, 1876. (Mitchell Library, Glasgow).

The drawing rooms of Sydney's Government House were re-decorated by Scottish-trained artists in 1879. The decoration features crimson damask drapery and upholstery, and carpets set against walls of an olive drab cast. Hay advocated just such a scheme of decoration as early as 1829 when he specified;

*... walls of a rich drab colour of sufficient warmth of tone to suit the scarlet window curtains and mahogany furniture.*<sup>10</sup>

The textured finishes have not been found in large numbers in Australia. But there are enough examples of stencilling in imitation of damask to establish a genuine transfer of these techniques from Scotland (*fig.5*).

The decorative style of the Scottish artists was predominantly classical. Styles such as 'Watteau' (*fig.6*) were very popular with them. The appeal to Scottish decorators of Watteau possibly lay in the ready adaptability of the style to classical traditions in the north.

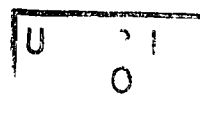
The Watteau style consisted of delicate naturalistic scenes framed in graceful arabesques and grotesques. Jean Antoine Watteau, author of the style, emerged from a school of painters which arose during the reign of Louis XV. They introduced naturalistic painted ornament to the ceilings and woodwork panels of grand apartments. James Ballantine, the Edinburgh stained glass artist and close associate of both David Roberts and David Hay, noted;

*... no painter, perhaps, ever combined nature and art so gracefully ...*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ian Gow, "D.R.Hay", Public Lecture, 1984

<sup>11</sup>James Ballantine, "Essay on Ornamental Arts as Applicable to Trade and Manufactures", (London, 1847), p.32.



## 2.2 The Revival of Gothic Art

In the south of Britain the principal development in the decorative arts was the Gothic revival. It underscored all other developments throughout the nineteenth century.

The Gothic Revival in Britain was in most respects synonymous with the revival in church building. The Revival began with an attempt to counter Chartism and Nonconformity, to build a defence against internal unrest in England in the years following the French Revolution by strengthening the Established Church. In 1818 Parliament was persuaded to pass a Church Building Act and to provide one million pounds sterling with which to build new churches. With further legislation and additional revenue some 612 churches were built in the thirty eight years between 1818 and 1856.

With so much interest in church building there was a great deal of debate about church architecture and widespread interest in ecclesiology. In 1839 the Cambridge Camden Society was formed to further ecclesiological interests. The Society's journal, The Ecclesiologist provided a rallying point for their movement and promoted;

*Anglican worship held in strict accordance with the Gothic style of the fourteenth century for they believed that both the Christian Church and the Gothic style reached their apogee in the fourteenth century.*<sup>12</sup>

One of the first tasks undertaken by the Society was the planning of a model church. They arrived at the view that;

*Real ancient designs of acknowledged symmetry of proportions or beauty of detail should be selected for exact imitation in all their parts, arrangements and decorations.*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The Ecclesiologist, I (2nd Ed. 1843) p.74; IV (1845) pp. 2 and 176; V (1846) pp. 3-5 and 75; VI (1847) pp. 7-14 and 85-8.



The Society demonstrated a preoccupation with the visible evidence of the Anglo-Catholic Revival. The effect of this concern for an expression of the Revival through architecture, liturgy, music, church fittings and decorations (especially stained glass), was to bring Gothic art to the general population. Under normal circumstances only the wealthy could afford to decorate their buildings. With the endowments from Government and private sources for church building the decorative art forms could be put on public display.

It would be misleading to consider the Gothic Revival in terms of ecclesiastic buildings alone; just as it would be false to consider the rise in interest in the decorative arts exclusively in terms of the church building programmes. The largest and most influential of all nineteenth-century building campaigns, the reconstruction of the Houses of Parliament after the destruction of the Palace of Westminster by fire,<sup>14</sup> was undertaken in a consistent Gothic style. This provided a great stimulus for decoration, and the mediaeval style in particular.

Furthermore the enormous wealth generated in the industrial centres of Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century produced both a need, and the means, to build and decorate churches and public buildings in Classical and Gothic styles. It was the Gothic style, however, which provided the solid foundation for a truly English artform.

The background to both the Gothic Revival and the revival

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<sup>13</sup> 'A Hint on Modern Church Architecture', The Ecclesiologist, I (2nd Ed. 1843) p.133.

<sup>14</sup> Georg Germann, Gothic Revival in Europe and Britain: Sources, Influences and Ideas, trans. Gerald Onn (London: Lund Humphries, 1972) p.67. The Houses of Parliament in the former Palace of Westminster were destroyed by fire on 16 October 1834. In June 1835 the Parliamentary committee responsible for the reconstruction of the Houses of Parliament announced a competition for the new building to be erected on the site of the Old Palace in either a Gothic or Elizabethan style.

of painted decorations can be examined in religious buildings. Certainly during the mediaeval period, in both (near) Eastern and Western civilisations, art, such as painted decoration, was devoted almost entirely to the service of religion. Indeed there are striking similarities between the authentic examples of English and Near Eastern wallpaintings which were exploited by the decorators of the second half of the nineteenth century.

The decorators were able to draw inspiration from surviving examples of eastern art of the mediaeval period, and illumination on manuscripts (*fig.7*) to employ in English church interiors. Few authentic examples of English mediaeval wallpainting survived the depredations of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century reformers and the limewashing of interiors.

Viollet-le-Duc, one of the most admired and respected nineteenth-century students of Gothic design, believed;

*... it is certain that the art of architectural decoration developed itself in the cloister, and proceeded from Greek Byzantine art.*<sup>15</sup>

It is believed that European artists looked to Byzantine art for inspiration in the early mediaeval period, and certainly English mediaeval painters produced an artform which closely resembled early Christian or Romanesque art (*fig.8*). Teams of mediaeval builders travelled backwards and forwards across the English channel<sup>16</sup> so it is likely that they might have been responsible for the transfer of the decorative artforms, including decorative wallpainting. However almost all trace of this art was suppressed so successfully during the reformation that it

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<sup>15</sup> E. Viollet-le-Duc, Dictionnaire Raisonné de l'Architecture Française du XI<sup>e</sup> au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, 10 vols. (Paris, 1854-68), Vol. VII, p.57.

<sup>16</sup> John James, Chartres, les Constructeurs, two parts, Chartres, Société Archeologique d'Eure et Loire, 1977. The work identifies teams of masons who participated in the construction of Gothic cathedrals in both England and Europe.

remained virtually unknown in the period prior to its revival in the nineteenth century.

Painted decorations did not feature significantly as architectural decoration in Gothick<sup>17</sup> work. Although the Society of Antiquaries researched and published examples of mediaeval painting, these authentic examples were not widely reproduced as architectural decoration and internal painted decorations did not feature at all in the Commissioner's churches.

Students of the Gothic Revival mostly agree that the Revival stemmed from a literary impulse which developed into a romantic movement. The architecture and decoration of this phase was basically classical with applied Gothic details; the 'Strawberry Hill' Gothic.<sup>18</sup> This preceded the spiritual phase, which emerged out of the search for a truly English religious artform, in the second quarter of the nineteenth century .

#### 2.2.1 Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin

The most important figure of the spiritual phase of the Gothic Revival was unquestionably Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin. In a relatively short working career, between 1835 and his death in 1852, he designed more than one hundred buildings and wrote eight very influential books. He formed business associations with the manufacturer, John Hardman<sup>19</sup> to produce decorative metalwork and stained

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<sup>17</sup> 'Gothick' is used when referring to the pre-Victorian phase of the nineteenth-century Gothic Revival. It generally meant little more than pointed arches, barge boarded gables, or crenellations and pinnacles. The Gothick phase of the Gothic Revival is now appreciated as a splendid and particularly British contribution to European Romanticism. (Kerr and Broadbent, Gothick Taste, p.8).

<sup>18</sup> The term 'Strawberry Hill Gothic' is used chiefly to describe an urbane Georgian version of mediaeval design. Strawberry Hill was the name of Horace Walpole's house at Twickenham, Middlesex, which he acquired in 1747 and had by 1753, transformed into a compact Gothic Villa.

<sup>19</sup> John Hardman (1811-1867) founded an ecclesiastical metal works at Birmingham in 1838. Pugin persuaded him to expand his business to include stained glass. From 1845 to 1852 Pugin was chief designer for the firm John

glass, and another with the decorator, John G. Crace<sup>20</sup> to supply decorated tiles, wallpapers, fabrics and all manner of painted decorations.

Throughout his prodigious career Pugin's motivating philosophy was the restoration of the Christian style of architecture and the decorative arts,<sup>21</sup> which he believed were suited to his country and its climate.<sup>22</sup> His career began at a time when Gothic churches were being erected all over England. What he saw as a shallowness and shoddiness of the Gothic architecture in the majority of churches erected as a result of the Church Building Act of 1818, compelled him to pursue assiduously his Christian beliefs and an ideal Christian Gothic art.

Pugin knew from his own researches that these 'Commissioners' Gothic',<sup>23</sup> churches bore no relationship to the beautifully decorated English churches of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It seemed to him at the time that the whole community, from the eminent architects who recommended the Gothic style,<sup>24</sup> to the worshippers themselves, were totally ignorant of Gothic art.

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Hardman and Co.

<sup>20</sup> John Gregory Crace (1809-1889) decorator, was the son of Frederick Crace and grandson of John Crace, decorators of the Brighton Pavilion.

<sup>21</sup> The style to which Pugin referred was the style of Gothic, or English Mediaeval, art. Germann, Gothic Revival in Britain and Europe, p.70.

<sup>22</sup> Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, 'A Letter to A.W. Hakewill, Architect, in answer to his Reflections on the Style for Rebuilding the Houses of Parliament', (Salisbury, 1835), p.13.

<sup>23</sup> 'Commissioners Gothic' was the term used to describe the architecture of the churches which were built in the so called Gothic style at the direction of the Commissioners appointed by the British Parliament in 1811. The Commissioners urged the employment of Gothic design, having been advised that it would accommodate the greatest number of people at the smallest expense.

<sup>24</sup> The Church Commissioners asked the Crown Architects to make recommendations for designs which would offer high capacity and good auditorium facilities - a traditional feature of Protestant church architecture - at an economical price.

At the age of only 23 he took the bold step of drawing this fact to public attention in his highly controversial, Contrasts, or, a Parallel Between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, and Similar Buildings of the Present Day; Showing the Present Decay of Taste.<sup>25</sup>

Born the son of a French *emigré* who acquired a considerable reputation as a draughtsman and editor of illustrated books on Gothic architecture, he was at age 18 the captain of a schooner which was soon wrecked. At 19 he became director of a firm of stonemasons then facing bankruptcy. His first significant contribution to the Gothic Revival was made when he undertook to complete his father's works when his father died in 1833.<sup>26</sup> He completed the last of these works, Examples of Gothic Architecture, in 1835, the same year he helped Charles Barry with his competition design for the new Houses of Parliament and the year in which he was converted to the Catholic faith.

Pugin's dedication to authentic Gothic architecture and art grew out of his detailed study of mediaeval buildings. In his youth he worked alongside his father to prepare drawings of authentic mediaeval designs for publication and he became so enamoured of the art that he could later state with candour:

*After a most close and impartial investigation, I feel perfectly convinced the Roman Catholic Church is the only true one, and the only one in which the grand and sublime style of architecture can ever be restored.*<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> A.W.N. Pugin, Contrasts, or, a Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, and Similar Buildings of the Present Day: Showing the Present Decay of Taste, (London, 1836, 2nd Ed. 1841).

<sup>26</sup> The decision to devote himself entirely to the pursuit of Gothic design was announced by Pugin in a letter to Willsdon on 26 February 1833.

<sup>27</sup> Phoebe Stanton, Pugin. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971) quoting letter from Pugin to A.W. Hakewill.

Like so many of his fellow architects who were caught up in the Gothic Revival, it led to him converting to the Catholic faith. He revealed:

*I am the scholar and representative of those glorious Catholic architects who lived in ancient days and to whom the merit of all our present performances are in justice to be referred. I am continually studying and working in their principles. I seek antiquity not novelty. I strive to revive not invent.*<sup>28</sup>

With the publication of Contrasts in 1836 and Gothic Furniture in the Style of the Fifteenth Century, and the building of his first Gothic style building, 'The Grange', to serve as his own home, Pugin's career was in full Gothic flood.

Because he was already collaborating with Barry on the Houses of Parliament, serving as superintendent of carving and decoration, Pugin's first major architectural commission did not come until 1837. He was invited by the rich Lancashire landowner, Charles Scarisbrick, to renovate his house in the Gothic style. Then followed a number of other commissions for churches and other Gothic designs. St Mary's, Uttoxeter, completed in 1839 was the first of these. Painted decorations did not feature prominently in these early works.

Although his concern with the totality of structure and decorations had not matured until about 1839, he was already involved with Crace, Hardman and Minton on the decoration of St Marie's Grange, Ramsgate, which was an essay in the fifteenth-century style. A watercolour sketch of the library suggests a polychrome wall treatment with a frieze of illuminated letters.

St Alban's, Macclesfield, has a beautifully decorated chancel, of about 1841, with an otherwise plain interior.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, also completed in 1841, has painted decorations on the roof and columns only, although Pugin planned also to paint and decorate the spandrels, arches and walls. By his own reckoning Pugin did not believe that he had a satisfactory example to hold up to others until the completion of Ackworth Grange and St Giles', Cheadle, decorated in 1845.

The forerunner to the decorations of St Giles', Cheadle, can be found in the little church of St Mary, Warwick Bridge.<sup>29</sup> The open timber roof and chancel were beautifully painted and gilded (*figs 10&11*) by the same craftsmen who later carried out the work at Cheadle (*figs 12&13*). Curious as it may seem today to an observer of this elaborately decorated church, Pugin did not set out to decorate the interior of St Giles with painted decorations, even though he considered it to have been restored with scrupulous fidelity.

He worked tirelessly to collect accurate models for the decorations which consist of hundreds of painted patterns, each with its special iconographic meaning. For him the result was perfect and he wished, more than anything else, to hold up to others this church as a model to be copied.

The inspiration for the painted decorations probably came from a project which both Pugin and his rich client, the Earl of Shrewsbury, had come to know while St Giles was under construction. This was the restoration of *Sainte Chapelle* in Paris, chosen also as the model for the painted decorations restored to St. Stephen's chapel in the Palace of Westminster. Shrewsbury wrote to Pugin from Paris instructing him to treat the interior of the Cheadle building with painted decorations. Pugin went out and acquired an authentic fourteenth-century manuscript, illuminated with coloured designs, and other artefacts.

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<sup>29</sup>The church of St Mary, (Our Lady and St. Wilfred), Warwick Bridge, Cumberland, (1841), is one of the finest surviving examples of Pugin's English Parish churches.

The work was carried out to instructions by John Hardman's corps of painters. Hardman also supplied the stained glass and the metalwork. The wide range of encaustic floor tiles were designed by Pugin from the same sources and made up to his specifications by Mintons. This successful formula appears to have been followed in the delightful Rolle chantry, Bicton,<sup>30</sup> and again in St Marie's Grange,<sup>31</sup> where Crace was introduced on the decoration and furnishings.

The Rolle chantry is decorated with very sophisticated painted decorations. So too is St Mary's, West Toffs, which has painted designs closely resembling the plates in Floriated Ornament.<sup>32</sup> The design motifs in the chancel and organ loft are derived from manuscript illuminations and authentic mediaeval examples which Pugin had studied in England and France. Pugin drew every detail of the decoration and carefully directed the workmen.

For the edification of those who did not have the benefit of his years of study of the subject, and because there was something inherently didactic about everything that Pugin did, he published his Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament<sup>33</sup> and Floriated Ornament to illustrate the true meaning of mediaeval decorations. Glossary contains a number of richly coloured plates which expose Pugin's ideas on colour, motif and decoration, compiled from ancient authorities and examples. In Floriated Ornament he revealed that:

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<sup>30</sup> The Rolle Mortuary Chapel, Bicton, Devonshire, (1849-50), erected on the site of an old church. Pugin produced one of his finest works in the interior. The painted decorations are improvisations of Heraldic material.

<sup>31</sup> St Marie's Grange, Ramsgate (built 1843-44 and decorated 1849-50) was described by Pugin as a folio edition of his previous house, St Marie's Grange, Salisbury.

<sup>32</sup> A.W.N. Pugin, Floriated Ornament, a series of 31 designs (London: 1849).

<sup>33</sup> A.W.N. Pugin, Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament and Costume, compiled from Ancient Authorities and Examples (1846).



*... the finest foliage work in the Gothic buildings were all close approximations to nature, (and that) their peculiar character was chiefly owing to the manner of their arrangement and disposition.*<sup>34</sup>

The designs in the 31 plates show a feeling for natural forms and a remarkably perceptive eye for abstract design. His explanation of the principles of mediaeval decoration is free of references to symbolism and predictably didactic.

Pugin's mastery of painted decorations appears to have reached maturity in the late 1840s and it was most probably the discipline of the interior decoration of the Houses of Parliament which drew out his talent.

It was in 1844 that Charles Barry engaged him on the interior decoration of the Houses of Parliament. Although Barry is known to have had some experience of working in the Gothic style of architecture, he was a classicist and did not have his collaborator's intuitive understanding of Gothic detail.

Pugin was unique in being able to think in Gothic. Hence he was able to devise the ingenious adaptations of late mediaeval ornamental detail to such nineteenth-century objects as umbrella stands, inkwells, gas chandeliers, as well as to wallpapers, textiles, blinds and painted decorations. He instructed all the tradesmen in detail and achieved outstanding results, most notably in the carvings and stained glass.

Whether it was through a feeling of altruism or, more likely, through the desire to promote Gothic design as far as possible, he consolidated the design achievements of the Houses of Parliament into an extremely successful business in conjunction with Crace, Hardman, George Meyer, (his builder), and Powell.

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

It seems almost everyone, but most particularly the church builders, sought Pugin's designs in metalwork, glass, furniture, fabrics, wallpapers, sculpture in stone, wallpainting, tiles, bookbindings and embroidery. With the unveiling of the new Houses of Parliament the demand grew even further and continued after Pugin's death in 1852. The business remained healthy for many years under Crace's direction.

In other projects such as the church of Our Ladye Star of the Sea, Greenwich<sup>35</sup> by the architect William Wardell, also undertaken in 1851, Pugin's hand can be seen in the painted decorations and fittings he designed for the project. The last public appearance of Pugin together with his fabricators was in the Mediaeval Court of the Great Exhibition in 1851. The designs he prepared were executed by Crace. The Gothic tradition was thus promoted through such collaborations beyond the limits which could have been considered possible for one man in such a brief space of time.

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<sup>35</sup>Our Ladye Star of the Sea, (1851), by William Wardell. Much of the decoration inside is reputed to be by Pugin.

### 2.2.2 The Crace Family

The Crace family business, established in 1768 by Edward Crace, a studio artist, passed on through five generations. By virtue of the number and importance of the commissions undertaken by the Craces during the nineteenth century they maintained a dominance in their field.

Edward was succeeded in the business by his son, John, who worked closely with prominent architects including William Chambers and John Soane. John was succeeded in the business by his son Frederick whom he trained. Together they worked on Carlton House and the Brighton Pavilion, amongst a host of important commissions. Frederick Crace painted and gilded the private apartments of Windsor Castle for George IV and later continued the work for William IV, introducing his son John Gregory Crace to the business on these works in 1826 at the age of seventeen.

John Gregory Crace expanded the business into a major decorating and furnishing house. He drew influence and artists from France, which he esteemed to be well in advance of Britain in high class decoration at the time, and he opened smart premises in London to show off the firm's wares. Like his father and grandfather before him he continued the tradition of designing and directing all of the firm's work until the business grew too large to continue this practice.

J.G.Crace was a widely travelled and eclectic decorator. During the 1830s and 1840s there were strong influences from France, Italy and Germany in his designs. However his introduction to Pugin and their collaborations, particularly on the Houses of Parliament, laid the foundation for outstanding success in the Gothic style (*figs 14&15*). Together they added a vital new dimension in Gothic Revival decoration by expanding the range of elements available for interior decoration.

J.G. Crace introduced his son John Diblee Crace to the business in the mid 1850s. During the following three decades they produced a high output of work which reached to the distant colonies of New South Wales and Western Australia.<sup>36</sup> But far more prominent and accessible were their works in places of note such as Windsor Castle and the 1862 Exhibition Building.

It was John G.Crace who was recommended by Sir Charles Barry for the decoration of the Houses of Parliament, in 1848, although the contract was awarded in the name of Frederick Crace and Son.<sup>37</sup> It was also John G. Crace who was appointed special commissioner and as a juror for works of decoration, furniture and paper hangings at the 1851 exhibition. At this exhibition he also executed the decoration of the Mediaeval Court for Pugin. Although the records show that Owen Jones designed and supervised the decoration of the Exhibition Hall it is known that Crace retained a strong association with the building and decorated the Queen's apartments in the building when it was re-erected at Sydenham.

Although it is not possible today to make a comparison of the colours used in the many late nineteenth-century exhibition halls, it seems likely that it was Crace's London exhibition hall decorations of 1862, rather than Owen Jones' earlier interior, which were copied as the model for the halls which appeared later in many of the principal centres of population throughout the British Commonwealth.

The Crace firm was finally wound up by J.D.Crace in 1899 having achieved every conceivable objective in decoration.

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<sup>36</sup>Crace supplied the furnishings for Government House in Perth, WA, in 1862 and for a House called 'Gungahlin' in NSW, in 1883.

<sup>37</sup>In researching the history of the Crace business it is not always clear who was responsible for the work at any point in time.

### 2.2.3 William Wardell

William Wardell is representative of a number of architects whose interest in the authenticity of Gothic architecture brought them into contact with Pugin. The two collaborated on a number of commissions in the closing years of Pugin's career. Wardell<sup>38</sup> later emigrated to Australia for health reasons and made a mighty contribution to the development of Gothic art and painted decoration there.

Like Pugin, Wardell was converted to Roman Catholicism and preferred to work in the Catholic tradition, designing about thirty Catholic churches, mostly in the London area. Pugin appears to have provided the designs for the decorations and furniture in Wardell's two principal London projects, Our Ladye Star of the Sea, Greenwich, and Our Lady of the Victories, Clapham, Wandsworth. The writer, Pevsner, believed the latter to be amongst the most noteworthy church works of the 1840s.<sup>39</sup>

At no time in his career did Wardell show any inclination to design decorations for the interiors of his churches, although he did design some furniture. Instead he sought the assistance of the best available talent to embellish a selected number of his buildings. In London it was to Pugin that he turned for assistance and, when he reached Australia, he went to the best available decorators in Melbourne and Sydney.

Only a small number of Wardell's Australian works are in the Gothic style. In the rapidly expanding colonies of Victoria and New South Wales, styles were diluted by the many social and ethnic groups which made up the fabric of

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<sup>38</sup>William Wilkinson Wardell (1828-1899) trained as both an architect and engineer in London. He designed and built over thirty Gothic Revival churches in Britain before emigrating to Australia in 1858, arriving in Melbourne where he was immediately employed by the Catholic Church.

<sup>39</sup>N. Pevsner, The Buildings of Britain, London, (Penguin Books, 1952), p.41

the new country, hence the decorations in two of his best known Gothic buildings, St Mary's, East St. Kilda, Melbourne, and the E.S. & A. Bank, Melbourne, are in an unusual Protestant Heraldic style which emanated from Scotland. On the other hand, St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney and St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, both by Wardell, are two outstanding examples of the English Gothic Revival style.

Soon after arriving in Melbourne Wardell brought out from England J.B. Denny<sup>40</sup> to act as Clerk of Works on the construction of St John's College, Sydney University, and on St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, two of Wardell's most important Australian commissions. There is an interesting link established between Wardell, Denny, Pugin, and another outstanding figure of the Gothic Revival, Thomas Willement.<sup>41</sup> J.B. Denny was Estate Builder to the Earl of Shrewsbury at Alton Towers,<sup>42</sup> where he worked under the direction of Thomas Willement from 1833 to 1842<sup>43</sup> and Pugin, from 1837 to 1851.

It is possible that Denny was involved in the construction of nearby St Giles, Cheadle and that after Pugin's death he moved to London to work with Wardell (from 1852 to 1858). In any event, his experience in the employment of the Earl gave him unique experience and qualifications for the Gothic building works he carried out under Wardell's direction in Melbourne and Sydney. There was no large reserve of experience from which Wardell could draw and it is a measure of the enterprise of both men that they were able to collaborate so far from their places of origin.

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<sup>40</sup> John Bun Denny (c.1800-1892) estate builder to the Earl of Shrewsbury, Clerk of Works to Pugin and Wardell. Listed as Architect in the Sands and MacDougall Melbourne Director, 1890.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Willement, (1786-1871) prominent stained-glass designer and decorator from 1812 to 1865.

<sup>42</sup> Alton Towers, near Cheadle, Staffordshire, (c.1814-1827), altered and enlarged by Pugin from 1837 for the sixteenth Earl of Shrewsbury.

<sup>43</sup> Clive Wainwright, 'Davington Priory', Country Life, 9 December 1971.

#### 2.2.4 Thomas Willement

Thomas Willement's career has been overshadowed by that of Pugin, but he was equally important as a pioneer of Gothic Revival decoration. Indeed, many of the achievements for which Pugin is now acclaimed, were made also by Willement.

He first worked for the Earl of Shrewsbury at Alton Towers in 1833, four years before Pugin was appointed architect. His works there included a vaulting of rich stained glass for the ceiling of the corridor, a large armorial window for the banqueting hall, and the whole of the painted decorations throughout the principal apartments.<sup>44</sup>

When Willement was required to work under Pugin the two came into conflict. In 1842, after a disagreement over the way Willement made up one of Pugin's designs in glass, Pugin announced that he would never work with him again. It would be wrong to construe the falling out as an indictment against the quality of Willement's design work for there is ample evidence in his surviving work to confirm that it was authentic and beautifully crafted. It was probably a case of two designers being one too many on the project. Pugin was unused to stepping back to allow another to advance. It was Willement who had to make way for Pugin on this project.

Willement is best remembered as a designer of stained-glass and painted decorations, but he also designed textiles, wallpapers (*fig.16*), tiles and furniture, and was celebrated as an antiquary, artist, collector and author of several books on heraldry. During the 1830s and 1840s he published several authoritative works on stained glass, ancient furniture and Elizabethan architecture. He left a good account of his life's work which ran to over one thousand commissions.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Clive Wainwright, 'Thomas Willement', Country Life, 16 December 1971, p.1718.

During his long career Willement worked with most of the important architects of his generation, Salvin, Blore, Butterfield, Carpenter, Smirke and, of course, Pugin. Willement's scholarly antiquarian approach led him down a slightly different path from the one followed by Pugin. He was more interested in Elizabethan architecture and heraldry, and so was at ease with the country-house designers such as Blore and Salvin.

However early Gothic styles were not excluded from Willement's repertoire. In fact he restored a considerable amount of important early glass and some interiors. At Davington Priory, which he acquired for himself in 1842, he carried out one of the best and most sensitive examples of church restoration produced anywhere in the 1840s.<sup>46</sup>

He attempted to give back to the interior some of its lost mediaeval colour and splendour by using polychromatic decoration together with furniture and fittings that emphasised the historical character of the liturgy. Unlike the restorers of the previous century, who had a somewhat fanciful idea of the composition of mediaeval buildings, Willement and his scholarly fellow revivalists studied Gothic buildings at first-hand and only reproduced what they knew to be in the nature and the spirit of English Gothic architecture.

#### 2.2.5 Resistance to Gothic

Although the revival of Gothic architecture is clearly associated with the re-establishment of Roman Catholicism in England, English Catholics did not embrace the Gothic style easily. Catholic worship was a criminal offence until 1791, only private worship in the chapels of foreign embassies being permitted.

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<sup>45</sup>Clive Wainwright, 'Davington Priory', Country Life, 9 December 1971.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.



The first Roman Catholic churches built in England after the Reformation were built in the classical style. Later, when the ranks of English Catholics were swollen around Liverpool and Salford by Irish immigrants, they too were built in the classical styles.<sup>47</sup> The adoption of Gothic was met with initial resistance.

For a long time the non-conformist churches and the Church of Scotland also used classical styles. Neither English and Welsh non-conformists, nor Scots Presbyterians could be expected to proclaim the Catholic Middle Ages as the most glorious era of Christian history. Their traditions emphasised the preaching of God's word, rather than the celebration of his Blessed Sacrament. Hence a typical non-conformist place of worship was a deliberately austere preaching box.<sup>48</sup>

The Gothic Revival up to the middle of the nineteenth century was principally an English phenomenon. In Scotland the neo-Classicists still dominated architectural circles and built the majority of churches and public buildings. The reason for this is not difficult to determine. The extreme violence of the Reformation had destroyed Scotland's mediaeval art heritage almost completely, and the Calvinist revulsion against 'idolatry' and 'graven images' ensured that there would be no rush to replace it in the turbulent centuries which followed.

Outside of the Church of England classical styles held a position of strength from which they were able to diversify in the climate of enlightenment which came with the travels to the East and the classical world by a few architectural scholars. The classical school enjoyed the guiding influence of champions who increasingly drew their influence from the architecture of the east.

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<sup>47</sup> Warwick Rodwell and James Bentley, Our Christian Heritage, (London, George Phillip, 1984), p.191.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p.192.

### 2.3 Owen Jones and The Islamic Inspiration

The religious inspiration of the sort which propelled Pugin in his pursuit of 'the sublime art' resulted in an entirely different destiny for his immediate contemporary, Owen Jones.<sup>49</sup> For, like Pugin, Jones believed that great works of architecture were products of religious inspiration, and that;

*... the Reformation ... destroyed Religious architecture and the chain which held society linked together.*<sup>50</sup>

At this point their views took entirely different paths. Owen Jones looked steadfastly to the East for his design inspiration where Pugin sought the same in the architecture of England itself.

Accounts of the significance of nineteenth-century polychromy generally refer to the place and importance of Owen Jones.<sup>51</sup> His work as architect and decorator, publisher, designer, illustrator and pioneer of chromolithography, place him at the head of the list of influential figures involved in the renaissance of English Decorative Art. His lifelong friend, colleague and admirer, Christopher Dresser,<sup>52</sup> referred to him in a public lecture delivered in 1874 as the greatest ornamentist of modern times.<sup>53</sup>

Owen Jones developed a profound understanding of how to achieve 'repose' in richly ornamented interiors by the

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<sup>49</sup> Owen Jones (1809-1874) trained as an architect with Lewis Vulliamy, then travelled extensively in the East.

<sup>50</sup> Owen Jones, 'On the Influences of Religion upon Art', lecture delivered to the newly formed Architectural Society, 1835, privately printed by Jones' friends in 1863.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Darby, 'The Islamic Revival, 1830-1970', (the Roger Dixon Memorial Lecture, 6 June 1985, unpublished).

<sup>52</sup> Christopher Dresser (1834-1904) commercial designer and design educator.

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Dresser. Public lecture delivered at Owen Jones's memorial exhibition, 1874.

application of principles which he discovered from first-hand observation of Islamic architecture in North Africa and Spain. He believed that the work of all British designers would benefit from close study of the art of Islam as it had for himself.

When Jones's articles with Vulliamy came to an end in 1831, he travelled extensively in France, Egypt, and Spain where, in Granada, he was smitten by the Alhambra, the fairytale palace,<sup>54</sup> the building which to him reached:

*...the very summit of perfection of Moorish art, as is the Parthenon of Greek art. In this one building is to be found the speaking art of the Egyptians, the natural grace and refinement of the Greeks, the geometrical combinations of the Romans, the Byzantines, and the Arabs.*<sup>55</sup>

Jones's close study of this building inspired all his later work and it galvanised his career in the promotion of artistic decorative design.

He first visited Granada in 1833 in the company of the Frenchman Jules Goury,<sup>56</sup> with the express purpose of studying the ancient systems of polychromatic decoration. An earlier attempt to make this study in Constantinople was frustrated by the paucity of coloured remains. However word had spread amongst the travelling fraternity of European students of art,<sup>57</sup> that the Alhambra was still the richest jewel of polychromatic decoration, despite the loss of its paintwork and gilding.

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<sup>54</sup>In 1835, while preparing his Alhambra for publication, Jones gave a lecture to the newly formed Architectural Society, in which he referred to 'the fairy palace of the Alhambra'. A copy of this lecture, privately printed by Jones' friends in 1863, is in the Victoria and Albert Museum: National Art Library.

<sup>55</sup>Owen Jones, Grammar of Ornament, (London: Day and Son, 1856) p.66.

<sup>56</sup>Jules Goury, (died 1834), met Owen Jones in Egypt in 1832. They travelled together to Constantinople and to Granada, where Goury died in August, 1834.

<sup>57</sup>Travel in Eastern Europe and near Eastern Asia was the goal of most young British and European artists searching for new directions in art. Hittorf, Semper, Lewis and Roberts, all preceded Jones and Goury to Egypt and Spain.

Goury and Jones set about recording this masterpiece of Moorish art with a view to publishing the results. Tragically, however, Goury succumbed to cholera at Granada in late 1834. Jones returned with his body to France, where he resolved to complete their joint work. In 1837 he returned to Granada to authenticate their drawings, which then took another eight years to finalise and publish.<sup>58</sup>

When the coloured drawings for this book could not be published in England in the comparatively new art of lithography, he decided to print and publish the work himself. In this he took an important pioneering step towards the establishment of colour printing, known as lithochromatography, as a new industry.<sup>59</sup> The resulting volumes, Alhambra,<sup>60</sup> found their way into the working libraries of British design studios.<sup>61</sup>

Christopher Dresser believed that Jones should have been given the title 'Lord Alhambra' for his services to the promotion of eastern decorative art.

British designers and the British public did not have to wait for the publication of Alhambra to learn of Jones's obsession with eastern polychromatic ornament. He forecast as early as 1835 that colour, as he had experienced it in Islamic buildings, would play a part in future architectural developments<sup>62</sup>. Indeed at the time he was drawing up plans for the colouring of the Crystal Palace he revealed that he had first conceived of the vast

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<sup>58</sup> Owen Jones, Plans, Elevations and Sections of the Alhambra, 2 Vols (London, 1842).

<sup>59</sup> Michael Darby, 'The Islamic Perspective, An Aspect of British Design in the Nineteenth Century' (Exhibition catalogue, Leighton House gallery, London, 1980).

<sup>60</sup> Owen Jones, Plans, Elevations and Sections of the Alhambra, 2 Vols

<sup>61</sup> A copy of Alhambra survives today in the working library of Woodward Grosvenor and Co. Ltd., manufacturers of high class figured carpets since 1793 for instance.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Darby, Roger Dixon Memorial Lecture.

interior glowing with fragments of primary colour twenty years earlier in Egypt.<sup>63</sup>

In his own early attempts to create the new architecture he drew too literally on his Eastern sources, as in his competition entry for St Georges Hall, Liverpool, in 1839. One reviewer claimed;

*... in the interior, the rich decorations, the painted roof, and the slender columns, show that the architect seems to have been imbued with a love for his favourite Alhambra. The building, however, is much too fantastic for execution.*<sup>64</sup>

A few years later another competition design was rejected and the Builder noted;

*Mr Owen Jones has not been able to forget the Alhambra, his design being throughout a clever attempt to reproduce that style.*<sup>65</sup>

Jones' early architectural works were a little too novel for immediate acceptance by the profession in the 1840s. They certainly did not have the same impact as his decoration, although Christopher Dresser, who remained ever loyal to his inspirational teacher, described his St James Concert Hall, Picadilly, as having excessive beauty.

His attempts to create a new architectural style broadly based on the same approach he applied to decoration failed to meet the demands of conventional architecture. Consequently his concern with building decreased and his involvement with decoration increased. With his excellent self-education he was readily able to turn his hand to designing interior decorations and also patterns for dress and furnishing fabrics, and wallpapers.

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<sup>63</sup>Michael Darby, 'Owen Jones and the Eastern Ideal' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Reading, 1974), p.28

<sup>64</sup>Gentleman's Magazine, CLXVIII, 1840, p.69.

<sup>65</sup>Builder, 8 May, 1847, p.214.

Jones made his start along the path of ornamentation by decorating the interior of Christ Church, Streatham, South London, for his future brother-in-law, James W. Wild.<sup>66</sup> Although the decorations do not survive it is most likely that they were in a style well suited to the architecture, probably in the Moorish style. In 1842 this would have been very unusual and probably difficult for the worshipping public to accept.

Some idea of the nature of Jones' design proposals at this time can be gained from his two executed schemes for numbers 24 and 8 Kensington Palace Gardens.

The design for the painted decorations of the ceiling of the octagonal drawing room of No. 8, executed in 1843, uses a central rose pattern and wide border of the exotic plant motifs found in the Alhambra (*fig.17*).

Wild was also an authority on Islamic art, having lived in Cairo and studied Islamic architecture in the 1830s. He became an authority on Arabian art and was subsequently appointed a referee on the subject at the South Kensington Museum, where, in 1852, the Department of Practical Art was established in response to Jones' aggressive promotion of the utilitarian approach to design, in particular Islamic design.

### 2.3.1 The Great Exhibition

The idea for the Great Exhibition of 1851 grew out of the annual exhibition of the Society of Arts which, under Prince Albert's presidency, sought to promote the British design arts, particularly the union of the fine arts with manufacturing. However, far from highlighting the advanced state of British design, the exhibition revealed a sad decline in the standard of design in industrially manufactured goods.

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<sup>66</sup>James W. Wild, (1814-1892), architect, lived for many years in Cairo where he gathered a very large collection of Cairean ornament for study.

The exhibition building was, however, revolutionary. The story of how the designer, Joseph Paxton, drew on British industrial resources to produce a glass and steel structure, which earned the label 'Crystal Palace', has been told many times. That it was erected and dismantled in the space of a few months, then re-erected on a new site at Sydenham, was, by Victorian standards, a truly remarkable achievement.

Less well-known, by contrast, are the details of the decoration of the interior which were designed by Owen Jones. In the years leading up to the Exhibition Jones was attracting a great deal of attention for his well-publicised interest and involvement in decoration. As the superintendent of decorations he set out to achieve a cohesive polychromatic effect by using only primary colours, blue, yellow and red. The following extracts from a speech by Jones not only explains why, but reveals a lot about the thinking of the time:

*... the very nature of the material of which this building is mainly constructed, viz., iron, requires that it should be painted ... a simple tint of white or stone colour, the usual method of painting iron [on] a line of columns ... would present the effect of a white wall, and it would be impossible, in the distance, to distinguish one column from another; [if], the building be painted of a dark colour, like the roofs of some of our railway stations, this, equally with mass of indistinctness ..*

*... now consider the building as painted with some neutral tint, dull green or buff. In doing this we should be perfectly safe, ... Yet how tame and monotonous would be the result!...*

*... the only other well-defined system which presents itself, [is], parti-colouring. This, I conceive, if successfully carried out, would bring the building and its contents into perfect harmony, and it would fitly carry out one of the objects for which this exhibition was formed, viz. that of promoting the union of fine arts with manufactures...*

... if we examine the remains of the architecture of the ancients, we shall find everywhere, that in the early periods the prevailing colours used in decoration were the 'primaries', blue, red and yellow, the 'secondaries' appearing very sparingly ...

... it is equally true of the works of the middle ages, in the early manuscripts, and in the stained glass, though other colours were not excluded, yet the primaries were chiefly used, whilst, in later times, we have every variety of shade and tint, but rarely used with equal success ...

In the decoration of the Exhibition building, I therefore propose to use the colours blue, red, and yellow, in such relative quantities, as to neutralise or destroy each other; thus no one colour will be dominant or fatiguing to the eye, and all the objects exhibited will assist, and be assisted by, the colours of the building itself ...

... discarding ...the perfect neutral white as unfit for the occasion, we naturally adopt the colours blue, red, and yellow, in or near the neutral proportions of 8, 5 and 3; but, to avoid any harsh antagonism of the primary colours when in contact, ... I propose, in all cases, to interpose a line of white between them, which will soften them and give them their true value.

It is well known, that if blue and red should be placed together without the interposition of white, they would each become tinged with the complementary colour of the other; ...

As one of the objects of decorating a building is to increase the effect of light and shade, the best means of using blue, red, and yellow, is to place blue, which retires, on the concave surfaces, yellow, which advances, on the convex, and red, the colour of the middle distance, on the horizontal planes, and the neutral white on the vertical planes. Following out this principal on the building in question, we have red for the underside of girders, yellow on the round portions of the columns, and blue in the hollow parts of the capitals.<sup>67</sup>

In arriving at the proportions of 8, 5 and 3, for blue,

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<sup>67</sup> Evening lecture read to the Ordinary General Meeting of the Royal Institute of British Architects, December 16, 1851.



red and yellow, Jones drew on the direct experiments of George Field, whose main work, Chromatography,<sup>68</sup> was the established standard work on colours. However this was the first time that it was applied to architectural decorations on a grand scale. What Jones achieved, was a balanced colour composition, just as a composer would produce a musical composition by balancing and arranging musical notes. Contemporary reports confirm that the effect in the Crystal Palace was one of uniformity akin to a bluish haze. In this case the theory, as Jones well knew from his experience with buildings of the Islamic world, succeeded in practice.

Jones recognised the potential of a building which, at least on the inside, resembled an eastern bazaar. It did not, therefore, require a quantum leap in thinking for him to design a decorative treatment which would greatly enhance the display of exhibits and extend this theme, particularly by using large carpets suspended from the galleries. The designs for some of these would have been inspired by the colour plates in Alhambra. What is more, Jones reinforced the Islamic theme in his layout of the exhibits. He placed the four main Islamic displays at the four cardinal points of the exhibition.

British exhibits made a poor showing at the Exhibition. However there was a good response to the Islamic displays, including the building decorations and the Alhambra court designed by Jones.

His views were immediately sought on the approach to follow in setting up the Department of Practical Art at the South Kensington Teaching Museum whose aim it was to fill an obvious void in English design education. Many of the Islamic artefacts from the Exhibition were bought to start its collection.

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<sup>68</sup> George Field, Chromatography, or a Treatise on Colours and Pigments, and of their Powers in Painting, (London, 1835); also ed. Thomas W. Salter, London, n.d. [1869], and ed. J. Scott Taylor, (London, 1885).

Jones became involved in the teaching of the syllabus. In his printed lectures on colour in the decorative arts,<sup>69</sup> he listed nineteen axioms, and added a further four in a series of lectures he gave 'On the True and False in the Decorative Arts'.<sup>70</sup> These were subsequently published by the Department of Practical Art as their official doctrine.<sup>71</sup>

### 2.3.2 The Grammar of Ornament

In 1856 Owen Jones assembled his 'principles', together with illustrations of all the important styles of ornament, in The Grammar of Ornament. This famous publication was conceived as a portable museum; an exhibition of ornamental designs from all cultures. The colour plates in the book are referred to by Jones as 'collections' and he hoped that the 'collection' of such a rich variety of ornamental designs from all periods and all cultures might aid in arresting what he believed was slavish copying of familiar forms. In so doing, however, he acknowledged:

*It is more than probable that the first result of sending forth to the world this collection will be seriously to increase this dangerous tendency, and that many will be content to borrow from the past those forms of beauty which have not already been used up ad nauseam. It has been my desire to arrest this tendency, and to awaken a higher ambition.*<sup>72</sup>

In the preparation of 'the collection', Jones was assisted by his friends, the designers, J.Bonomi, (Egyptian ornamental plates), James Wild (Arabian), J.B.Waring (Byzantine and Elizabethan), Christopher

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<sup>69</sup> Owen Jones, Lecture on Architecture and the Related Arts, 1863.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> The lectures are listed in the first report of the Department of Practical Art, 1853, p.228.

<sup>72</sup> Owen Jones, Grammar of Ornament, p.1.

Dresser (natural flowers), and Matthew Digby Wyatt (Renaissance and Italian).

The Grammar of Ornament opens with the elaboration of thirty seven general principles in the arrangement of form and colour in architecture and the decorative arts, which are advocated throughout the work. It became what was arguably the most important design source book ever published, and probably the most useful of all references for designers; especially painters and decorators. In the opinion of the plain speaking Journal of Decorative Art it was claimed that Jones and The Grammar of Ornament;

*... took the lead when the industrial arts had touched the lowest depths of vulgarity. [Jones] laid down rigid principles - discipline and control - made common sense the basis of all design ... His work served to check the latitudinarianism of the decorators of that day.*<sup>73</sup>

The sourcebook was used by British designers and manufacturers. Jones became a major figure in the renaissance of English decorative art. Matthew Digby Wyatt, who collaborated with Jones on both the Great Exhibition and the 1862 Exhibition claimed, in 1870, that he could detect the influence of Jones. He stated;

*... we work now in almost all departments of production, especially in carpets, rugs, tiles, floor-cloth, mural decoration, paper hangings, shawls and to some extent in jewellery and mosaics, in the spirit if not in the forms of Oriental art. Its influence is growing and I believe highly beneficial.*<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Journal of Decorative Art, January, 1881, p.3.

<sup>74</sup> 'Owen Jones and His Contemporaries', Chapter II, Journal of Decorative Art, February 1881, pp. 14-18.

## 2.4 The Egyptian and Greek Revival

In the north of Britain the decorative arts followed a somewhat different path from that established in the south. The Neo-Classicists still dominated in Scotland long after Englishmen ceased to consider themselves essentially Greek and Roman in spirit. While Islamic influences from the East and Gothic influences from France and Italy were appearing in English art and architecture; in Scotland the church and the wider community clung to classical styles.

Scottish artists returning from their travels in Europe and the East had been exposed to the same artistic influences as Jones and Wild but these influences did not manifest the same effect on them. However, influential Scottish artists returning from study tours in the Orient promoted Egyptian and Greek architecture most successfully. Their efforts contributed to rekindle what was, by then, a flagging interest in the Greek Revival.

The growing demand for large public buildings, such as museums, called for an architecture of display. The grandiose Neo-Classicism based on the revival of Greek, and of Roman architecture was considered most suitable for the purpose in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Nowhere did this produce a more spectacular effect than in Edinburgh, the Athens of the north.

When Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837 the Greek Revival style was fast becoming old-fashioned everywhere except in Scotland. Indeed, with the career of Alexander Thomson set to take off, it was yet to reach its full potential in Scotland.

It was well understood by Victorian students of art history that Greek architecture grew out of the Egyptian. Owen Jones qualified this to add that Greek art borrowed

partly from Egyptian and partly from the Assyrian.<sup>75</sup> Curiously, some designers in Scotland treated Egyptian and Greek as one artform; or rather they remarried the two in a new public artform, while their southern contemporaries treated the two as separate.

In England the Egyptian Revival produced only a few unashamedly eccentric architectural curiosities like Joseph Bonomi's Flax Mill at Leeds.<sup>76</sup> Thomas Hope produced Egyptian designs for furniture and interiors (*fig.2*) but these did not have a significant influence on the mainstream of fashion.

In the popular imagination the Egyptian Revival is usually thought to begin with the Napoleonic campaigns in Egypt in 1795-1799. However it was not until the publication of Denon's, *Voyage*<sup>77</sup> in 1802 and *Déscription*<sup>78</sup> in 1809-28, the two principal source books, that the examples of Egyptian design became based on scholarly observation rather than on fancy. These two publications added to the already substantial repertoire of Egyptian motifs in Empire and Regency taste.<sup>79</sup>

The Egyptian Court at the Crystal Palace in Sydenham by Owen Jones and Joseph Bonomi was intended for educational purposes (*fig.19*). It made a substantial impact on the Victorian public,<sup>80</sup> probably because it was the first

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<sup>75</sup> Owen Jones, *Grammar of Ornament*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>76</sup> Temple Mills, John Marshall's Flax Mill in Holbeck, Leeds by Joseph Bonomi, 1838-40.

<sup>77</sup> D. Viviant Denon, *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte pendant les Campagnes du Général Bonaparte*, (Paris, 1802).

<sup>78</sup> *Commission des Monuments d'Egypte. Description de l'Egypte, ou Recueil des Observations et des Recherches qui ont été faites en Egypte pendant l'Expedition de l'Armée Française. Publié par les Ordres de Sa Majesté l'Empereur Napoleon le Grand* (Paris, 1809-28).

<sup>79</sup> James Steven Curl, *The Egyptian Revival* (an introductory study of a recurring theme in the history of taste), (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1982), p.100.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

major public showing of Egyptian decorations and ornament in a comprehensive three dimensional display. Earlier there were two edifying illustrated works by Scottish observers from which designers in Scotland, in particular, were drawing inspiration. One was J.G. Wilkinson's, Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians,<sup>81</sup> which illustrated the implements and trappings of everyday life revealed in Egyptian tombs and tomb paintings. The other, David Roberts, magnificently illustrated, Egypt and Nubia.<sup>82</sup> This was the first work to demonstrate lucidly the degree to which colouring was used externally on Egyptian edifices. (fig.18) The information which reached British designers and artists was sufficient for them to construct a charming and mostly fanciful impression of the art of Egypt.

This mid nineteenth-century revival in England, in the main , was confined to studio artists, such as Edward Poynter who produced a stunning oil painting entitled 'Israel in Egypt',<sup>83</sup> a grand 'restoration' of ancient Thebes, based on Egyptological research (fig.20).and furniture designers.<sup>84</sup>

#### 2.4.1 Alexander Thomson and Followers

The most spectacular manifestation of the nineteenth-century Egyptian influence is to be found in the work of the misnamed Glasgow architect, 'Greek' Thomson,<sup>85</sup> whose very individual style had the respect and admiration of a wide circle. The 'Greek' label was adopted by Thomson in

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<sup>81</sup> J.G.Wilkinson, Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians (1837).

<sup>82</sup> David Roberts, Egypt and Nubia (1842-50).

<sup>83</sup> Sir Edward Poynter, Israel in Egypt, 1867, oil on canvas; 137.2 x 317.5cm signed 'E.J.P.' and dated 1867. Guildhall Art Gallery, Corporation of London.

<sup>84</sup> Illustrated London News, 11 May 1817, p.478.

<sup>85</sup> Alexander 'Greek' Thomson (1817-75) was one of the leading architects in Glasgow in the mid nineteenth century. He designed nearly all of his buildings in a late Neo-Classical (Egypto-Greek) style.

his own lifetime and an examination of the opinions of his colleagues and contemporaries reveals that they believed that he gained his inspiration from a close study of Greek, Egyptian and Assyrian architecture.

It would have been reasonable for the Victorian architectural community to arrive at the conclusion that Thomson's abiding interest was in the Greek. However this overlooks the role of the Italian Romanesque and other lesser influences on his work. He acknowledged that the Greek provided discipline to tie these styles together and there is no reason to doubt that his work was thoroughly researched. The amazing fact remains, though, that Thomson had no first hand experience of the countries of origin of these styles.

The architecture which most inspired Thomson was the work, in Edinburgh, of William Playfair and Thomas Hamilton. He greatly admired also the work of H.L. Elmes; especially his St Georges Hall in Liverpool.<sup>86</sup> Among the very few architectural writers he acknowledged were J.G. Wilkinson, David Roberts and James Ferguson.<sup>87</sup> It is difficult to imagine that he would not have referred also to Stuart and Revett's, The Antiquities of Athens<sup>88</sup> which was the main source book for the Greek Revival. Certainly the illustration of the Choragic Monument of Thrasyllos (320-319BC) appears to have had an impact on his designs.<sup>89</sup>

Alexander Thomson's 'Greek' architecture is now recognised as being the most exciting mid nineteenth-century development in Scotland. It drew acclaim from home and abroad, with comments such as;

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<sup>86</sup> St Georges Hall, Liverpool (H.L. Elmes, C.R. Cockerell, R. Rawlinson) 1842-54.

<sup>87</sup> Ronald McFadzean, The Life and Work of Alexander Thomson (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979) p.214.

<sup>88</sup> J. Stuart and N. Revett, The Antiquities of Athens, Measured and Delineated by James Stuart, F.R.S. and F.S.A. and Nicholas Revett, Painters and Architects (London: 1762-95).

<sup>89</sup> McFadzean, p.215.

*... there is one living architect of genius, Mr Alexander Thomson who by his works, is at the present day showing that Greek Art, properly used can be applied with success.*<sup>90</sup>

In 1880 Ford Madox Brown, the distinguished pre-Raphaelite artist and a decorator of some note, visited Thomson's Queen's Park church in Glasgow and stated that he regarded;

*... this church above everything [he had] seen in Modern Europe.*<sup>91</sup>

Even William Burges, a devotee of the thirteenth-century French Gothic, recommended to his students at the Architectural Association that they should;

*... devote some time to the drawings of Mr. Thomson of Glasgow, they represent buildings in Greek Architecture but certainly the best modern Greek Architecture it has ever been my lot to see.*<sup>92</sup>

Sadly, many of Thomson's best works have been swept aside in Glasgow's 1960s redevelopment programme. It is therefore not easy today to demonstrate how the bold massing and rich decoration of the exteriors of the buildings related to the interiors, and to what extent the interiors were also decorated. Research must therefore concentrate on the surviving examples and the descriptions and illustrations in contemporary works.

The best surviving example is the St. Vincent Street U.P. Church, Glasgow.<sup>93</sup> It is a building which demonstrates most powerfully Thomson's talent with bold massing. The architectural impact of the Greek temple, the eye-catching

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<sup>90</sup> Comment by Professor Roger Smith. Records of the Society of Arts, (London, 1865).

<sup>91</sup> Glasgow Herald, 22 December 1880.

<sup>92</sup> William Burges, 'Our Future Architecture', Builder (1 June 1867) pp.385-7.

<sup>93</sup> St Vincent Street United Presbyterian Church, Glasgow, (1857-9).



towers of pseudoisodomic masonry, and striking Egypto-Greek decoration are all dominant in this building. The very simple planning of minor rooms around a central chamber is justified by Thomson in the following comment which reveals that he was;

*... imbued with the thought that the classical style which was in use for all sacred structures when Paul preached, was that best fitted for a Presbyterian place of worship. To utilise the classic style to [the then] modern ecclesiastical uses involves certain difficulties. A Presbyterian church is essentially a place for hearing in, so the first duty of the architect is to produce an auditorium.*<sup>94</sup>

The treatment of the interior of St. Vincent Street is indeed bold. The open timber framed roof conforms to conventional assumptions about the form of the Greek temple design. The main members are picked-out in earthy reds and browns which contrast with the drab greens on the ceiling. Red brown stencilled decorations adorn the main members. The walls are painted in bold colours which, although re-painted in recent years, are believed to be consistent with the original. The column capitals and relief ornaments are picked-out in a variety of colours. The polished yellow pine joinery is delightfully enhanced by Greek patterns of stencilling and inlaid ebony.

This interior treatment was different from the almost contemporary Queen's Park church.<sup>95</sup> Although there is only a tantalisingly brief description of the Queen's Park church it seems that Thomson drew on a wide range of Egyptian, Classical and natural plant motifs to produce an interior decorative scheme of outstanding originality. Ford Madox Brown claimed that in this church;

*... tone and colour [were] suggestive of paradise itself.*<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> James Flemming, Historical Sketch of the St. Vincent Street United Free Church Congregation, (Glasgow, 1916), p.13.

<sup>95</sup> Queen's Park United Presbyterian Church, Glasgow, (1867), now demolished.

In domestic work Thomson did not deny his unbounded talent and devotion to Egyptian design in the handling of form and decoration. For example, the tenement he designed in Queen's Park<sup>97</sup> features all the devices such as projecting aedicule, pilasters and entablature decorated with incised anthemion and honeysuckle enrichments. The treatment of the interiors exemplified his pre-occupation with Greek design. The bold plaster cornices and ceiling decorations are sometimes splendidly ornate in design.

One of Thomson's truly great domestic works, Holmwood<sup>98</sup> is featured in Blackie's, Villa and Cottage Architecture.<sup>99</sup> The illustrations show a stupendous ensemble of Greek architectural detail and ornament (*fig.23*). The black and white illustrations are rich with ornament and figurework. The dining room walls were decorated with a continuous series of subjects from Flaxman's illustrations of the 'Iliad'; coloured brown on a blue ground. The drawing room featured panel paintings illustrating Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King'.

Holmwood has a significant place in the development of architectural painted decorations in Scotland and Australia, for it bought Daniel Cottier<sup>100</sup> and Thomson together for the first time. This collaboration laid the foundation for their later work on the Queen's Park United Presbyterian church which drew such warm praise from Ford Madox Brown.

The Egypto-Greek influence which is evident in the work of Thomson remained strong in Scotland for many years. The prominent art chronicler, James Moyr Smith,<sup>101</sup> drew on

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<sup>96</sup> Glasgow Evening Times, (19 October 1893).

<sup>97</sup> Tenement, Queen's Park (corner of Eglinton Street), Glasgow, (1857-8).

<sup>98</sup> Holmwood, Netherlee Road, Cathcart, Glasgow, (1857-8).

<sup>99</sup> Villa and Cottage Architecture, (selected examples of country and suburban residences recently erected), (London, Blackie and Son, 1868).

<sup>100</sup> Daniel Cottier, (1838-1891), Glasgow-born stained glass artist, decorator and designer.

Thomson.'s decorative works to illustrate themes in his monthly journal Decoration.<sup>102</sup> The Egypto-Greek Revival was by then a dead issue, however, perhaps because of hometown loyalties, Moyr Smith chose to place Thomson's eccentric design ideas once again before the public. The journal, Decoration, was very popular with ex-patriate Scottish artists in particular. It therefore contributed to the transfer of the Egypto-Greek influence across the seas to Australia.

During the 1870s Moyr Smith became involved with Art Manufactures and supplied decorative designs for furniture and tiles to leading manufacturers. He had trained as an architect in the Glasgow office of James Salmon where he came into contact with the leading Glasgow designers. As a designer and chronicler of style development he did a great deal to promote their work.

In the first issues of his Journal he featured the work of Alexander Thomson and his son John.<sup>103</sup> It can be concluded from this that, as editor, Moyr Smith was expressing admiration for their work.

A greek design by John Thomson which appeared in July 1881, shows a wall treatment which can be traced back to Holmwood (*fig.23*). The Glasgow designer, Andrew Wells,<sup>104</sup> whose work was frequently illustrated in Decoration bears a strong stylistic similarity (*figs 24 & 25*).

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<sup>101</sup> James Moyr Smith, architect, designer and illustrator, published several authoritative works on the decorative arts.

<sup>102</sup> Decoration in Painting, Sculpture, Architecture and Art Manufactures, new series (London, 1881).

<sup>103</sup> John Thomson, (b.1859), son of Alexander Thomson, trained at the R.A. in London and with architects Blomfield and Pearson. Commenced practice in Glasgow in 1885.

<sup>104</sup> Andrew Wells, (1844-1918), Decorator. Trained and worked with Daniel Cottier in Glasgow before migrating to Australia in 1885. Returned to Glasgow in 1896.

In 1886 Wells moved from Glasgow to Sydney where he executed many designs in the Egypto-Greek style he had observed in the work of Thomson in Glasgow.

The illustrations of Alexander Thomson's work in Decoration convey a clear impression of the versatility and wide ranging application of the Egyptian and Greek motif in decorative work. Not only are these classical motifs applied to decorative painting, but Thomson also applied them to fabrics and furnishings as Thomas Hope had half a century earlier.

The Egyptian and Greek influence drifted in and out of the mainstream of nineteenth-century decorative arts. The influential Glasgow born designer, Christopher Dresser, paid attention to Egyptian ornament in his outstanding work Decorative Design. Dresser took as an example the Egyptian lotus to illustrate how the Egyptians were able to build on a single ornament to produce a complete decorative design.<sup>105</sup>

Egyptian and Greek design inspired the Art Furnishers and Decorators of the 1880s. The journal, The Cabinetmaker and Art Furnisher, ran a series entitled, 'Old Styles in New Frames' in which they illustrated the evolution of ornamental devices such as the fret and wave scroll, which the Egyptians created, through succeeding Greek and Roman cultures.<sup>106</sup> From then onwards the style became debased. New examples were rather frivolous (*fig.22*).

The British campaigns in the East during World Wars I and II produced further Egyptian and Greek revivals, particularly in Australia, where the early and mid-nineteenth-century revivals failed to produce more than a handful of civic curiosities.

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<sup>105</sup> Christopher Dresser, Principles of Decorative Design. (London, 1873), republished (London, Academy Editions, 1973).

<sup>106</sup> Cabinet Maker and Art Furnisher. (1 July 1881).

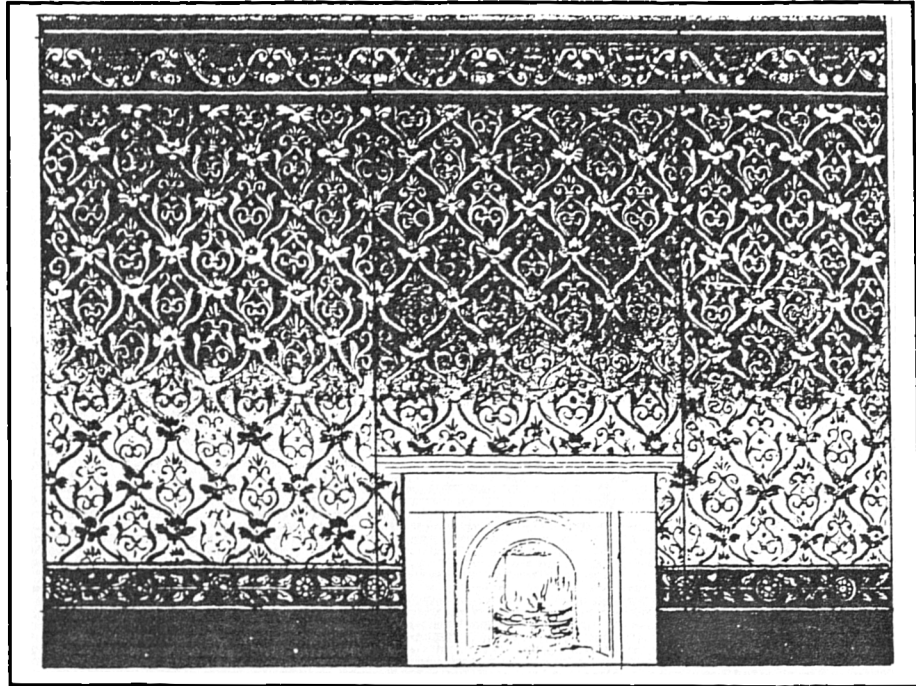


Fig.5

Design for wall decorations by Lyon, Cottier and Co. utilising imitation damask finish. Source: Mitchell Library, Sydney.

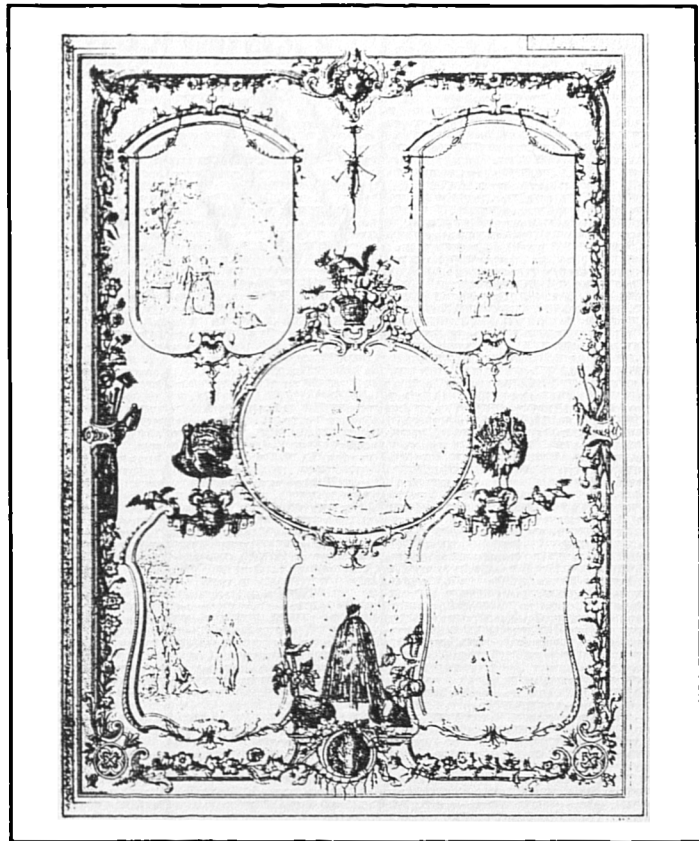


Fig.6

Illustration of Watteau style decoration from James Ballantine's , Essay on Ornamental Art, titled 'Interior Decoration - French'.

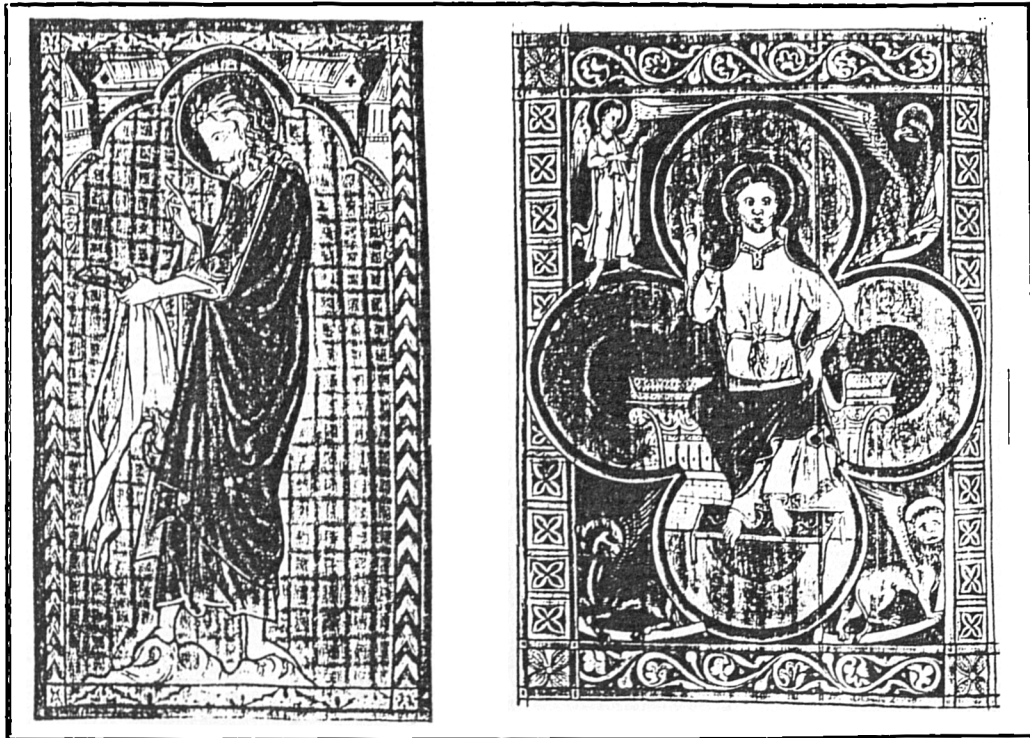


Fig. 7

Mediaeval manuscript, *St Bartholomew, Oscott Psalter*, (English), 1270 AD  
The background and border patterns are the same as those which appeared in painted decorations.

Fig. 8

'Christ in Majesty'. Miniature from psalter, (English), mid-thirteenth century. The decorative devices closely resemble painted decorations of the Romanesque period.

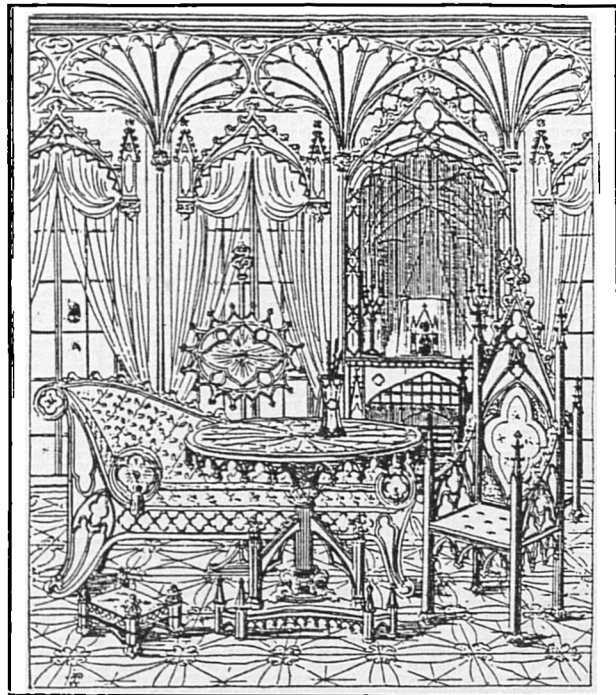
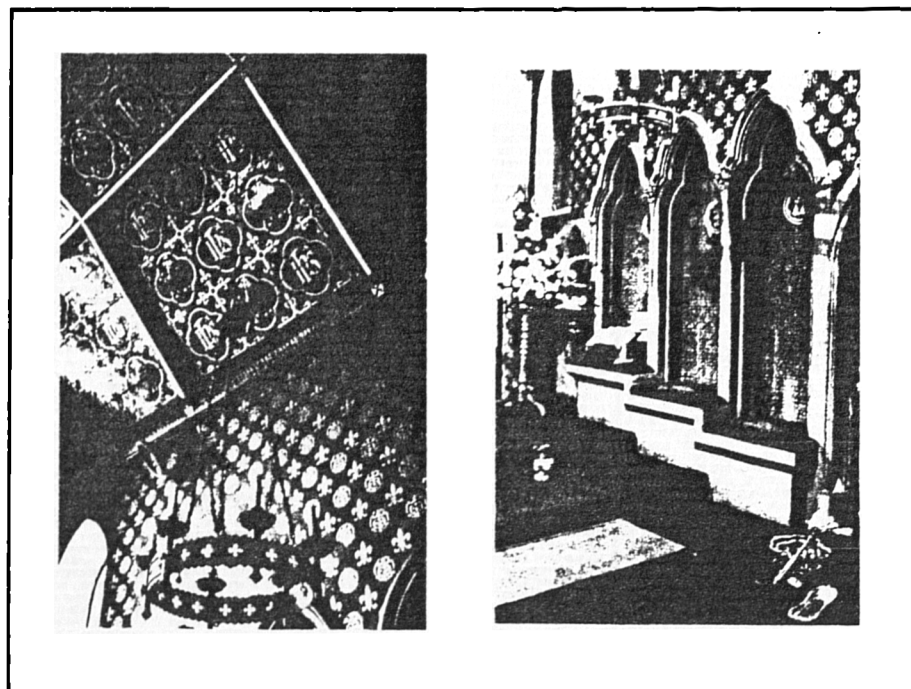


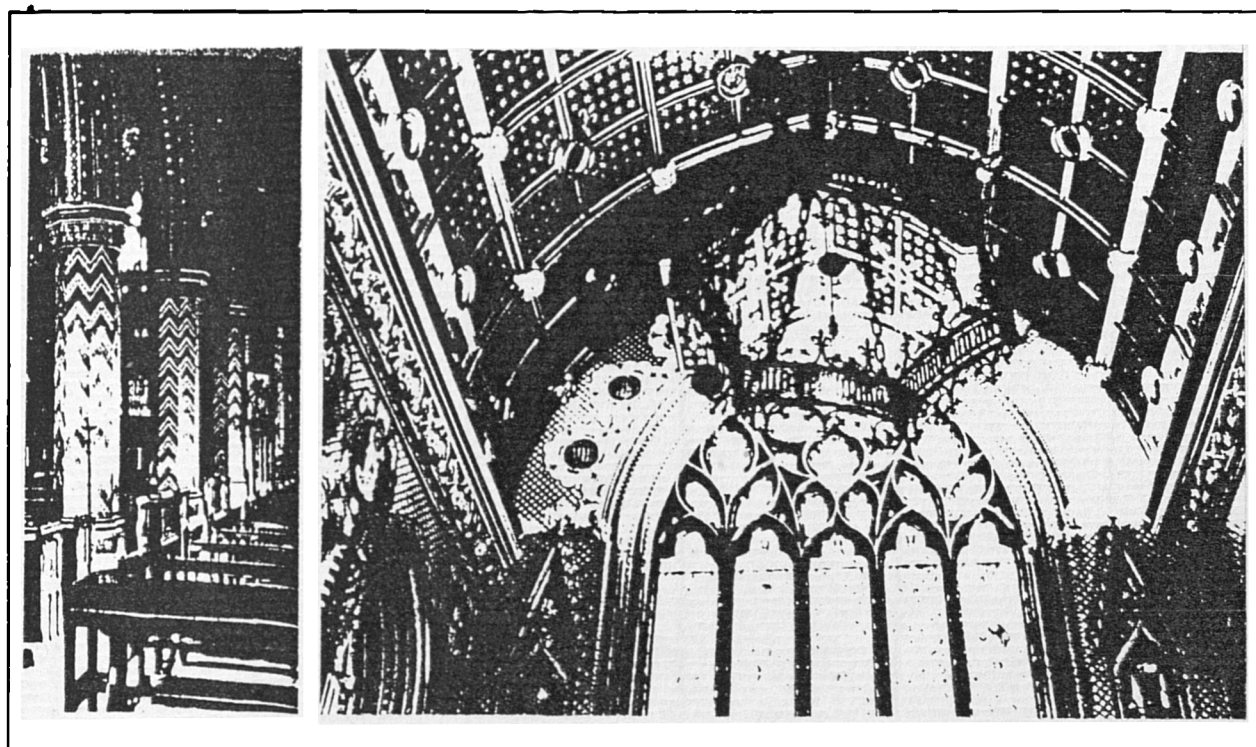
Fig. 9

Romantic Gothic design, "The Extravagant style of Modern Gothic Furniture and Decoration", an awful warning published in Pugin's, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*, 1840.



*Figs 10 and 11*

*Views of the nave roof and sedilia of Pugin's, Warwick Bridge church, 1841; one of the finest examples of Pugin's English Parish Church interiors.*



*Figs 12 and 13*

*Views of the sanctuary and north aisle of St Giles, Cheadle. The decorations are by the same hand as those at Warwick Bridge. They have been recently restored by Campbell and Smith.*



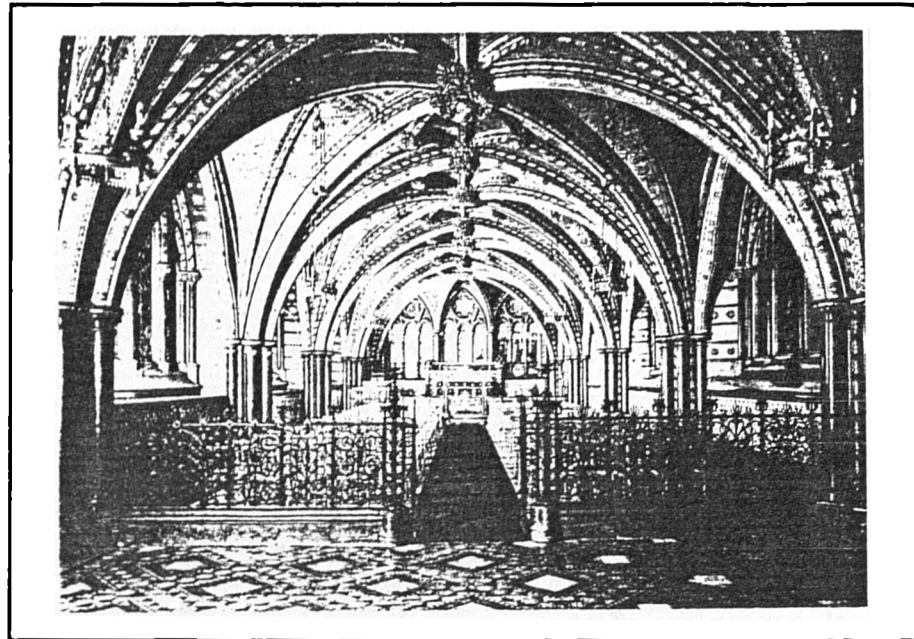


Fig. 14  
*St Mary Undercroft, Westminster. Restored by E.M. Barry. After the fire which destroyed St Stephen's (the fourteenth-century Crypt Chapel) the walls were scraped and repainted by Crace.*

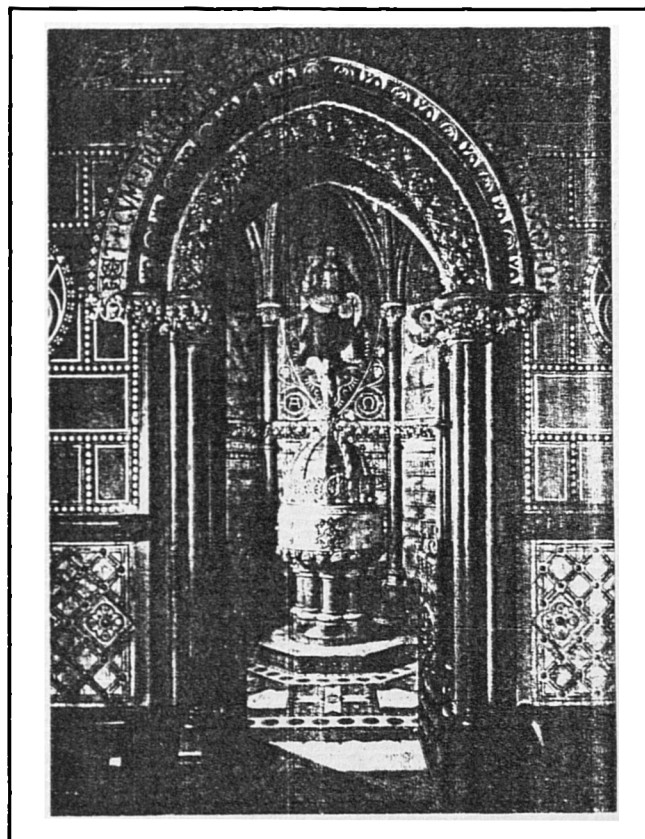


Fig. 15  
*St Mary Undercroft. Detail of the painted decorations by Crace around the font in the Crypt Chapel.*



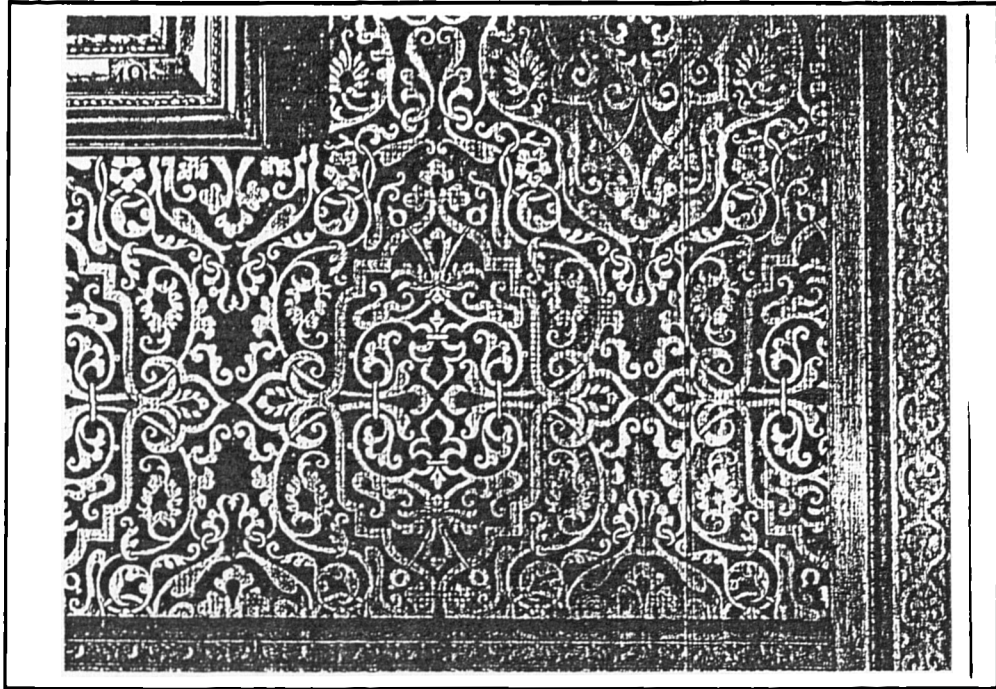


Fig. 16  
Detail of wallpaper designed for the dining room of Charlecote, Warwickshire, by Thomas Willement, who restored the Elizabethan country house in the nineteenth century. The wallpaper is a flock in red and brown. It illustrates Willement's mastery of mediaeval pattern design. Source: *Country Life*.

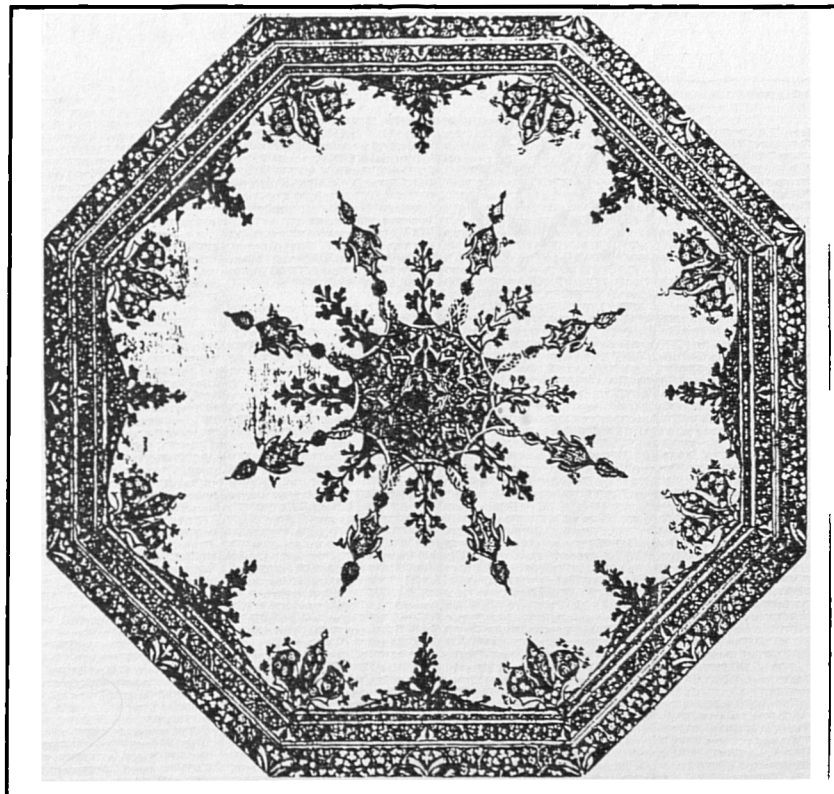


Fig. 17  
Design by Owen Jones for part of the drawing-room ceiling at No 8, Kensington Palace Gardens, London (1843). Source: *Exhibition Catalogue, 'The Islamic Inspiration'*.





Fig.18  
 Portico of the Temple of Philae, sketched by David Roberts and published in his *Egypt and Nubia* (1842-50). He claimed that "the remains of the brilliant and tasteful colouring of the walls and pillars still testify the exquisite taste and finish of the whole".

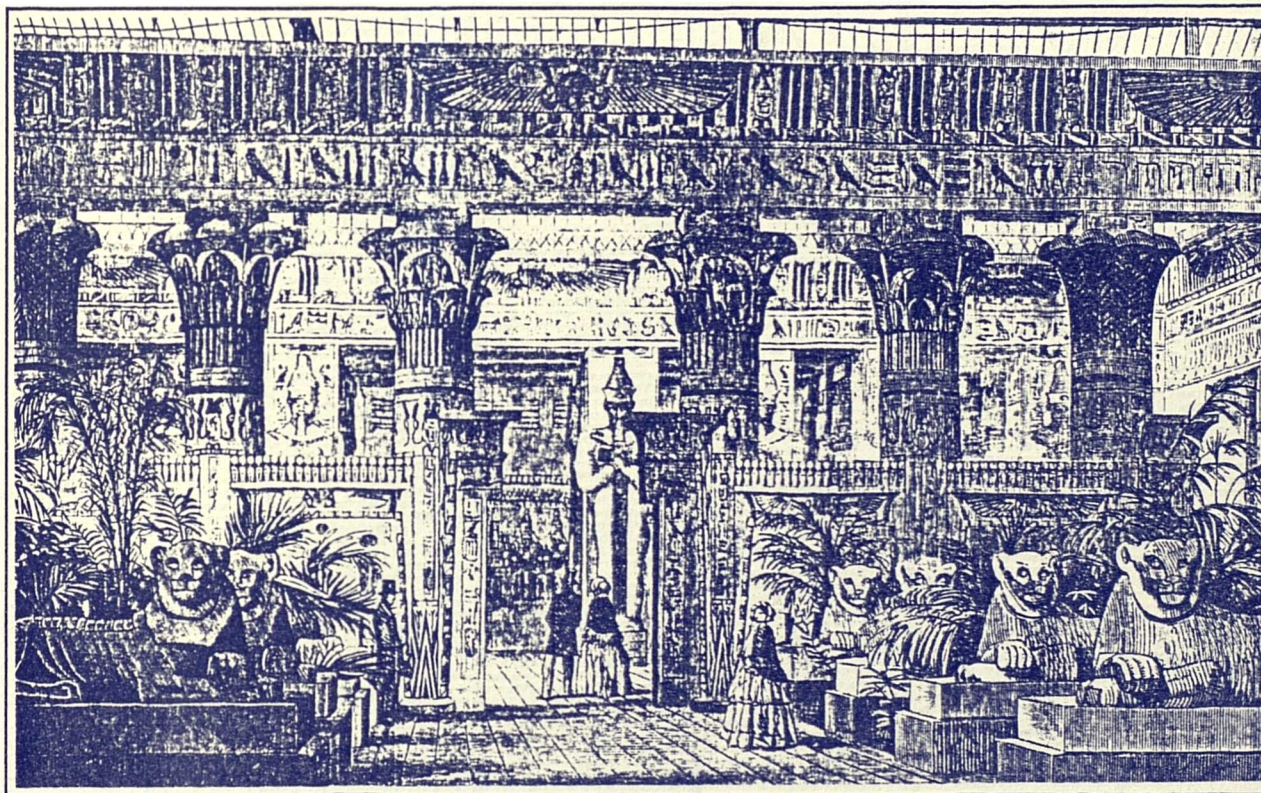


Fig.19  
 Illustration of the Egyptian Court at the Crystal Palace, Sydenham, by Owen Jones and Joseph Bonomi. Source: *The Illustrated London News*, 5th August 1854.



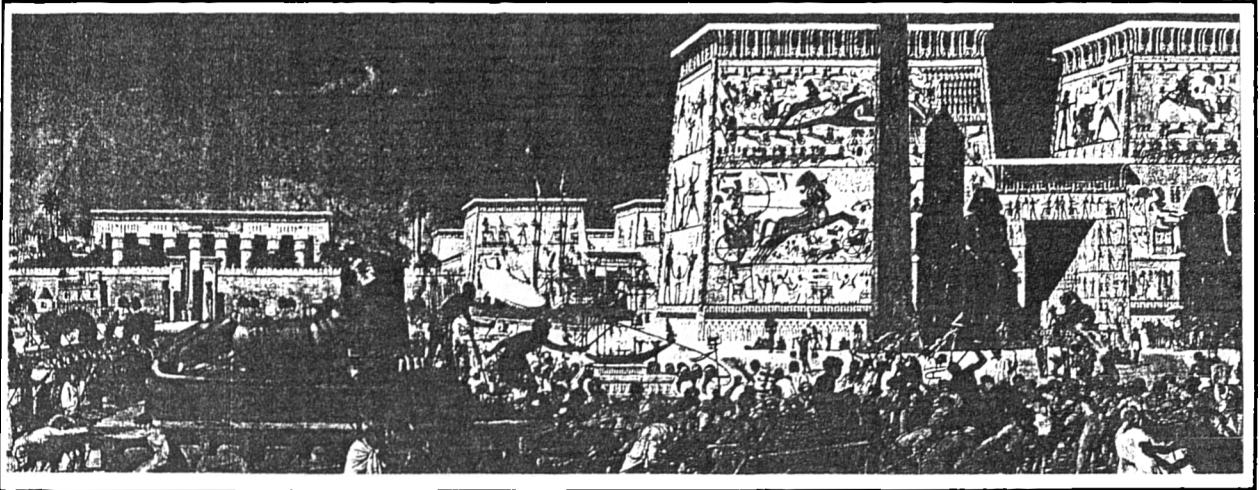


Fig. 20  
Oil Painting by Sir Edward Poynter, 'Israel in Egypt', (1867). Source:  
Exhibition Catalogue.

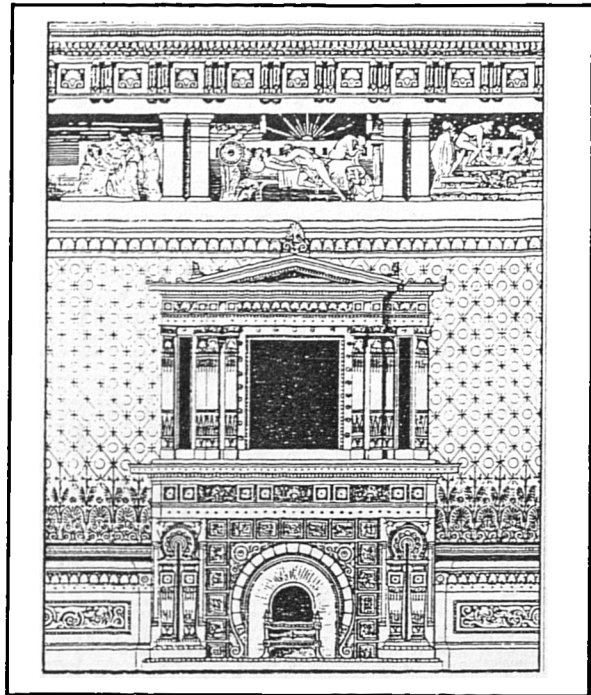
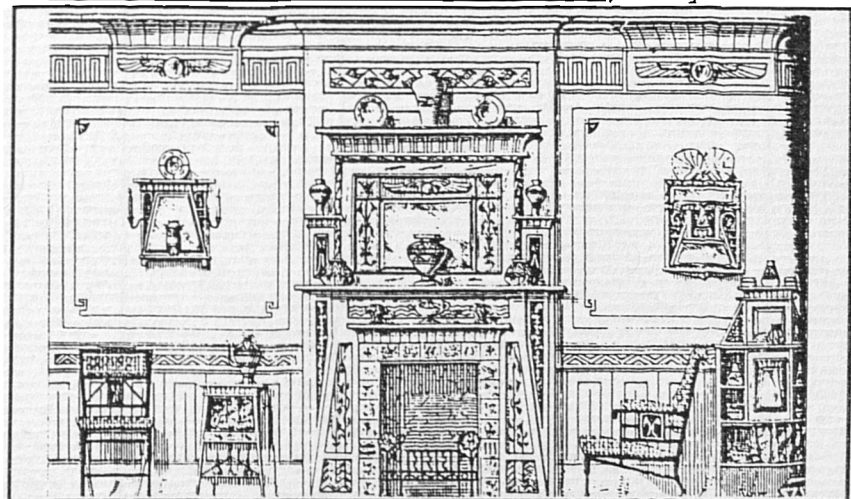


Fig. 21  
Greek design by John Thomson, son of Alexander. Source: *Decoration*.

Fig. 22  
Egyptian design. Source: *The Cabinetmaker and Art Furnisher*, July 1882



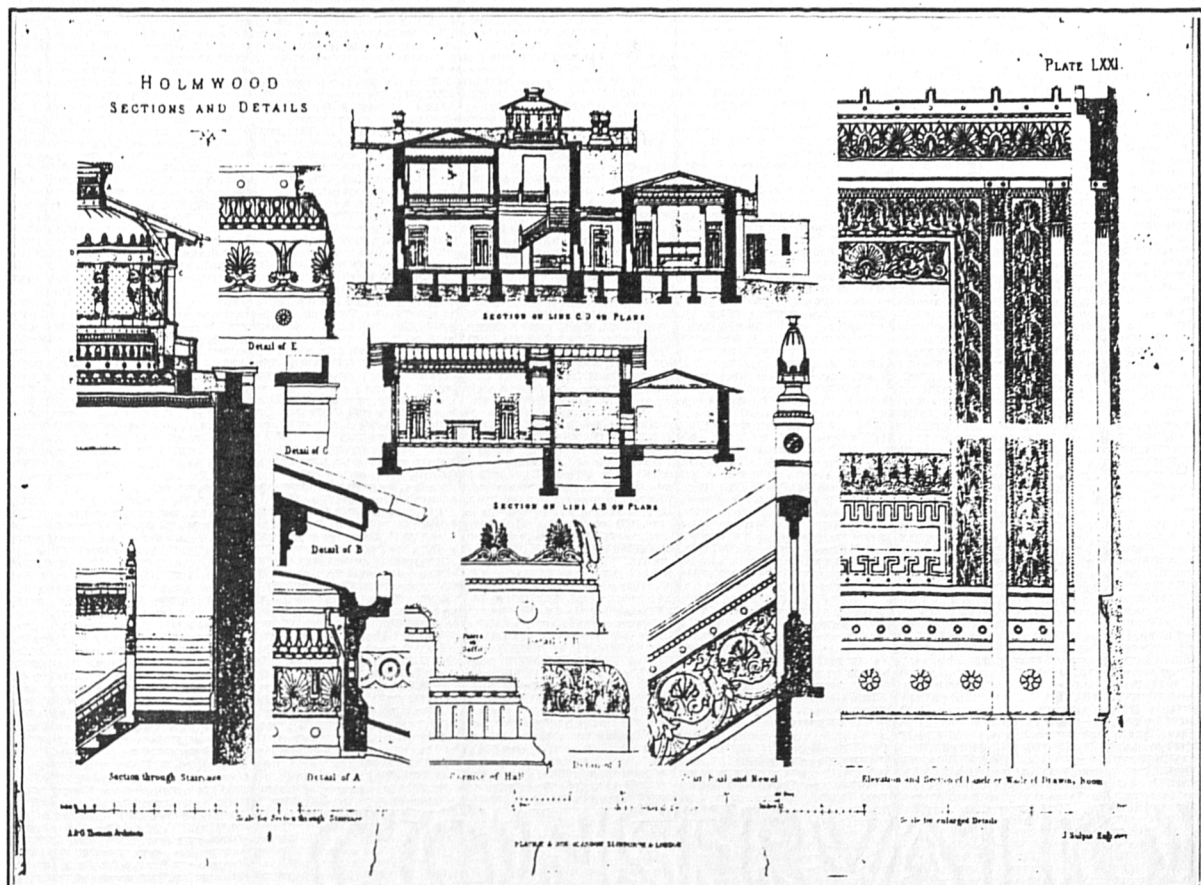


Fig. 23  
Drawing by Alexander Thomson for the interiors of Holmwood Villa, Glasgow, showing the adventurous use of classical details to be carried through in painted decorations. Source: Blackie's, Villa and Cottage Architecture.

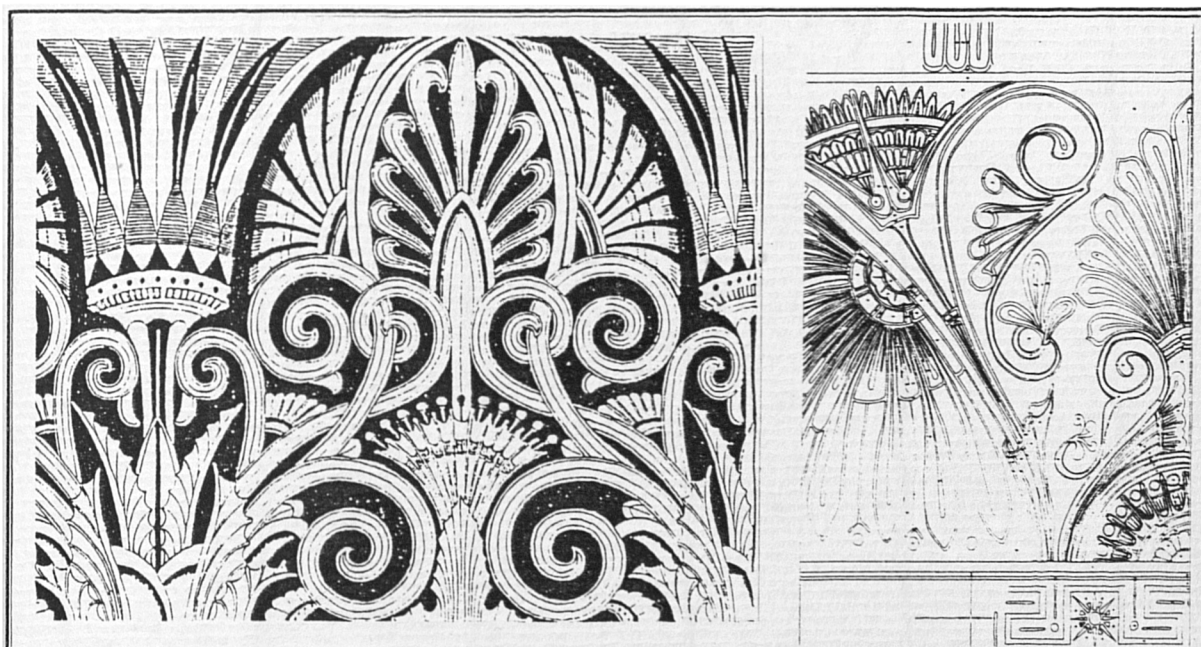


Fig. 24  
Design for a dado band by Alexander Thomson incorporating Greek and Egyptian motifs. (Decoration, August 1882).

Fig. 25  
Part record drawing of decorations drawing from the same sources and Alexander Thomson, in Parliament House, Sydney, (circa 1890).

## CHAPTER 3 MID-VICTORIAN DEVELOPMENTS

### 3.1 The Houses of Parliament and Attempts to Revive Monumental Mural Painting in Britain

Following the destruction by fire of the old Palace of Westminster in 1834, Charles Barry's new parliament buildings offered the opportunity for a series of grand mural paintings celebrating the history of Britain. Indeed Benjamin Robert Haydon, a mural painter, gazing upon the 'sublime' spectacle of the fire, comforted himself with the reflection that there would be a better prospect of introducing painting to the House of Lords, which he had long been advocating.<sup>1</sup>

However the opportunity arose at a time when there was no tradition in Britain of historical painting on such a grand scale. There was no obvious style to choose, or group of artists to undertake the work.

A Royal Commission was established, under the presidency of the Prince Consort with Charles Barry as secretary, to investigate the problem. Both men were of the opinion that modern German painting, in particular the Nazarene School<sup>2</sup>, provided the best model, but that it would be clearly inappropriate to employ German artists to undertake the work. As a result a number of scholarships were offered to young British artists to encourage them to study abroad in preparation for their eventual participation in the work.

Between 1843 and 1847 a series of competitions was held to identify suitable artists and, from 1845 onwards, commissions were offered for specific sites in the new

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<sup>1</sup>T.S.R. Boase, 'Painting (of the Houses of Parliament)', The Houses of Parliament, Ed.M.H. Port (London,Yale University Press, 1976) p.268.

<sup>2</sup>The group of German artists called the Brotherhood of St Luke founded in 1809. Their aim was to restore to art the religious quality found in mediaeval painting.

Houses of Parliament. The first of these commissions went to Daniel Maclise<sup>3</sup> and William Dyce.<sup>4</sup> These two artists were responsible for most of the work which survives.<sup>5</sup>

The idea of introducing monumental decoration into the new Houses of Parliament was not new. In 1835 a Commons committee under the chairmanship of William Ewart undertook a review of the relationship between the arts and manufactures. It concluded that fresco painting, considered at the time to be the highest branch of the visual arts, should be given official patronage and opportunity in England. In 1841 a select committee, appointed to consider the promotion of the fine arts in connection with the re-building of the Houses of Parliament,<sup>6</sup> recommended the Royal Commission which presided over the implementation.

The Royal Commissioners called upon the advice of Peter Von Cornelius<sup>7</sup> who was then regarded as the schoolmaster of Europe in all matters relating to wall painting. As a result a competition for cartoon drawings for wall paintings was announced in conjunction with the tabling of the Commissioners' first report by their secretary Charles Eastlake in April 1842. This marked the beginning of a period of frustration and heartbreak for those who attempted the work. Their dream of English wallpaintings to rival the traditional wallpaintings of Germany and Italy could not be realised.

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Maclise (1806-1870) versatile Irish artist influenced by Delaroche and Cornelius. His most significant works are his frescoes in the Royal Gallery of the House of Lords, 'The Meeting of Wellington' and 'Blucher' (1861) and 'The Death of Nelson' (1864).

<sup>4</sup> William Dyce (1806-1864) Scottish historical and religious painter. He had travelled several times to Rome where he met Cornelius and Overbeck. He returned home in the 1840s to study fresco technique.

<sup>5</sup> David Piper, Ed. The Genius that was British Painting (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1975) p.252.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.269.

<sup>7</sup> Peter von Cornelius (1783-1867) trained with the Nazarenes in Rome between 1811 and 1819 when he returned to Germany to work on fresco wallpaintings on a grand scale in Munich and Berlin.

### 3.1.1 The First Essays

Prize winners in the first competition included the artists, Armitage, Watts, Cope, Horsley, Bell, Townsend, Frost, Paris and Selous. A further competition was held in 1845 for specimens of fresco painting and major spaces in the Lords' Chamber were assigned to William Dyce, Daniel Maclise, Cope and Horsley. Lesser spaces were assigned to Cope, Horsley, Herbert, Severn and Tenniel. However, despite the best efforts of Eastlake and others to chronicle historical painting methods,<sup>8</sup> there was insufficient knowledge on fresco technique in Britain to guarantee the success of these works

Dyce went off to the continent to study fresco techniques in detail before embarking on his work. His account, published in the sixth report of the Commissioners, in 1846, covered such matters as the reactions of the various pigments used by the Italians, the effects of damp on the adhesion of the paint, the combination of true fresco and the particular problems associated with ultramarine.<sup>9</sup>

Armed with this knowledge he commenced work under very difficult circumstances and had his first fresco completed by 1847. Maclise and Cope were by then also well advanced with their first works.

Once the process was under way the momentum of the decorations grew as extra commissions were given to these same artists, and to others who were brought in to assist. However the work clearly did not go well. For midway through the process the oil medium was substituted for fresco in some of the important works. Fresco proved difficult for the artists to master in this building which was obviously not well suited to the medium.

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<sup>8</sup>Apart from the reports of the Commission, Charles Lock Eastlake produced Materials for a History of Oil Painting (London: Longman, 1847) and Merrifield produced The Art of Fresco Painting (London: Murray, 1846) and Original Treatises ... on the Arts of Painting (London: Murray, 1849)

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. p.272

### 3.1.2 Failure of the Fresco Medium

It was reluctantly accepted that the fresco technique could not be established as a serious decorating medium in Britain because of the incompatible climate. A more realistic view was that British construction techniques were not well suited to the medium. Evidence of the brave struggle waged by British artists to overcome the technical difficulties can be seen in the various approaches followed in the Westminster building.

The frescoes were painted on lime plaster over wooden laths. Behind the laths a ventilating cavity was left between the plaster and the stone wall construction to allow the back of the plaster skin to breathe, however this does not appear to have been successful. Damp which accumulated in the cavity migrated through the plaster thus disrupting the frescoes. This damp probably emanated from condensation within the cavity. It is interesting to speculate that the problem might not have arisen if the normal practice of building in solid masonry without the cavity had been followed.

The frescoes accumulated disfiguring dirt deposits which posed a further problem. The atmosphere of London at the time, with so much industry and mechanised transport, was uncompromising. Prince Albert attempted to have the frescoes cleaned by the method recommended by Dyce - by rubbing with stale bread - however this only partially enlivened them. Four years later the paint was blistering and peeling off due to the damp.

In 1863 the Commissioners appointed a committee to examine the frescoes. John Ruskin and Thomas Gambier Parry both sat on this committee. They concluded that future work should be undertaken in the waterglass technique, by which method the paintings could be executed conventionally.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>The waterglass technique involved the fixing of pigment to dry plaster by a final application of potassium or sodium silicate (waterglass).



The final undignified chapter in the history of true fresco in the Houses of Parliament was written in 1895 when Professor A.H. Church, Professor of Chemistry in the Royal Academy of Arts in London and author of the important treatise on painting, The Chemistry of Paints and Painting,<sup>11</sup> was called upon to report on the frescoes. He concluded that only one of the frescoes was worth preserving. All the others were covered over.

### 3.1.3 Abandonment of Fresco - a New Approach

The paintings undertaken in the oil and waterglass media at Westminster met with more success than those undertaken in *buon fresco*.

When Daniel Maclise agreed in 1859 to paint in the Royal Gallery he declined to work in fresco or even waterglass, asking instead for approval to paint in oil. He was persuaded to travel to Berlin to study the newly-developed waterglass or stereochrome method of painting. This led him to become a complete convert to the method and he gladly continued his work at Westminster in this medium.

William Dyce, the committed Nazarene, struggled on with *buon fresco* from 1848 until his death in 1864. During this time he came to the conclusion that in England the technique could only be practised during the summer months. J.R. Herbert, who had begun frescoes in the Peers' Robing Room in 1858, was persuaded three years later to cut them out and start afresh in waterglass. He later moved on to oil on canvas.

The unsatisfactory sequence of events illustrates that the attempts to establish historical and allegorical painting in the fresco tradition in English art were inadequate. The technical problems were never satisfactorily resolved.

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<sup>11</sup>A.H. Church, The Chemistry of Paints and Painting (London: Seeley, 1890).

### 3.2 The High Victorian Movement

In the middle years of the nineteenth century the Gothic Revival in Britain spawned a vigorous new style featuring characteristics borrowed from the Continent. It is recognised today as the High Victorian movement and it is identified with strong constructional forms.

There was a distinct move away from the delicate patterns of naturalistic ornament and the soft tints of English mediaeval Gothic decorative art to a vigorous architectural style modelled on the French and Italian Gothic. It featured larger patterns, simple geometric shapes and strong primary colours. It was both a development of, and a departure from, the Gothic Revival.

The High Victorian movement grew from modest beginnings around 1850, starting as a purely architectural development. Within two decades it had produced a unique architecture characterised by a general effect of massiveness. This was combined with a varied outline in external forms and a vigorous handling of decorative forms with polychromatic contrasts of material throughout. High Victorian buildings often exhibit constructional rather than applied decoration. Even when the decoration was applied it was introduced to reinforce the architectural integrity and thus elevate the status of the decoration.

At the forefront of the movement were the Art architects<sup>12</sup> whose consideration of the building and its decoration as a whole developed into an exciting new phase in British decoration.

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<sup>12</sup>The term 'Art architect' derives from a comment made by G.E. Street in his lecture 'On the Future of Art in England', delivered to the anniversary meeting of the Ecclesiological Society in 1857. He said, "We must all believe entirely that we should be better artists and greater men if we did a little less in architecture and a little more in painting [for] three fourths of the poetry of building lay in its minor details ... and it is undoubtedly true that it is easier to design ... a cathedral ... than it is to ... [design] ... in stained glass ... or [decoration]...".

### 3.2.1 John Ruskin

The key figure in the High Victorian movement was not an architect, but the artist, critic and writer, John Ruskin.<sup>13</sup> Without Ruskin and his writings the Gothic Revival might never have evolved beyond the early English phase. The change in direction came with his publication of The Stones of Venice.<sup>14</sup> This contained a widely influential chapter 'The nature of Gothic',<sup>15</sup> which caused designers to look afresh at Gothic detail.

Ruskin's interest in architecture and decoration began quite innocently, just as it did for the antiquarians of the eighteenth century, with a reverence for buildings in decay, and the sentiment of age.<sup>16</sup> He admired the fine chiselling and the colour of old buildings.

An important principal of which Ruskin wrote, was the need to distinguish between decorative and constructive parts of a building. He condemned false representation of material. He felt that decoration should be set in bold opposition to architecture and that it should be readable.

Church decoration had a direct bearing on secular developments. Church developments were always reported and they therefore provide a record of community and professional attitudes in the mid-nineteenth century.

Ruskin's views on these issues were a little more clear than those of the Ecclesiologists, who were incapable of disciplining their views on the subject of painted decorations. They would have had;

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<sup>13</sup> John Ruskin (1819-1900) art critic, moral guide and prophet in art circles.

<sup>14</sup> John Ruskin, The Stones of Venice (Vol. I 1851, Vols II & III 1853).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> John Ruskin, Praeterita II (Vol. VI, 1886-87) 'I revered the sentiment ... of ... age ... the love of rough stones ... for the first time [in Lucca, Italy] I now saw, what mediaeval buildings were, and what they meant ...'

*... every inch [of their church interiors] glowing [with painted decorations].*<sup>17</sup>

This view conflicted with the earlier stated view of the Ecclesiologists. They initially had advocated that walls, indeed all interior surfaces, should be left unpainted. This somewhat naive view denied that mediaeval church interiors were rich with painted decorations before the reformers scraped off, or limewashed over, the evidence. However the Ecclesiologists were rescued by Ruskin who stated publicly that;

*... all that matters is that there should be no deceit.*<sup>18</sup>

It left the way open for the use of stencil and fresco decorations in those situations where the better endowed church building groups wished for something more than natural wall finishes.

The debate regarding the method of constructing and finishing a building of the time centred on church building. It is therefore appropriate to analyse church building further in the context of this study.

Ruskin's views converged with those of the Ecclesiologists on important issues such as favouring the use of brick in church building. The decorative texture and colour of brickwork was seen as artistically significant.

In 1844-5 the Secretary of the Ecclesiological Society, Benjamin Webb, travelled extensively in northern Italy where he saw many examples of the building types and use of materials which inspired Ruskin. In 1847 the Society published a description of the all-brick Gothic masterpiece, Albi Cathedral.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ecclesiologist, IV, 1845, pp. 199-203.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Warwick Rodwell and James Bentley, Our Christian Heritage (London: George Phillip, 1984) p.193.

In 1848 Webb published his Continental Ecclesiology<sup>20</sup> in which he praised the colour and detail of Italian Gothic churches. This established a turning point in the direction of the Gothic Revival, for, from this point onwards constructional polychromy, or the decorative exploitation of the colour and texture of the masonry elements, forced its way into English architecture.

There was a persuasive school of thought among Victorian designers that only the more important buildings should be decorated. Ruskin was able to show that the purpose, or standing of the building, was irrelevant and what mattered most was the effect created by the individual artists. By enquiring into the social conditions which would, or would not, allow the craftsmen to enjoy working on the decoration, Ruskin opened an argument which was fervently continued a few years later by William Morris, who shared Ruskin's admiration for 'honest building'.

Fresco painting was a feature of Italian architecture which Ruskin encouraged in Britain. It features a little in the work of the ecclesiologist architects including George Edmund Street<sup>21</sup> and William White.

St James-the-Less, Vauxhall, a polychrome brick building by Street, is most significant, having a fresco over the chancel arch by the artist G.F.Watts. William White's church, St Michaels and All Angels, Lyndhurst,<sup>22</sup> is also a brick building which features outstanding frescoes by Frederick Leighton in the reredos. Both are representative of Ruskin's influence.

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<sup>20</sup> Reverend Benjamin Webb, Continental Ecclesiology, (London: 1848)

<sup>21</sup> George Edmund Street (1824-81) having trained in G.Gilbert Scott's office accepted several commissions for churches in which he used various decorative treatments in the interiors, including fresco techniques.

<sup>22</sup> St Michael and All Angels, Lyndhurst, Dorset (1860-9) features a fresco in the chancel of Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins carried out by Thomas Gambier Parry in the spirit fresco medium. It is believed to be the first fresco painted in an English church since the Reformation.

### 3.2.2 William Butterfield

William Butterfield<sup>23</sup> and Street were prolific church builders and, in the mature years of their careers, highly regarded also in the secular design areas. Their influence on design trends in the second half of the nineteenth century was considerable. The influences on their early work is most pertinent to later developments.

Butterfield was the favoured architect of the Ecclesiologists. His buildings were never consciously modelled on either French or Italian examples and they were never as massive or ponderous as those of some other leading lights in the High Victorian movement, such as Street and William Burges.<sup>24</sup>

It was Butterfield who provided a model church for the Ecclesiologists when he built the London church of All Saints, Margaret Street, St Marylebone in 1849 (*fig.28*). The building, which is crammed onto a minimal inner London site, features the recommended decorative devices of banded polychromy. To compensate for a restriction of light inside it is bejewelled with inlaid stone and coloured brickwork which enlivens the interior. It has all of the extra features which were so dear to the Ecclesiologists such as polychromatic tiles to the internal walls and floors, painted decorations and gilding, frescoes (by William Dyce) and paintings (in oil) of the twelve apostles in the chancel.

As the adopted model church of the Ecclesiologists, it was often discussed in relation to Ruskin's Seven Lamps<sup>25</sup> and Digby Wyatt's publication of the Cosmati mosaics.<sup>26</sup> In

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<sup>23</sup> William Butterfield (1814-1900) considered to be one of the Apostles of the High Church school with his angular multi-coloured church buildings.

<sup>24</sup> William Burges (1827-81) designed a small number of churches in the French Gothic style concentrating on visual and romantic rather than moral matters.

<sup>25</sup> John Ruskin, Seven Lamps of Architecture, (London: 1849).

<sup>26</sup> M.D. Wyatt, Specimens of the Geometrical Mosaics of the Middle Ages, 1849.

All Saints the laws of flat pattern decoration were ruthlessly observed.

Butterfield linked the decoration with the different constructional parts of the building according to the principles espoused by Ruskin. Quite unlike Pugin who, although he also advocated the construction of decoration according to its location in the architecture, hardly ever deviated from the naive 'all over' approach of decoration used by the English decorators during the middle ages. It is interesting to contrast this building with the interior of Pugin's church at Cheadle, where anti-illusionistic principles apply equally in the painted decorations.

Although Butterfield's place at the head of the Ecclesiologist's list of preferred architects was not held for a long period, he continued to work in the conservative traditions espoused by the group during most of his career. In St. Alban's, Holborn<sup>27</sup> there is a high level of maturity evident in Butterfield's control of the polychromatic decoration (*fig.27*).

### 3.2.3 George Edmund Street

George Edmund Street had the benefit of travel in Europe, and a background of detailed study of Italian models to shape his opinions on architectural matters. Butterfield's All Saints, Margaret Street, rather than the Italian models, directly influenced his own early work. He considered All Saints to be;

*... the most beautiful, but the most vigorous, thoughtful, and original among them all.*<sup>28</sup>

Street's church, St James-the-Less, Westminster (Vauxhall) is clearly modelled on All Saints. It features polychrome

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<sup>27</sup> St Alban's, Holborn, London, 1860, was destroyed during World War II. The Interior was illustrated in The Builder, 1862, p.443.

<sup>28</sup> Warwick Rodwell and James Bentley, Our Christian Heritage, p.194.

brickwork externally, and the internal relationship between wall surfaces and surface decoration, and a structural framework which closely follows the pattern established by Butterfield (*fig.26*).

It is known from the considerable volume of Street's published comments that his keen interests included stained glass and the decorative devices of ecclesiastical architecture. He sometimes paraphrased Ruskin on such subjects. He had an ecclesiological interest focussed on;

*... the wonderful beauty of the apsidal east end (of his churches).*<sup>29</sup>

This interest spawned an exuberance in the treatment of the decorations in the chancels of his churches. Even the most modest of parish churches had chancels where Street was able to merge together his love for stained glass and colourful display. There are many examples of this. The flourish of painted decorations in the Parish church of Howsham, Yorkshire,<sup>30</sup> is but one example of this liaison of glass and decorations in an otherwise restrained building.

As a young architect in training Street worked in George Gilbert Scott's office alongside a highly talented young designer, Alfred Bell. The two became close friends and very close associates in their later careers. Alfred Bell commenced designing stained glass in the 1850s. He soon established a business in stained glass and decorations. In 1855 he joined forces with John Richard Clayton in a more ambitious decorating business which quickly blossomed to provide a decorating service to Scott, Street and the growing group of like-minded architects who shared their interest in the highly decorative features of churches.

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<sup>29</sup> Paper delivered to the Oxford Architectural Society, 1852.

<sup>30</sup> Howsham Parish Church, Yorkshire, illustrated in the Civil Engineer and Architects Journal, 1861, Plates 9 and 13.



As a committed Art architect Street believed strongly in the need to incorporate into his work all allied artistic disciplines, especially architectural painting.

He introduced the artistic crafts of metalwork and needlework some years before other Ecclesiologists placed importance in these crafts.

Street's influence reached Australia when his designs for the Hobart Cathedral, Tasmania, were carried through in 1851. But it was the influence of some of his writing which made the greatest impact at home and abroad. His book, Brick and Marble in the Middle Ages<sup>31</sup> was a widely respected document.

Additionally he put into practice the theories expressed in his writings, with a flair for adventurous decoration. For example, in All Saints, Clifton,<sup>32</sup> he used robust chevron patterns and banding on the ponderous barrel vaulted timber roof in a most innovative way to accentuate the east-west dimension of this basilica-like church. This was a work which heralded a break away from the shackles of Gothic design and ornament. In style at least this can be linked with the protestant churches of the north and the decorative work of Glasgow artists in the 1860s and 1870s.

Street was at once innovative and conservative. There is a substantial surviving legacy of the coloured decoration of his work serving to illustrate the marriage of art and architecture in the High Victorian movement, through his example.

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<sup>31</sup> G.E.Street, Brick and Marble in the Middle Ages: Notes of a Tour in the North of Italy, 1855.

<sup>32</sup> All Saints, Clifton, 1864. Destroyed during World war II, illustrated in Building News, 4, August 1865.

#### 3.2.4 William White

William White<sup>33</sup> played a significant secondary role in the development of High Victorian decorative art through his network of contacts with some of main figures. He was in Scott's office at the same time as Street and Alfred Bell with whom he shared a commitment to the use of structural polychromy and painted decoration.

St Michael and All Angels, one of White's most outstanding works, is a key work on which he collaborated with Frederick Leighton and some of the best artists from the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Edward Burne-Jones, Phillip Webb, Ford Madox Brown and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, to produce the brilliant array of stained glass which adorns the interior of the church.

The association with the pre-Raphaelite brethren, the artists whose influence on decorative art and interior decorations was highly significant, was also most important to the development of White's decorative work. In his outstanding London church, Holy Saviour, Aberdeen Park, he used a decorative treatment which he may have borrowed from the decorators of the Brotherhood.

The church is a red brick structure which is enhanced by structural polychromy of contrasting coloured bricks. White enhanced the decorative effect further by overstencilling the brick with semi-transparent paint, giving the appearance of an overlayer of floral lace. These floral motifs do not conform to the models usually adopted for church interiors, but they provided an interesting transition from the low relief sculptural decorations advocated by Ruskin, and the florid all-over flat stencil decorations of the later nineteenth-century Aesthetic work.

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<sup>33</sup>William White (1825-1900) Trained in the office of George Gilbert Scott before setting up his own practice in Truro, Cornwall.

A very fine domestic interior for which White was responsible is to be found in Bishops court, Clyst Honiton, South Devon.<sup>34</sup> White created the impressive building (in which he features seven or eight different building stones) by enlarging and restoring an ancient Episcopal palace. The architecture has an authentic Gothic character which White enhanced with bold Gothic style painted decorations in the main halls and the chapel.

A painted triptych in the chapel by the artist N.J. Westlake<sup>35</sup> provides a possible link to the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, of which Westlake was a member, as were the decorators Lavers and Barraud, for whom Westlake also worked.

### 3.2.5 George Gilbert Scott

George Gilbert Scott<sup>36</sup> was prominent in the High Victorian movement. He was the most prolific nineteenth-century Gothicism, but curiously he remained aloof from the mainstream of the movement. Through the sheer volume of work he undertook he came into contact with most of the principal architects and decorators of the movement. Many of the leaders of the movement received their early training in Scott's large architectural practice.

Unlike his near contemporaries he experimented only briefly with polychromy, and, even though he visited Italy and enthused about Italian Gothic architecture, structural polychromy is a feature of only a relatively small number of his works. All Souls, Haley Hill, Halifax is a fine example of polychrome work which Scott considered to be, on the whole, his best church (*fig.29*).

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<sup>34</sup> Bishop's Court, Clyst Honiton, South Devon (1860-64). Project undertaken by William White to remodel and renovate the ancient Episcopal Palace (founded 1284) for John Garratt Esq.

<sup>35</sup> See Biographical Notes, Lavers and Barraud.

<sup>36</sup> (Sir) George Gilbert Scott (1811-1878). During a working career of 40 years built or restored nearly 500 churches, 39 cathedrals and minsters, 25 universities and colleges, and many other buildings.

In his St Pancras Hotel, King's Cross, and the Camden Church, Camberwell,<sup>37</sup> Scott used the devices of polychrome brickwork and stencilled and painted decoration in a clever way. Contemporary illustrations of the coffee room at the Midland Hotel, St Pancras, show the crescent shaped room to have a panelled ceiling with figurework in the panels. Groups of figures adorn the walls in a two meter deep frieze above a richly stencilled wall filling. These works illustrate Scott's honest talent for decoration.

Scott employed decorators to paint in many of the five hundred churches he built or restored. In the main the work is quite unrelated to the architecture as if he did not see decoration as being an integral element. For him the introduction of painted decorations was just a matter of conformity with new conventions. He was not an Art architect.

Scott had excellent contacts to aid him in his work. He consistently used the firm of Clayton and Bell to produce stained glass and decorations. He is believed to have introduced his former employee, Alfred Bell, to the stained glass artist Richard Clayton, and to have directed work their way to help them gain a start in what proved to be one of the most prolific stained glass enterprises.

### 3.2.6 George F. Bodley

George Bodley<sup>38</sup> was another of the young Art architects who gained their start in Scott's office. When he left in 1857, Bodley embarked on an important career which was built on the foundation of some important church work. The two early commissions, of St Michael and All Angels, Brighton,<sup>39</sup> and St Martin-on-the-Hill, Scarborough,<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See The Builder, 1854, p.363. London, Camden Church, Camberwell, 1854, (destroyed).

<sup>38</sup> George F. Bodley (1827-1907) trained in the practice of G.G. Scott.

<sup>39</sup> St Michael and All Angels, Brighton, 1859.

have outstanding interiors which feature mature painted decorations and other church art.

Although St Michael's incorporates polychrome materials in the manner of Butterfield's and Street's earlier churches, it is a rather plain building. It features stylised figure painting over the chancel arch and modest stencil decorations.

St Martin-on-the-Hill has more interest and richness all round in the decorations. These were created by the co-operative efforts of Bodley and the newly established firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co., who had worked with him at Brighton. Bodley was one of the first to call in the talented coterie of artists then working with Morris. Their work at Scarborough is outstanding.

The east wall decorations painted by Burne-Jones in distemper at Scarborough are superb. The nave roof and wall decorations do not achieve the same high level of artistic appeal but they are remarkable for having been executed in part by Bodley himself.<sup>41</sup> The bulk of the decorations are by the combined hands of Morris, Philip Webb and the job foreman, Campfield. It was Campfield who carried out the designs by Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown for the painted timber pulpit - a pre-Raphaelite gem.

In about 1870 Bodley formed a partnership with Thomas Garner. Five years later they joined with G.G. Scott Junior in the formation of a business (called Watts and Company) modelled on the Morris Company.

Watts and Company, which continues to supply high quality church furnishings and decorations, is still the leader in this field.

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<sup>40</sup> St Martin-on-the-Hill, Scarborough, Yorkshire, 1861 (consecrated 1863).

<sup>41</sup> Bodley injured himself when he fell from the scaffolding while working on the roof decorations.

### 3.2.7 William Burges

The High Victorian movement produced many characters, but none more interesting than William Burges.<sup>42</sup> He is the outstanding figure in the High Victorian Movement.

Burges was talented and enigmatic. The critics are quick to point out that he had few clients. Only the rich could afford the complete architectural packages he offered. Burges needed wealthy clients so that he could complete his works with all the necessary sculpture, painted decorations, and other ornamentation which made up the architecture of the mediaeval world. For, although Burges was a trend-setter, he was also an incurable romantic who lived in a make-believe mediaeval world. Through his work he was simply living out his fantasies.

Fashion trends moved very rapidly in the middle years of the nineteenth century and inevitably there was a shift in interest away from the Ruskinian structural polychromy, towards the more robust and monochrome French Gothic styles. William Burges emerged as the champion of the new style in about 1858.<sup>43</sup> He condemned the piebald appearance of the Italian inspired churches and, in so doing, joined a growing band of critics who reacted against the practice of using constructional polychromy. He believed that the basis of a Victorian style would be found in the early French or transitional (ie between Romanesque and Gothic), because it was a style much better suited to the highly polluted mid nineteenth-century environment.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> William Burges (1827-1881) trained in the offices of Edward Blore and Digby Wyatt after which he ran an exclusive practice from London designing in the 13th Century French style.

<sup>43</sup> Stefan Muthesius, The High Victorian Movement in Architecture, 1850-1870 (London, 1972). Muthesius nominates 1858 as the date which marks the reaction against constructional polychromy and the shift in interest to France rather than Italy as the source of inspiration.

<sup>44</sup> Early French was an architecture of great masses with few mouldings.

This point was picked up early in the 1860s by a number of the leading designers including Street, Godwin, Nesfield, Shaw, Pearson and Bodley. They each incorporated the early French into their work and from this emerged a new style. The amalgamation of English, French, Italian and, in the case of Burges, Islamic styles, formed the framework of a new eclecticism which consumed first the ecclesiastical design and then spread to secular areas.

The inspiration for Burges' work came from three main sources; the mediaeval world of thirteenth-century France, the mediaeval world of Japan and its crafts, and the world of Islam, which he studied at first hand. He spent a lifetime assiduously collecting. He accumulated manuscripts and objects from all sources to guide him in his work. He placed painting and sculpture on an equal plane with architecture and he followed French examples by grouping the figures in his sculpture together in a didactic arrangement. He did not use flat pattern or meaningless decoration.

There is hardly any decoration in Burges' grand cathedral, St Finn Barr's, Cork, Ireland,<sup>45</sup> apart from some painted decorations in the chancel. In St Mary's Studley Royal,<sup>46</sup> the nave is undecorated while the chancel is awash with polychromatic paintwork on the sculpture, with rich and varied stone finishes painted onto the walls. The roof decorations are painted over a background of gilding. This is characteristic of the transitional work.

The painted decorations at Studley Royal were carried out by Charles Campbell.<sup>47</sup> He was a young church decorator

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<sup>45</sup> St Fin Barres Cathedral, Cork, 1865-1879. This cathedral represented for Burges a French Gothic dream come to reality. The limited painted decorations are by Campbell Smith.

<sup>46</sup> St Mary's, Studley Royal, Yorkshire, 1871-8. The painted decorations include such subjects as Views of Jerusalem, the Garden of Eden and the Book of Revelation.

<sup>47</sup> Charles Campbell (1843-96). After serving an apprenticeship in the arts and decorating trade with a church decorator, he started on his own in 1873.

who caught Burges' eye when Burges was teaching drawing and colour composition in London. Under Burges' guidance and patronage Campbell later developed a remarkably successful decorating business.<sup>48</sup>

Campbell carried out the painted decorations at Knightshayes, Devon,<sup>49</sup> where there is enough of the original work surviving to show how Burges skilfully incorporated Islamic motifs into a very refined interior. This refinement contrasts sharply with the full-blooded romanticism which is in evidence at Cardiff where Burges was given a free hand by the Marquis of Bute to indulge in his mediaeval and mythological fantasies on two commissions.<sup>50</sup>

At Cardiff Burges worked in the spirit of Viollet-le-Duc when he restored and enlarged both the Castle and the mediaeval 'chateau', Castell Coch. These were the principal and out-of-town residences of Lord Bute, the wealthiest client in the world at the time.

The interiors of these two buildings are bejewelled with fantastic finishes and decorations. To explore these would be to look into the mind of a very complex character, which would go beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless a fundamental feature of the decorations goes some way to explaining Burges' fascination with painted decorations (*figs 30&31*).

What mattered most to Burges was that sculpture and painting in architecture should tell a story and provided a framework for rich narrative scenes and other painted

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<sup>48</sup> In 1877 he formed a partnership with G.F.Smith.

<sup>49</sup> Knightshayes Court, Devon, a large mansion designed for J.Heathcote - Amory, erected 1869-79. Burges was sacked from the job in 1874 because of delays and the interiors were completed by J.D.Crace. The whole of the painted decorations were inaccurately reconstructed by Campbell Smith and Co. in 1977.

<sup>50</sup> Cardiff Castle and Castell Coch, two mediaeval buildings rebuilt and furnished for the Marquis of Bute between 1865 and 1875.



decorations. He arrived at this view by assimilating the theories of Ruskin and the narrative art of his close friends, the pre-Raphaelite Brethren.<sup>51</sup>

In 1855, as part of his Lille Cathedral competition entry,<sup>52</sup> Burges designed an organ case. It appears to be the first example of the painted furniture which was to become known as 'Art furniture'.

Burges' friends Edward Burne-Jones and Phillip Webb, and their circle, started making furniture which they decorated with paintings in about 1857.

Burges himself took a few more years to produce the style of furniture which he designed for Lille Cathedral. It was simple in outline and carpenter-like in construction. The abundant pinnacles and suggestions of battlements give a character which suggest shrines or castles in which the painted stories were happening. It was indeed a most imaginative work of an Art architect.

Burges' work of fully integrating decorations and furnishings with the architecture was the forerunner of the creative new style which became known as the Art Movement.

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<sup>51</sup> Burges was close to Rossetti, Morris and Burne-Jones, three of the principal collaborators on the decoration of the Oxford Union Debating Hall.

<sup>52</sup> Stefan Muthesius, The High Victorian Movement, p.158. An illustration from *Les Archives Diocesaines, Lille*.

### 3.2.8 John L. Pearson

The 1860s work of the Belgian born English architect, John Loughborough Pearson<sup>53</sup> exhibits 'early French' tendencies. The two buildings which influenced him most were the cathedrals of Caen and Albi, both of which had robust proportions and great masses of masonry.

Pearson's work in the London churches of St Augustine, Kilburn, and St Peter's, Vauxhall,<sup>54</sup> shows evidence of the influence of the all-brick, majestically vaulted Albi cathedral. In St Peter's, where the brick rib vaulting of the nave is not relieved by any decoration, all attention is focussed in the apsidal east end (*fig.32*). In this respect Pearson's work differs from Butterfield, Street and Burges.

The long, undecorated naves of both of Pearson's London churches lead straight into the chancel, with only a token break between the two. In both churches the chancel features painted decorations to concentrate the viewer's attention in the area of the altar. The decorations in both were executed by Clayton and Bell.

Pearson's work, and his contribution to the development of church decoration, should be appreciated for the way in which he was able to contrast the bold austerity of his French-influenced architecture with the warmth and intimacy of his treatment of the liturgical focus of his churches. He used painted decoration sparingly but with great skill and effect.

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<sup>53</sup> John Loughborough Pearson (1817-98) an architect of the late Gothic revival whose best-known work was Truro Cathedral.

<sup>54</sup> The Parish church of St Augustine, Kilburn, 1871 and St Peter's church, Vauxhall, 1860.

### 3.2.9 High Victorian Design in Australia

There were serious attempts to introduce the English High Victorian style architecture to Australia by commissioning designs by the leading English architects. The results were pale by comparison with English examples.

Church leaders in Australia invited designs from the leading English architects for the Anglican Cathedrals in Hobart, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane, but the results did not meet the high level of expectations. In Hobart Bodley's design for St David's Cathedral, begun in 1868, falls well short of his best work. The Hobart church by Street is undistinguished. Butterfield's St Paul's Anglican Cathedral in Melbourne is possibly the most successful transposition of the style. However his North Adelaide Cathedral is not a good reflection of his work. William Burges designed a cathedral for Brisbane which was never built. Pearson's design was used instead.

As none of these architects came to Australia their design work was executed far from their control. This is most evident in the finishing, an aspect of the work of the High Victorian and Art architects in which they took great pride and care.

There are Clayton and Bell stained glass windows in more than one of the buildings, but there are none of the Art architectural features such as the ironwork, furniture and furnishings which distinguish their English work - a fundamental disappointment in the transposition from England of the High Victorian style.

There are many fine examples of High Victorian architecture by Australian designers which are stylistically well connected with the work of the Art architects. However, for the most part, they lack the stylistic integrity of their British antecedents.

### 3.2.10 Godwin, Nesfield and Shaw

The last wave of High Victorian architecture was propelled by the young *protégés* of the first 'Art' architects, the vanguard of the new movements, 'Queen Anne' and 'Arts and Crafts'. Godwin, Nesfield and Shaw were the dominant figures and leaders of these new developments.

Edward W. Godwin<sup>55</sup> was one of the most original designers of his generation. He came under the influence of Burges with whom he shared a passion for the Japanese arts and crafts, which feature strongly in his work. His interiors are outstanding. His wallpaper and furniture designs for leading makers were widely admired and freely copied.

Richard Norman Shaw,<sup>56</sup> one of the dominant figures of the late nineteenth century, was chief assistant to Street, in succession to Philip Webb and, like Street, he developed an interest in all the arts associated with architecture. In partnership with William Eden Nesfield<sup>57</sup> he was a pioneer of the Queen Anne Movement. His interests in decorative design extended to designing stained glass, carpets, wallpapers and furniture.<sup>58</sup>

Nesfield worked closely with Shaw from 1862 to 1868. They attempted to revive the picturesque tradition which they found in the English countryside. Nesfield was a cultured decorative artist whose collection interests reflected the aesthetic taste of his art and his architecture.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Edward William Godwin (1833-86) a brilliant designer of buildings, furniture and decorations.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912).. After training in the office of Street he shared partnerships with Nesfield and also Adam Heaton for whom he designed furniture and furnishings.

<sup>57</sup> William Eden Nesfield (1835-88) in partnership with Shaw he pioneered the Queen Anne style.

<sup>58</sup> Shaw designed these items for his close friend, the Bradford based decorator, J. Aldam Heaton.

<sup>59</sup> J.M. Brydon, 'William Eden Nesfield, 1835-88', Architectural Review, i(1897) p.286.

### 3.3 Stained Glass and Painted Decorations

Stained-glass decorations were highly significant in English mediaeval architecture. However, through some ignorance of its historical significance, the artform was reduced to a very minor role at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The tradition continued in churches and romantic secular buildings<sup>60</sup> but it was a time when the glaziers shops were largely involved in the removal and replacement of coloured glass in mediaeval buildings.

The revival of stained glass, which is strongly linked to the Gothic Revival, coincided with Queen Victoria's accession to the throne in 1837. This was the year in which Pugin's first church was constructed and the beginning of a revival which once again integrated stained glass and painted decorations in decorated interiors.

Pugin's contemporary, Willement, shared his interest in glass. They recognised the true value of mediaeval glass and each made concerted efforts to preserve surviving examples and also to ensure that new work reached similar standards of design and production. They maintained and developed an antiquarian interest in glass which was in evidence in the earlier romantic interiors<sup>61</sup>, but added painted decoration in a committed way.

The revival of stained glass is closely linked with the revival of painted decorations. So much so that the two artforms merged in the studios and workshops of many of the leading designers and decorators. Many leading designers and decorators took on stained glass while stained-glass trained artists often took on painted decoration in recognition of the close relationship between the two.

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<sup>60</sup>Clive Wainwright, The Romantic Interior, the British Collector at Home 1750-1850 (New Haven: Yale, 1989). The author notes that stained glass was the last of the elements to make up the Romantic Interior.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid. p.65. At Horace Walpole's 'Strawberry Hill' (1747-96) and William Beckford's 'Fonthill Abbey' (1796-1822) new glass was incorporated with acquired ancient glass.

### 3.3.1 Pioneers in Stained Glass

The development of stained glass began in the twelfth century and prospered in the thirteenth. The first strong primary colours, including the beautiful characteristic yellow stain, were introduced in the fourteenth century. In the sixteenth century considerable effort was directed towards supplementing the artist's palette by the introduction of enamel colours to be used in those situations where coloured glass facets were impractical, as in the case of red lips or blue eyes on figures. The evolution of the art stopped abruptly at the Reformation with the emergence of Puritanism. The Revival began with the campaign of nineteenth-century church building.

In England the designers, Thomas Ward and James Nixon, James Powell, William Wailes, Michael O'Connor, John Hardman, Isaac Gibbs and Thomas Willement all played a key role in the Revival of both stained glass and Gothic art. The majority of their works were ecclesiastical.

In the north the extreme violence of the Reformation had destroyed Scotland's mediaeval stained glass heritage almost completely. There were very few surviving examples of the art to inspire designers.<sup>62</sup> What is more the Calvinist revulsion against the worship of graven images practically excluded figure painting and glass from church interiors.

In Scotland neo-classicists dominated architectural circles and the majority of churches and public buildings were thus constructed in classical styles. Nevertheless stained glass was revived, and the inspiration came with the brief flush of Romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century during the heroic age of archaeology.

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<sup>62</sup> Michael Donnelly, Glasgow Stained Glass (Glasgow: Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries, 1981) p.5.

James Ballantine<sup>63</sup> was in the forefront of the Scottish Revival. His firm, Ballantine and Allen was established nine years after William Cairney and Sons<sup>64</sup> opened in Glasgow. Hugh Bogle<sup>65</sup> and David Kier,<sup>66</sup> the other two significant Scottish designers of stained glass, opened a few years later.

The pioneers in stained glass played an important practical role also in the development of Art decorations. As contributors to the decoration of interiors they were involved in philosophical and intellectual debate over interior decorations. The antecedents of the main decorating businesses can be traced back to these artists.

### 3.3.2 Scottish Stained Glass and Decoration

It is important to review the work of the Scottish stained glass artists and decorators to build up a background profile on the main decorating businesses and furnishing houses which dominated the field in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Firms like William Cairney and Sons, and the Kier family gave a start to some of the central figures in this study.

The central thread which runs through the revival of the decorative arts entwines many of the key painters, stained-glass artists and painter/decorators. Their artforms merged into one; 'Art decorating', in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

Before Pugin began his fruitful collaboration with John Hardman in 1845 early English stained glass is full of

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<sup>63</sup> James Ballantine (1808-77) worked as a slab boy to David Roberts then a house-painter before opening his glass business in Edinburgh. He made the stained glass for the House of Lords.

<sup>64</sup> William Cairney first advertised as a glass painter in Glasgow in 1828.

<sup>65</sup> Hugh Bogle, who trained with Ballantine, built up a substantial decorating business before diversifying into stained glass around 1850.

<sup>66</sup> David Kier (1802-64) established a business with his sons, William and James in Glasgow in 1852.

heraldic symbolism. It was Pugin who directed the Revival, leading from the front, by producing technically and historically accurate glass and writing expansive accounts of the principles and practice of mediaeval design.

Pugin's influence in Scotland was very limited. The stained-glass designs of the artists in the north held firmly to a classical direction. It was not until late in the century that they veered toward aesthetic and more organic forms.

Daniel Cottier<sup>67</sup> exercised a considerable influence over glass design in Scotland; most particularly in Glasgow. He drew inspiration from classical art and he learned much about composition from Alexander Thomson. The subjects which appear in Cottier's early work approach the ideal of Greek gods - robust and beautiful figures with flowing golden hair, or tightly curled Aegean locks. They dress in Roman style wrap-around loose robes. But it is in the use of colour that Cottier excelled. His brightly coloured work is developed around the primaries, with the significant difference that the colours are modified in subtle ways which allow them to co-exist in harmony.

Daniel Cottier and other leading Scottish designers made a very substantial contribution to the diversification of the decorative arts of both Scotland and England because they were not constrained by rigid Gothic or Classical design conventions. In England there was strong conservatism in ecclesiastical design in particular and it was not easy for English designers to work outside the widely accepted conventions.

### 3.3.3 English Stained Glass

The mediaeval world from which Pugin and the Gothicists drew inspiration was one in which decoration was applied

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<sup>67</sup> Daniel Cottier (1838-91) is the central figure in the Glasgow art movements of the 1860s. (See 4.2).



with equal generosity to walls, ceilings, glass, furniture and clothing. Designers moved from one area of design to another. It was of no consequence to them to design everything from fabrics and finishes through the full repertoire of building decoration.

William Morris, despite being one of the youngest and nearest to the outer edge of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, brought the design style of the group to stained glass by employing Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Ford Madox Brown and Webb as glass designers. These outstanding artists extended the scope of use of glass by pushing the art in a secular direction. Even in their church work there is less of the religious symbolism of other glass artists. By concentrating on the craft and decorative qualities of mediaeval design they were able to break away from structural formality of Gothic art and introduce the free flowing forms of the new Aesthetic style.

#### **3.3.4 Stained Glass and Art Decorations**

The legacy of Pugin's work in England is greatly in evidence in the Art decorations of the second half of the nineteenth century. By seeking out and training craftsmen to undertake the decorative treatment of his buildings, Pugin set an example which was followed by a significant number of the next generation of Art architects. The Art architects introduced artists of potential to their exciting world of interior decorations.

What is interesting is that many of the stained glass artists learned the companion skills of painting and decorating painters, like Campbell and Smith, picked up the skills required to decorate glass. This pattern emerged first with the establishment of Morris' firm in the early 1860s, and it continued to the end of the century. Stained glass and painted decorations became closely linked in all secular and ecclesiastical work.

Clayton and Bell's first commission for painted decorations came from Scott, by way of an incentive to assist them in their new venture. In 1859 he employed them to paint murals at All Souls', Haley Hill, where they were joined by Stacy Marks, a freelance mural artist and decorator whom Richard Clayton had first met in his student days.<sup>68</sup> Street also used Clayton and Bell as decorators with stunning results in his richly decorated churches at St Peter's, Bournemouth, Garton-on-the-Wolds, East Yorkshire and Newland, Malvern.

Campbell Smith and Company are not well known as stained glass artists, partly because their ongoing business of painting and decorating is so well known that it overshadows all else. However the decorative painting business was married with stained glass during the Art period of the 1880s when Campbell and Smith were involved in the decoration of a number of hotels and theatres. The following account indicates that the glass side of the business was not insignificant.

*The Grand Hotel at Charing Cross ... [has been decorated with} six or seven thousand feet of stained glass ... having been done by Campbell Smith and Campbell.*<sup>69</sup>

Clayton and Bell and Campbell Smith are representative of many firms which introduced the other artform to their established businesses in order to meet their client's needs for a comprehensive decorating service. Cottier and Company, (London and New York); Lyon and Cottier (Sydney); Heaton, Butler and Bayne, (London); J and W Guthrie, (Glasgow); and McCulloch and Gow, (Glasgow), are just a few who managed to master these related arts and produce outstanding results.

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<sup>68</sup> Peter Larkworthy, Clayton and Bell, Stained Glass Artists and Decorators, (London, The Ecclesiological Society, 1984), p.15

<sup>69</sup> The Journal of Decorative Art, 1884, Vol IV, pp 458-9.

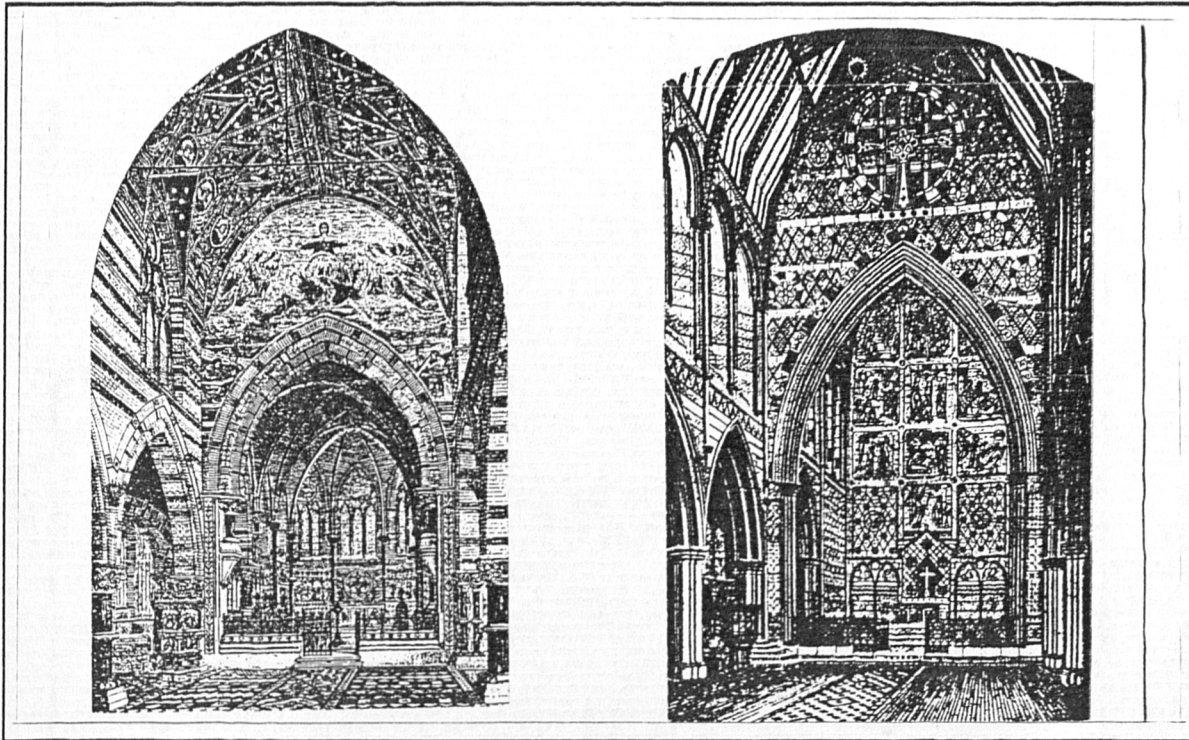


Fig. 26

Illustration of St James-the-Less, Westminster, designed by G.E.Street (1860) with fresco over the chancel arch by G.F.Watts. Reproduced from Capes', Old and New Churches of London, 1880.

Fig. 27

East Wall of St Alban's, Holborn by William Butterfield (1862) with both constructional and painted Polychromatic decoration. The Builder, 1862.

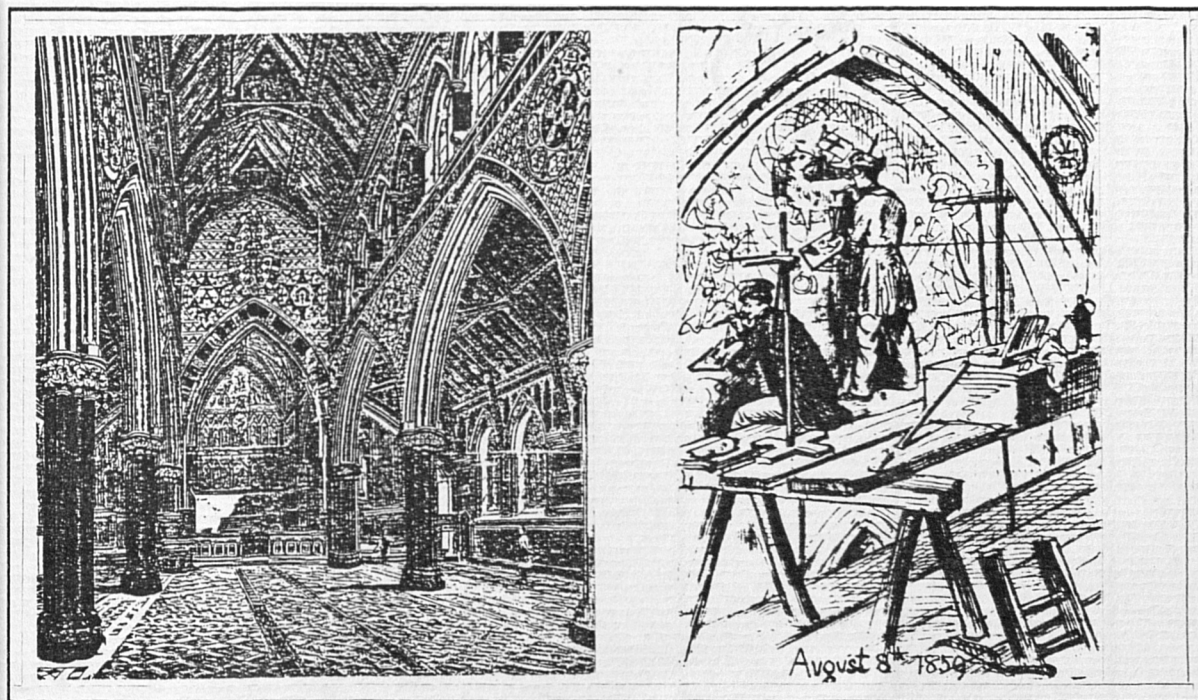
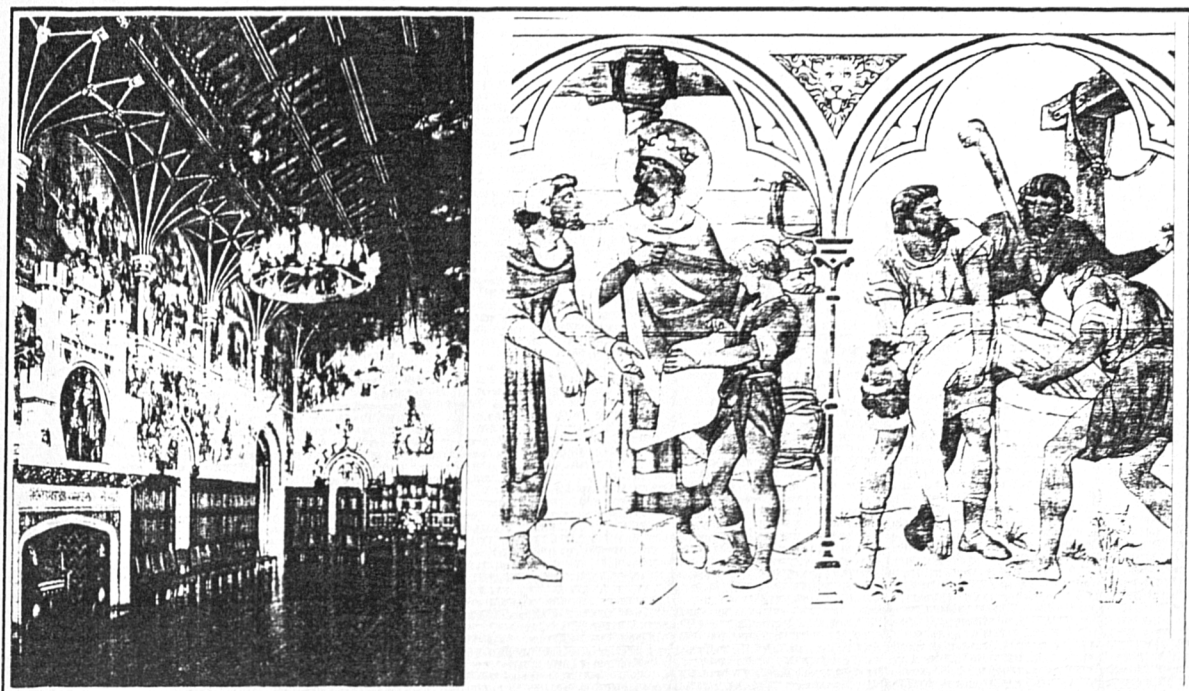


Fig. 28

All Saints, Margaret Street, by William Butterfield (1859), the preferred model of the Ecclesiologists. From Capes's, Old and New Churches of London.

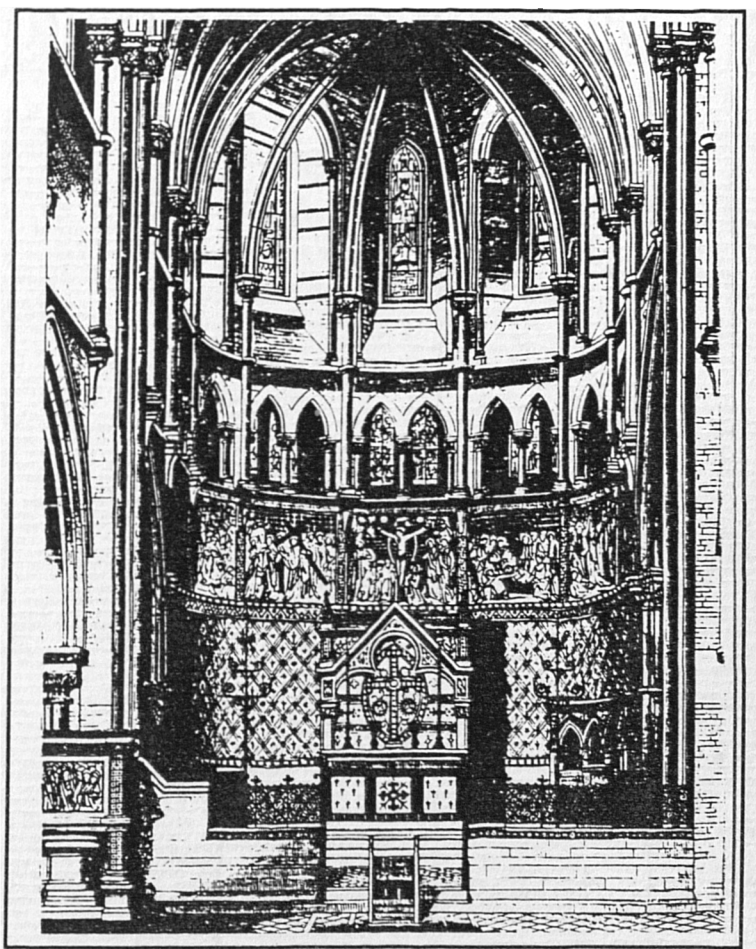
Fig. 29

Stacy Marks and an assistant working for Clayton and Bell at painting the chancel arch in G.G.Scott's, All Souls Haley Hill, Halifax, 1859. Sophisticated results from crude resources. Source: Victorian Stained Glass.



*Figs 30 and 31 (Detail)*

*The Banqueting Hall, Cardiff Castle, designed by William Burges. The painted decorations include paintings of early Christian martyrs by Campbell Smith.*



*Fig. 32*

*View of the East End of the Church of St Peter, Vauxhall with oil paintings of the Passion Cycle by Clayton and Bell.*

## CHAPTER 4 THE ART MOVEMENTS

### 4.1 Artistic Taste and Aestheticism

The conventional view of nineteenth-century interiors is of cluttered, richly decorated and lavishly ornamented spaces with barely enough light for normal domestic and business tasks. This is contrasted with a perception of twentieth-century interiors as light, sparsely furnished spaces with only token decorations and ornamentation.

In reality there was a great difference between the refined interiors of some and the clumsy excesses of others.

During the second half of the nineteenth century there was a refinement in taste amongst the wealthy upper-middle classes which is evident in the decorations of their domestic interiors. The Artistic decorations, as they were handled by the skilled decorators, lost much of their *finesse* as the styles filtered down to the middle classes over a period of several decades.

Late in the nineteenth century there were a number of art movements influencing interior design, decoration and even dress. The most significant of these was the Aesthetic Movement. This movement was closely related to the discovery by British designers of Japanese arts and crafts. Others were inspired by influential designers or writers such as William Morris and Charles Eastlake. New style furnishing houses developed in response to demands for artistic furnishings and decorations. They worked closely with leading designers and decorators who warmly embraced the new resources such as Japanese arts and crafts materials.

The 1862 International Exhibition at South Kensington, London marked a turning point in British design and

decoration. It witnessed the first public showing of the newly formed firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Company. It also included the first showing, at a European Exhibition, of Japanese art; modest display of lacquer, bronze and porcelain from the personal collection of the first British Minister in Japan, Sir Rutherford Alcock.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.1.1 **Morris and Company**

Morris and Company was founded in 1861 under the name of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co, by the partners Morris, Webb, Madox Brown, Burne-Jones and Rossetti. The group was brought together by Rossetti who was quick to exploit the generous talent he recognised in Burne-Jones and Morris in particular. They all shared a love of decoration and art which ran to the design and painting (by their own hands) of utilitarian furniture (for their own use). Morris became the elder statesman of the group when he assumed sole proprietorship of the firm in 1875, but in the early days he was a 'junior member' under the spell of Rossetti.

The individuals who founded Morris and Company also formed the nucleus of Rossetti's pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.<sup>2</sup> They congregated regularly in Rossetti's studio to discuss art and artistic pursuits. Together they undertook the ambitious task of decorating the Oxford Union Debating Hall,<sup>3</sup> a project which was technically flawed from the outset.

Rossetti chose the subject of the paintings and directed the group of volunteers who laboured over the decorations

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Rutherford Alcock was the first British Minister in Japan. He returned to London with a substantial collection of traditional Japanese handcrafts.

<sup>2</sup> Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1881) formed the PRB as a hilarious lark. The group of painters led by him, who met in Millais's studio in September 1848, laid down aims which promoted original thought and rejected the teaching of Sir Joshua Reynolds and, in particular, Raphael's 'Transfiguration'.

<sup>3</sup> In 1857 Rossetti and Morris visited the partially complete Oxford Union Debating Hall and persuaded the architect, Woodward, and the building committee, to allow them to decorate the hall with a series of 'frescoes'.

at Oxford. Morris proved to be a source of amusement to the others on the project, as he struggled to reconcile his burgeoning socialist views with his overt fascination with the Mediaeval world.

At Holland Park, where the group gathered informally at Rossetti's home on many occasions, it was first Rossetti, and later William Burges who was looked up to by the others. Morris later transformed their art into a very profitable business by producing the results of their art in a form which had widespread commercial appeal.

The painting of the Oxford Union Debating Hall was little more than a glorious summer lark and not surprisingly the decorations were littered with private jokes in the form of caricatures concealed in the paintings. Their interest in furniture designs probably started with the painting *soirées* in London when Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Morris and Burges applied decorative paintings to their household furniture.<sup>4</sup> Burges later elevated the informal practice to a stunning artform.

The earliest professional decorating commissions by Morris and Company were undertaken in the churches designed by Bodley at Brighton and Scarborough. Several members of the group worked side by side with Bodley on the decoration.

One of the most public of the early works was the Green Dining Room at the South Kensington Museum, undertaken about 1866. This room was in daily use by architects, designers and art students of all kinds and it is highly probable that it was the decoration of this room which kindled the interest for similar schemes in so many of the so-called 'Aesthetic' interiors. E.W. Godwin is known to have derived his ideas for painted woodwork from that room.<sup>5</sup> Godwin and

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<sup>4</sup> Burges's own narrow uncomfortable bed was stencilled and decorated with a headboard panel painting by Henry Holiday in oils of 'Sleeping Beauty'.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Aslin, The Aesthetic Movement, Prelude to Art Nouveau (London: Ferndale Editions, 1969) p.63.

Morris also shared a common interest in Japanese art in those early years.

The attraction of Japanese arts and crafts for Morris and his fellow mediaevalists was that it was well founded on centuries-old craft traditions. In fact it was probably the nearest thing to a living mediaeval craft that could be found at the time. Understandably therefore it had a strong attraction for Morris, Burges, Godwin, and other designers of the Art Movement. But Morris and Company quickly outstripped the others, at least in terms of phenomenal commercial success.

#### 4.1.2 **Japanism**

The impact of Japan on the decorative arts in Britain passed through three distinct phases.<sup>6</sup> In the 1860s it was a matter for individual collectors and enthusiasts. In the 1870s, the fashion was in full swing amongst informed people and Japanism and the Aesthetic movement were virtually synonymous. The movement became a form of popularised mania in the 1880s and was soon discredited by discerning folk.

One of the early collectors of Japanese art was William Burges. His collection of prints began in the 1850s and he made no attempt to conceal his enthusiasm for the display at the 1862 exhibition:

*To any students of our reviving arts of the thirteenth century, an hour or even a day or two spent in the Japanese Department will by no means be lost time, for these hitherto unknown barbarians appear not only to know all that the middle ages knew but in some respects are beyond them and us as well.*<sup>7</sup>

The demand for Oriental art amongst a small and informed public soon became a mania on a grand scale. However in

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid, p.79.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, p.81.



the two decades before the mania transformed Japanese taste, it formed the basis of an authentic new and exciting art style.

Arthur Lazenby Liberty<sup>8</sup> was working in the oriental department of Messrs Farmer and Rogers in 1862 when some of the Japanese and Oriental exhibits from the Exhibition were sold over the counter. A year later he progressed to the position of manager of that department. In 1875, he opened a business of his own. Liberty's immediately became the focal point of Japanese and Oriental taste.

Influential men of taste, including Ruskin, Burne-Jones, Whistler and Norman Shaw, all collected, studied and copied from Japanese designs.

The Glasgow decorator, Daniel Cottier, whose influence spread to both Australia and America, was swept along by the Japanese torrent. It has even been suggested that Cottier transported the aesthetic movement to America. He did produce a range of designs for the American market which were based on the work of Godwin and the majority of these designs were in the Anglo-Japanese style.

Christopher Dresser, claimed by some to be one of the greatest of all commercial designers, was strongly influenced by Japanese art. It is known that he made drawings and purchases from the Alcock collection. In 1877 he visited Japan, travelling widely and even meeting the Emperor to whom he stated;

*For years past I have been an admirer and collector of Japanese objects.*<sup>9</sup>

In 1879 Dresser entered into a partnership with Charles

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<sup>8</sup> Arthur Lazenby Liberty (1843-1917), started a career with Farmer and Rogers (1863-75), which led him to open one of London's longest running furnishing and fabric houses.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Dresser, Principles of Decorative Design, reprint ed (New York, Academy Editions, 1973), 'A Chronological Outline of the life of Christopher Dresser', by Stuart Durant.

Holme to import Japanese and other oriental wares. This venture thus mirrored the strong interest amongst recognised artists and the commercial appeal of the Japanese arts and crafts.

#### 4.1.3 **Edward W. Godwin**

Edward W. Godwin<sup>10</sup> had a sound background in the principles of Gothic architecture when, as a young man, he moved from Bristol to London and fell under the influence of William Burges. It is believed that Burges introduced Godwin to Japanese design some time before the move to London for his Bristol home was decorated with Japanese prints. It is reputed to be the first home in England to be decorated in accordance with Japanese design principles.<sup>11</sup>

From 1862 onwards Godwin devoted himself to Japanism in the way he had during the previous ten years immersed himself in the Gothic of old England. The strength of this interest is evident in a series of designs for furniture and painted interiors which are acknowledged as some of the best examples of Aesthetic decoration.<sup>12</sup> Godwin was one of the most accomplished designers of the movement which became recognised as the Aesthetic movement.

In 1877 Godwin designed a house for James Whistler in Tite Street, Chelsea. The fruitful collaboration between these two talented men established a high degree of significance for Tite Street and the new style of artistic decoration.

The interior decoration featured elegant lightweight furniture similar to the pieces prepared for the Paris exhibition, but instead of the black ebonised finishes the

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<sup>10</sup> Edward William Godwin (1833-86) was one of the most brilliant and original designers of his generation.

<sup>11</sup> Aslin, p. 84

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Tite Street furniture was finished in yellow tones and gold, with purely decorative abstract paintings conceived by Whistler to complement Godwin's designs. It was a significant new direction in the application of decorative painting to furniture. The earlier use of painted decorations on furniture employed the furniture merely as a background to the paintings which were confined to the flat surfaces.

Godwin was also the pioneer of a new approach in the use of colour in interior decoration. The general rejection of primary colours had already occurred. By the mid 1870s there was only limited ongoing use of the aniline dyed fabrics; the coal tar purples and magentas, and the strong primaries. Strong colours were still in use, but they were tempered with soft tertiaries, usually subdued greys and greens. Godwin, however, designed a series of interiors around a single colour.

His crowning achievement was made in 1884 in a room he designed for Oscar Wilde in shades of white only. The inspiration for such a radical departure from accepted contemporary standards was drawn from Japanese prints. Godwin's instructions for the work were most explicit:

*The whole of the woodwork to be painted in enamel white and grey to a height of five feet six inches. The rest of the walls to be finished in lime white with a slight addition of black to give a greyish tone.*<sup>13</sup>

Godwin drew inspiration from Japanese models for most of his work. He candidly admitted that his furniture was only loosely modelled on Japanese designs since there were, after all, not many examples from which to copy. However he designed a successful range of wallpapers, textiles and ceramic tiles, based on authentic Japanese models, for the leading manufacturers Jeffrey and Company.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Aslin, p.84.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.93.

#### 4.1.4 The Aesthetic Movement

The Aesthetic Movement developed in direct contradiction to the convention that either one particular style, or other, was the best and right style, or that the Victorian age should create a new style. All styles, all periods, all schools of taste and beauty were accepted as equally valid in the Aesthetic Movement. Inevitably the styles of Japan, classical Greece, the Italian Renaissance, and the English eighteenth century became the vogue.<sup>15</sup>

The three decades of frenzied artistic activity leading up to the 1890s, was the period of the Aesthetic Movement. At the time one observer noted that;

*There has assuredly never been since the world began an age in which people thought, talked, wrote and spent such inordinate sums of money and hours of time cultivating and indulging their tastes.*<sup>16</sup>

It was a period in British history when designers, artists, architects, writers and manufacturers combined to elevate the decorative arts of Britain above all the rest of Europe. The Anglo-Japanese designs which flowed logically from the interest in Japanese art, and the aesthetic interiors of the new (so-called) 'Queen Anne' architecture<sup>17</sup>, together with 'Aesthetic' clothing, were all outward manifestations of the movement which was a reaction against established traditions.

Public figures, like Whistler and Oscar Wilde, gave the popular press the opportunity to lampoon the followers and denigrate the achievements made by the sincere and earnest

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Girouard, Sweetness and Light, the Queen Anne Movement 1860-1900 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) p.5.

<sup>16</sup> Furniture Gazette, (Vol. V. 1871) p.76.

<sup>17</sup> The 'Queen Anne' architecture was an original mixture of seventeenth and eighteenth-century elements, especially red brick, white woodwork, high roofs and 'Flemish' gables which became the style of the progressive causes of the period 1860-90. It mirrored the Aesthetic style in decorations.

devotees, the designers who injected new life into the art industries of glass manufacture, metal work, ceramics, furniture and furnishings, and even book illustration.

E.W. Godwin might be considered the quiet achiever of the Movement. He produced furniture designs between 1867 and 1886 in an Anglo-Japanese style, with slender proportions and black ebonised finishes derived directly from Japanese models, which set the fashion for other designers. The panels of cabinetwork featured areas of ornamentation in Japanese leather papers, or even authentic Japanese carving (bought from Liberty's). Earlier pieces, like those produced by the Morris circle, employed the furniture merely as background to the paintings which were confined to the flat surfaces.

The style received universal acclaim at the Paris Exhibition of 1878 where the official English Pavilion contained a room in the new Aesthetic style. This featured stained glass windows, an embroidered frieze and furniture designed in the Anglo-Japanese style by Godwin with painted panels by Whistler.

Godwin was also representative of a group of artists who propelled the Aesthetic movement with their prodigious output of designs for the full range of decorative finishes. Others, like J. Bruce Talbert,<sup>18</sup> and Thomas Jeckyll,<sup>19</sup> produced high quality designs in the Aesthetic style.

Jeckyll, abandoned his Gothic Revival training, as Godwin had done, and abandoned in part his profession also to concentrate on the design of decorative art and furnishing objects. He designed even humble objects like cast iron fire grates with Japanese aesthetic motifs. These fireplaces were incorporated into new and remodelled

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<sup>18</sup> Bruce James Talbert (1838-1881) craftsman, architect and designer.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Jeckyll (1827-1881) architect and designer.

interiors from London to Glasgow as William Leiper<sup>20</sup>, and his decorator of the early 1870s, Daniel Cottier, introduced them into most of their commissions.

An interior decorating commission of 1876, for F.R. Leyland, provided Jeckyll with the opportunity of endowing the Movement with a stunning and lasting monument, the Peacock Room.<sup>21</sup> This room, with its life-size peacocks painted in gold by Whistler onto a blue ground,<sup>22</sup> combines the black ebonised (or lacquered) joinery, with Tudor ceiling ornaments in a very sophisticated way.

By the 1880s Japanism had become synonymous with Aestheticism. It had also become institutionalised through a wide exposure made possible by an expanding printing industry. One of the first folio publications was Thomas Cutler's, A Grammar of Japanese Ornament and Design.<sup>23</sup> The book was modelled on Jones' Grammar.<sup>24</sup> Its aim was to:

*... present a carefully selected series of characteristic examples of the natural and conventional ornament of the Japanese.*<sup>25</sup>

Thomas Cutler claimed to have taken eighteen years of pleasant study to prepare the book and it can be assumed that some of the time was spent in Japan. The book is illustrated with a brilliant series of lithographed

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<sup>20</sup> William Leiper (1839-1916) Glasgow born and trained architect.

<sup>21</sup> The dining room of Frederick R. Leyland's London House. See John Winter and Elizabeth West Fitzhugh, 'Some Technical Notes on Whistler's Peacock Room', Studies in Conservation, Vol.30 (No.4 November 1985). The room was originally designed by Jeckyll as a Dining room. In 1904 it was purchased by Charles L. Freer and moved to his Detroit, USA, home.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. The striking appearance of this room has been admired by all students of the period. The colour contrasts have been especially studied. Recent pigment identification revealed that the gold is in the form of both gold leaf and platinum over a yellow ground of lead, cadmium and yellow ochre. The blue is Prussian blue.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Cutler, A Grammar of Japanese Ornament and Design, (London: Batsford, 1880).

<sup>24</sup> Owen Jones, Grammar of Ornament.

<sup>25</sup> J.Moyr Smith, Ornamental Interiors, p.73.

plates, some of which attempt to analyse the geometry of repetitive ornament and representations of the natural subjects which were the essence of Japanese design.

It was a key book, because Cutler contributed to making ornament better understood, encouraging ornament as design rather than the former practice of imitation.<sup>26</sup>

A writer of considerable influence, James Colling, had questioned current practices in Art Foliage for Sculpture and Decoration.<sup>27</sup> He observed;

*... there was [formerly] no need to consider the origins of patterns (Greek, Roman, Japanese, etc.) but rather to select from them all that is beautiful.*<sup>28</sup>

What he was criticising was the very structure of the Aesthetic movement, the 'art for art's sake' approach expressed, and adopted, by the majority of designers of the period.

A new monthly journal for painters and decorators, The Journal of Decorative Art, gave Japanese art a mention in its very first issue published in January 1881,

*a fashionable furore which obtains at the present time in favour of Japanese Art, to the almost total exclusion of any other style.*<sup>29</sup>

This, of course, was a gross exaggeration, but it was nevertheless a clear indication of the degree of interest in Japanese art held by the members of the decorating profession at whom the journal was directed.

For the benefit of readers, the Journal of Decorative Art presented a good coverage of those aspects of Japanese art

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> James F. Colling, Art Foliage for Sculpture and Decoration (London: 1865)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> The Journal of Decorative Art, January, 1881, p. 8

which touched on the painting and decorating trade, such as Japanning (obviously), bronzing, stencilling and lacquerwork. The journal also gave good coverage to Rottmans, the trading and manufacturing business responsible for the importation of Japanese leather papers<sup>30</sup> and other Japanese wares appropriate for home decoration. In 1884 it began a series of 'Notes from Japan' to relay to readers the observations of correspondents reporting new developments in that country.

Painters and decorators were able to draw inspiration and design ideas also from the coloured illustrations in a range of foreign publications. One excellent volume, Japanische Vorbilder,<sup>31</sup> was a splendid compendium of designs worked up from composites of Japanese motifs. It was well suited to copying from its plates to produce stencil decorations.

The basis of painted decorations of the Aesthetic Movement was stencilling, an art which was raised to a very high plane in Japan. It had the advantage (in the post-Ruskin era), that it imposed conditions which obliged the designer to work 'in the flat',<sup>32</sup> and was therefore eminently suitable for walls (especially wallpapers) and furnishing fabrics.

The Japanese have a long tradition in the use of fine stencils to decorate fabrics. The British designers already had a tradition of stencilling, but it required some imagination to adapt Japanese designs to building interiors. The folio volumes and journals therefore played an important role in helping the painters and decorators to make the transition from one to the other.

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<sup>30</sup> The Journal of Decorative Art, December 1891, pp.190-201.

<sup>31</sup> Von H. Dolmetsch, Japanische Vorbilder, (Stuttgart: 1886).

<sup>32</sup> The Journal of Decorative Art, January 1881, p.8



## 4.2 Daniel Cottier and the Glasgow Style

The late nineteenth-century art movements produced many outstanding figures who contributed in several different ways to the remarkable revival in the British decorative arts. Daniel Cottier was an exceptionally influential and inspirational leader of a large group of artists and decorators in the mainstream of artistic developments in Scotland, England, Australia and America.

Cottier is not well recognised by historians. Most students of the period choose to concentrate on the work of Morris and the English designers. Even contemporary critics and students of the art movements failed to place Cottier in his rightful place on a pedestal with Morris, Rossetti, Talbert and their like. The lack of recognition and documentation makes it a somewhat difficult task to reconstruct the story of Cottier's life and his work.

It is not clear whether Daniel Cottier started his career with William Cairney and Sons or with another of the pioneering Glasgow manufacturers of stained glass, David Kier and Sons. According to Henley,<sup>33</sup> Cottier was apprenticed to David Kier together with Kier's own two sons William and John.

Once released from his indentures Cottier moved south to London where he studied art at F.D. Maurice's Working Men's College. He attended lectures presented by Ruskin, Rossetti and Ford Madox Brown<sup>34</sup> before moving to Edinburgh where he secured, in 1862, the prestigious post of chief designer to Field and Allan of Leith.<sup>35</sup> There he met many of the talented young artists who later became

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<sup>33</sup> W.E. Henley, Collection Cottier (Edinburgh/Paris), (1892), Catalogue of paintings and other works of art presented by Cottier with a biographical introduction by the author.

<sup>34</sup> Glasgow Evening Times, 9 October 1893.

<sup>35</sup> Brian Gould, 'Two Van Gough Contacts; E.J. Van Wasseligh, Art Dealer; Daniel Cottier, Glass Painter and Decorator', (Bedford Park: Naples, 1969).

his disciples in the dissemination of his decorative art to America and the Australian colonies. He also met Field's daughter, Marion, whom he married in 1866.

He was not long at Field and Allan's before branching out on his own, setting up a studio in George Street, next door to the Edinburgh offices of Glasgow architects Campbell Douglas and J.J.Stevenson. Through his neighbour's office he was introduced to William Leiper and J.Bruce Talbert, who, together with Douglas and Stevenson, provided the most rewarding commissions of his early career.

#### 4.2.1 Early Work in Glasgow

There are few surviving examples of commissions undertaken by Cottier in Edinburgh from the early 1860s. Amongst the known works are those which were undertaken at Irvine,<sup>36</sup> Cramlington,<sup>37</sup> Aberdeen<sup>38</sup> and at Paisley Abbey.<sup>39</sup>

In 1865 Cottier was commissioned by Stevenson and Douglas to supply the glass and painted decorations to the Townhead Parish church in Glasgow. He worked from his mother's house at Garnethill in Glasgow, assisted by Andrew Wells, the young decorator he had taken with him from Field and Allan.<sup>40</sup> An account of the decorations at Townhead has been handed down by an observer, who;

*... had heard a rumour of the startling character of the decoration, and was anxious to see what it was like...[it comprised]....great masses of positive colour*

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<sup>36</sup>Window (possibly 'the Widow's Mile') undertaken at Field and Allan for the Trinity Church, Irvine, Ayrshire, now in Ely Stained Glass Museum.

<sup>37</sup>It is noted at the Ely Museum that the best surviving example of Cottier's work is in the north aisle of St Nicholas, Cramlington, Northumberland.

<sup>38</sup>Cottier provided glass and painted decorations for the home of his friend, John Forbes White, Seaton Cottage, and for White's mother, 'Bridgefield', Aberdeen in 1864.

<sup>39</sup>Stephen Adam, Truth in Decoration and Art (Glasgow: 1896) p.48. Description of a window by Cottier in Paisley Abbey, 1864.

<sup>40</sup>'Glasgow Scraps', Vol XXXVII (37), Note from William Gibson to William Young, 4 May 1914).

- red and blue, with figures of dense black - the motif was Egyptian and the design might have found a fitting place in a great hall of one of the Pharaohs.<sup>41</sup>

Here in the Townhead church was something entirely new and very striking - something as bold as the architecture itself. This example of decorative painting broke new ground. It was colourful, bold and classical.

Cottier was at ease with architecture and architects. It has even been suggested that he might have indulged in his own architectural designs.<sup>42</sup> Certainly he mixed freely in architectural circles, working at times in collaboration with Stevenson, Leiper, Campbell Douglas, Talbert, J.M.Brydon and Alexander Thomson.

In 1865 Cottier was admitted to the Glasgow Architectural Society, possibly in recognition of the architectural quality of his work. At the February 1866 meeting of the Glasgow Architectural Society he read a paper entitled 'Colour the Handmaid of Architecture',<sup>43</sup> in which he displayed a sound knowledge of the art and science of building. He clearly saw the potential for decorations to play a more substantial role in architecture.

Alexander Thomson's influence on Cottier is quite evident. He was unquestionably an innovative and exciting designer whose influence on Cottier is manifest in the few tantalising examples of decorative paintings which survive. Thomson was a councillor of the Architectural Society which, in 1865, collaborated with Messrs Blackie and Son on a publication which included an early example of a joint project by Thomson and Cottier, 'Holmwood Villa' at Cathcart.<sup>44</sup> It was possibly their first project

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<sup>41</sup> James Mavor, 'My Window on the Street of the World'

<sup>42</sup> Brian Gould claimed that Cottier added a drawing room and dining room at Seaton Cottage, Aberdeen.

<sup>43</sup> Ronald McFadzean, The Life and Work of Alexander Thomson, p.199.

<sup>44</sup> Village and Cottage Architecture, (Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1868), p.47.

together which, although it is not known exactly how much Cottier contributed to the final designs, as illustrated it contains rich classical ornamentation with lotus, anthemion, palmette, rich powderings and a great deal of figurepainting (*fig.23*). It is recorded that Cottier supplied painted panels of figures from Tennyson's, Idylls of the King, at least.<sup>45</sup>

In 1867 Cottier and Thomson collaborated again on two major projects, the United Presbyterian Church at Queen's Park, Langside Road, and the Great Western Terrace, Glasgow. The church drew very high praise from Ford Madox Brown when he inspected his former pupil's work there in December 1883,

*... above everything [he had] seen in modern Europe. [Cottier had] a range of performance beyond that of any other modern artist.*<sup>46</sup>

Although the church has been demolished, it is known that Cottier's scheme of decorations at Queen's Park was based on a wide range of Egyptian, classical and natural plant motifs.

There are scant records of his work for Thomson in decorating the interiors of the Great Western Terrace, a residential development in Glasgow. However, surviving decorations in No.4 Great Western Terrace demonstrate the sort of boldness described. His work for William Leiper in the Dowanhill church also can be examined. The Church is the subject of a long-term restoration programme, commenced by the Four Acres Charitable Trust in 1984, which includes in its aims the promotion of Cottier's genius and his contribution to art of the period.

Leiper was a mere youth of 25 years when he won the commission for the Dowanhill Church in 1865. Although the

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<sup>45</sup> W.L. Stewart (Mrs), 'Memoir of the Thomson Family', (unpublished). Mrs Stewart was the granddaughter of Alexander Thomson.

<sup>46</sup> Glasgow Evening Times, 9 October 1893.

design is faithful to his early Gothic sympathies the interior decorations by his youthful collaborator Daniel Cottier are of a classical nature.

The glass, in particular, features bold and vigorous figures in strong primary hues (*figs 33&34*). The glass was commissioned from Cottier when the completed painted decorations so impressed the congregation that a wealthy parishioner was induced to put up the money for a complementary scheme of stained glass.<sup>47</sup> The parishioners were intrigued by Cottier and his work:

*Some of the old members of those days have told that they used to come into the church to see [Cottier] working on the walls. One day they saw one design and scheme of colour; next day they would find it all washed out. This process of rubbing in and washing out went on for weeks, till some of them began to think he was "not all there". At last he was satisfied with his gold stars picked out in the deep blue of the roof, and his wonderful harmony of brick red, brown and yellow covering the walls in parallelograms. The whole scheme of design and colour has been admired and copied by so many since his day. The originality of it, however, surprised and delighted experts by its charming artistry.*<sup>48</sup>

Dowanhill may mark the beginning of Cottier's career in art furnishing for he appears to have supplied and decorated some of the furnishings. The joinery of the pulpit is wonderfully decorated by Cottier's hand with bold geometric patterns not unlike those which were later adopted by Christopher Dresser (*fig.35*). The collection stand<sup>49</sup> is similarly decorated by Cottier and the flowered crewelwork behind the pulpit seat, although much later, was made by Cottier's daughter to a design no doubt inspired by her father.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Rev. William Dickie, History of Dowanhill Church 1823-1923, (Glasgow: 1926), p.73.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> The stand is now in the collection of the People's Palace Museum, Glasgow.

<sup>50</sup> Cottier had two daughters, Ella (Elizabeth) and Peggy (Margaret). Ella would have made the crewelwork at the age of 10.

#### 4.2.2 Cottier and Co

In 1869 Daniel Cottier moved to London to formally open his new business, registered as Cottier and Co. art furniture makers, glass and mural painters.<sup>51</sup> His partners, B.J. Talbert, J.M. Brydon and William Wallace were all from his Glasgow architectural circle.<sup>52</sup>

Also in London at this time were J.J. Stevenson, a former partner of Campbell Douglas and designer of the first successful Queen Anne terrace in the capital, and J.Moyr Smith, who became celebrated as an illustrator. This group of ex-patriate Scots boasted considerable talent.

The work of Cottier and Co. is not well documented and it cannot be confirmed that Brydon and Wallace, the architects, played a key role in the business. However one surviving interior of the period is outstanding for its architectural strength and the exquisite manner in which the decorations are integrated into the architecture. This is the interior of 'Cairndhu', Helensburgh, designed by William Leiper for the Glasgow Provost, John G. Ure. The richly panelled interiors feature deep toned staining which sparkles with gilded Japanesque motifs, and fireplaces, (and would have also featured) furniture designed by Talbert (*figs 37&38*).

Cottier designed the glass (*fig.36*) and possibly also the decorative scheme. The formula was the same one used by Cottier at 'Collearn', a Scots Baronial mansion by Leiper at Auchterarder, Perthshire. The main drawing room of 'Cairndhu' is so strikingly similar to Talbert's published illustration, 'A Study of Decorations and furniture',<sup>53</sup> that it seems likely that the illustration is of this very

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<sup>51</sup> Post Office London Directory, 1871. The address is given as 2 Langham Place, Regent Street

<sup>52</sup> Michael Donnelly, Glasgow Stained Glass, (Glasgow 1981), p.11.

<sup>53</sup> Bruce J. Talbert, Examples of Ancient and Modern Furniture, Metal Work, Tapestries, Decoration, 1876

same interior. It is likely that Talbert was the designer.

The team of decorators at 'Cairndhu' (and probably also at 'Colearn') were directed by Cottier's talented young *protégé*, Andrew Wells<sup>54</sup>. He was assisted by Charles Gow<sup>55</sup> and Norman Macdougall<sup>56</sup>.

When Cottier moved to London Wells stayed on as his manager in the north, playing a key role in these important commissions and, later, carrying the design philosophies to more remote centres. Both Gow and MacDougall also stayed close to Cottier throughout their careers. This highlights a feature of Cottier's personality which distinguishes him from most of his contemporaries; the ability to gain the undying respect and loyalty of his collaborators.

When he moved his business base to New York in the 1870s, and also established a partnership with John Lyon in Sydney, Cottier was given unstinting support from several of his most able *protégés*. For artists of this period to willingly cross oceans in support of their employer's ideals is a truly remarkable event.

It is clear that Cottier saw himself as having a wider brief to support art and its ideals wherever the opportunities were greatest. His followers gave him the support he needed to pursue this ideal of uplifting artistic standards in art and decoration. He was a visionary of rare ability and character. It is truly extraordinary that until very recently his remarkable achievements have gone virtually unnoticed.

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<sup>54</sup> Andrew Wells (1844-1918) learned the art of decorative painting from Cottier.

<sup>55</sup> Charles Gow joined Daniel Cottier in 1867.

<sup>56</sup> Norman Macdougall joined Cottier straight out of art school, working first as a glass stainer and later as a designer.

#### 4.2.3 Daniel Cottier, Patron of Artists

Cottier's artistic interests extended to the work of avant-garde artists whose talents he recognised well ahead of other critics. His interest in fine art was more genuine than that of his predecessors like David Hay, who displayed the work of recognised artists as a form of promotion of the higher ambitions of his own decorative art. Cottier collected works of many artists and displayed in his shop works by talented young artists who had not yet received the benefits of popular recognition.

As a young man Cottier had contracted rheumatic fever in Aberdeen and it continued to affect his health throughout his life. His decision to move his business to New York in 1873 was probably influenced, at least in part, by the desire to work in a healthier environment. He spent the rest of his life travelling to and from America and Europe, devoting more and more time to his art dealings.

The art dealership began as a part-time affair in London and grew to be highly significant. Because of his poor health Cottier was unable to take out life assurance and thus collected old masters as a form of insurance for his family. At the time of his death, at the age of 53 years, he owned works by Corot, Courbet, Daubigny, Diaz, Monticelli and Rousseau.<sup>57</sup>

Cottier's business in London was an Art Furnishing house, not unlike those of his competitors. However the business also supported young unrecognised artists whom Cottier encouraged by involving them in the painting of his wares. His great charm and generous support clearly inspired his young employees also to achieve high standards in their art.

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<sup>57</sup> The sale catalogue of the paintings that Cottier owned at the time of his death listed some 147 works with a strong representation of the canvasses of Corot (11), Courbet (4), Daubigny (11), Diaz (8), Monticelli (25), and Rousseau (7).



When Cottier was entering into new ventures in New York and Sydney, in the mid-1870s, he made contact with a leading Paris art dealership<sup>58</sup> through which he met Elbert J. Van Wisselingh. He persuaded Van Wisselingh to move to London to manage his art dealership (one of his three London shops) and to specialise in the Barbizon painters.<sup>59</sup> Cottier had taken in a young Dutch painter, named Matthew Maris, who worked at restoring old masters and designing decorations for gas globes which Cottier manufactured as part of his art furnishing business.

Vincent and Theo Van Gogh both became close friends of Cottier through their mutual interest in the Barbizon painters. In the 1870s Cottier promoted their work, together with that of the earlier artists, through his shops in London, New York and Sydney.

In New York Cottier set up a very fashionable furnishing and decorating business. The shop, managed by James Inglis,<sup>60</sup> was sumptuous. It dealt in fine furniture and hangings, gasoliers and pictures, glass and decorations. Some of the work (*figs 39&40*) were illustrated in Clarence Cook's respected publication of 1878, The House Beautiful.<sup>61</sup> Cook acknowledged his debt to Cottier:

*The cover of the book has been designed by Mr Daniel Cottier, to whom as friend and artist, the author has been constantly indebted for advice and practical help since he first began to write these pages. Without him and his house represented here by Mr James S. Inglis, the book would have wanted much ...*<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Brian Gould, 'Two Van Gough Contacts'. The art dealer is referred to as Goupil's. However it might have been René Gimple who handled many French landscape painters of the period.

<sup>59</sup> The Barbizon school of painters took their name from the village of Barbizon on the edge of the forest of Fontainebleau near Paris where they worked during the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

<sup>60</sup> John Lyon's diary (1886) includes an entry in which he identifies Inglis as the manager and records that, "Cottier's (New York Store) is sumptuous".

<sup>61</sup> Clarence Cook, The House Beautiful, (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Co, 1878). The articles were published originally in Scribner's Weekly.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p.17.

In New York, where Cottier spent more and more time, he continued to support young artists. Through Cook Cottier met the sculptor Olin Warner. When Cottier saw the young man's financial situation he gave Warner the use of a room on the premises of the shop for use as a studio. The young sculptor worked there for nearly two years, until the autumn of 1879, sculpting busts of Cottier and his daughters during the period.<sup>63</sup> Afterwards Cottier became Warner's permanent agent, continuing the patronage which was so essential to the artist's success.

Warner was only one of several who enjoyed such patronage. The contribution which Cottier made to the higher artforms through patronage was acknowledged in his obituary notice:

*Probably no one who has sold foreign pictures in New York has helped so many young American artists as (Cottier). He bought the pictures of men whom he believed promising and urged the merits of their work against the general indifference and neglect of American amateurs.*<sup>64</sup>

Paintings and art also made up an important side of the Sydney business managed by John Lyon, although it did not function in the same avant-garde manner of the London and New York dealerships<sup>65</sup>. At one time the shop in Liverpool Street, Sydney, held in stock works by Manzonni, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Corot, Le Claire, Vernier, Saunier, Campiani, Maris and others.<sup>66</sup> The important role in patronising the artists continued through the direct employment of the best available local and overseas artists to work on design and painted decorations.

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<sup>63</sup> George Gurney, 'Olin Levi Warner (1844-1896)', A Catalogue Raisonné of His Sculpture and Graphic Works, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware, June 1978.

<sup>64</sup> *New York Times*, 8 April 1891, p.8

<sup>65</sup> Daniel Cottier did not work in Australia but it is understood that he visited John Lyon in Sydney on one occasion. It is recorded that he referred to the collection of paintings at the New South Wales Art Gallery as a 'pauper's collection'.

<sup>66</sup> Undated Catalogue of the Lyon, Cottier and Co. Collection of Foreign Paintings on view at 179 Liverpool Street, Hyde Park, Sydney. Circa 1880.

#### 4.2.4 The Glasgow Style

Glasgow, the nursery of Cottier's decorative art, has a special place in art history. The Glasgow Style, which is usually associated with the Glasgow Art School and its students and graduates of the period 1890-1920, was a style of bold non-conformity. It might not have developed if the pioneers of decorative art; especially Daniel Cottier, had not broken many of the design conventions two decades earlier.

The School originated as the Glasgow Government School of Design in 1840. The ideal towards which the School strived was to unite realistic truth with decorative beauty. Developments in Glasgow between 1860 and 1890, a period of immense prosperity and artistic patronage in the City, had an effect on the development of the School which played a key role in the development of the decorative arts.

The employment in the 1870s by Cottier of Norman Macdougall, straight from the Glasgow Art School, was the earliest direct link between Cottier and the School. Macdougall worked closely with Andrew Wells on a number of decorating commissions in the north, including 'Cairndhu', before joining the Guthrie Brothers when this firm took over the goodwill of much of Cottier's and Wells' work in the north, after Wells' departure for Sydney in 1886 (*figs 42&43*).

When Wells returned from Sydney and joined the Guthries in 1897. The firm had a close association with the young Charles Rennie Mackintosh, marketing furniture to his designs and executing his decorative commissions. Between 1900 and 1903 John Guthrie was himself Superintendent of the Technical Studios at the Glasgow School of Art.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> The Glasgow Style 1890-1920. Exhibition Catalogue of the Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries, Department of Decorative Art, 1984.

The Glasgow style was essentially a refinement of the preceding Art movements. It was built on a foundation of established decorative design resources such as the textile industries in the north. The Art Furnishers like Guthrie and Wells, and Wylie and Lochhead already had strong links with the textile and carpet manufacturers. This made it possible for the design ideas of the bright young Glasgow School graduates to be directly realised. Their architecture and interior decorations could be approached with the confidence of knowing that their designs could be faithfully carried through by local craftspeople. All the designers and craftsmen were in direct contact through an established network.

The celebrated tearooms of Miss Cranston,<sup>68</sup> the Glasgow *entrepreneur*, are central to an understanding of how the network of designers functioned. From 1888 onward George Walton<sup>69</sup> received commissions for painted decorations in the tearooms. In the Buchanan Street tearooms he employed C.R. Mackintosh to execute the mural designs for him. In others Miss Cranston commissioned Mackintosh, who then subcontracted the stencil painting to Guthrie and Wells, who were working closely with Mackintosh at the time on the production of his furniture designs.

George Walton takes a place of great importance in the celebration of the Glasgow Style. His training at the Glasgow School of Art was undertaken part-time because of financial constraints. His success as a decorator was rapidly achieved with patronage from Miss Cranston. As the designer of tearooms and showrooms in England he received sufficient recognition to attract further commissions outside Scotland. He produced many remarkable decorative commissions throughout Britain and Europe.

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<sup>68</sup> Catherine (Kate) Cranston (1850-1934) known as a pioneer of art in Tea Rooms, an innovator among Glasgow caterers.

<sup>69</sup> In 1888 George Walton operated an ecclesiastical and house decoration business from 152 Wellington Street, Glasgow.

One of these schemes survives almost intact in 'Elmbank', the former residence of the York businessman, Sidney Leetham.<sup>70</sup> The painted decorations illustrate several distinguishing features of Walton's 'Glasgow' style.

They comprise stencilling over oiled panelling and plasterwork. The simple stencil patterns are of either flowing sinuous lines, in the manner of European Art Nouveau, or geometric heraldic inspired designs. The combination of dissimilar styles underlies the eclecticism of the Glasgow style.

The panels of mock fresco painted decorations at 'Elmbank' have as their subject romantic literary events.<sup>71</sup> They are in flatted oil on scratched plasterwork to give the antique appearance of old fresco-work (*figs 44&46*). The effect appears to be consistent with illustrations of other work by Walton.

He also used the extraordinary device of incorporating three dimensional objects such as copper *repoussée* and coloured, faceted glass brooch-like ornaments into his stencil patterns. The effect is striking and possibly unique (*figs 45&47*).

The work by Walton, Mackintosh and other Glasgow style designers has great significance. As the inspiration for events which took place outside Britain, particularly in Vienna, the unorthodox compositions and decorative values of the Glasgow style marked the beginning of the end of nineteenth-century historicist decorative design and the arrival of modern styles.

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<sup>70</sup> 'Elm Bank', York, designed by W.G. and A.J. Plenty, 1897.

<sup>71</sup> The mock frescoes were painted on the end walls of the dining room.

### 4.3 Art Furniture and Decoration

The first use of the term 'Art Furniture' to describe the new furniture designed by artists, rather than craftsmen, appeared around 1867.<sup>72</sup> The Art furnishers and decorators emerged from various crafts and trades including cabinetmaking, glass staining and painting.

Many decorators were forced to take up furnishing in order to be able to offer a comprehensive decorating service to their clients;

*The system of putting every kind of decorative work into the hands of one firm , has of late years become almost an established custom, indeed, this is so much the case that old firms in the painting and decorating trades have been compelled, in self defence to take to the furnishing trade as well.*<sup>73</sup>

The effect of this practice was to drive those firms specialising in an aspect of interior decoration, particularly painting, to diversify. Firms which developed to provide a decorative painting service, like Campbell Smith and Company, had to either take on staff of their own or collaborate with furnishing specialists, as Campbell's did with Liberty's, in order to compete with the bigger, comprehensive furnishing houses.

The first Art furniture was produced by William Morris and his circle of leading artists in 1861-62. Morris produced furniture, tiles, glass, wallpapers and table glass to the designs of Madox Brown, Rossetti, Philip Webb, J.P. Seddon and Morris himself. Charles Eastlake did a great deal to promote Art Decorations in his widely read Hints on Household Taste<sup>74</sup> published in 1868 in which he featured the work of the Art Furniture Company.

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<sup>72</sup>The term appeared in Building News, 25 December 1868 as a caption to a plate showing furniture pieces designed by Walford and Donkin Architects. The Art Furniture Company was established in 1867.

<sup>73</sup>The Journal of Decorative Art, August, 1884, pp. 550-52.

<sup>74</sup>C.L. Eastlake, Hints on Household Taste, (London: Longmans, 1868).

Art decorations appeared in the interiors of most styles of buildings. However Art furnishings were particularly favoured in domestic buildings in the Queen Anne style. The architects of this style played a vital role in the unification of many disparate parts of artistic interiors. Just as Queen Anne designers drew inspiration from the whole of the English decorative tradition and from Greece, Japan and the Italian Renaissance, so did Art furnishers and decorators combine details from the Jacobean, Moorish, Renaissance and Gothic styles. The eclecticism which was controlled by the architects and the decorators was a feature of both artforms.

The forerunner to the Art Furniture Manufacturers and Decorators of the 1870s and 1880s was Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. 'The Firm',<sup>75</sup> produced every kind of decoration and furnishing for houses and churches. Painted decorations played a unifying role in their interior decorations and in the furniture itself (*fig.48*).

#### 4.3.1 B.J. Talbert and Others

Bruce J. Talbert was the outstanding figure of the whole Art furniture period. He was probably the most original and remarkable of furniture designers of the aesthetic age. He was one of the earliest professional designers to achieve a national reputation. His architectural training in the office of Campbell Douglas and J.J. Stevenson in Glasgow brought him into contact with Cottier and Brydon.

With Brydon's help, Talbert produced a highly significant work featuring Art furniture and interior decorations<sup>76</sup> through which he influenced decorating trends throughout Britain (*fig.49*).

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<sup>75</sup> Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. became known simply as 'The Firm'.

<sup>76</sup> B.J. Talbert, Gothic Forms Applied to Furniture, Metalwork and Decoration for Domestic Purposes, (Birmingham: 1867).

In 1887 J. Moyr Smith published his Ornamental Interiors in which he claimed;

*The drawing room furniture and the drawing room decoration given in sheets XX and XXI [of Talbert's Gothic Forms] were without doubt the cause of the new style of decoration and furniture taking hold of the Public; for the book soon found its way to the chief designers and cabinetmakers in the Kingdom , and imitations which were perhaps sometimes improvements, were produced on all sides.*<sup>77</sup>

A year after the appearance of Talbert's Gothic Forms C.L. Eastlake released Hints on Household Taste<sup>78</sup> which had a great success in the United States, resulting in the use of the term 'Eastlake style'<sup>79</sup> to define the type of decorations illustrated by Talbert, Eastlake himself and Talbert's pupil, W.H. Batley, who produced, in 1883, A Series of Studies for Domestic Furniture and Decoration.<sup>80</sup>

Japanese and oriental design played a significant role in the work of Talbert, Eastlake and Batley. In the execution of their design ideas oriental fabrics and artefacts were vital, unifying interiors in which the furniture and decorations were often eclectic. Most of the Art decorators traded in oriental rugs and furnishing fabrics and at least one, Liberty's in London, built an Art furnishing business around oriental fabrics and ornaments.

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<sup>77</sup> J. Moyr Smith, Ornamental Interiors, (London:1887).

<sup>78</sup> C.L. Eastlake, Hints on Household Taste.

<sup>79</sup> The 'Eastlake Style' was simply the Art furnishing and decorating style as reported by Eastlake.

<sup>80</sup> W.H. Batley, A Series of Studies for Domestic Furniture and Decoration, (London: 1883)



#### 4.3.2 Liberty and Company

Liberty's was established in 1875 as an oriental warehouse to market mainly Japanese and Indian fabrics and decorations. Customers in the first years of trading included William Morris, Ruskin, the Rossettis, Burne-Jones, Whistler, Norman Shaw and E.W. Godwin. In 1886 the furnishing and decoration department was established, offering a full interior decorating service.

One of Liberty's specialities was their range of furnishings in the Moresque style. They combined with painters, Campbell, Smith and Co. in the decoration of London theatres; the Alhambra Theatre of Varieties and the Empire Palace of Varieties. These frivolous essays in decoration should not, however, mask Liberty's serious efforts to advance design.

Painted decorations, undertaken on their behalf by Campbell, Smith and Co., formed only a minor component of Liberty's decorative work. Paper and textile hangings dominated.

The firm became highly distinguished for its *Art Nouveau* furniture, most of which was designed by George Walton. The *Art Nouveau* style in Italy became known as *Liberty* style, in recognition of the important place Liberty's occupied in Art furnishing at the end of the nineteenth century.

#### 4.3.3 Guthrie and Wells

The firm of J. and W. Guthrie<sup>81</sup> and Andrew Wells Limited was established in 1897 after Andrew Wells returned from ten years in Australia. It developed from a merger of his

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<sup>81</sup> J. and W. Guthrie's stained glass studio was one of the most important and influential of the new studios to emerge in Glasgow in the 1880s. The business had been commenced by James Guthrie Senior in 1869 or earlier.

resuscitated Glasgow business with the successful stained glass and painting business of John and William Guthrie and it assumed great importance in Scotland.

The Guthrie and Wells enterprise was clearly modelled on Cottier's in London and Lyon's in Sydney. They opened a branch of the business in London in 1888, following the success of their showing at the Edinburgh International Exhibition. In the 1890s they were listed as 'House and church decorators and artists in stained glass, plain and ornamental glaziers, and dealers in antique furniture' (*fig.41*).

Having strong links with Cottier<sup>82</sup> they were able to acquire the services of two leading Cottier-trained decorators, Norman Macdougall and F. Vincent Hart. With such talented designers on staff they exhibited successfully in Glasgow, Paris and Budapest between 1898 and 1902. They also collaborated with Mackintosh on several significant projects.<sup>83</sup>

The success of Guthrie and Wells enterprise is central to the correct appreciation of the work of the decorators, including Wells, who determined the stylistic direction of their work. The importance of artists and designers like Charles Rennie Mackintosh has been well established. However the work of the decorators and the furnishing studios which provided the essential support to Mackintosh has been slow to receive recognition.

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<sup>82</sup> When Cottier moved to London he passed on to Wells most of his work in the north. When Wells moved to Sydney it is believed that much of his work passed on to the Guthries.

<sup>83</sup> The Glasgow Style. It is noted that Mackintosh drew on the resources of several leading firms but particularly Guthrie and Wells for Stencil painting. The firm carried out stencil decorations in the first of Miss Cranston's tea rooms.

#### 4.3.4 Wylie and Lochhead

The long running furnishing business of Wylie and Lochhead, founded in 1829, was still a household name in Scotland a century later.

In the 1870s they were the first of the Glasgow furnishers to specialise in ship and yacht interiors. It was the beginning of the age of luxury ocean-going steamers, many of which were built on the slipways of the Clyde. The sumptuous interiors of these vessels were decorated and furnished in a manner which rivalled the best of the domestic and hotel interiors.

By the 1880s Wylie and Lochhead had showrooms, factories and warehouses throughout the city, with branches in London and Manchester. All over Europe and the Empire this gigantic concern controlled a network of agents and buyers. Wylie and Lochhead undoubtedly became the largest business of its kind in Scotland, employing some 1,700 people in 1882. The success of the firm characterised the rise in the late nineteenth century of colossal furnishing firms also to cope with their client's every need from the cradle to the grave (literally). In Glasgow, 'the Workshop of the World', the furnishing industry thrived from the custom generated in 'the Second City of the Empire'.<sup>84</sup>

There is a notable difference in scale between the enterprises of Wylie and Lochhead and most other Art Decorators. As a result of their considerable scale the firm could include a wide range of custom designed carpets and fabrics at very economical prices. However their wares lacked the individuality and artistic excellence which derived from the closer involvement of the artists in the decorative work of other Art Decorators.

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<sup>84</sup> Juliet Kinchin, 'The Wylie and Lochhead Style', Decorative Arts Society, Journal 9, Article 2, 1985

#### 4.4 Decorators, Authors and Encyclopaedias

To understand the nature of decoration in the nineteenth century it is necessary to understand that the period between 1820 and 1920 was one of rapid development and changing taste. Technological advances were accompanied by developments in artistic taste and nowhere was this phenomenon more evident than it was in the use of paint materials and furnishings.

In the first decades of the century very noticeable changes occurred in the field of housepainting. The trade emerged from a dark period when it was associated with 'sharp practices' to become a most closely watched artform.

Then in the middle decades of the century there were phenomenal advances in the output of furnishing fabrics made possible by the improvement in manufacturing machinery and techniques. The advances provided a foundation for a more artistic indulgence in interior decorating late in the century. The injection of interest came with more public display and greater general availability of exotic goods from the east, and the regular exhibition of examples of decoration and furnishing.

Overlaid on these developments was a method of reporting and the dissemination of ideas through the growth of commercial printing. As soon as new decoration and artistic developments occurred they were reported in the press and, in the majority of instances, they became the subject of scholarly assessment by artists and decorators. Previously the artistic development of amateur and professional decorators was shaped by personal experience and travel abroad. However, throughout the nineteenth century publications increasingly offered readers the opportunity of an artistic education.

Throughout the century key figures responded to new developments by publishing their views. The artists and decorators enjoyed the twofold benefits of having their opinions reported and followed, of being able to direct public debate by having their decorations published.

#### 4.4.1 Early Publications

The earliest publications on painting and decoration were, at best, illustrated with hand coloured plates<sup>85</sup> (fig.50). In consequence they were not just a little dry for the contemporary students to follow, but particularly uninspiring to research one century later.<sup>86</sup> Nonetheless key figures such as George Field and David Ramsay Hay managed to not only reach an audience but also to influence the way paint and colour was used.

Field's, Chromatography<sup>87</sup>, first published in 1835 with hand coloured plates, was republished in various forms right up until 1885. In its last form it includes only four colour plates.

Two of Hay's influential publications<sup>88</sup> relied on simple introductory coloured plates to satisfy the appetites of its readers. The clear manner of presentation and the intimate style of Hay's writing were attractive without the need for illustrations. He took the reader into his confidence with phrases like,

*The humble art of imitating woods and marbles is in some measure allied to the high art of portrait painting. ...It is well known that there are a great number of*

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<sup>85</sup> Arrowsmith's, House Decorator and Painter's Guide; Ballantine's, Essay on Ornamental Art, and Whittock's, Decorative Painter's and Glazier's Guide are all traditional trade manual-style publications involving the use of a small number of simple lithographic plates to accompany the somewhat laboured text

<sup>86</sup> Publications by Arrowsmith and Ballantine included simple line drawings. Whittock included coloured engravings.

<sup>87</sup> George Field, Chromatography; or a Treatise on Colours and Pigments, and of their Powers in Painting, (London: Charles Tilt, 1835).

<sup>88</sup> D.R.Hay, The laws of Harmonious Colouring, (1828 and 1847) and A Nomenclature of Colours, (1846)

*painters of cheap portraits, whose professional practice lies amongst a class of society not remarkable for their appreciation of works of art.*<sup>89</sup>

Hay's writings were quoted frequently in encyclopaedias such as the Britannica and Loudon.<sup>90</sup> The quotations do not always acknowledge the author.

#### 4.4.2 Colour Illustrated Publications

A profound change in the communication of decorative design theory occurred in the middle of the nineteenth century with the comparatively new technique of colour printing by means of lithochromatography.

Owen Jones pioneered the technique when he set up his own presses to print and publish the drawings made by Jules Gourey and himself at the Alhambra in 1842.<sup>91</sup> This two volume publication<sup>92</sup> was closely followed by the publication of The Grammar of Ornament, which immediately established itself as the yardstick against which all other design encyclopaedias were subsequently measured.

Alhambra and Grammar were not the first, but were the most advanced, at the time. Pugin's important treatises on decoration, Floriated Ornament and Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament appeared at the same period but they were less ambitious in their scale.

A prominent group of authors and decorators rallied around Jones and assisted with the publication of Grammar. They included J.B.Waring, J.D.Westwood, Digby Wyatt and Christopher Dresser. Their own works on allied subjects which followed Grammar are mostly very impressive.

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<sup>89</sup> D.R.Hay, Laws, p.134

<sup>90</sup> J.C.Loudon, Encyclopaedia and Encyclopaedia Britannica.

<sup>91</sup> See 2.3, p.46.

<sup>92</sup> Owen Jones, Plans, Elevations and Sections of the Alhambra.

J.B.Waring was an accomplished draughtsman whose first publication was a detailed study of the cathedral of Burgos. He collaborated with Digby Wyatt on the guide books of the Crystal Palace, and then with Jones on Grammar. Between 1858 and 1874 he published a swag of books on architecture and ornament of which the most significant is probably Illustrations of Architecture and Ornament.<sup>93</sup> This covers a wide field in comprehensive style.

Christopher Dresser had a prodigiously long and productive career in decorative design. His first published designs were prepared in collaboration with Jones and it is apparent from his comments that he was influenced by Jones throughout his career. He produced a number of highly significant treatises on decorative design including, Studies in Design,<sup>94</sup> Principles of Decorative Design,<sup>95</sup> and Modern Ornamentation.<sup>96</sup> Dresser was able to write with authority and clarity because he was the master of a full range of decorative design principles and techniques. In particular he was a master of painted decorations and entered into public debate on the subject of building interiors with great energy and enthusiasm.

Not all of the publications which appeared after the introduction and widespread accessibility of chromolithography employed the technique to full effect. Dresser, for reasons of economy no doubt, used colour plates only selectively. F.E.Hulme, James Ward and Lewis Day, all very prolific writers on the subject of decorative design, chose to work with black and white lithography to communicate their ideas on pattern, without venturing too far with views on the deployment of colour.

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<sup>93</sup> J.B.Waring, Illustrations of Architecture and Ornament, (London: 1865).

<sup>94</sup> Christopher Dresser, Studies in Decorative Design (for House Decorators, Designers and Manufacturers), (London: 1874-76).

<sup>95</sup> Christopher Dresser, Principles in Decorative Design, (London: 1882).

<sup>96</sup> Christopher Dresser, Modern Ornamentation, (London: 1886).

Others worked almost entirely with colour plates to communicate their ideas. César Daly, the leading French architectural journalist of the Nineteenth Century produced the lavishly illustrated L'Architecture Privée au XIXeme Siecle<sup>97</sup> which ran to three printings between 1864 and 1877. Despite it being a French publication it was found in the libraries of many, if not most, British and Australian decorators of the period. It is highly likely that this publication played an important role in educating both decorators and their clients about the global composition of coloured decorations. The publication has exquisitely rendered examples of complete schemes of decoration. Certainly it would have given a lead to decorators about the value of coloured models as devices for winning client approval for decorative schemes (fig.51).

The Audsleys, the family group of designers and illustrators led by the architect George Audsley, went in a slightly different and more directly practical direction with their highly influential publications. They sought to make it even easier for decorators to benefit from their examples by providing large-scale, elaborately prepared models for painted decorations.

The first publication<sup>98</sup> by William James Audsley and George Ashdown Audsley was a dictionary of Architecture and the allied arts published in Liverpool in 1878. This publication was closely followed by a major work on the leading design styles<sup>99</sup> and another on Gothic decorative design styles<sup>100</sup>. The lastnamed was a publication of

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<sup>97</sup> César Daly, L'Architecture Privée au XIXeme Siecle, 3 Vols, (Paris: 1864).

<sup>98</sup> W.J. and G.A. Audsley, Popular Dictionary of Architecture and the Allied Arts, (Liverpool: 1878).

<sup>99</sup> W.J. and G.A. Audsley, Outlines of Ornament in the Leading Styles, (Liverpool: 1881), reprint ed. Designs and Patterns from Historic Ornament, (London: Dover, 1968).

<sup>100</sup> W.J. and G.A. Audsley, Polychromatic Decoration in the Mediaeval Styles, (London: Henry Sotheran, 1882).



immense value to church decorators. They could work directly from the illustrations to produce a vast repertoire of Gothic decorations. Surviving examples of painted decorations in England and Australia attest to the value of this work.

George Audsley regarded very highly the use of chromolithography to convey design ideas and to promote ornament and decoration. In 1883 he published a book on chromolithograph.<sup>101</sup> He also had a strong interest in the arts of Japan, privately printing Notes on Japanese Art<sup>102</sup> in 1874 and The Ornamental Arts of Japan<sup>103</sup> in four volumes between 1882 and 1884. At the time of his death in 1925 it was claimed that work on the Ceramic Arts of Japan was highly prized by collectors (who were paying \$1,000 per copy).<sup>104</sup>

In 1892 George Audsley made his home in New York, where he successfully continued his architectural practice into his 85th year. The Practical Decorator and Ornamentist,<sup>105</sup> the book most highly valued by the widest audience of practising decorators, was published also in 1892. This two volume quarto size publication prepared in conjunction with Maurice Ashdown Audsley contains beautifully coloured models for decorative painting in various classical and exotic styles. It even contains an explanation of how the patterns can be enlarged by the use of a grid for wall painting. Audsley's descriptions were clear and practical.

*Although numerous works on ornament have been published during the past quarter of a century ...not one contains designs capable of being executed by the simplest means at the disposal of the Decorative Artist and practical painter - namely stencilling ... others are*

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<sup>101</sup> G.A. Audsley, The Art of Chromolithography Popularly Explained, (1883).

<sup>102</sup> G.A. Audsley, Notes on Japanese Art...Illustrated by Specimens..., (1874)

<sup>103</sup> G.A. Audsley, The Ornamental Arts of Japan, 4 Vols, (1882-1884).

<sup>104</sup> 'George A. Audsley, Architect, Dead', New York Times, 24 June 1925.

<sup>105</sup> G.A. and M.A. Audsley, The Practical Decorator and Ornamentist, 2 Vols, (Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1892).

too elaborate with designs too small for the painter to copy ... [therefore]... the designs are rendered in the largest sizes practicable...

To secure the matt effect of decorative painting a special process of printing has been adopted for the plates.<sup>106</sup>

When it is remembered that George Audsley was an architect, in the modern sense of the term, it is intriguing that he should have devoted so much time and effort to the promotion of decoration, in particular, painted decorations. It is truly astonishing that his work received such widespread acceptance. This might be explained by the clear impact of his work in the 1880s, at the height of the boom in painted decorations, which established him as an influential leader in the field.

#### 4.4.3 Periodicals

At the time Audsley was writing there was a growth of interest in periodical journals treating the subject of interior decoration and painting. The Journal of Decorative Art,<sup>107</sup> was the most accessible to painters and decorators in the last decades of the Nineteenth Century.

The first issue of The Journal appeared in January 1881 with the assurance that;

...our best endeavours will be directed to making [the Journal] in every respect a thoroughly representative journal of the painting and decorating trades.<sup>108</sup>

The editor<sup>109</sup> at the time of the launching of the journal claimed to have 47 years practical experience in painting

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> The Journal of Decorative Art, an Illustrated Technical Journal for the House Painter, Decorator and all Art Workmen, Volume 1, Manchester and London, January 1881.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>109</sup> The editor is not identified in the early issues. When, from about 1890, the articles are attributed, A.Seymour Jennings was a principal contributor, possibly with editorial responsibility.

and decoration. During this time the trade had undergone a complete revolution. The Journal identified all of the changes and offered both useful and informative details of all facets of the trade in the introductory issues. The Journal continued for several decades and covered even the most idiosyncratic and eccentric details of the trade.

The monthly journal Decoration<sup>110</sup> also appeared in January 1881. Its editor, James Moyr Smith, pitched his writing at a slightly higher level, covering the subject areas of painting, sculpture, architecture and art manufactures. However, after only a few issues Moyr Smith received a plea from an "ordinary painter", urging him:

*... to use every endeavour to improve the "ordinary housepainter's" taste. What we want is practical designs and practical suggestions for carrying them out...the books that would be of value are of prohibitive price.*<sup>111</sup>

Not surprisingly, given that the journal emanated from the Midlands, the journal published details of the trade in the north, and did a sterling job in keeping readers informed of all the latest relevant publications.

The Cabinet Maker and Art Furnisher<sup>112</sup> is another journal that appeared in the early 1880s. It did not directly treat the subject of painted decorations but it provided very practical information on all of the related matters of room furnishing, which, in the matter of Art furnishing, could hardly be separated from the painted decorations. Of particular interest were the designs by Bruce J. Talbert which appeared in the early editions.<sup>113</sup> These designs incorporated the full range of aesthetic devices such as the sunflower and the four seasons.

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<sup>110</sup> Decoration, New Series, (London) January 1881.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10

<sup>112</sup> The Cabinet Maker and Art Furnisher, (London) 1880.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 July 1881.

The Studio<sup>114</sup> played a highly significant role in the promotion of the Glasgow style and the contemporary artforms of sinuous line and eccentric symbolism which are today usually termed 'Art Nouveau'. This journal tapped the large middle class audience which had become bored by the historical revival styles and was bursting with enthusiasm for a new artform. It appeared first in 1893 at precisely the moment when the Aesthetic and Art Movements had been exhausted of all original ideas and it was immediately a sensation. The first issue set the standard when it appeared in a wrapper designed by Aubrey Beardsley featuring tree stems and foliage incorporating the three open lilies which were to become an Art Nouveau signature.

In Australia, readers were more conservative, or at least the journals were very conservative. The Building Mining and Engineering Journal<sup>115</sup> was one of the earliest to report on developments in the decorative arts as they related to buildings and decoration. It also reported occasionally on the methods of producing painted decorations. An earlier publication, The Workshop, (A monthly journal devoted to progress of the useful arts), lasted only for one year (1870-71).

The new century witnessed the arrival of a new, and directly relevant, journal, The Australasian Decorator and Painter.<sup>116</sup> This long-running journal examined every aspect of the trade and it kept the local artists fully informed of developments in Australasia and Britain. When it first appeared early this century it did not include any coloured illustrations but it selectively introduced colour to enhance the decorative design illustrations. (Regular features on decorative schemes were accompanied by full plate coloured illustrations).

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<sup>114</sup> The Studio, first published April 1893.

<sup>115</sup> The Building, Engineering and Mining Journal, (Sydney) 1888-1905.

<sup>116</sup> The Australasian Decorator and Painter.

In the 1920s the journal changed its title to The Decorator and Painter for Australia and New Zealand with the same format. The content was always sound but very unimaginative. The innovative new styles like Art Nouveau and Art Deco came and went with hardly a mention in the Journal. Even the Federation style which is the Australian equivalent of the European and American Art Nouveau was treated in the most subdued manner in the Journal.

However the Journal did play an important role in the development of painted decorations in Australia, providing a rallying point for all those with a practical, professional or commercial interest in the trade. It was the last periodical of the genre to cater to this group.

#### **4.5 Prelude to Modern Design**

In the main, twentieth-century society was less interested in decoration and more interested in design and technology. For many, the economic investment in interior decoration was transferred to other investments such as motor cars, travel and leisure activities.

The turning point in decoration and taste began with the elegantly simple designs of Godwin and the innovative adaptation of Japanese design models by several of his contemporaries in Britain, Europe, America and Australia. Godwin was one of the first to break with the nineteenth-century convention of room decoration built up in combinations of dense colours. Instead he sought more subtle manipulation of tones and even attempted one highly significant interior in monotone.<sup>117</sup>

Unquestionably the designers and promoters of the Glasgow style were building on the foundation laid by Godwin and followers of Japan-inspired designers like Christopher Dresser when they stripped away the pattern of repetitive

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<sup>117</sup> Elizabeth Aslin, The Aesthetic Movement, p.84. See 4.1.3 referring to Godwin's work for Oscar Wilde.

design motifs in wall decorations and furnishings to produce subtle interiors contrived to feature the individual values of design ornaments and surfaces. As a group they were the first to break with tradition. They are significant because their work extended to every facet of decorative art.

*Nowhere has the modern movement of art been entered upon more seriously than at Glasgow; the church, the school, the house, the restaurant, the shop, the poster, the book, with its printing, illustrating and binding, have all come under the spell of the new influence.*<sup>118</sup>

The 'new influence' was the Glasgow style. On the continent it was Art Nouveau, sometimes termed *style Liberty*. Its implementation can be traced through firms with very high output like Wylie and Lochhead.<sup>119</sup>

At the Glasgow 1901 exhibition their pavilion dominated the furnishing section. Its interiors were by E.A. Taylor, John Ednie and George Logan, all graduates of the Glasgow Art School. Their work created widespread interest.<sup>120</sup> The same room settings were equally highly acclaimed in Budapest and Turin the next year. The decorative palette of these decorators was lighter and brighter than that of earlier designers. The economical use of design and colour was a consistent feature of the new design styles.

Wylie and Lochhead also provided an outlet for other designers of the modern styles thus promoting modern design to the general public. They marketed furniture and decorations by London firms such as Liberty's, J.S. Henry and J.P. White, and they commissioned work by the Arts and Crafts Guild workshops of Ashbee and the Silver Studios.

In America Daniel Cottier had a close association with the

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<sup>118</sup> The Studio, 1907.

<sup>119</sup> Being such a large firm with an enormous clientele, Wylie and Lochhead mirrored taste on a broad scale.

<sup>120</sup> Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries, The Glasgow Style 1890-1920, (Glasgow:1984). Taylor, Ednie and Logan were friends and colleagues working with Wylie and Lochhead during the period 1890-1905.

designers Tiffany and Lafarge who were at the forefront of the modern design movements.

#### 4.5.1 Arts and Crafts

This movement attempted to revive handicrafts and improve standards of decorative design in late Victorian England.

It was inspired by the teachings of Morris and Ruskin whose romantic socialism affected the whole movement. It was believed that the true root and basis of all art lay in the handicrafts. From this belief the craft guilds were established. C.R.Ashbee<sup>121</sup> was one of the main organisers.

Many craftsmen fled the cities in favour of the country. They sought to rediscover the artisanal way of working with their traditional crafts.

Not all of the guilds were in the country or even in England for that matter. The guild philosophy spread to Scotland, where the Scottish Guild of Handicrafts was established in Glasgow.<sup>122</sup> It was clearly modelled on English prototypes. Membership encompassed many of those associated with the Glasgow style. Another group, established in 1898 to promote work in the decorative arts, was the Scottish Society of Art Workers.<sup>123</sup> This society also included many of the prominent names of the Glasgow Style.

The guilds were responsible for reintroducing handworked decoration which enabled a reduction in the quantity of decoration and a greater concentration on selected pieces.

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<sup>121</sup> C.R.Ashbee (1863-1942). A major contributor to the doctrines and practices of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

<sup>122</sup> The Scottish Guild of Handicrafts Ltd was modelled on English prototypes. Its aim was 'to carry on the industries ... in all kinds of artistic products'.

<sup>123</sup> The Scottish Society of Artworkers was formed in 1898 to promote work in the decorative arts.

#### 4.5.2 Art Nouveau

The Art Nouveau<sup>124</sup> style is of little relevance in Britain, Australia and America where the Glasgow style, the Federation style and the Tiffany styles dominated in the same era. The former was a self-consciously new decorative style which emerged in the 1880s and had faded by the time of the World War I. It was a decorative style founded upon the study of natural forms. The style was essentially a mannered version of the botanically based decorative style of the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>125</sup>

The origins and sources of the sinuous curves and spare lines, the distinguishing features of Art Nouveau decorations, can be found in the work of Mackintosh, Walton and some of the other significant decorators from the Glasgow School. However the Art Nouveau style rarely took over a room as a whole. It was mainly confined to small individual decorative objects.<sup>126</sup>

Although it is often claimed that Art Nouveau was a very significant style, it was only a minor style in countries off the Continent. However, it did open the way for novel forms and novel proportions, allowing the genuinely new Modern styles to evolve.<sup>127</sup> In this way it can be considered as a brief concluding chapter to the nineteenth-century decorative arts.

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<sup>124</sup>The Art Nouveau style took its name from the the shop opened in Paris in 1895 by Samuel Bing.

<sup>125</sup>Stuart Durant, Ornament (from the Industrial Revolution to Today), New York: Overlook, 1986) p.29.

<sup>126</sup>Peter Thornton, Authentic Decor (The Domestic Interior, 1620-1920) (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1984) p.314.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid.



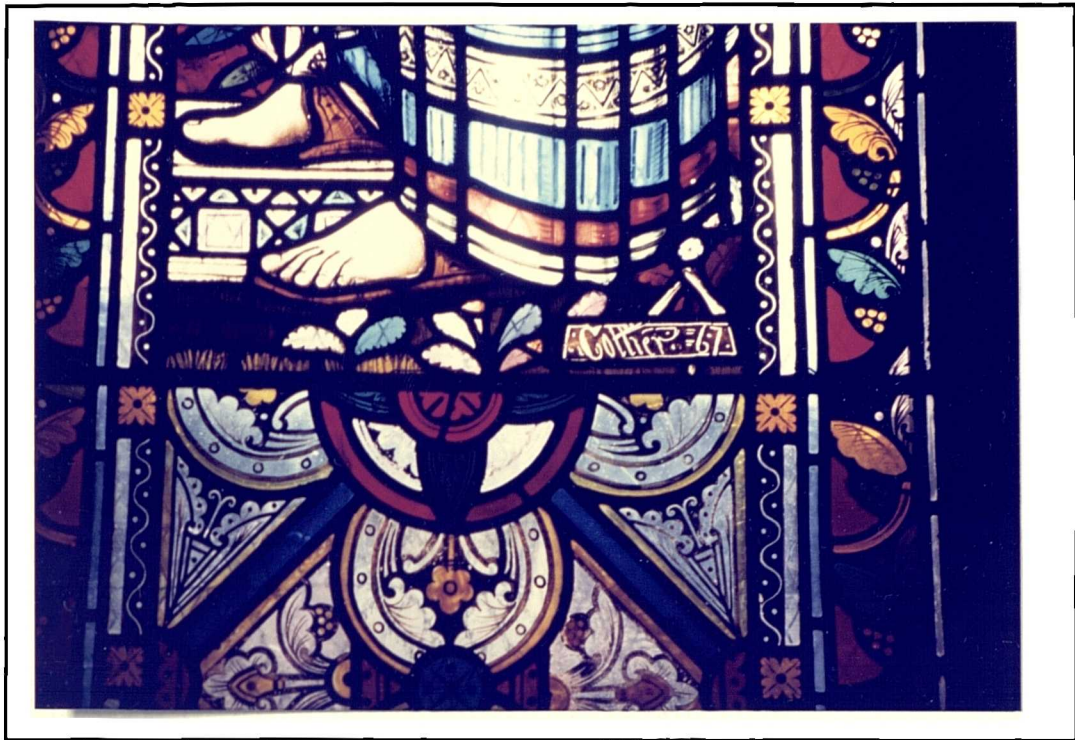


Fig. 33  
Detail of stained glass by Daniel Cottier in the Dowanhill Church, Glasgow.  
The brilliant designs owe more to the study of Egyptian and archaic Greek  
sculpture than to any Puginesque model.



Fig. 34  
A section of Daniel Cottier's painted wall decorations in the Dowanhill  
Church. The walls are stencilled in distemper in "wonderful harmony of brick  
red, brown and yellow...in parallelograms".



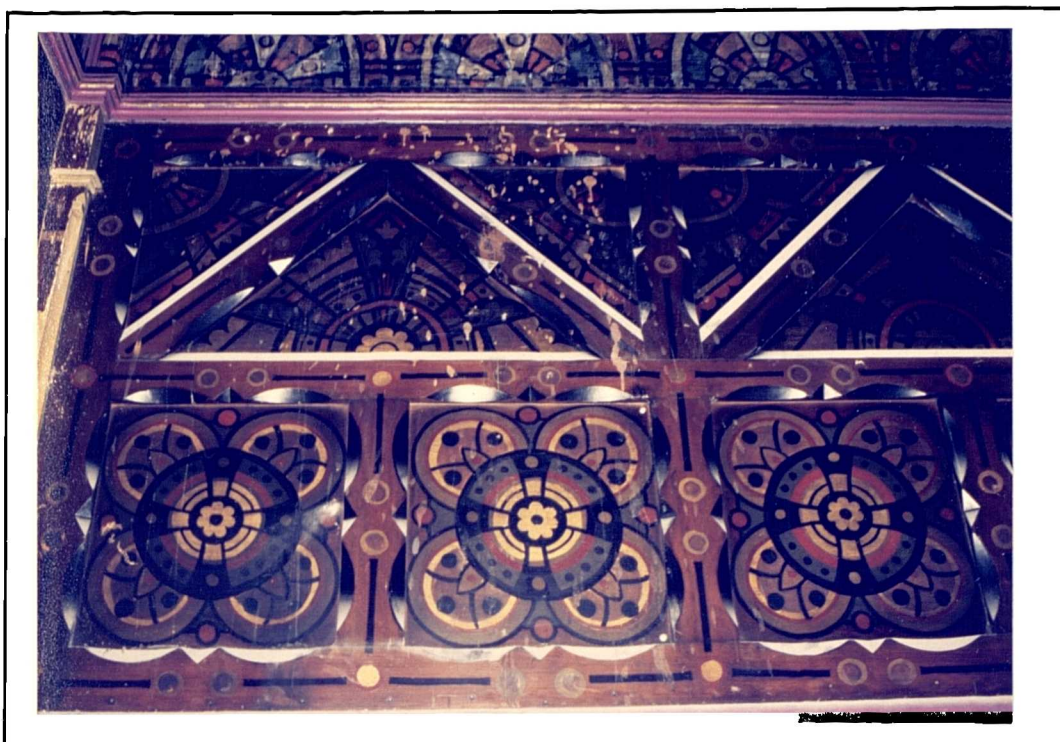


Fig. 35  
Detail of chancel joinery in the Dowanhill Church, Glasgow painted in strikingly modern style by Daniel Cottier and Andrew Wells, 1867.



Fig. 36  
Window in the Hallway of Cairndhu House, Helensburgh, 1873, depicting the four seasons by Daniel Cottier. The yellow quarry borders, which featured prominently in most Cottier windows of the period, feature the traditional thistle and pomegranate with the sunflower in bold Aesthetic style.





Fig. 37  
Detail of the Drawing Room ceiling decorations by Daniel Cottier at 'Cairndhu', Helensburgh, 1873. The Japanese influence is very strong in the use of gold on the the deep stained wood.



Fig. 38  
Detail of Drawing Room ceiling, Cairndhu. This work was undertaken by Andrew Wells for Daniel Cottier, with assistance from Charles Gow and Norman MacDougall. The work shows remarkable maturity and finesse.



Fig 39

Design for an Aesthetic Room published in Clarence Cook's, The House Beautiful, 1878. The arrangement (especially the grid stencil pattern on the walls) was copied almost directly into some Australian interiors.

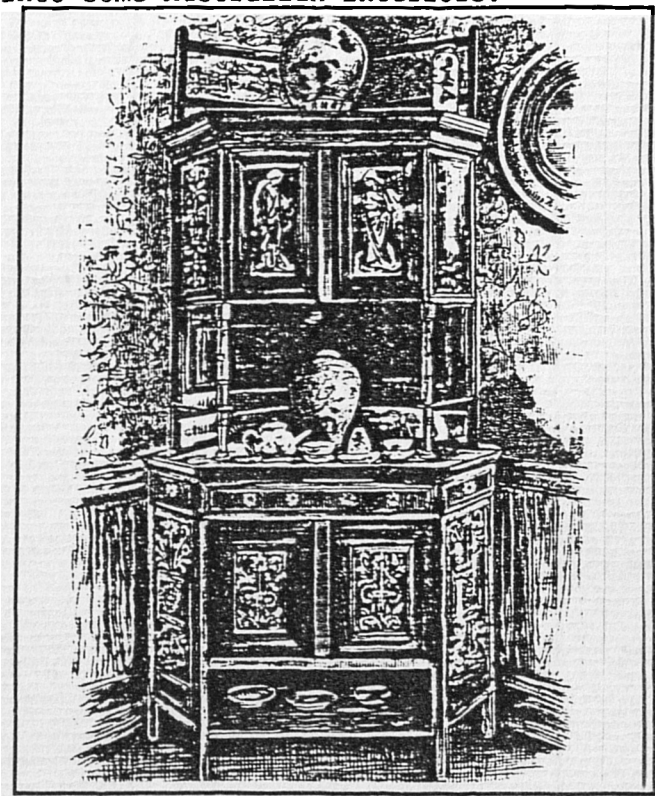


Fig. 40

Design by Daniel Cottier and Co for a movable cupboard, published in Cook's, The House Beautiful. The piece serves mainly as a frame to the painted panels.





Fig. 41  
Guthrie and Wells Catalogue Cover c.1900. The partnership was formed in 1897.

Fig 42  
View of the Glasgow showroom of J. and W. Guthrie, Glasgow 1893. Source;  
Journal of Decorative Art, May 1893.

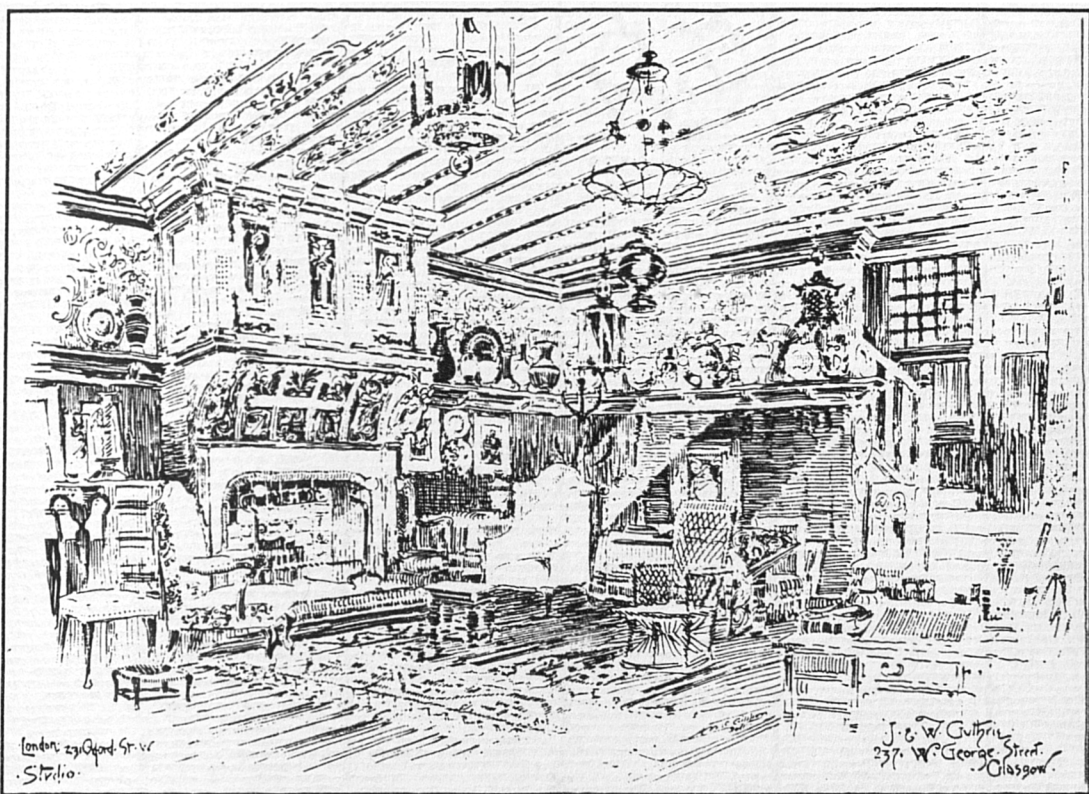


Fig. 43  
View of the new basement showroom of Guthries at 237 West George Street. The  
premises were designed and altered by William Leiper in 1893.

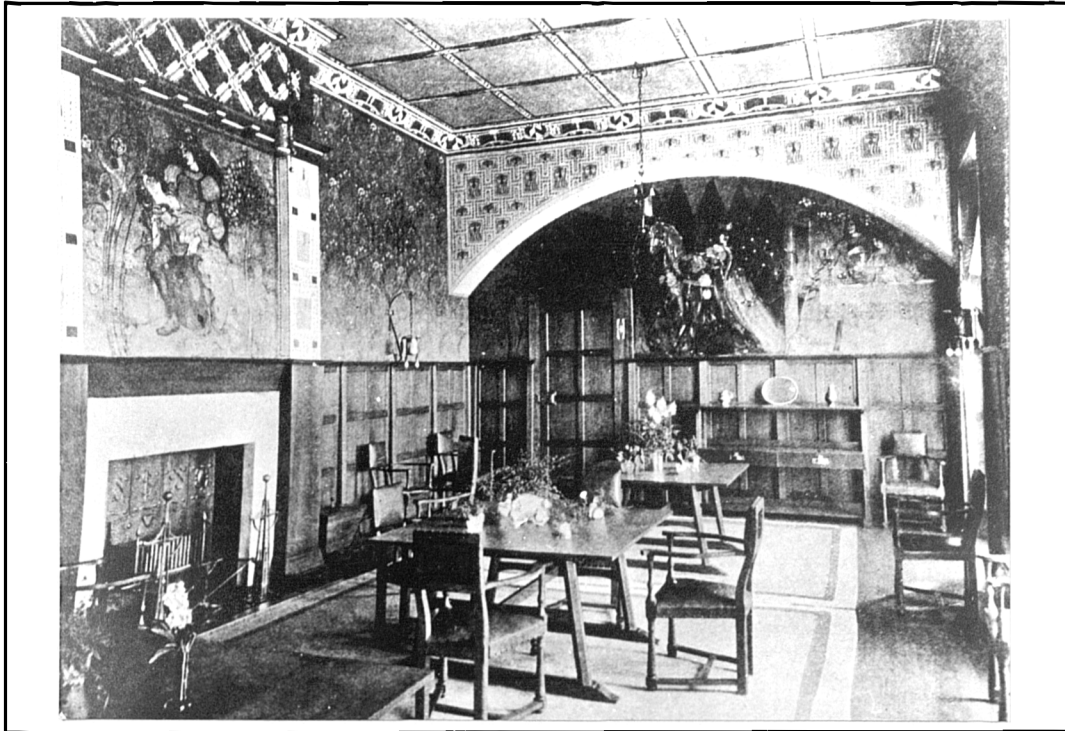


Fig. 44  
The dining room at 'Elm Bank', York, decorated by George Walton for architects, W.G. and A.J. Plenty. The room features frescoes at each end and walls decorated in green tones contrasted with brown carpets and upholstery. Source: Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies Library.

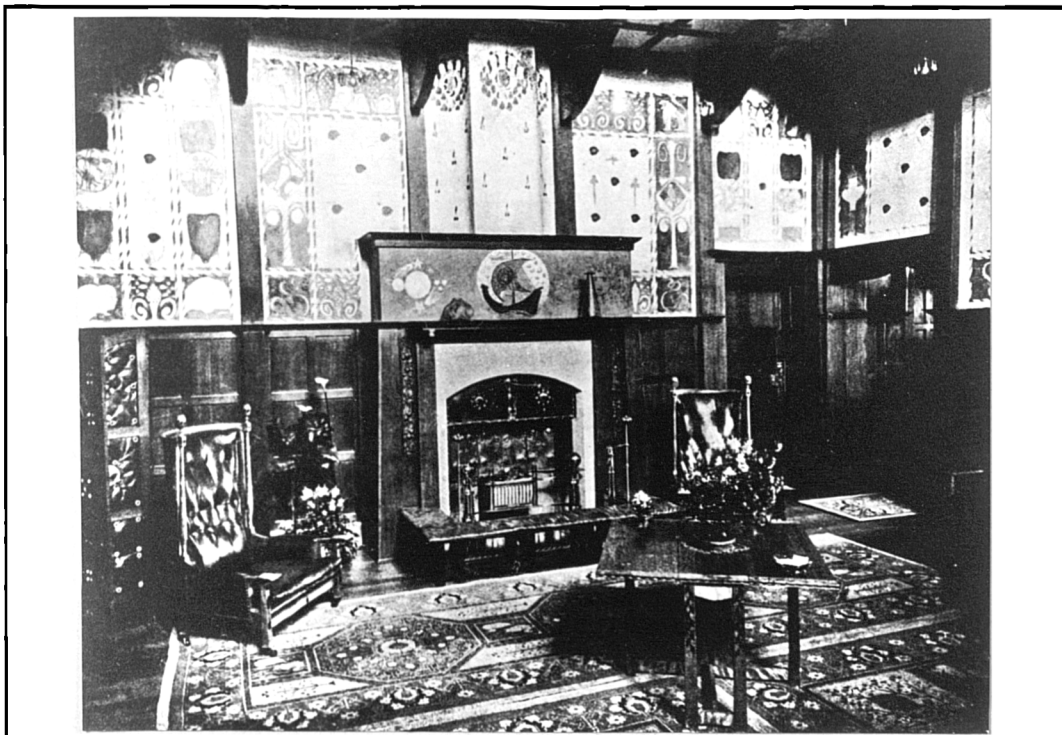


Fig. 45  
The interiors of 'Elm Bank', York, feature a variety of decorative devices such as sanded and painted walls, coloured glass in windows, joinery and walls; and polished brass and bright iron metalwork. Source: IIAS Library.





Fig. 46  
*'Fresco' decoration by George Walton at 'Elm Bank', York. The fresco effect was achieved by painting in flatted oil over a scratched plaster surface. The protecting varnish is presumed to be modern.*



Fig. 47  
*Detail of wall decoration by George Walton at 'Elm Bank', York. The use of coloured glass and repoussée in the wall decorations is very rare - possibly exclusive to Walton.*



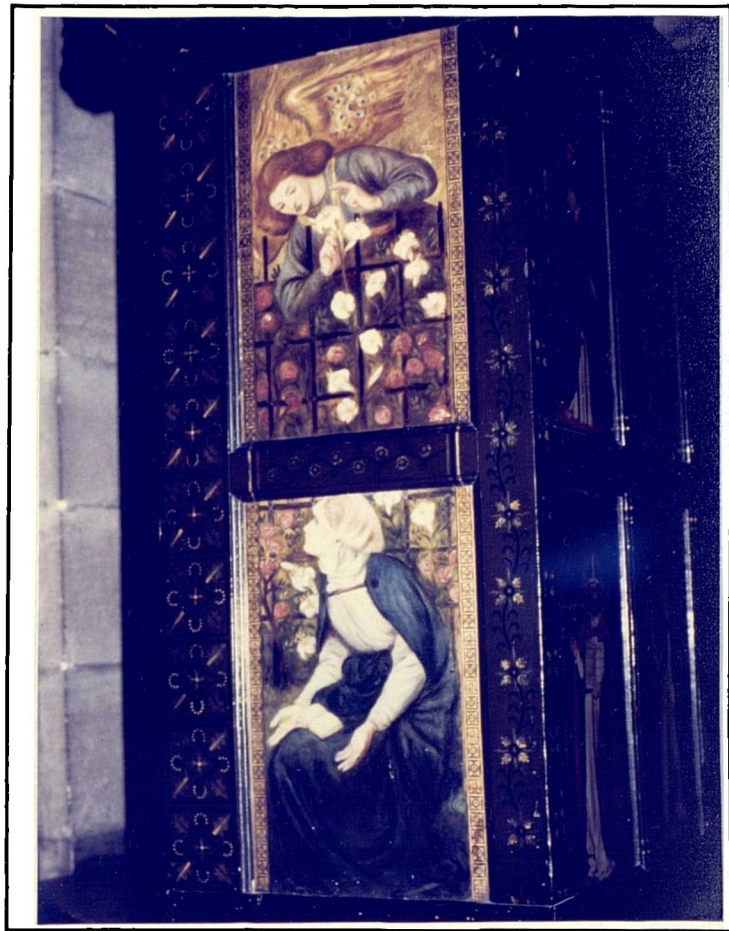


Fig. 48  
Decorated pulpit at St Martin-on-the-Hill, Scarborough, designed by G.F.Bodley. The paintings were designed and executed by Rossetti, Campfield, Madox Brown and Morris.

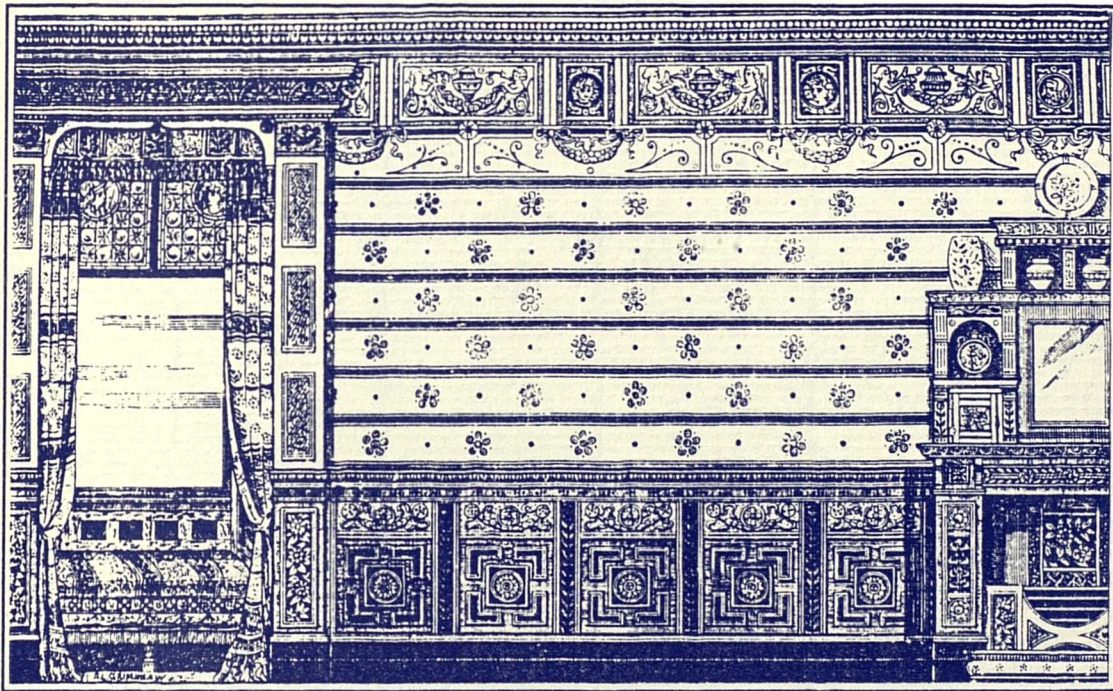


Fig. 49  
Scheme for Library decoration by A.L.Simpson, published in Moyr Smith's, *Ornamental Interiors*, incorporating many of the features introduced by Talbert, including the dado panelling modelled on the 'Cairndhu' ceiling.



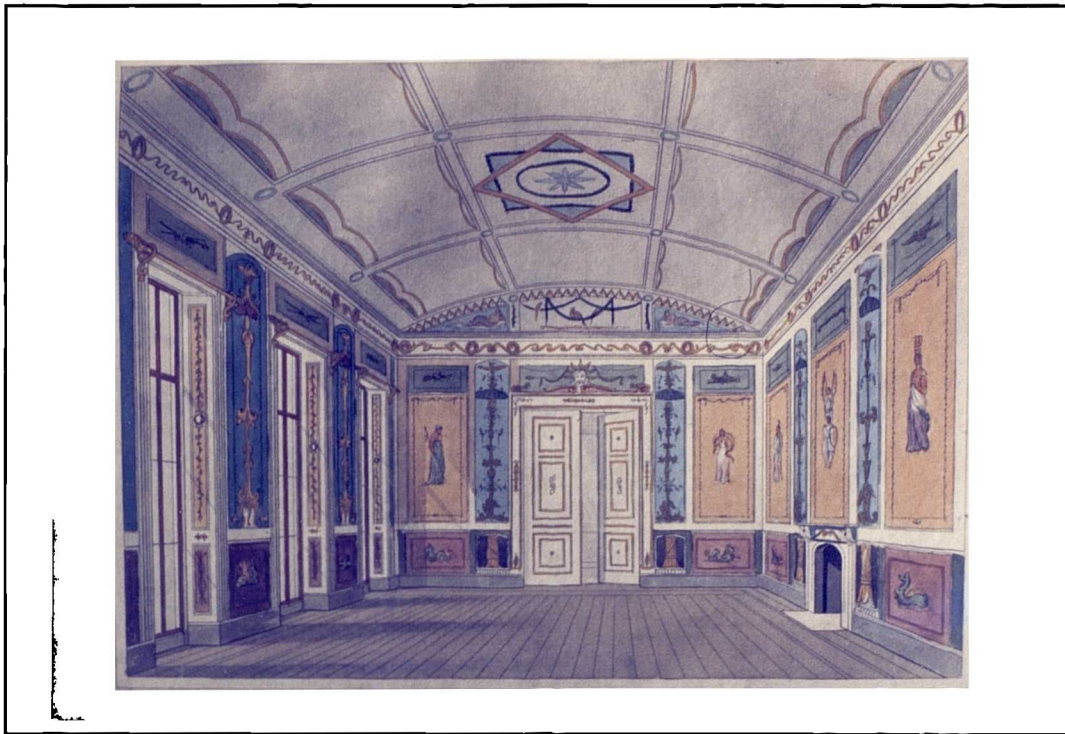


Fig. 50  
Design by Arrowsmith's *House Decorator and Painter's Guide* for a room in the style observed at Pompeii. The reproduction is quite primitive.



Fig. 51  
Design by Alfred Normand for the Atrium of the Pompeian House built at Avenue Montaigne, Paris for Napoleon III, 1856-58. The coloured model, which is excellent in technique, faithfully records the decorators' intent. It follows the style presented in César Daly's, *Architecture Privée*.

## PART TWO

### DECORATIVE ART AND PAINTED DECORATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

#### CHAPTER 5 THE EARLY YEARS

##### 5.1 Population and Culture in the New Colonies

When Queen Victoria ascended to the throne, in 1837, the non-aboriginal population of the new British colony of New South Wales was only about 400,000 people. The Port Phillip district, the site of the future city of Melbourne, was yet to receive its first shipload of immigrants.<sup>1</sup> The remote southern colony of Van Diemen's Land (the future state of Tasmania) had only a small population of convicts, government officials and free settlers. The north and the west of the Australian continent remained unexplored.

In these early years there was no population base or culture to support decorative art. The privileged classes of Sydney and Hobart Town had few cultural assets beyond those which they brought with them from home. The few artists in the colonies had arrived, not as free settlers, but as transportees. Those like Francis Greenway,<sup>2</sup> who had some knowledge of the finer arts, were pressed into service on the colonial building programme.

The 1850s were highly significant in Australian history. The Port Phillip district gained independence from New South Wales and each of the other colonies, except Western Australia, attained self-government.

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<sup>1</sup>The first shipload to Port Phillip of mostly Scottish immigrants arrived from Glasgow in 1839.

<sup>2</sup>Francis Greenway (1777-1837) was in private practice as an architect in Bristol before being transported to New South Wales in 1812 (arrived 1815) for forgery. His family had been stonemasons, builders and architects in the west country for generations before.

The decade of growth which began with the discovery of the first large deposits of gold in the early 1850s, was marked by a population growth to over one million people. From this point forward the urban fabric of Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart began to take form, very much along the lines of the British cities of Liverpool and Glasgow.

The discovery of gold led to a shipping boom. The new immigrants were brought to Australia in ships which offered low return freight charges, leading to greatly increased exports of wool and other income-producing primary products. Then, shortly afterwards, with the introduction of the fast new clipper ships, Australia ceased to be an isolated colonial outpost.

Sea traffic between Britain and Australia, and coastal transport between the towns of Newcastle, Sydney, Melbourne, Launceston, Hobart and Adelaide, became brisk and vital. It became possible, for the first time, for architecture and the decorative arts in Australia to be linked, in real time, with developments in Europe.

There are as few as two recorded examples of amateur wall painting in Australia which pre-date the commercial introduction of painted decorations about 1860.

Oswald Brierly,<sup>3</sup> one of the very small number of trained artists known to have worked in New South Wales before 1850, painted a mural on the dining-room wall of his rented Sydney cottage after returning from a voyage north of Australia. This painting, 'HMS Rattlesnake in a Squall off the Island of Timor', is believed to be one of the earliest murals painted in Australia.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Sir Oswald Walter Brierly (1817-1894) born in Chester and studied art, navigation and naval architecture. Sailed to Australia on the 'Wanderer' with Ben Boyd to manage Boyd's whaling station at Twofold Bay between 1842 and 1848. He turned to painting full-time in 1848.

<sup>4</sup>The painting is recorded in photographs of the interiors of the house which was demolished in the 1970s.

At Port Arthur, the Tasmanian penal settlement, there are small paintings on the walls of the verandah and principal rooms of the Commandant's residence (*fig.52*). This series of scenes from antiquity is believed to have been painted in the late 1840s by the wife of the first commandant.<sup>5</sup>

There is very little recorded information on which to base an analysis of decorative art during the first fifty years in the colonies of New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria. However, with the exception of the work produced by Walter Renny<sup>6</sup> who advertised as a decorator, it would seem that painted decorations were not widely available in New South Wales or Victoria until the first significant decorating businesses were established by Scottish decorators in Sydney and Melbourne in the 1870s.

There are very few early references to the rare examples of painted decorations in New South Wales in the earlier period. However it is understood that these were mostly the work of house-painters and studio artists who operated in conjunction with the upholsterer-decorators. Colonial Society lacked the resources required to support the kind of high quality decorative work which was by then becoming more commonplace in Britain.

#### 5.1.1 Upholsterers and Decorators

In Sydney and Melbourne upholsterers controlled much of the commissioned decorative work in the 1830s and 1840s. They supplied furniture and wall hangings, and most other forms of interior decoration to the growing urban populations in cities. They controlled the importation of furnishing materials from Britain and Europe in the early years.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>It was common in the early nineteenth century for ladies to paint as a leisure activity. Little is known about this work or of any other works by the amateur artist.

<sup>6</sup>Walter Renny (or Rennie) (c.1810-80) had a Sydney business listing himself as a painter and decorator.

<sup>7</sup>Upholstery, or 'silk work' as it was termed, was the most costly item of internal decoration, representing up to sixty per cent of the cost. The work

The leading English furnishing houses of Gillows, Trollopes, and Jackson and Graham also supplied the Colonial market directly with wall hangings and furniture.<sup>8</sup> In some cases upholsterers were sent out by these firms to supervise the furnishing of new residences for the wealthy families and individuals of Melbourne in particular.

Painted decorations hardly featured at all in the early years. There are very few documentary references to decorative painting, and site research on the surviving buildings of the era confirms the lack of interest or resources to undertake work in the style of British examples at home. The painted decorations of 1860 in the lobby of Parliament House in Sydney are probably the first of their type in Australia.<sup>9</sup>

The earliest recorded descriptions of decorative painting in Australia date from the 1840s. One such example arrested travellers on the Great Western Road between Sydney and Bathurst. Travellers encountered an inn at the foot of Mount Victoria called 'The Rivulet' which was described by one startled visitor:

*A new, glaring, smart-looking inn here promised tolerable accommodation; it was as fine as twenty differently coloured kinds of paint could make it. Panellings and "pickings-out" of rainbow hues were set off by pillars of imitative and varnished marble, the like of which no quarry ever knew; and these again, touched up with bronze paint and gilding, gleamed in the sun with almost dazzling lustre.*<sup>10</sup>

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of upholsterers therefore often stood out over other decorating trades.

<sup>8</sup>Very good documentary records exist for the vice-Regal residences of Sydney, Hobart and Melbourne built between 1837 and 1860. English firms of decorators supplied furnishing materials for all three buildings.

<sup>9</sup>The Sydney Morning Herald, 25, September 1860. p.5. Brief description of the new lobby decorations in Parliament House painted by Walter Renny.

<sup>10</sup>Mrs Charles Meredith, Notes and Sketches of New South Wales, 1844. p.75.

In the absence of any other information it might be reasoned that the decorative painting described at 'The Rivulet' could have been undertaken by painters trading as 'oil and colourmen', since such businesses existed in Sydney in the early years. These tradesmen mixed and supplied paint in addition to undertaking full painting commissions. The fancy picking-out work might equally have been undertaken by ships' painters, who advertised for shore-based work during lean times and who clearly had good skills for the detailed timberwork on sailing vessels. It could even have been done by glass and sign painters, specialists who advertised a greater range of painting skills than the oil and colourmen.

It would have been surprising to find high quality decorations in colonial buildings prior to 1850 as such detail would have been at odds with the architecture, which was mostly utilitarian. Colonial craftsmen were capable of producing high quality stonework and joinery with the abundant local materials, but their skills were in limited supply and the more highly skilled tradesmen were greatly in demand on the prestigious government building projects. Decorating resources were very scarce. There was no local production of carpets, fabrics, or wallpapers and very limited production of paints. All these materials were imported and, in a land which suffered a serious depression with near famine in the early 1840s, the need was for more vital commodities.

Nevertheless it is clear that colonial Society sought to emulate Society at home in most matters, including decoration. Some naive examples of locally produced decorative works have come to light in each of the three colonies in recent years as buildings constructed prior to 1850 have undergone conservation treatment.

Recent research of the wall finishes of the former Farmers Inn at Hartley, near Mount Victoria, has revealed some

straightforward Greek fret stencilling and a painting of a parrot over a chimney breast which is framed with a joinery architrave in the manner of a hung canvas.<sup>11</sup> At Woodlands Homestead, near Melbourne, a series of painted decorations of the 1840s has been recently uncovered and restored.<sup>12</sup> The decorations, executed in oil medium, feature marbled pilasters, stencilled borders and friezes. These examples, and the paintings in the Commandant's residence at Port Arthur, each convey an overwhelming impression of naivety and amateurism.

The theatre provided opportunities in the new colonies for lighthearted decorations. The newspapers relished the chance to report new examples. When the Olympic Theatre opened in Sydney in 1842 it invited the following report of the decorations undertaken by the upholsterer, Andrew Lenehan<sup>13</sup> in conjunction with J. Skinner Prout<sup>14</sup> the colonial artist:

*...Round the arena in front of the boxes is painted an elegant series of vignettes by Mr Prout...the drapery with which the theatre is hung is light and pretty, in colours mingled with taste and the disposition exceedingly graceful...which reflects much taste on Mr Lenehan the upholsterer...and rich, elegant gas lighting.*<sup>15</sup>

The Royal Victoria Theatre in Sydney was a building of some note. The modestly decorated interior was illustrated in Joseph Fowles, Sydney in 1848, one of the very rare interior views of a decorated colonial interior (*fig.53*).

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<sup>11</sup>The inn was built and decorated in the 1840s. Work undertaken by A. Thorn and A. Kosinova in 1985 for the NSW NPWS revealed the painted decorations and the relationship with the framed painting.

<sup>12</sup>Work undertaken in 1985-7 by A. Thorn and A. Kosinova on behalf of the Victorian Department of Forests and Lands.

<sup>13</sup>Andrew Lenehan (c.1815-86) cabinetmaker, upholsterer and undertaker, arrived in Sydney from Ireland in 1832. Established a business in Sydney in 1835 which grew to be a large enterprise covering all aspects of decoration, other than painted decorations, in the 1850s.

<sup>14</sup>John Skinner Prout (1806-1876) nephew of Samuel Prout. Arrived in Sydney 1840 and returned to Britain in 1850.

<sup>15</sup>The Australian, 29, January 1842.

### 5.1.2 Andrew Lenehan and Sydney Rivals

The career of Andrew Lenehan, Sydney's most successful early upholsterer, provides an interesting insight into the way in which early colonial society coped with cultural isolation.

The enterprise was launched by Lenehan soon after he arrived in Sydney from Dublin in 1835. It was a modest affair catering to the essential needs of Sydney town folk in cabinetmaking, upholstery and undertaking.

Almost thirty years later the business was described as a very prosperous affair;

*...wherein are constantly employed cabinetmakers, turners, carvers, and gilders, decorators, French polishers, joiners, chair and bedstead makers, upholsterers (male and female) and workers in every other industrial branch of his most comprehensive enterprise.*<sup>16</sup>

Lenehan's business was one of half a dozen enterprises of a similar type and scale which are known to have served the Sydney public between 1840 and 1870.<sup>17</sup> Much of their work was commissioned by the Government and especially the colonial architects who were involved in the ambitious programme of building and furnishing government offices, courthouses, schools, hospitals, orphanages and all manner of new institutions.

In 1855 Lenehan was involved in a row over work he undertook for the New South Wales Colonial Architect, Alexander Dawson. He had been invited to re-furbish the old furniture in the new Government House. However the work escalated as a result of the Governor's direct intervention and, although the original contract did not

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<sup>16</sup>*The Empire*, 21, May 1863.

<sup>17</sup>Kevin Fahy, 'Andrew Lenehan - Sydney Cabinetmaker', *Australiana*, Vol.10 No.1, February 1988. This brief article reviews the contemporary scene in its coverage of the work of Lenehan.



cover such works, Lenehan was required to virtually redecorate the suite of State Rooms.

Lenehan petitioned the Parliament when Dawson, (who subsequently lost his post over the incident) refused to recognise his claim for payment for the full extent of the works. The resolution was unfavourable to Lenehan, who was invited to recover all goods furnished by him in excess of his original estimates. The cost of his action probably contributed to his financial hardship in later years and it certainly led to a decline in his involvement in the formerly rewarding government projects.

The transcripts of the Parliamentary enquiry reveal an insight into the nature of the decorating trade at the time. Rival decorators, John Hill, Henry Woolley and Charles Hunt were all called to give evidence on the quality and value of Lenehan's work, which they praised. They each volunteered information also about the nature of their own businesses.

Henry Woolley introduced himself to the hearing committee as a decorator to Her Majesty Queen Victoria in England. He further described himself as;

*... upholsterer and decorator - artistic decorator - responsible for furnishing the palace with furniture and decorating the walls.*<sup>18</sup>

Woolley might have been indeed an artistic decorator back in England but the opportunities for artistic decorations in the colonies were very limited. The scope of Woolley's decorating work in Sydney is not known to have gone beyond paperhanging. Artistic decorations had not yet appeared in the colonies.

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<sup>18</sup>Minutes of Evidence, Report from the Select Committee on the Petition of Mr Andrew Lenehan, Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 3 December 1862.

The earliest recorded genuine example of artistic painted decorations has only recently been confirmed.<sup>19</sup> This is the scheme of decorations in the old wing of the Houses of Parliament in Sydney. The work was carried out during the winter recess of 1860 by a traditional painter with all round skills.

*The refreshment-room is...papered with taste and painted with skill...and elegantly decorated ...between the refreshment room and the library is a spacious lobby, also painted and decorated.*<sup>20</sup>

This work was exceptional in the colonies. It might have been inspired by one of the traditional manuals such as Arrowsmith's<sup>21</sup> or Whittock's<sup>22</sup> which illustrated very similar work. The scheme is Pompeian in character, in tertiary tones of reds, browns and greens. It was carried out by Mr Walter Renny who advertised himself as 'Painter and Paper Hanger to the Government'.<sup>23</sup>

### 5.1.3 Classical Ordinariness

Sydney in the early years had a predictably Georgian colonial character. The distinguishing verandahs, which are still part of the individual character of Australian architecture, were introduced as early as 1815 as the only significant modification to an otherwise utilitarian Georgian style of architecture.<sup>24</sup> The majority of buildings were classical and ordinary on the outside and on the inside.

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<sup>19</sup>See Case Study No.5

<sup>20</sup>The Sydney Morning Herald, 25 September 1860. p.5

<sup>21</sup>H.W.and A.Arrowsmith, The House Decorator and Painter's Guide.

<sup>22</sup>Nathaniel Whittock, The Decorative Painter's and Glazier's Guide.

<sup>23</sup>It is known that Renny operated from the 'Royal Blue House' at 170 Pitt Street, Sydney, but little else is known of his work.

<sup>24</sup>Although there is considerable controversy over the origin of the verandah, it appeared in the bungalow style work of Governor Macquarie who arrived in Sydney in 1810. His highly visible 'Rum' Hospital in Sydney (completed 1815) was built with verandahs all round in the manner of buildings which Macquarie knew from his days of service in India.

As far as can be determined from documentary records and site analyses, the interior finishing of most buildings was consistent with common British practice. Interior painting work prior to 1870 did not involve a great amount of stencilling or other decorative treatments. For the most part the work conformed to the classical arrangement of late eighteenth-century models of white distempered ceilings and papered or distempered walls in colours chosen for their functional aptness.

John Verge<sup>25</sup> was the leading classical architect in Sydney during the 1830s, whose clients sought to demonstrate refinement through their buildings. However, although they had the means to afford sumptuous decorations if it had been their desire, their buildings were classically plain on the inside.<sup>26</sup>

Burdekin House,<sup>27</sup> designed by Verge, was a showpiece in the centre of Sydney. Its ornamental plasterwork in the style of Louis XIV was distempered in plain colours. If it had been built and furnished in Edinburgh or London it could be expected that the interiors would have featured Watteauesque panels on the walls and ceilings.

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<sup>25</sup>John Verge (1782-1861) English-born architect who commenced work in Sydney in 1831. He retired to the country in 1837 at the peak of his career to farm.

<sup>26</sup>Outstanding Verge buildings such as Elizabeth Bay House and 'Lyndhurst' have been thoroughly researched in recent years without revealing any decorative treatments beyond the graining of a few discreet joinery items.

<sup>27</sup>Burdekin House, erected in Macquarie Street, Sydney in 1841, was a London Regency style house attributed to John Verge (supervised by James Hume).

## 5.2 Gothic and Classical Influences

The Gothic influence in church architecture in New South Wales before 1870 was quite strong. The predominantly Anglican and Roman Catholic immigrants brought with them the ecclesiastical aspirations of their places of origin, and these were Gothic.

The earliest churches were very simple and austere, being in the style known as 'carpenter' or 'Commissioners' Gothick.<sup>28</sup> The interiors were painted in plain colours without any attempt at coloured embellishment, as can be judged for the description of St Peter's, Sydney.

*St Peters' is the archetype of colonial "Compoism" built at great cost and with very good feeling ten years ago (in 1841) , chiefly at the insistence of some Presbyterian gentlemen of brick and stucco, with an abundance of plaister and varnish decoration.*<sup>29</sup>

St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney's grandest church until it was demolished by fire in 1865,<sup>30</sup> is shown in contemporary illustrations as having a perfectly plain interior.<sup>31</sup>

### 5.2.1 Edmund Blacket and the Ecclesiologists

The first trained church builder known to have any real interest in ecclesiastical decorations in Australia was Edmund Blacket whose main works date from the 1850s.

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<sup>28</sup>See 1.1 and 2.2. These terms describe the superficial Gothic styles which preceded the revival of mediaeval art and decorations.

<sup>29</sup>Rev. W.H.Walsh, 'The Ecclesiology of New South Wales', The Ecclesiologist, (New Series) Vol IX, 1851, p.263. Walsh read a paper at the 12th Anniversary meeting of the Ecclesiological (late Cambridge Camden) Society.

<sup>30</sup>St Mary's Cathedral was commenced as the Catholic Chapel to a design by Chaplain Therry in 1821. The building obtained recognition as a cathedral in 1843. It was still unfinished when it was destroyed by fire on 29 June 1865.

<sup>31</sup>Illustrated Sydney News, 1863. The interior of St Mary's from a drawing by J.S.Prout is shown as having no colour or decoration, even in the cancel end and the area of the chancel.

From the 1840s, the builders of the Anglican churches were often continuing members of the Ecclesiological Society and understandably they wished to work in the spirit of the society. Rev. W.H. Walsh of Christ Church, Sydney, wrote to the Cambridge Architectural Society in 1848 with news of a new building in the style recommended by the ecclesiologists;

*We have chosen First Pointed for our style of Architecture. As we shall, in this case have no adverse influences to contend with, we hope to carry out all our views of ecclesiastical propriety without interruption.*<sup>32</sup>

Edmund Blacket became the darling of the Ecclesiologists when he arrived in New South Wales from England in 1842. The first church which he built<sup>33</sup> was almost completely a copybook church modelled on St Peter's, Bidderstone, Wiltshire, a fifteenth-century building illustrated in Pugin's, Examples of Gothic Architecture.

Blacket was a keen Anglican with a trade training in the painting of stained glass windows. He came to Australia with a letter of recommendation from the Archbishop of Canterbury for whom he had been an inspector of schools. Once settled in Sydney he established a busy architectural practice which produced restrained interiors featuring chaste decorations. His direct professional interest in stained glass appears to have ceased prior to his arrival, although he continued to design and paint glass as a recreational interest.

Blacket had left England before the full impact of Pugin's decorative work was felt in ecclesiological circles. However, like Pugin, he collaborated with the main suppliers of ecclesiastic decorations and church fittings, such as Hardman of Birmingham, to furnish his buildings.

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<sup>32</sup>The Ecclesiologist, February 1848. p. 383

<sup>33</sup>Joan Kerr and James Broadbent, Gothick Taste, p.130. The first Parish Church designed and built by Blacket was the little rural church of Holy Trinity, Berrima (1846-49).

Blacket's office flourished with ecclesiastical commissions throughout the late 1840s, 1850s and into the 1860s.<sup>34</sup> In a colonial equivalent of G.G. Scott's London practice<sup>35</sup> he introduced into his office many talented young draftsmen and architects.

## 5.2.2 John Horbury Hunt

Within a few days of his arrival in Sydney from America in 1863, John Horbury Hunt<sup>36</sup> had made the acquaintance of the Acting Colonial Architect, James Barnet,<sup>37</sup> who directed him to the office of Blacket. Hunt quickly assumed an important role in Blacket's office as a designer, and as inspector for all of the country work.

The supervision work for Blacket in the Hunter Valley brought Hunt into contact with the rich and influential White family. The Whites provided Hunt with a very convenient springboard from which to launch his own private practice after just a few years with Blacket.<sup>38</sup>

Hunt was clearly interested in painted interior decorations. They complemented the essential components of his design style which bore a close similarity to the work of English architects working in the craft tradition.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>For a brief period in the 1850s he occupied the position of New South Wales Colonial Architect.

<sup>35</sup>See 3.2.5.

<sup>36</sup>John Horbury Hunt (1838-1904) American-born architect who maintained a vibrant practice in Sydney from 1863 to 1899.

<sup>37</sup>James Barnet (1827-92) Scottish-born architect who gained his start in Sydney by working as a stonemason for Blacket on the new Sydney University. He joined the Colonial Architect's staff in 1860.

<sup>38</sup>The supervision of country works involved many days of arduous travel by horse-drawn vehicle so Blacket passed on to Hunt all of this work. It was through the supervision of St Alban's, Muswellbrook, that Hunt met Reverend Canon William White and his family of rich pastoralists. They invited Hunt to design the cathedrals of Newcastle, Armidale and Grafton as well as a dozen churches in the Hunter Valley and New England districts of New South Wales.

<sup>39</sup>The use of fine raw brickwork and boldly expressed timber carpentry is strongly reminiscent of the work of the young British architects like Webb and Bodley who rebelled against the commercialism and industrialism of the stucco-fronted terraces of London during the 1860s.

In the marvellously simple Pro-Cathedral in Newcastle, NSW,<sup>40</sup> Hunt incorporated a modest amount of painted decoration to supplement the raw face brickwork of the interior. In the outstanding Arts and Crafts style residence 'Boolloominbah',<sup>41</sup> which Hunt built for Frederick White, to a brief which simply stipulated that it should be the finest house in New South Wales,<sup>42</sup> he incorporated bold painted decorations in three rooms, which combined romantic allegorical and chivalrous scenes with Australian animals, birds and flowers.<sup>43</sup>

### 5.2.3 James Barnet

James Barnet gained his start in Sydney also in the office of Blacket. He went on to become the outstandingly talented and prolific designer of major buildings and a highly influential patron of decorative artists. His architecture was highly significant and his interest in painted decorations was vital to the development of this artform in New South Wales.

The thirty year period between 1860 and 1890 during which James Barnet occupied the office of Colonial Architect, was one of vigorous cultural development in New South Wales. He presided over the largest and most important period of Government building in New South Wales history.

Barnet was responsible for the outstanding architectural achievement of building the large number of grand, mostly Italianate, courthouses and other public buildings in the principal cities of New South Wales.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Pro Cathedral, Newcastle (1883-84). Built to replace the very early church pending construction of the new cathedral (also to Hunt's designs).

<sup>41</sup>'Boolloominbah', Armidale, NSW (1887) built for Frederick Robert White of Harben Vale. The residence. The thirty-five room residence has an interior highlighted with painted decorations including figures and literary text.

<sup>42</sup>Drawings and Specification in the possession of Mr Alan Nangle.

<sup>43</sup>B. Mitchell, 'Boolloominbah and Travenna; A Case Study of Owners and an Architect', Armidale and District Historical Journal, No.28, 1985, pp.59-80.

The architecture of Barnet's buildings was the equal of anything undertaken in Europe during the same period. The interior decorations of the buildings was also outstanding.

The architectural horizons were still limited when Barnet embarked on his career in New South Wales. However he was not long in gaining a reputation for reliable, conscientious work as an assistant in Blacket's office. He entered the Colonial Architects office and became Clerk of Works and deputy to Alexander Dawson in 1860.

It is significant that James Barnet was a Scot<sup>45</sup> and that he trained in Scotland at the very time of the re-awakening of interest in painted interior decorations. The Scottish connection served him well during the years of his office. A steady stream of talented Scottish designers, painters and decorators called on Barnet in their search for patronage. John Lyon, another Scot, went to Barnet in search of decorating commissions when he established his decorating business in Sydney in 1873. The result was that Lyon, Cottier and Co. profited handsomely from Barnet's patronage during his remarkable term.

*Their first patron was Mr. James Barnet, a colonial architect, who commissioned the firm to decorate the new Post Office and Government House, followed by the Exhibition Building in the Garden Palace. Among their early patrons were the good old architects Messrs. Blacket, Backhouse, Horbury Hunt and Wardell, for whom they decorated many important buildings all over the country.*<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Following the discovery of gold and the succeeding expansion of primary production cities like Goulburn and Bathurst were developed to ambitious plans. Both cities have imposing courthouses designed by Barnet.

<sup>45</sup>James Barnet was born in Arbroath, Scotland on 17 October 1827.

<sup>46</sup>'Mr John L. Lyon', The Australasian Decorator and Painter, 1 Aug. 1909, p. 263



#### 5.2.4 William Wardell in Victoria

At the time James Barnet was arranging for the public buildings of Sydney to be adorned with painted decorations, the new colony of Victoria was having painted decorations introduced to its public buildings by the newly appointed chief architect, William Wardell, the architect who had recently arrived from London.

Wardell's career in Australia began in Victoria and finished in New South Wales. It was as significant and long-lasting as that of Barnet. Without these two visionary designers the important tradition of decorative painting which developed in Sydney and Melbourne might not have eventuated.

William Wardell's contribution to Australian architecture and decoration was brought about because of his own poor health. Like a significant number of the painters and decorators who moved from Great Britain to Australia, Wardell left his native country to pursue a career in the warmer, drier climes of the Antipodes

Wardell's interest in painted decorations, particularly the decoration of church interiors, grew out of his association with Pugin and their collaboration on at least two of Wardell's London churches.<sup>47</sup> Through Pugin he met John Bun Denny,<sup>48</sup> whom he brought out from England to supervise his private commissions, including the erection and decoration of his most important ecclesiastic work, St Patrick's cathedral in Melbourne.<sup>49</sup> Denny worked as Wardell's principal assistant from around 1860 until 1891.

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<sup>47</sup>Ursula M. de Jong, 'William Wilkinson Wardell, His Life and Work: 1828-1899' (Monograph) Department of Visual Arts, Monash University, 1983. It is claimed that Wardell knew Pugin personally. However without primary documentation there remains some doubt about the nature of the association.

<sup>48</sup>John Bun Denny (c.1800-1892) architect, worked with Willement, Pugin and Wardell in England before moving to Australia.

<sup>49</sup>St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne (1858-86).

When he embarked on his voyage to Melbourne, Wardell left behind a prosperous and flourishing architectural practice. However he found Melbourne and Sydney also provided rich opportunities. In his public office in Victoria he was granted the right of private practice. This enabled him to have access to the best private commissions in addition to his prestigious public work.

His private work included two Cathedrals; St Patrick's, Melbourne and St Mary's, Sydney, and eighteen parish churches between 1858 and 1878.<sup>50</sup> These were all designed by him in the Gothic Revival style.

He moved to Sydney in 1878 after a turbulent period in which the architects of Victoria objected strongly to his work on major public buildings, while occupying the position of Inspector General of Public Works, and concurrently running his private practice. His private practice in Sydney also flourished.

The work in this third phase of his career was mostly commercial and undertaken in classical styles. However, in the 1880s, Wardell did introduce a Scottish mediaeval style with polychrome brickwork and crow-stepped gables which he used in some provincial banks and residences.

Throughout his career Wardell was an enthusiastic patron of the painters and decorators. In Melbourne he employed the Paterson Brothers<sup>51</sup> to decorate many of his buildings, and he worked with the decorators, Lyon, Cottier and Co. in Sydney. He always sought out the best available talent to complete his meticulously detailed interiors.

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<sup>50</sup>Ursula M. de Jong, 'William Wilkinson Wardell, His Life and Work: 1828-1899', p.35.

<sup>51</sup>Charles, James and Hugh Paterson, leading decorators in Melbourne from 1875 to c.1925.

In 1886 Wardell called for competitive decorative proposals for his Venetian Gothic-style Bank in Collins Street, Melbourne,<sup>52</sup> which was then nearing completion. The commission was awarded to Lyon, Cottier and Co, whose newly arrived designer, Andrew Wells, clearly impressed Wardell with his very sophisticated style and presentation.

Wells was one of three designers invited by Wardell to submit a design proposal. It is probable that his scheme, based on the Protestant heraldic style decorations he had developed in his Glasgow practice, was favoured over the other two because of its forms and motifs which were entirely novel in Melbourne (*figs 58&59*).

The introduction to Wardell of Wells, and his young assistant, J.Ross Anderson,<sup>53</sup> was propitious for each of these three talented individuals. The painted decorations which survive from their first collaboration, and the second in St Mary's, East St Kilda<sup>54</sup> are outstanding.

In Sydney, the painted interiors of the former New South Wales Club<sup>55</sup> illustrate the combined talents of Wardell and Wells in the classical style. The ease with which Wardell produced both Gothic and classical designs, and the way in which he incorporated painted decorations into both, illustrates their total acceptance in conventional architectural circles in the developing cities of Sydney and Melbourne at the time of their greatest period of growth.

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<sup>52</sup>English, Scottish and Australian Bank, Collins Street, Melbourne.

<sup>53</sup>J.Ross Anderson (1862-1929) Scottish-born painter and decorator.

<sup>54</sup>St Mary's, East St Kilda 1887.

<sup>55</sup>New South Wales Club, Bligh Street, Sydney, 1887.

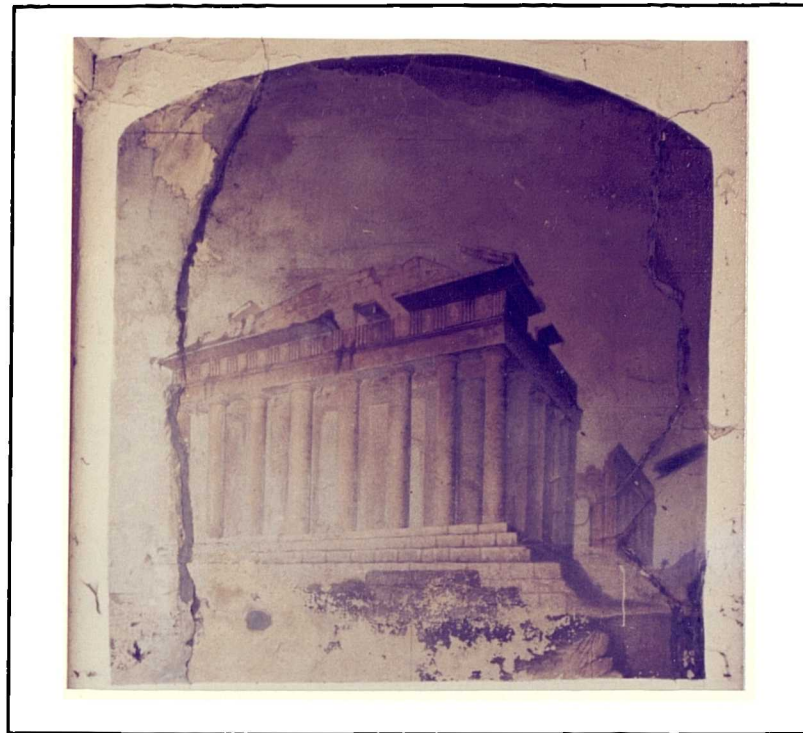


Fig. 52  
View of the Parthenon, painted in the Commandant's residence, Port Arthur, Tasmania about 1850 by the lady of the house. The subject is believed to have been copied from Les Ruines d'Athenes.

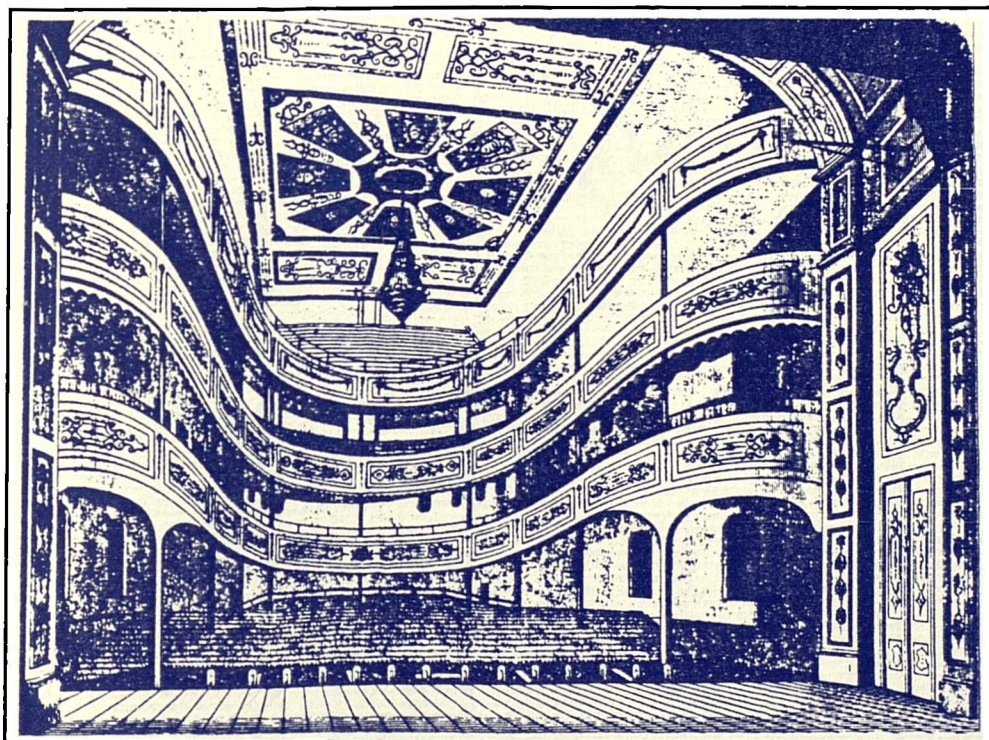


Fig. 53  
The interior of the Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney, showing the decorated stage and auditorium. Engraving by F.Nansell, after J.Fowles, published in Fowles', Sydney in 1848, Sydney 1848.



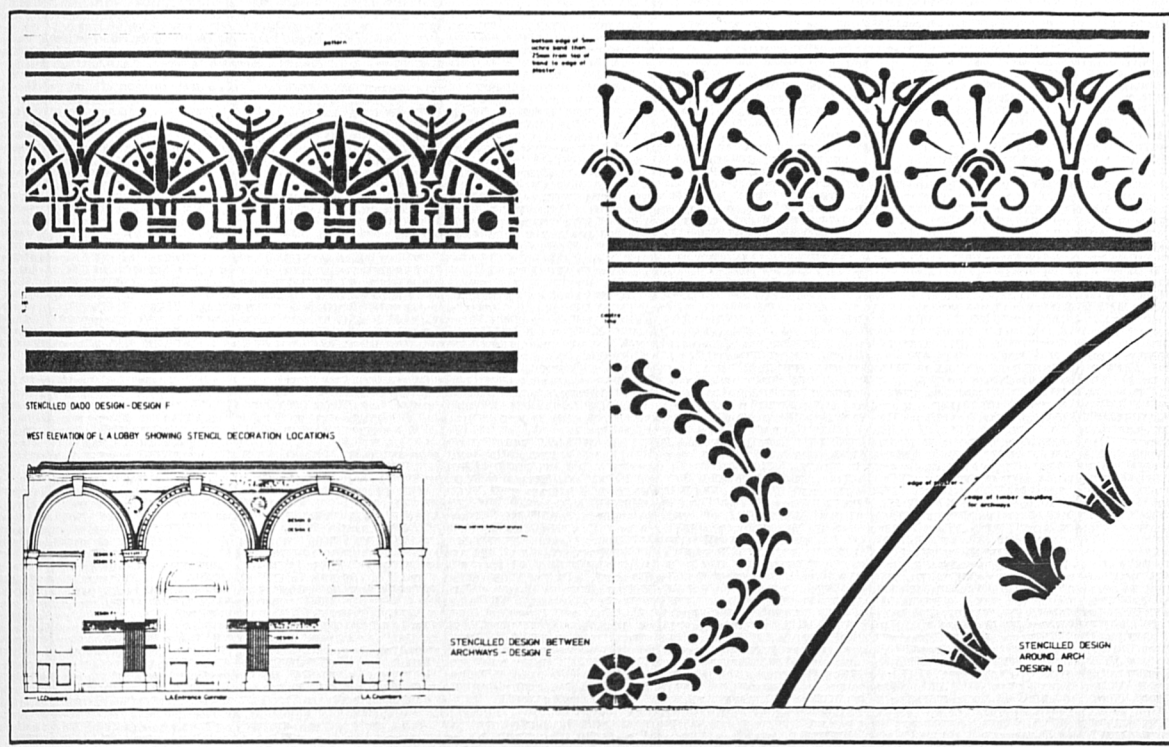
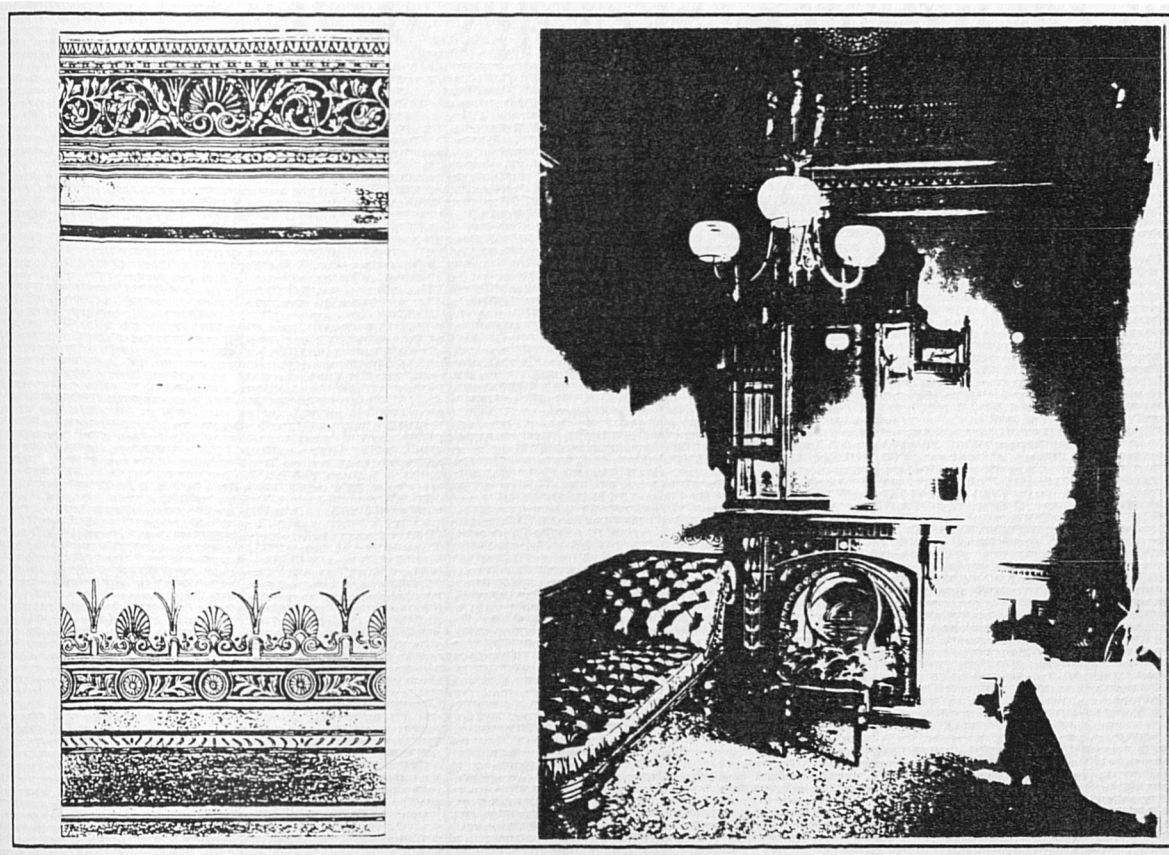


Fig.54  
Record Drawing of the decorations by Walter Renny in the Lobby of Parliament House, Sydney, 1860. Source: NSW Public Works Department.



Figs 55 and 56  
A design by Lyon, Cottier and Co. for wall decorations based on Greek motifs (circa 1880) and a view of the Post Master General's Ante Room, Sydney, in which the same wall treatment is used. Source: Mitchell Library, Sydney.

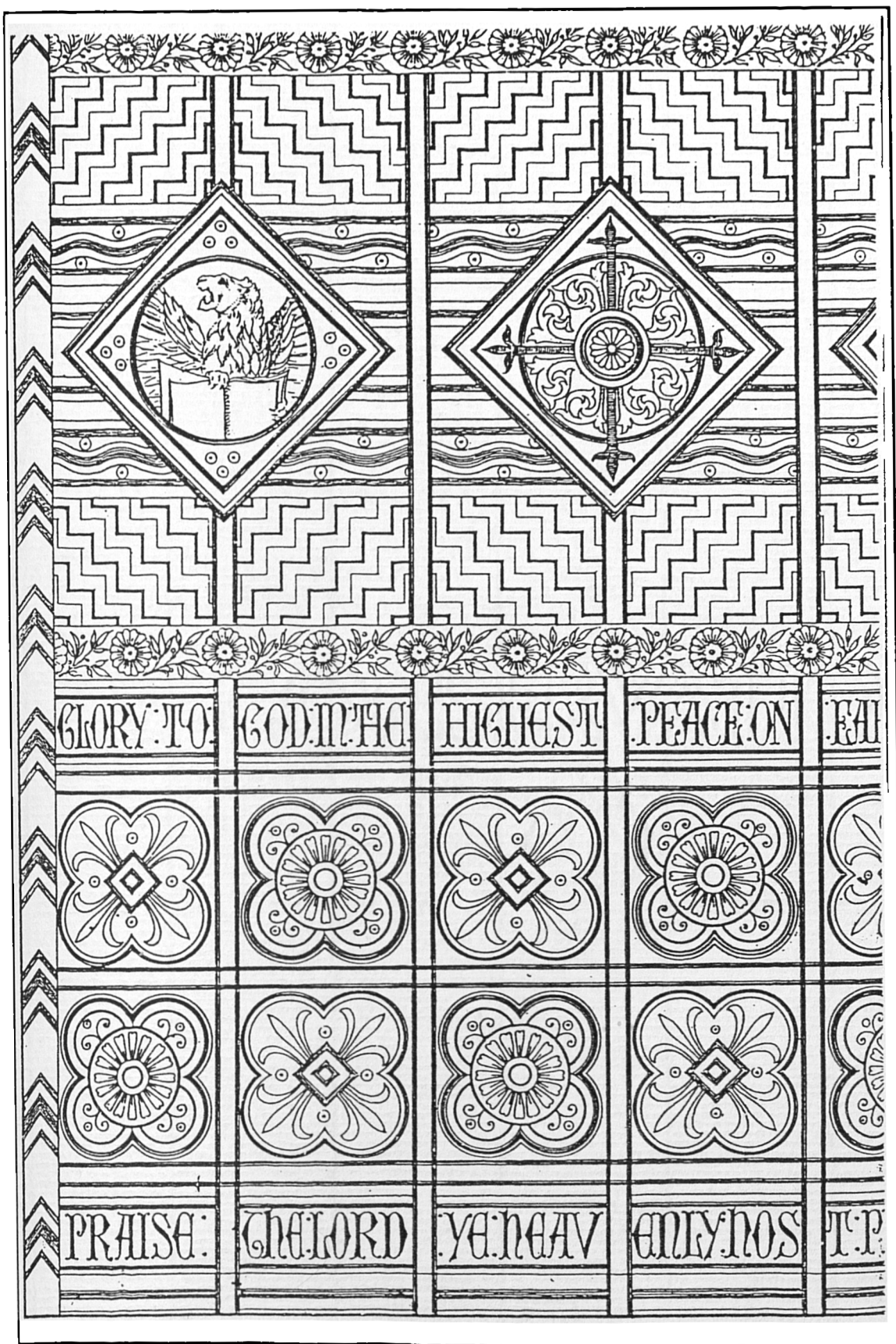


Fig. 57

Design by Andrew Wells for the roof of Bellhaven UP Church, Glasgow, 1885. The design is based on the Protestant Heraldic style which Wells developed and used on his early projects in Melbourne. Source: *Decoration*, March 1887.

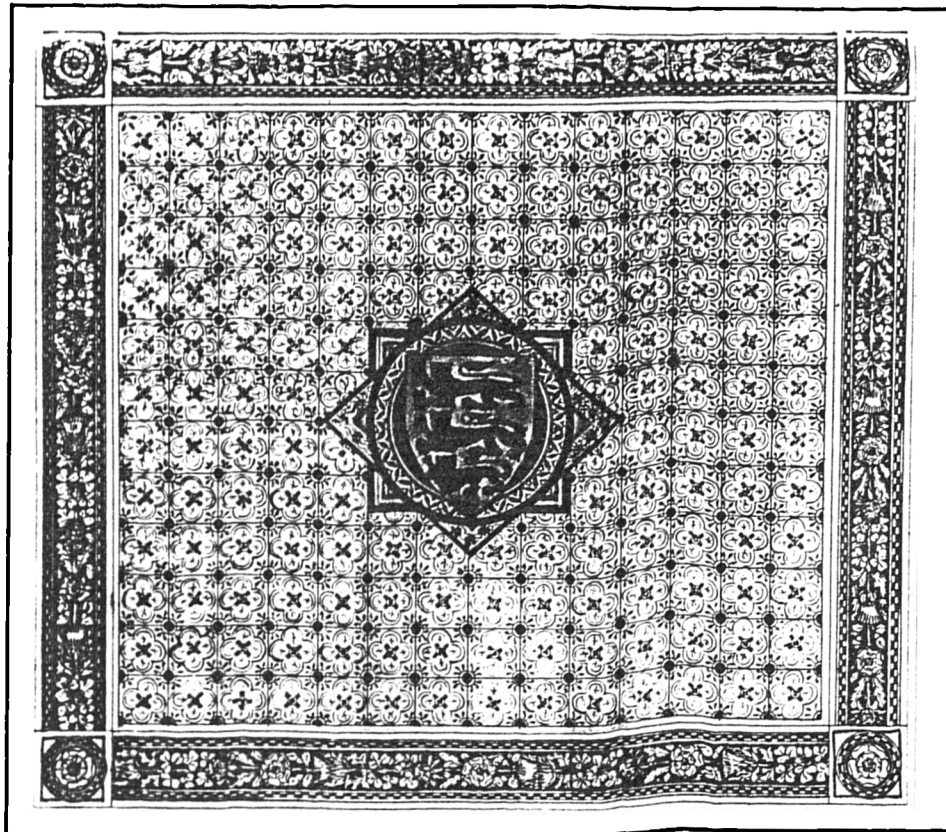


Fig. 58

Design proposal by Andrew Wells for the roof of the banking chamber in the E.S. & A. Bank building, Collins Street, Melbourne, 1887, in which Protestant Heraldic style motifs are used. Source: Mitchell Library, Sydney.

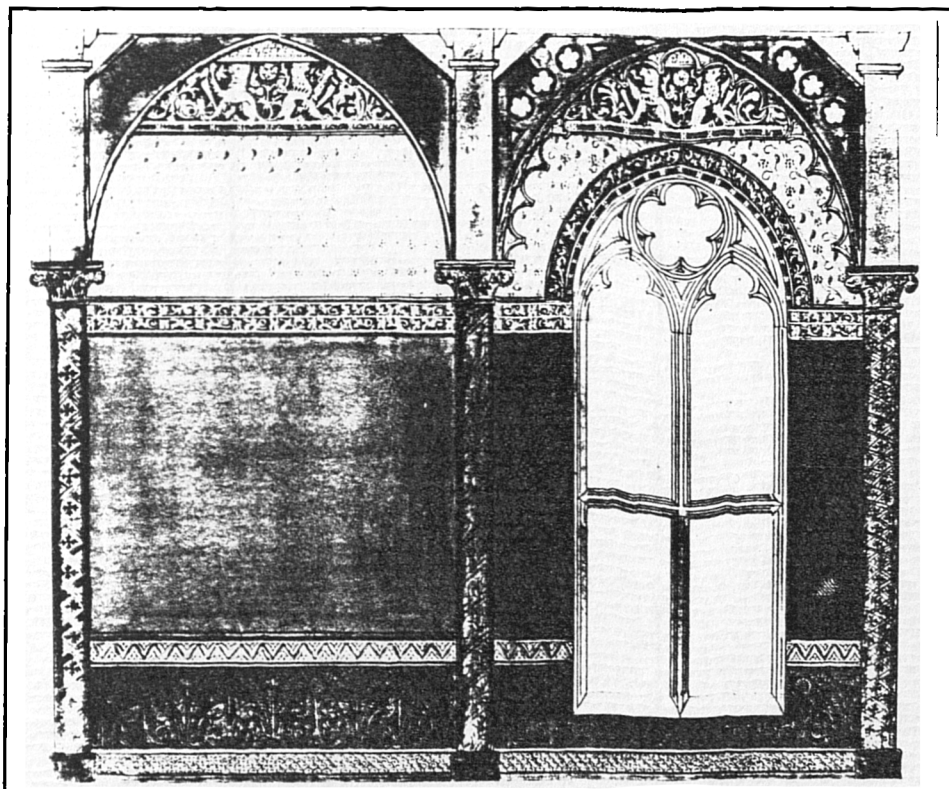


Fig. 59.

Design by Andrew Wells for the wall treatment in the banking chamber of the E.S. and A. Bank, Collins Street, Melbourne. Source: Mitchell Library, Sydney.

## CHAPTER 6 CULTURAL GROWTH AND MATURITY

### 6.1 Sydney and Melbourne

The period between 1860 and 1890 was one of great prosperity in Australia. Over the period the urban population rose significantly. As the non-aboriginal population of all the Australian colonies combined approached three million, nearly half of this number were living in Melbourne and Sydney.

Decorators and other tradesmen and craftsmen arriving in Australia in the second half of the last century could realistically choose between Melbourne and Sydney to make a start. The other Australian cities were small by comparison and opportunities in them were limited.

Melbourne and Sydney were booming cities and they were rivals. The competition for trade with Europe and the Americas and the rivalry resulting from the competing needs to populate and develop was very real. A visitor to Australia during the last century could not fail to be aware of it:

*Although Sydney is the older town, Melbourne is justly entitled to be considered the metropolis of the Southern Hemisphere. The natural beauties of Sydney are worth coming all the way to Australia to see; while the situation of Melbourne is commonplace if not actually ugly; but it is in the Victorian city that the trade and capital, the business and pleasure of Australia chiefly centre.*<sup>1</sup>

By the end of the century Sydney had become the second city in the British Empire, in terms of population and wealth, after London and ahead of Glasgow and Melbourne.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Twopenny, Town Life in Australia (London: Elliot Stock, 1883) pp.1-2.

<sup>2</sup>The Australasian Decorator and Painter, 1 January 1908, p.93



Melbourne and Sydney were cities of outstanding architectural character. In the 1880s the great wealth of the colonies had produced a legacy of fine buildings and civic amenities, nearly all of which had been created during the thirty years since the discovery of gold. The architecture had a quality of unity as a result of the contemporaneity of the buildings and civil works.

There was considerable optimism for the future in Australia which translated into fine architecture, most notably in Melbourne during the 1880s.

*Altogether, the public buildings of Melbourne do the greatest credit to the public spirit of the colonists, and offer substantial testimony to the largeness of their views and the thoroughness of their beliefs in the future of their country. There is certainly no city in England which can boast of nearly as many fine buildings, or as large ones, proportionately to its size, as Melbourne ... [however] the style of architecture in Sydney [is preferred] to that most common in Melbourne. First and foremost, owing to the more limited area of the business part of the town, the Sydney buildings are much loftier.*<sup>3</sup>

Melbourne was a more prosperous city in the immediate post-goldrush period because it was bigger (in population) and it derived great wealth from the gold and the land boom which followed. Sydney had grown along more modest lines:

*Of the public buildings of Sydney, the handsomest are the treasury, the Colonial Secretary's office, and the Lands Office, each four or five stories high, and close to the waters edge. The Colonial Secretary's office is only second to the Melbourne Law Courts amongst the completed buildings of Australia.*<sup>4</sup>

These eye-catching buildings of Sydney share the common characteristic of having been designed by the same

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<sup>3</sup>*The Australasian Decorator and Painter*, 1 January 1908, pp. 10,23

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

architect, James Barnet, and decorated (at least in the principal spaces) by Lyon, Cottier and Co.<sup>5</sup> The opportunities for high class decorations in Sydney and Melbourne were very rich. Melbourne and Sydney of the 1880s can be compared with Glasgow and London of the 1870s. The pastoral and commercial wealth of the main Australian cities rivalled the commercial and industrial wealth of the major British cities.

According to J.Ross Anderson,<sup>6</sup> a brilliant young Scottish decorator who arrived in Sydney in the 1880s and worked in all the major Australian cities, the decorative work was better in Melbourne. From having worked in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Tasmania Anderson believed that Melbourne was ahead of the other states for high class work.<sup>7</sup>

#### 6.1.1 Scottish Artists in Australia

The Australian colonies attracted migrants from most parts of Europe and America during the second half of the nineteenth century. Some groups, who brought specific skills, dominated the areas of their particular interest or tradition. The immigrants brought cultural assets which were occasionally the first of their type to be introduced into an otherwise barren environment.

Large numbers of Scottish immigrants settled in Melbourne and to a lesser extent in Sydney. Some had been associated with the decorating trades in the prosperous cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh where a grand tradition of decorative painting was developing in parallel with the development of textile manufacturing in the north of Britain.

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<sup>5</sup>Lyon, Cottier and Co., painting and decorating business run by John Lyon from Sydney between 1873 and 1916.

<sup>6</sup>J.Ross Anderson (1862-1929). Scottish painter and decorator.

<sup>7</sup>The Australasian Decorator and Painter, 1 November 1907.

Scottish-trained artists were involved in the decoration of a large number of the public and private buildings in the principal Australian colonial cities during the period of their greatest growth and prosperity between 1870 and 1910. These decorators were responsible for the first Australian examples of the exciting new art movements which were capturing public attention in Britain.

For the Scottish decorators the attraction of the Australian colonies lay in the chance to begin a new life in a land of unbounded possibilities. The developing colonies offered rich opportunities during times when work in the northern cities was slow.<sup>8</sup>

For many there was the added attraction of the milder, drier climates. The longer summers and milder winters made life amidst the paint pots far more bearable than it could ever be in the north where the working days in winter were very short and mostly damp, and the health of the painters could be severely affected.

Many of the Scottish painters and decorators, particularly those from the Clyde, worked closely with the shipbuilding industry, producing decorations for luxury yachts and steamers. The temptation to board a trans-Atlantic or trans-Pacific steamer as a paying passenger, when their work was slow, proved to be compelling to a significant number of them.

The Scottish decorators comprised a tight-knit artistic community; a clan which supported the traffic of personnel backwards and forwards across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans at a time when travel was not always fast or entirely safe. However these artists shared a very close bond through their art.

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<sup>8</sup>It is possible to gauge from reports by decorators, which were reported in The Journal of Decorative Art, how decorating work was sensitive to economic circumstances. Reports often referred to work being very slow (or good).

It is very rewarding to trace the development of the work of the Scottish artists through their personal associations. By tracing the development of John Lyon,<sup>9</sup> the Paterson brothers,<sup>10</sup> Andrew Wells,<sup>11</sup> Charles Gow<sup>12</sup> and J.Ross Anderson it is possible to develop an impression of the art and the culture of the important period of their work.

While it is understandable that they should have sought to share their experiences when isolated from the home of their art and training, it is surprising that they should have maintained such strong links with their homeland and with each other. There is a strong suggestion that they always clung to the hope of returning if and when fortunes would allow it.

Today there are a few examples of their work which remain to illustrate the great skills of the decorators. And because of the impact on society of some of the more public buildings such as Government House and the 'Garden Palace' exhibition building in Sydney there are good descriptions and photographs through which the painted decorations can be studied. The analysis of the surviving archaeological evidence and the contemporary reference material adds further to the understanding and critical evaluation of this important period of cultural and artistic development in Australia.

#### 6.1.2 John Lamb Lyon

The first of the significant artists to have an impact on the Australian decorating scene was Glasgow-born, John Lamb Lyon. He was a talented glass artist and designer with a rare ability to inspire his colleagues and

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<sup>9</sup>John Lamb Lyon (1839-1916). Scottish stained glass artist and decorator.

<sup>10</sup>Charles, James and Hugh Paterson. Scottish painters and decorators.

<sup>11</sup>Andrew Wells (1844-1918). Scottish painter and decorator.

<sup>12</sup>Charles Gow (c.1845-c.1892). Scottish painter and decorator.

subordinates. His Sydney-based business, trading as 'Lyon, Cottier and Company', and 'Lyon, Wells, Cottier and Co.', dominated the decorating scene for forty years from the early 1870s.<sup>13</sup>

John Lyon trained as a glass artist in Glasgow with William Cairney,<sup>14</sup> a pioneer among a small group of glass painters operating in Glasgow early in the nineteenth century. Some of Lyon's training might have also been with the Kier family, where Daniel Cottier trained.<sup>15</sup> Upon completing his training he moved to London where he spent six years with Ward and Hughes, a prominent firm enjoying Royal favour at the time.

Lyon's motives for taking the decision to emigrate to Melbourne with his young bride are not recorded. Within a few years of his arrival in Melbourne in 1861 he had assumed the position of chief designer with Ferguson and Urie, one of the first firms to produce stained glass in Australia.<sup>16</sup> Despite primitive working arrangements at Ferguson and Urie, a design by Lyon won critical acclaim when exhibited in Melbourne in his first year.<sup>17</sup>

In about 1870 John Lyon returned to Europe on holiday where he sought out his old friend, Daniel Cottier. The

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<sup>13</sup>The business operated between 1873 and 1886 as Lyon, Cottier and Co. From 1887 to 1896 it traded as Lyon, Wells, Cottier and Co.

<sup>14</sup>It was recorded in the obituary notice of John Lyon published by The Australasian Painter and Decorator on 1 July 1916, that he served his apprenticeship with Kearney and Company. There is no firm of this name known at the time and it appears more likely that it was William Cairney and Sons.

<sup>15</sup>Lyon and Stowe Family Papers 1880-1936. Mitchell Library, Sydney. Personal Diary maintained by John Lyon during his trip in 1886. He made a special trip to pay his respects to William Kier when he returned to Glasgow on holiday.

<sup>16</sup>The Australasian Painter and Decorator, 1 July 1916. This an enterprise which, due to its pioneering position, was required to produce all of its own colours and to work with primitive equipment including a camp oven to fire the glass.

<sup>17</sup>Intercolonial Exhibition of Australia, Melbourne, 1866-7 Official Record, (Melbourne, Blundell and Co.) p.33. The entry by Lyon under the name, Ferguson, Urie and Lyon, at the Exhibition, was for a chancel in the Early English Decorated style.

result of their meeting in 1870 or 1871 was the establishment, in Sydney in 1873, of the business Lyon, Cottier and Co., Art Furnishers, Decorators, Stained Glass Artists and Church Decorators.<sup>18</sup>

By 1874 the Lyon family was firmly settled in Sydney.<sup>19</sup> By 1877 their home was established above the shop at the prestigious address of 333 Pitt Street, Sydney.<sup>20</sup>

It is clear from the surviving personal records and family papers that John Lyon and Daniel Cottier maintained a close friendship and business association for fifteen years without face-to-face contact.<sup>21</sup> This supports the suggestion that Lyon and Cottier had developed a close bond during the years they were apprenticed together.

Their friendship went beyond business for there are constant references in family papers to correspondence between family members who would have hardly ever even met. Writing in 1885 shortly before her father met up with Cottier again in London, Margaret, then aged 23, wrote in her diary;

*Yesterday I wrote to Ella Cottier...ever since we got her portrait I thought I would like to write ...although it is many years since we were in London still I remember her quite well, Mrs Cottier wrote to mama a short time ago...I thought I would rather write to Ella , she will be quite an American girl now after living so long in New York.*<sup>22</sup>

Then;

*I see I had just written to Ella Cottier...she was just leaving New York for London...then going to New York*

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<sup>18</sup>Lyon and Stowe Family Papers 1880-1936. The business address was given as Liverpool Street, Sydney, opposite Hyde Park.

<sup>19</sup>Uniting Church Archives (3 Blackwood Place, Parramatta, NSW)

<sup>20</sup>Lyon and Stowe Family Papers.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Diary of Margaret Lyon, 18 June 1885.

*again. Papa has been thinking of taking a trip home before Xmas and Mr Cottier's movements will influence his route...we understand he will be in New York until Xmas.*<sup>23</sup>

Lyon made the trip early in 1886 travelling via New York where he visited Cottier's 'shop'. He did not meet Cottier there, as he had returned to London, although he met his managers and partner.

When Lyon caught up with Cottier in London he discovered that Cottier had lost interest in the Aesthetic decorations which had been so vital to his early work in London.

*...arrived London about 7 o'clock - too early for Cottier who was not up when I called...fifteen years showed great changes on the whole family but after a little talk you get reconciled to appearances which seem to banish and the unaltered voice and manners makes one feel as young as ever... there is a good deal of quiet style in Cottier's home ...He has taken the adjoining house which when finished and furnished will make a great establishment...Cottier has banished all the Japanese stuff he used to be so fond of. He now dislikes it so fashion changes.*<sup>24</sup>

The fragments of detail form a picture of a very close-knit fraternity of artists at the centre of which Daniel Cottier commanded a profound loyalty, inspiring young assistants to travel to the opposite ends of the world to ply their art in New York, Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide. Lyon, Cottier and Company was John Lyon's business, although it was supplied with a steady stream of talented young men from Cottier's Glasgow and London businesses.

There is a suggestion that Lyon did not see his own future as a permanent resident of Sydney. He might have considered the Sydney business in the same way that

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Personal Diary maintained by John Lyon during his trip in 1886.

Cottier viewed his London and New York businesses; as branches of the headquarters and true home of their art, Glasgow. It seems probable that the decorators moved to Australia and chose one of the main population centres uniquely because of the opportunities for decoration.

The free movement of personnel back appears to confirm this attitude. Important decorators like Gow and Wells made long-term commitments to the Australian enterprise without becoming permanent residents. For example Andrew Wells took charge of all decorative commissions and brought fresh new ideas to the Sydney and Melbourne works for a period of ten years before returning to Glasgow.

John Lyon depended on the flair and talent of the bright young men supplied to him from London and Glasgow by Cottier. He had considerable artistic talent, which is evident in his designs in stained glass and his portraiture (*figs 60-62*) but his decorative work was traditional. His work does not display the same vigour and robustness of Cottier's early classical style or the aesthetic appeal of the pre-Raphaelite inspired work of Cottier's best pupil Charles Gow.<sup>25</sup>

The conventional mediaeval style of painting which Lyon learned in the studios of Kier, or Ward and Hughes, is the thread of consistency which ran through the work of the firm over the forty year period prior to World War I.<sup>26</sup> For, although the younger design talents like Gow and Wells came and went, Lyon maintained his control over the intellectual and artistic content of the firm's work, especially through the training of all of the locally-recruited staff.

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<sup>25</sup>Journal of Decorative Art, May 1884. p.513. This refers to Gow's role as leading designer hence confirming his responsibility for several key works undertaken during the period of his association with the firm.

<sup>26</sup>The stained glass work and the portraiture in the painted decorations of the firm bear a strong similarity to works attributable to Lyon.



Lyon gained good social recognition from his work and he obviously contributed significantly to social and cultural life in Sydney.<sup>27</sup> Although not wealthy, he maintained a good lifestyle, living from the 1880s in a comfortable house by the water at Balmain where he spent his leisure hours boating and painting. From the late 1880s he enjoyed the luxury of an unhurried morning boat journey to the city and the long walk to the business address in Liverpool Street.

He brought his two sons into the business but they did not have the drive and talent of their father. The firm fell into decline as John's health failed in old age. The firm closed down within a few months of his death in 1916.

In recent years, with the discovery of many examples of nineteenth-century painted decorations in Sydney and the other major Australian population centres, the work of John Lyon and his associates has been properly assessed. The applied research has revealed more detail of the period and it has put the work into context.

Until quite recently, however, it was believed that all high quality painted decorations of the period 1870-1920 were the work of 'Lyon and Cottier'.<sup>28</sup> This fact confirms both the shallow understanding of the subject and the high residual knowledge of Lyon's importance. Today he is appreciated as an artist whose personal qualities, great energy and close association with Cottier, rather than his individual talent, made a huge contribution to the development of a decorative painting tradition in Australia.

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<sup>27</sup>There are many references to Lyon's involvement in church activities and in the promotion of art, other than his commercial decorative art.

<sup>28</sup>At the time this study was commenced, with some basic site research in the late 1970s, there was no detailed contemporary knowledge of the Art movements or the late nineteenth-century use of painted decorations by others.

### 6.1.3 The Paterson Brothers

The firm of C.S.Paterson Brothers, which dominated the decorating scene in Melbourne, was commenced by Charles Stewart Paterson<sup>29</sup> soon after his arrival in Australia from Scotland in 1872. He was later joined by his two younger brothers, James and Hugh.<sup>30</sup> Charles and James had trained in Scotland with leading decorators before setting up in Melbourne.

Charles Paterson had trained as an apprentice to John Nesbitt of Edinburgh<sup>31</sup>. His younger brother, James served an apprenticeship with Purdie, Bonnar and Carfrae, also in Edinburgh. The youngest, Hugh, had the benefit of a formal art education away from the smelly paint pots. He arrived in Australia before he had completed his education and continued his art training at the Melbourne National Gallery with such local artists as Longstaff, McCubbin and Tom Roberts.<sup>32</sup> The Paterson family was one of great talent and commitment to the highest artistic ideals.

The Patersons dominated the high class commissions in Victoria while Lyon and Cottier<sup>33</sup> were dominating the trade in Sydney. They did not, however, design or produce stained glass or deal in Art furnishings. Their business was purely one of painting and decorating.

In 1879 Hugh Paterson returned to Scotland where he was engaged as a figure decorator by Cornelius,<sup>34</sup> returning with valuable new skills to supplement the firm's

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<sup>29</sup>Charles Stewart Paterson (1843-c.1900).

<sup>30</sup>James Paterson (c.1845-1929) arrived in Australia in 1873.

Hugh Paterson (c.1850-c.1920) arrived c.1875.

<sup>31</sup>John Nesbitt became the chief decorator with George Dobie and Sons, George Street, Edinburgh

<sup>32</sup>Tom Roberts (1856-1931) established the important Heidelberg School of Australian Impressionism (of which Frederick McCubbin and Sidney Longstaff were members) after returning in 1885 from a study tour in Europe.

<sup>33</sup>Lyon, Cottier and Co.(1873-86) and Lyon, Wells, Cottier and Co.(1887-96).

<sup>34</sup>The Australasian Decorator and Painter, 1 November 1909, p.30. 'In 1879 Mr Paterson was engaged by Cornelius, the famous art decorator of Scotland'.

repertoire. On a subsequent visit he became acquainted with William Morris, Sir Frederick Leighton and Walter Crane and, by judicious use of the knowledge gained through these contacts, he was able to keep the Melbourne-based firm well abreast of European trends.<sup>35</sup>

However the firm did not enjoy the regular injections of freshly trained talent from London and Glasgow which kept Lyon and Cottier's work moving forward in exciting new directions. Paterson Brothers' work remained a little more conservative while always being technically excellent.

Although there must have been strong rivalry between the decorators; for they often competed for the same commissions, there was clearly a strong bond between the expatriate Scots which brought them together on and off the work sites. Margaret Lyon met Hugh Paterson in 1885 when her father invited him to the family home in Sydney:

*Papa was introduced to a Mr Paterson from Melbourne. He has not been long out from home and paints beautifully, he is such a nice little fellow he was over at our place two or three times. Papa gets on nicely with him, he is not much taller than me and sings scotch songs splendidly, he has gone back to Melbourne, I like talking to him, there is some pleasure in talking to a man one has not to look up to, he looks to one just the sort of man who will marry a ridiculously tall woman some day you know.*<sup>36</sup>

Melbourne Society gained respect for the work of the Patersons. Indeed the firm secured a large share of the most prestigious commissions during the 1870s and 1880s and they remained in business well into the present century. During this period they carried out decorations in many private residences and the vice-Regal residence, Parliament House, the Town Hall and a large number of

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<sup>35</sup>The Australasian Decorator and Painter, 1 November 1909, p.30.

<sup>36</sup>Lyon and Stowe Family Papers. Personal Diary of Margaret Lyon, 18 June 1885.

banks and business premises, all in or near to Melbourne.

An outstanding example of their art survives in 'Villa Alba', Melbourne.<sup>37</sup> The decorations, which received conservation treatment in the 1980s, were reported with considerable admiration in the 1880s.

*The practice of House Decoration is becoming increasingly popular among the well-to-do classes in this city and its suburbs, and wallpapers for the purpose of internal ornament are being discarded in favour of painting in distemper, in combination with the judicious use of gold leaf, while the ceiling which used to be left bare, so that to look up was like gazing into space has become an important feature in a decorated room. One of the latest residences upon which a considerable outlay has been incurred in connection with its internal ornamentation is that of Mr Greenlaw in Studley Park. It has been the aim of Messrs Paterson (sic) Brothers by whom the work has been executed to introduce as much variety as possible so that each apartment has its distinct scheme of colour, richer and darker hues predominating in the lower rooms, halls and passages and lighter and brighter ones having been employed in the upper ones. Natural objects conventionally treated have been freely used for the purposes of ornament excepting in the dining room where the frieze is composed of a series of panels upon which are painted scenes from some of Sir Walter Scott's novels. Upon the walls of a corridor also, connecting the house with the offices have been painted panoramic views of the City of Edinburgh and Sydney Harbour seen through the opening of a massive stone colonnade resting on a dado of dark wainscote.*<sup>38</sup>

This contemporary description gives a clear indication of the place of painted decorations in the social culture of the day. It also confirms the continuing nostalgia for home. More importantly however it establishes the public recognition of the Paterson's skills and range of decorative treatments.

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<sup>37</sup>'Villa Alba', Kew, Victoria (c.1860) remodelled, enlarged and decorated 1883-84.

<sup>38</sup>The Argus, 14 March 1884.

#### 6.1.4 Andrew Wells

Andrew Wells was persuaded to join Lyon and Cottier in the Sydney-based enterprise when the combined effects of poor health and hard times affected his work in Glasgow. His contribution to the development of decorative painting during his ten year long stay was an important one.

It is not easy today to appreciate the severity of conditions under which the decorators were required to work in North Britain. Although Glasgow occupied the place of second city in the British Empire, with rich opportunities for the decorators, many chose to uproot and entrust their fate to the steamship companies which would deliver them to uncertain new prospects. Wells is just one of many who followed this path.

Andrew Wells had been introduced to decorative painting by Daniel Cottier. After finishing three years of a glass staining apprenticeship under Cottier's eye at Field and Allan in Leith, he followed Cottier into his new venture in 1864. Wells worked as assistant to Cottier on all of his early decorating commissions and stayed on in Glasgow to supervise Cottier's Scottish commissions when Cottier moved to London.

With the goodwill from Cottier, Wells enjoyed success. By the time he decided to leave Glasgow for Sydney he had developed a very important business, practising house and church decoration. He developed a particular style which is remarkable for the precision of the finishes and the sharpness of the lines. His church work and many of his secular commissions feature the 'Protestant heraldic' motifs which do not feature in the work of other decorators of the period (*figs 63&64*).

Andrew Wells' Glasgow business flourished during the decade prior to his departure for Sydney. The newspaper

and journal reports, particularly those in Decoration which was edited by Moyr Smith, glowed with praise for his work:

*St Andrews , Glasgow, is a classic church; the interior is superbly finished, and it has been decorated with great taste and skill by Andrew Wells,<sup>39</sup>*

and,

*Mr Wells is a decorator of rare capacity, and facile princeps in inventive power.<sup>40</sup>*

However not all seasons were equally good for Wells and his fellow decorators. 1885 and 1886 were depressed years in the North. It was in 1886 that John Lyon was in Glasgow looking up old acquaintances and it is highly likely that Lyon met up with Wells at a time when his business was in a mild decline and his health poor. This was a time when Wells would have been most interested in the suggestion made by Lyon that he should follow the path of the significant number of his fellow decorators taking their trade to Australia.<sup>41</sup>

*I was doing well enough in Glasgow, as you know, but my health for years was bad. I had colds constantly, and was troubled with sleeplessness. So I sold out my stock, and prepared to come here, where I joined the firm which is now Lyon, Wells, Cottier and Co., Glass Stainers and Decorative Artists. Mr Lyon manages the glass department, and I the decorative...The skies here are most beautiful blue, most days without a cloud; a glorious climate, and a great contrast to the grim damp and smoke of Glasgow. My health is much improved by the change; my friends in Glasgow thought I was mad to leave my business, my friends, and all I had built up for so many years, and to come here on a mere chance - having to begin business again...<sup>42</sup>*

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<sup>39</sup>Decoration, 1 June 1885, p.112

<sup>40</sup>Journal of Decorative Art, November 1886, p.993

<sup>41</sup>Charles Gow had not long returned from a number of years working with Lyon. Gow was known to Wells and it is possible that Gow even took over some of the goodwill of Wells business when Wells moved to Sydney.

<sup>42</sup>Decoration, 1 June 1887. p.47.

Before he left for Sydney he was the guest of honour at a dinner of the 'Pen-and-Pencil' Club in Glasgow on 13 November 1886:

*The occasion was the leave taking of Mr Wells, who is about to go to Sydney. About sixty gentlemen associated with painting, sculpture, and architecture, decoration, literature, music, science and drama, showed their esteem for Mr Wells as a man and an artist, and wished him in his antipodean adventure the prosperity which he so eminently merits.*<sup>43</sup>

Andrew Wells made a great impact in both Sydney and Melbourne with his exciting new decorative style. His first commission, to decorate the new E.S. & A. Bank in Melbourne for William Wardell, was won competitively almost as soon as he arrived. This work remains as one of the outstanding examples of Wells' 'Protestant heraldic' style. In it he employed the frieze based on the repetition of the lion rampant which became a significant decorative device in the Lyon and Cottier repertoire (fig.59).

The upper floor of the building, which was designed as the residence of the manager, Sir George Verdon, was also decorated by Wells. In this he used the device of gold leaf laid over a sanded substrate to create a very rich effect with a sparkling ground (fig.66). The ceilings of Verdon's residence survive as one of the best examples of aesthetic decorations to be undertaken in Australia.

Soon after completing the work in the bank, Wells undertook more work for Wardell in St Kilda and Sydney.<sup>44</sup> Wells decided to move back to Sydney, leaving his assistant J. Ross Anderson to supervise the work at St Kilda. He remained in Sydney as manager and chief designer

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<sup>43</sup>Decoration, November 1886. p.30.

<sup>44</sup>St Mary's Church, East St Kilda (1887) and The New South Wales Club, Bligh Street, Sydney (1887).

of all the decorative painting commissions<sup>45</sup> until he took the decision to return to Glasgow, probably with health restored.

Wells was generous with his knowledge. He lectured freely on his art while in Australia and he assisted John Lyon with the training of the new generation of artists to carry on the firm's work. He also trained his own two sons whom he took into business with himself when he returned to Glasgow in 1896.

Andrew Wells and Sons, Glasgow, amalgamated with J. and W. Guthrie in a co-partnership which surpassed, in terms of excellence of achievement, both of the individual businesses.<sup>46</sup> Wells remained with the firm until he retired to Bournemouth around 1912, no doubt suffering again from poor health. He died in 1918.

#### 6.1.5 Charles Gow

Charles Gow is believed to be the designer of the outstanding decorative works undertaken by Lyon, Cottier and Co. in the years 1876 - 1879. He joined John Lyon on the recommendation of Daniel Cottier when they agreed to embark upon the Sydney-based venture in the early 1870s. Since the early decorative work by Lyon, Cottier and Co. was carried out in a style which is not consistent with John Lyon's traditional style, it can be concluded that these works were designed by others.

It is believed that works such as the ceilings of Government House, Sydney,<sup>47</sup> and the ceilings of 'Ayers House' in Adelaide,<sup>48</sup> were designed by Charles Gow.

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<sup>45</sup>Decoration, 1 June 1887, p.47.

<sup>46</sup>It was Guthrie and Wells which supplied the furnishings and decorations to Charles Rennie Mackintosh when he was making his initial impact in Glasgow in the 1890s.

<sup>47</sup>Government House Sydney (built 1837-43) was remodelled and redecorated in 1878. The surviving ceiling decorations are very skilfully constructed.

<sup>48</sup>The outstanding ceiling decorations in Ayers House (1854) are believed to



Information about Charles Gow and his work before 1880 is very limited. He was clearly a man of immense design talent whose life was dedicated to the art which he learned in Scotland and England and practised in Australia and Scotland. The Journal of Decorative Art summarised his early career all too briefly;

*He served the usual six years' apprenticeship to glass staining with Mr John Cairney, Glasgow, and after two years as a journeyman he entered the employment of Mr. Daniel Cottier about the time when he (Mr. Cottier) began to take up decorating along with his glass staining business, and the next twelve years were spent on high class decorative work in Scotland, England and Australia.*<sup>49</sup>

John Lyon's close friendship with Charles Gow is confirmed by a diary note made by Lyon during a trip to his former home in Glasgow in 1886.<sup>50</sup> He had met Gow when he was fresh from his training with Cottier and he took him into the business in Australia. Lyon would have been a paternal figure to Gow who was evidently a likeable as well as a talented artist.

The professional respect for Gow was confirmed in the report of a farewell dinner to him in 1891<sup>51</sup> on the occasion of his retirement from the very successful practice he shared with Hugh McCulloch,<sup>52</sup> another talented artist from the Cottier stable. Gow had met McCulloch when he joined Daniel Cottier in 1867, a time when Cottier was forming a working relationship with Alexander Thomson.

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date from the time the house was enlarged and remodelled around 1875. Gow was in Adelaide undertaking work for Lyon, Cottier and Co. at this time.

<sup>49</sup>Journal of Decorative Art, January 1891. p.12.

<sup>50</sup>Lyon and Stowe Family Papers. Personal Diary maintained by John Lyon during his trip in 1886.

<sup>51</sup>Journal of Decorative Art, January 1891, p.12. He called on 'Charlie' Gow and other former employees as well as his former employer, Kier.

<sup>52</sup>When Gow returned from Australia in 1879 he went into partnership in Glasgow with Hugh McCulloch.

Gow came under the influence of Cottier and Thomson at a very impressionable time in his own development. It appears that his style was significantly shaped by them. He was also a member of the team which decorated 'Cairndhu House',<sup>53</sup> arguably one of the most sophisticated and refined of all nineteenth-century decorative schemes, and this experience shows in some of Lyon, Cottier and Co.s work during the period of Gow's association with the Australian enterprise.

When Daniel Cottier moved his business to London late in 1869 it is likely that Gow was one of the assistants who moved with him. The Glasgow business was left in the care of Andrew Wells. It is highly likely that although Charles Gow was still very young he was invited by Lyon to help him establish the business on the recommendation of Cottier.<sup>54</sup> Clearly Gow had the talent to provide Lyon with the technical and decorative expertise which, as a glass designer, Lyon lacked.

There is no record of Gow's movements once he was in Australia. There is no proof that he was the decorator responsible for the outstanding work at 'Ayers' House' in Adelaide (*fig.67*). However this work bears the stamp of a very accomplished designer and it is therefore almost certainly the work of someone of Gow's talent. Since he was invited to establish a branch of the business in Adelaide in 1891, it is probable that he already knew the place well for he took the brave decision to abandon his successful practice in Glasgow to settle there.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>See 4.2.2 and *figs* 37 and 38.

<sup>54</sup>In 1870 John Lyon returned to Scotland and England on holiday and he met up with Cottier. They decided to open the Sydney business. As Lyon had no training in decorative painting and he had been away from Europe for nearly ten years it is probable that Cottier's agreement to supply Lyon with trained assistants was essential to the anticipated success of the venture.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

The business which Gow had established with McCulloch in Glasgow was a very successful one. The business in 1884 was operating from impressive showrooms at the prestigious address of West George Street, Glasgow.<sup>56</sup>

1886 was a good year for McCulloch and Gow, it was the year they acquired the goodwill of Andrew Wells' Glasgow business, when Wells left for Sydney. Their works during the following thirteen year association covered the full spectrum of opportunities offered in the rich commercial capital of the north, from churches to steam yachts:

*It will give some faint idea of the extent of their business operations when we say that we have before us a list of forty-one churches for which the stained glass and decorative work has been executed, and to attempt to number the institutions, banks, public buildings, etc, would be an endless task.*

*Messrs McCulloch and Gow have turned out a great deal of work both in glass and decorative panels for passenger steamers and yachts. Their exhibit at the Glasgow Exhibition brought them both fame and profit.<sup>57</sup>*

It is surprising to learn that in 1891 Charles Gow chose to turn his back on all this to return to Australia to re-join John Lyon in the business in Adelaide. His reasons are not stated but it is likely that his health was failing. His contacts with the shipping companies were obviously good and there would have been a top-class berth available to him for the asking. Sadly, however, there is no record of Gow from this point on and it is possible he did not live long enough to enjoy the benefits of life in Adelaide a second time around.

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<sup>56</sup> Journal of Decorative Art, May 1884, p.513.

<sup>57</sup> Journal of Decorative Art, January 1891, p.12.

#### 6.1.6 J. Ross Anderson

The decorating business of J. Ross Anderson developed from his association in Melbourne during the late 1880s with Andrew Wells and the Paterson Brothers. He was presented with opportunities which led to him establishing his own business there in the early 1890s. However the collapse of the land boom in Melbourne in the 1890s caused him to move from Melbourne to Western Australia.

Indeed Anderson moved his business from Melbourne to Perth, back to Melbourne and up to Sydney over the thirty years of his outstanding contribution to the decorating scene. He even undertook significant work in Brisbane. His willingness to travel for work is illustrative of the decorator's acceptance of the need to pursue opportunities wherever these occurred.

Anderson's family had a decorating business in Aberdeen, Scotland but Ross Anderson trained in London before migrating to Sydney in 1885.

He was not long in finding employment with Lyon, Wells, Cottier and Co., who sent him down to Melbourne to work with Andrew Wells on the E.S. & A. Bank in 1887. Shortly afterwards he was entrusted with the supervision of Wells' scheme of decoration in the small suburban Roman Catholic church at East St Kilda. He was required to carry out the decorations to Wells' designs.

He returned to Sydney briefly before leaving Lyon, Wells and Cottier to return to Melbourne to join the Paterson Brothers. In Melbourne he supervised several important works for the Paterson Brothers who, by the 1880s, were doing sufficiently well to employ several teams in the field.

Anderson was more gifted than necessary for an ongoing role as a team foreman. He decided in 1890 to make his own way in decorating. He became manager of the decorative portion of the Melbourne work of Beeler and Davies, a Sydney based firm of painters and decorators.

The collapse of the land boom and consequent depression in Melbourne during the 1890s seriously affected painting and decorating. Anderson was obliged to leave Beeler and Davies to travel to Perth, Western Australia in search of his own commissions. He decorated a number of churches, theatres and town halls in Perth and Fremantle.<sup>58</sup> When work picked up in the east he returned to Melbourne and then moved on to Sydney to complete his best work in the first decade of the new century.

The commission for which Anderson received most acclaim was the re-decoration of the Melbourne Exhibition Building.<sup>59</sup> The building was completely refurbished in preparation for the opening of the First Commonwealth Parliament by the Duke of York in 1901. Anderson's design (fig.68) was selected from six submissions. The interior of the immense building was painted and decorated in only fifteen weeks at a cost of four thousand pounds.<sup>60</sup>

In Sydney an excellent example of Anderson's work, the decoration of St George's Hall, Newtown, came to light when the building was studied recently.<sup>61</sup> In scale the work was comparable with the Melbourne Exhibition building but different in character:

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<sup>58</sup>Several works in Western Australia, including the Fremantle Town Hall, have been attributed to Anderson. However recent detailed research on the Fremantle Town Hall reveals that a design scheme by Anderson was painted by another firm of decorators.

<sup>59</sup>Melbourne Exhibition Building (built 1888) redecorated in 1900.

<sup>60</sup>The Decorator and Painter for Australia and New Zealand, 1 May 1929. p.220.

<sup>61</sup>Construction of the hall had been completed in 1888 but the mortgagees defaulted in 1893 during the depression before the decoration was executed. Anderson decorated the main hall in 1903. In the 1970s the building was analysed for use as a performing arts centre.

*...the style adopted is late French Renaissance, the ornamentation being painted in relief; the scheme of colour is of a natural tone, consisting of a beautiful combination of cream, azure blue, pearl grey, salmon, light citron, crushed strawberry colours, and gold. The upper panels to walls have for their centres painted with medallions representing St. George and the dragon, alternated by studies of different female types of loveliness, from the French girl to our own Australian beauty. The lower panels between the mirrors are made interesting by different painted musical emblems. The painted proscenium, which is rich and striking, has painted busts on either side of Thalia and Melpomene.*<sup>62</sup>

Anderson's busy career continued until he suffered a stroke, rendering him helpless, in 1926. This was just after completing the work of decorating the enlarged banking chamber of the E.S & A bank in Melbourne. This work was a continuation of the decorations he had painted with Andrew Wells in 1886 (*fig.69*). It is ironic that the first and last of his works in Australia were executed in the same building.

Until quite recently very little was known about the work of Anderson. The details of his important career have been assembled from the limited sources as information about his work comes to hand. The most revealing evidence of his immense abilities survive in the form of the coloured models he prepared for his projects.<sup>63</sup> These demonstrate a remarkable facility with colour and an astonishing photographic quality in the accuracy of details.

None of Anderson's own schemes are known to survive intact. However, an example of his painting ability can be studied in the respectfully subdued decorations he added to Andrew Wells' scheme in the E.S.& A.Bank in Melbourne.

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<sup>62</sup>The Sydney Morning Herald, 28 July 1903

<sup>63</sup>The set of Anderson's design drawings are held at the Melbourne College of Decoration.

## 6.2 Major Works in Sydney and Melbourne

A small number of key buildings in Sydney and Melbourne demonstrate the very high quality and cultural significance of the late nineteenth-century tradition of decorative painting. The history of the decoration of some of these buildings illustrates also how fashions changed over the years and how the fortunes of the decorators rose and fell.

Painted decorations in buildings were not viewed as permanent. It is therefore unusual to find intact examples. Selective examples of decorations, at best, survive as reminders of the rich tradition. The history of finishing of the buildings must be studied through written accounts and photographic records supplemented by archaeological investigations.

The public buildings of New South Wales in particular were often handsomely decorated. The examples from the period 1875 to 1900 were constructed by outstanding artists. Some of these decorations survive intact.

The commercial buildings and private residences in Sydney have fared badly by comparison. The city has been subject to extraordinary development pressures which have resulted in the loss through demolition of many excellent examples.

Commercial and domestic buildings in Victoria have fared better. There are many well preserved buildings of the second half of the nineteenth century and some brilliant examples of painted decorations.

The exhibition buildings of Sydney and Melbourne are most significant as they illustrate the importance of decorations on a grand scale. The records of these survive as further proof of the cultural value of this artform.

### 6.2.1 Patronage for the Decorators

The newly-formed firm of Lyon, Cottier and Co. had an immediate *entree* to public building work in Sydney through James Barnet, the Colonial architect.

*In their Pitt Street premises the firm decorated two rooms in the latest London style, and invited leading Sydney architects and others to inspect the work. Their first patron was Mr James Barnet, a colonial architect, who commissioned the firm to decorate the new Post Office and Government House, followed by the exhibition building in the Garden Palace. Among their early patrons were the good old architects Messrs Blacket, Backhouse, Horbury Hunt and Wardell, for whom they decorated many important buildings all over the country.*<sup>64</sup>

It is significant that Barnet and Blacket were both New South Wales Colonial Architects, although Blacket's term was very brief. He quit public service in 1858 to closely supervise the construction of the new University in Sydney. Barnet was his successor.

Wardell was, from 1860, Inspector General of Public Works and Chief Architect for Victoria. Backhouse was the principal Government Architect in Tasmania. These designers of public buildings were interested in incorporating painted decorations and Art furnishings into their work for the benefit of the public at large.

Barnet would not have been introduced to 'the latest London style' decorations before seeing them in Lyon and Cottier's shop. He would have immediately realised the potential to incorporate the high-class painted decorations into his major projects. He was committed to an ornate classical style into which the decorations sat handsomely. The results of the marriage of his Italianate architecture with the decorative work of Lyon, Cottier and Co. are some the best of the Victorian era.

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<sup>64</sup>The Australasian Painter and Decorator, 1 August 1909, p.264.



### 6.2.2 Some Public Works in Sydney

The Sydney General Post Office was possibly the first of the buildings decorated by Lyon, Cottier and Co.

Unfortunately there are no accurate records to confirm this.<sup>65</sup> Barnet encountered various problems during the construction of the Post Office which delayed completion for a long period.

Surviving illustrations indicate that the grand stair, and presumably also the postal hall, were simply treated with colour and grid stencilling. The Post Master's office was painted along more artistic lines with an elaborately decorated ceiling and cornice, a simple gold powdering on the olive coloured wall filling, separated from the dark dado by a band of stencilling in gold incorporating the anthemion.<sup>66</sup>

Government House in Sydney was not decorated with its Aesthetic decorations until 1878 (*fig.70*). However it is highly likely that Lyon, Cottier and Co. carried out some moderately adventurous decorations in the vice-Regal residence when alterations were made to the formal front of the House in 1875. Barnet designed a *porte cochere* (completed in 1875) which led to a remodelling of the formerly open adjacent grand entrance *loggia*. This space thus became an enclosed outer hall which was decorated with stencilling on the walls<sup>67</sup> and a tiled floor of locally produced encaustic tiles.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>The earliest photographs of the interiors date from around 1880 (*fig.56*). It is possible that these decorations were painted several years earlier.

<sup>66</sup>The colours have not been researched. They are conjectured from knowledge of other examples of similar work as indicated in the black and white photos.

<sup>67</sup>The walls were painted in light stone colours and stencilled with ashlar lines in Indian red. The effect of the very tall space was reduced by dividing up the wall height into three zones defined by horizontal bands of a running floral stencil pattern.

<sup>68</sup>The encaustic tiles, claimed to be the first of Australian manufacture, were produced by the Sydney craftsman, Angelo Tornaghi.

The main hall was painted in an austere mediaeval style in light to mid stone colours sometime around 1875. The Tudor character of the hall was reinforced by the introduction of painted arms<sup>69</sup> and a stencil grid on the flat plaster ceiling to divide up the space into panels in the manner of strapwork.

In 1878 Barnett added a colonnade to the eastern front of the House. The construction work occasioned a re-arrangement of doors which in turn necessitated redecoration of the State rooms. John Lyon was called in to redecorate the rooms.

The resulting work<sup>70</sup> is the most outstanding achievement of the time. It is indeed fortunate that it survives where so many other examples have not survived to illustrate this important period of decorative work.<sup>71</sup>

The ceilings in each of the State rooms of Government House were painted by John Lyon and his team of decorators in the Aesthetic style which developed from the work of Hay and Bonnar in Edinburgh and Glasgow. The walls were kept relatively subdued to provide a suitable contrast to the rich crimson and gold upholstery of the drawing rooms and ballroom (*figs 70&71*). The resulting effect was harmoniously balanced in the way David Hay had demonstrated three decades earlier.

Directly above the main-drawing room there was a private drawing-room of identical proportions which adjoined the upper terrace of the new colonnade. In this room Lyon chose a subtle scheme of cream and soft green, dividing up

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<sup>69</sup>Plain glazed windows along the western side were replaced with arms of the early governors in stained glass, and the corresponding blind panels on the opposite walls were painted with the arms of the succeeding governors.

<sup>70</sup>See case studies 3 and 4.

<sup>71</sup>Lyon, Cottier and Co. decorated the more ambitious residence of the rich Sydney merchant, Daniel Cooper, in 1883. However 'Woollahra House' was demolished early this century and the surviving photographic record of the interiors indicate that the decorations lacked the same refined character.

the walls into full height panels with gold outlined borders and a powdering of floral medallions (*fig.72*). The furnishings of delicate floral upholstery and the abundance of decorative *objets* such as flying *amorini* created the essential feminine charm for the room.

Lyon, Cottier and Co. was involved also in more than one campaign of work for James Barnet in the New South Wales Houses of Parliament in Sydney.

In the early 1880s John Lyon decorated the assembly chamber with a remarkably elaborate scheme (*fig.73*). The ceiling was painted with billowing clouds and a wide, elaborately-stencilled border. The walls were covered with a diaper of busy stencil patterns in browns, gold and orange on an almost white background. At the lower level the wall had a brown dado and stencilled border. To accompany this scheme, of decoration Barnet had John Lyon paint the Egyptian inspired stencils to the coved ceiling of the lobby, adding to the existing decorations painted by Renny twenty years earlier (*fig.74*).

Throughout the three decades of James Barnet's office, Sydney and the lesser New South Wales cities were enjoying vigorous growth. Barnet endowed the state with a legacy of outstanding buildings including the superbly ambitious Court Houses in the growth centres of Goulburn and Bathurst.<sup>72</sup> But although he could secure quality building construction in the country districts, the same talent did not exist for interior decorations. In consequence, the painted decorations in the two major country Court Houses are confined to some rather unambitious colour and stencilling in the principal areas only.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Goulburn and Bathurst are large country towns in rich pastoral districts. Inaccurate growth projections in 1880 led to them each having very grand courthouses built to confirm the establishment of law and order in the country districts.

<sup>73</sup>The assumption is that the painted decorations, like the frieze of stencilling in the Bathurst Court House entry lobby, were painted by journeymen or local house-painters.

### 6.2.3 Melbourne in the Boom Years

By comparison with even the remarkable prosperity of New South Wales, the wealth and development in Victoria was prodigious during the land boom of the last quarter of the century. The Victorian gold fields flourished longer than those in New South Wales, pastoral development accelerated and land booms in Melbourne created the opportunity for enormous profits to investors.

As early as the 1880s investors could double their earnings in a year through safe investment in land. Needless to say some of the wealth created by profitable investment was returned to buildings in the form of decorations.

The city of Melbourne boasts an architectural heritage of grand, ornate residences and public buildings. Residences such as 'Manderville Hall',<sup>74</sup> 'Werribee Park',<sup>75</sup> 'Labassa',<sup>76</sup> and 'Villa Alba',<sup>77</sup> contain some of the best known examples of rich decorations of the period (*fig.75*). Public Buildings such as the Houses of Parliament in Melbourne also contain some exquisite examples of decoration and painting (*fig.76*).

Melbourne had an impressive number of hotels, coffee palaces and commercial buildings, and banks in which decorative ambitions were expressed. The decorative work was produced by a relatively small group of decorators amongst whom the Paterson Brothers initially dominated. Their work in stately residences, banks, town halls and

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<sup>74</sup>'Manderville Hall', Toorak, Victoria, built c.1860 and remodelled for millionaire owner, Joseph Clarke 1876-78 by Charles Webb with decorations by Gillow and Co.

<sup>75</sup>'Werribee Park', Werribee, Victoria, built 1874-6 for rich pastoralist Andrew Chirnside to the design of James Fox.

<sup>76</sup>'Labassa' (formerly Ontario), Caulfield, Victoria, built 1889 for Canadian adventurer, Alexander Robertson, to designs by German architect, J.A.B.Koch.

<sup>77</sup>'Villa Alba', built c.1860 and enlarged and decorated 1884 for William Greenlaw. Decorations by the Paterson Brothers.

the Houses of Parliament during the 1880s stands out from the rest.

A number of young decorators, some of whom gained their start with the Paterson Brothers, soon challenged the supremacy of the leading firm. Of course there was wealth enough to generate work for several large decorating firms in Melbourne. But wealth alone did not guarantee elegant or tasteful decoration judging by one contemporary report.

*[Grand residences] have indeed had plenty of money spent on them, both in the way of painting, papering and furnishing; but although the expenditure has greatly gratified the owner, and perhaps most of his friends, it has often horrified those who possessed either a natural or a cultivated art taste. And such a waste of money is easily accounted for, seeing that it has been the rule for wealth to be unaccompanied by that sort of education which develops the perception of the truly beautiful.*<sup>78</sup>

The majority of decorators were newly arrived from Britain, and sometimes other European centres. Most had come to settle. Others were brought from abroad for specific projects. When Sir Joseph Clarke decided to enlarge and restyle his residence, Manderville Hall, he went to the expense of commissioning Gillow and Company of London, who sent out the furniture and decorations with their own artist to supervise the work.<sup>79</sup>

The German architect of 'Ontario' is believed to have used German decorators to create the very rich interiors of this palatial residence. An artist named Brettschneider is known to have carried out the elaborate painted decorations at 'Mintaro', west of Melbourne, and it is possible that he also worked on 'Ontario'.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>'A Habitable House', Australasian, 10 August 1878, pp.166-7.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup>Suzanne Forge, Victorian Splendour, p.96.

The abundance of work for craftsmen in the city occurred at a time when the main gold fields were almost worked out, and there were many Europeans living in Melbourne at the end of the gold rushes. Understandably those who had a craft or trade returned to Melbourne to gain employment. The new arrivals swelled the ranks of decorators and provided the much needed skills to carry out major works. Thus the leading firms like those of the Scots, J.Ross Anderson and the Paterson Brothers; and the American, J.Clay Beeler, were able to form large teams to take on major contracts.

#### 6.2.4 The Exhibition Buildings

The cities of Melbourne and Sydney held major exhibitions to promote local achievement in craft and trade while attempting to further their individual claims to ascendancy in the ongoing intercolonial rivalry. The large exhibition buildings broadly followed the Kensington model.

The designs of each of the exhibition buildings conformed to a basilic plan, having a principal hall (orientated as a nave), intersected by a transept hall. A dome at the crossing provided the elevation to dominate the landscape while, at the same time, providing the space for elaborate painted decorations and stained glass.

The decoration of the space under the dome normally radiated from a central feature such as a fountain or statue functioning as a *baldacchino*.<sup>81</sup> There was a great deal of symbolism in the space. It served to create decorating opportunities and elevate the importance of these buildings.

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<sup>81</sup>In the Garden Palace Exhibition building in Sydney the important focal point under the crossing was occupied by a statue of Queen Victoria (fig.78). It became the most popularly illustrated feature of the interior space.

The Intercolonial Exhibition held in Melbourne in 1866<sup>82</sup> provided John Lamb Lyon with the opportunity to gain early recognition when he received an honourable mention for a drawing of a stained glass window.

Seventeen years later the Intercolonial Exhibition in the 'Garden Palace', Sydney<sup>83</sup> afforded him the opportunity to demonstrate his talent on a far grander scale when he decorated the entire building (*figs 77&78*).

The decorations of the 1866 building appear in an illustration <sup>84</sup> to be relatively restrained. The ceiling of the dome was divided up into panels which were each painted in soft blue with a lined border with stencilled corner ornament. The exposed timber roof members were decorated with linework and running bands of foliage. The frieze at the base of the dome was given a similar treatment. At the centre of each panel there was a painted roundel depicting industry and commerce. The clerestory windows displayed floral arrangements in the etched glass.

The exhibition building was the venue for the Centennial International Exhibition in 1888. On this occasion it was substantially enlarged with a series of adjoining halls. The main spaces were enlivened with new decorations by J.Clay Beeler.<sup>85</sup> This work called for the employment of 182 men for three weeks.<sup>86</sup> Only a small number of these men could have been fully trained decorators.

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<sup>82</sup>Melbourne's Intercolonial Exhibition of Australasia, 1866-67, attracted 270,440 people over the four months of its showing.

<sup>83</sup>The Sydney International Exhibition Building known as the 'Garden Palace' erected in the astonishingly short time of nine months to the designs of James Barnett, 1879, and visited by 1.1 million. Destroyed by fire 1882.

<sup>84</sup>'Intercolonial Exhibition', Australasian News, 1866.

<sup>85</sup>J.Clay Beeler (c.1840-c.1920) American-trained decorator who arrived in Sydney in the mid-1880s. Formed a partnership with F.Mouncey in Melbourne to undertake major works in Victoria.

<sup>86</sup>The Australasian Decorator and Painter, 1 March 1909, p.133.

J.Ross Anderson enjoyed the opportunity to redecorate the same Melbourne exhibition building a third time. The building was chosen as the venue for the opening of the new parliament in 1901. Anderson's design proposal<sup>87</sup> was strongly classical in style and executed in subtle soft colours. The painted figures on the drum of the crossing had a distinctly baroque character.

James Barnet's Garden Palace exhibition building was a vast structure of little refinement. The construction time was too short to allow of any great finesse in the interior finishes and decorations. A description of the painted decorations by Lyon, Cottier and Co. nevertheless suggests a brightly coloured interior.

*The roof was painted light blue; the woodwork was buff and green touched up in red; the decorative elements were picked out in gold ... the dome was lit by a clerestory in the drum and a skylight of stained glass under the lantern. It was painted blue and scattered with stars ...the art gallery annexe [designed by William Wardell] had walls coloured a dullish red ...*<sup>88</sup>

James Barnet described the overall effect with enthusiasm:

*The result of the whole combination is pleasing, and has been likened to the effect of a field of waving and ripening corn.*<sup>89</sup>

The photographs<sup>90</sup> show a great deal of detail which is not adequately acknowledged in the descriptions. The balcony to the galleries along the nave was richly decorated. The motifs, such as aesthetic arrangements of flowers in urns, appear to be very similar to the decorations on the ceilings of Government House which were completed by the same decorators only a few months

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<sup>87</sup>Design drawing held at Melbourne College of Decoration (fig.68).

<sup>88</sup>Official Report of the 1879 Intercolonial Exhibition, Sydney.

<sup>89</sup>David Churches, 'The Garden Palace', unpublished thesis, University of New South Wales 1985.

<sup>90</sup>Photographs held by NSW Government Printing Office (figs 77-78).



earlier. The engaged pilasters were enriched with climbing spiral strap decorations with alternating flowers in gold leaf exactly the same as those used by John Lyon and his team twelve months earlier in Government House.

The only records of these decorations exist in the form of black and white photographs. The tonal values of these appear to confirm that colouring was also very similar to the work in Government House, which was being executed a short distance away in the Governor's Domain.

The allegories under the dome were framed in a panel of stencils laid out in a grid. This detail, first seen in the work of Daniel Cottier and illustrated by Clarence Cook,<sup>91</sup> was used by Lyon and Cottier in the work they had recently completed on the hallway walls at 'Cranbrook' in Sydney and also, in a different tonal arrangement, on the ceiling of the dining room at Government House.

For such an immense building; having been erected in such a brief time and finished rather crudely, the decorations are surprisingly elaborate and sophisticated. It was a remarkable achievement and a culturally significant event in colonial history.

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<sup>91</sup>Clarence Cook, The House Beautiful, 1878 (*fig.39*).

### 6.3 Art Furnishers and Decorators

The exciting new style of Art furnishings and decorations appeared in Sydney and Melbourne very soon after their appearance in London and Glasgow.<sup>92</sup> When John Lyon opened his new business in Pitt Street, Sydney he traded as 'Lyon, Cottier and Co, Artistic Interior Decorators, Stained Glass Painters etc'.<sup>93</sup>

Lyon had recently returned from London (and Glasgow) where he was greatly impressed by the Aesthetic decorations with which his friend Daniel Cottier and their close circle of expatriate scots were embellishing their own homes and the new Queen Anne style architecture of London. He returned to Sydney resolved to set up an equivalent business; to import paperhangings, Venetian gasoliers, Indian rugs and carpets, and art furniture to supplement his own output of stained glass and painted decorations. Cottier provided the network of suppliers and the skilled decorators from abroad.

In an obvious attempt to educate the Australian public to the aims of the new enterprise, Lyon included a background statement in a printed flier about the new opportunities which would be available to them.

*The revival of Decorative Art in House Painting has attained great perfection, and is in very general use among refined circles in the old country. Houses painted with taste and artistic feeling need not much exceed in cost the work done by the ordinary house painter, with his tame French greys and white enamel wood work. We pay strict attention to the architecture of the buildings entrusted to us, thereby, elucidating the ideas of the architect; and the ornamentation used, having all the beauty of the ancient Roman and Greek decorations, never*

<sup>92</sup>Terence Lane, 'Australians at Home: the Pictorial and Documentary Record of Australian Domestic Interiors of the 19th and Early 20th Centuries', *Historic Interiors* (Sydney: Sydney College of the Arts, 1984) pp.9-15.

<sup>93</sup>Lyon and Stowe Family Papers, 1880-1936. Mitchell Library, Sydney. Printed advertising brochure.

*fails to give pleasant satisfaction. It is making no idle boast when we state that no firm in the colonies can approach us in true artistic work.*<sup>94</sup>

The Art furnishing business took on a new character when Lyon followed the example of his distant partner and began to deal in paintings. With the arrival from London in 1882 of forty paintings (sent out from Glasgow by the picture dealer, Craigie Angus) the business emphasis changed slightly. The trading title became, 'Wall Painting, Faience, Art Furniture Manufacturers, Picture Collectors, Church Decorators',<sup>95</sup> paralleling Cottier's businesses in London and New York.

It has been suggested that Cottier was responsible for introducing the Aesthetic Movement to New York<sup>96</sup> just as Lyon was responsible for its introduction in Sydney. Up until the time of opening of his art furnishing business only the large emporiums, possibly only David Jones, was dealing in anything at all in the way of exotic furnishing fabrics and furniture.

By the 1880s news of the Aesthetic Movement in London had reached even the most conservative colonial backwaters. The date given for the introduction of Art furnishing and decoration in Melbourne is 1880. 'Artistic decoration' became the rage in the 1880s. Contemporary commentators dated its first popular appearance to the Melbourne International Exhibition of 1880.<sup>97</sup>

Art furniture and decorations were sought after by all levels of colonial society and understandably the suppliers were keen to oblige. A glance through The Builder and Contractor's News reveals several examples of

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<sup>94</sup> Lyon and Stowe Family Papers, 1880-1936. Mitchell Library, Sydney. Printed advertising brochure.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Mark Girouard, Sweetness and Light, p.210.

<sup>97</sup> Ada Cambridge, Thirty Years in Australia (London: 1903) p.135.

advertising under the banner of the new Art Movement by (formerly plain) businesses anxious to appeal to the 'newly enlightened':

*E.W.Verdich's, Art Furniture works, Darlington Road, Darlington, Artistic Wood Mantels, Church Furniture, Shop, Office and Bar Fittings etc.* <sup>98</sup>

and ,

*Decorative Designer ... Mr Joseland has opened an office similar to like offices in London and other large cities, for the purpose of assisting architects in the preparation of all kinds of high class architectural drawing, and also drawings for the architectural furniture and decoration of buildings. Mr Joseland has considerable experience with Messrs Geo. Trollope and Sons of London.*<sup>99</sup>

#### 6.3.1 W.H.Rocke and Co. in Melbourne

In Melbourne the firm of W.H.Rocke and Co. dominated the Art furnishing scene in much the same way as did Wylie and Lochhead in Edinburgh, offering for sale a wide range of Art furniture, furnishing fabrics and decorative *objets*. The leading decorators, Paterson Brothers, Anderson and Beeler did not venture too far into the domain of furnishing, preferring to work almost uniquely in painted decorations.

By the end of the century Art furnishings were widely available through a considerable number of decorating and furnishing houses. However W.H.Rocke and Co. remained at the forefront of the Art furnishing scene, with offices in Melbourne and London.

At the Centennial Exhibition in Melbourne Rocke and Co. took a pavilion which they decorated in the latest Aesthetic style. One report in an English journal drew a

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<sup>98</sup>The Builder and Contractor's News, June 23, 1888 p.338

<sup>99</sup>Ibid, May 19, 1888. p.332

generous comparison between the work of Roche's on display at the Exhibition and work in the main European centres:

*...praise to the contents of Messrs. Roche's pavilion, the more so because they would bear favourable comparison with the manufactures of the best houses in Britain. Such a collection of colonial art furniture must go a long way to dispel the notion that anything really artistic must come from London or Paris.*<sup>100</sup>

Certainly the viewer would have been hard put to discern between Roche's local manufacture and the more highly acclaimed products from Britain's leading furnishing houses. The furniture featured the same ebonised, gilt and painted surfaces.

Roche's also provided wall and ceiling decorations in adventurous styles, an example of which they presented at the 1880 exhibition in Melbourne.<sup>101</sup> As a result of their efforts to cater to colonial society taste for the latest and best decoration and furnishings, Roche's completed the range of artistic services available in the booming southern metropolis.

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<sup>100</sup>Furniture at the Melbourne Exhibition, The Cabinet Maker, 2 May 1881, p.176.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid. (fig.88).

#### 6.4 Emergence of a National Style

Although it seems extraordinary, given the appeal today of Australia's exotic flora and fauna, the Aesthetic and Art decorations of the 1870s and 80s rarely featured indigenous motifs. Even in the common depictions of the four seasons in stained glass and painted decorations the flowers and trees used to depict the seasons were those of the English landscape. Almost all of the early work of Lyon, Cottier and Co., of the Paterson Brothers, and others, was directly transposed from Britain (*fig.81*).

The quest for an Australian national identity began in earnest at the time of the Centenary in 1888. It was very noticable in the stained glass industry, where the continuing interest in imported English glass was denying local potential. It was argued that Australia should have its own school of glass painting.<sup>102</sup> It was argued that local artists were capable of superior work, being,

*... able to grapple with the differences of our climate from that of European countries [and manipulate the light] to suit the highlights of our colonies.*<sup>103</sup>

The light was different and so too were the flowers, plants and animals. As Federation<sup>104</sup> approached, designers reluctantly broke away from European exemplars and became enthused about the use of Australian themes in decoration. Until then flannel flowers, waratahs and kookaburras remained unpopular motifs to all but a few designers.

John Lyon showed an interest in uniquely Australian features when he depicted native flora and fauna in a glass painting of Captain Cook which he exhibited at the Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition of 1875. However it

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<sup>102</sup>Australasian Builder and Contractors' News, 2 June, 1888, p.37.

<sup>103</sup>Building and Engineering Journal, 9 May, 1891, p.179.

<sup>104</sup>On 1 January 1901 the Australian colonies were federated or combined into one nation.

required another decade to integrate indigenous motifs into the mainstream of his firm's work.

The waratah, quaintly regarded as the native rose, was used by Lyon in a tower window at 'Studley Park', Narellan, where the owner had his coat of arms combined with waratahs in 1888.<sup>105</sup> The distinctive kookaburra was not introduced into Lyon and Cottier's 'four seasons' windows until around 1890. Most of their decorative devices remained European for some time although it must have seemed incongruous to viewers to see kookaburras together with pre-Raphaelite ladies in English landscapes.

Native flora and fauna were slower to be introduced into painted decoration. The reluctance of local designers to tackle new motifs might be explained by the scale of detail required with painted decorations. In stained glass the viewer was normally close, enabling designers to paint detailed literal interpretations of small birds or flowers. However, in large rooms, where a frieze and ceiling decorations could be some distance from the viewer, a more stylised approach was necessary. Notwithstanding, the waratah was found to be an ideal motif for decorative design, particularly in features such as deep friezes. Lyon, Cottier and Co. were possibly amongst the earliest to use it in this way, in the Surveyor General's office, in Sydney around 1890.

The waratah, the most representative Australian flower, developed a unique design appeal, being vivid red in colour with contrasting grey green leaves and nearly spherical in shape. It worked as a design motif in a similar way to the pomegranate and the classical palmette. The waratah was eminently suitable for repetitive designs of strong colour. It became a highly useful device in the Art Nouveau-inspired designs of the Federation period.

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<sup>105</sup> Australasian Builder and Contractors' News, 20 July, 1889, p.56.

#### 6.4.1 Lucien Henry

Ironically it was a French-born designer, Lucien Henry,<sup>106</sup> who did more than any other to integrate native wildflowers into Australian decorative art. As Lecturer in Art at the Sydney Technical College<sup>107</sup> during the 1880s and 1890s he encouraged his students to respond to nature as a source of ideas. He sought the creation of a school of Australian Decorative Arts.<sup>108</sup>

Henry had received a formal art training in Paris at the *Ecole des Beaux Arts*. He arrived in Sydney from New Caledonia in the late 1870s after serving a prison sentence for political activities in the Paris Commune of 1871.

Upon arriving in Sydney he was immediately engaged to judge several of the arts exhibited in the Sydney International Exhibition held in the Garden Palace in 1879. He joined the Art Society of New South Wales and became a regular exhibitor. His oil paintings and watercolours took as their subject the Australian landscape and flora, particularly the waratah.

Through his teaching at the Sydney Technical College, and his art, Henry encouraged the adoption of native wildflowers and animals as the basis for a new national style in the decorative arts. He wrote:

*They (connoisseurs) may say what they like, and pass their own judgements on the Australian flora and fauna, which do not appear to convey much significance to them. According to their dictum the flowers have no perfume, the waratah is brutal in form and colour, the banksia is stiff, prickly and like an egret, the stenocarpus belongs*

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<sup>106</sup>Lucien Henry (1850-1896) French painter, sculptor and teacher who worked in Sydney c.1878-91.

<sup>107</sup>'Australian Flora in Art', Technical Education Gazette, No.24 (n.d.)

<sup>108</sup>To promote his idea Henry unsuccessfully sought to publish by subscription a pattern book for architects and craftsmen on 'Australian Decorative Arts'.



*to engineering and gives a splendid idea of an unsuccessful attempt at perpetual motion, the kangaroo is stupid and a pest; as for the lyre bird, a bad pun with some illusion to pressmen or politicians and it is dealt with. The word prejudice is far too weak to characterise the feelings entertained towards Australian elements, and it still requires long years of hard and patient work to introduce them into the Decorative Arts.*<sup>109</sup>

To promote his views Henry proposed a pattern book<sup>110</sup> for architects and craftsmen to illustrate the ways in which Australian flora could be incorporated into the decorative arts. The colour plates prepared by Henry for the unpublished book<sup>111</sup> included suggestions for painted decorations based on the waratah and other distinctive Australian flora (*fig.83*).

Henry proposed a scheme of decoration based on native flora for the Australian Museum in Sydney. The proposal would have done much to promote the use of indigenous decorative design models if it had proceeded. Unfortunately, like most of Henry's proposals, this did not proceed, thus denying him of a valuable opportunity to promote his ideal artform and also delaying for a little longer an important public showing of an Australian inspired decorative scheme.

One of few schemes realised by Henry, and probably the best known of his works, is the pair of stained-glass windows he designed for the Sydney Town Hall to commemorate the centenary of New South Wales.<sup>112</sup> The subjects, depicting symbolic representations of 'Captain Cook' and 'Australia', are surrounded by quarries of native flowers. The principal features of his decorative

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<sup>109</sup>Australian Art, 1889.

<sup>110</sup>The book was to have been entitled, Australian Decorative Arts. It was to include fifty full page polychrome plates.

<sup>111</sup>The unused colour plates passed into the collection of the Sydney Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences which developed from Sydney Technical College in the 1890s. They remained uncatalogued until rediscovered in 1977.

<sup>112</sup>In the last years of his term in Sydney, Henry designed for the Manufacturers, Goodlet and Smith, who made up the two huge windows which were installed above the stairways leading to the first floor galleries.

art ideal can be studied in their composition. The use of vivid reds and blues which give the windows a strong chromatic value is a particularly striking feature of most of his design work.<sup>113</sup> The vividly coloured waratah was essential to the designs.

The waratah became Henry's '*cause celebre*'. When he returned to France in 1891 he published the Legend of the Waratah, a book dedicated to a former pupil and teacher at the East Sydney Technical College. He died in France in 1896, when Australia was on the verge of nationhood.

#### 6.4.2 Phil Goatcher

Phil Goatcher<sup>114</sup> was a theatre set designer and illustrator before coming into the employ of Ernest Wunderlich, manufacturer of pressed sheet metal for internal and external decorative work.<sup>115</sup>

The Wunderlich brothers<sup>116</sup> promoted the use of Australian flora in decoration through the designs of their stamped metal products. This new manufacturing process for pressed metal, which commenced in 1886, had assumed the proportions of a major industry when, in 1895 Wunderlichs employed Phil. W. Goatcher to work for them full time on the production of designs for their manufactures. Goatcher's role was to produce modern designs for the full range of metal products which, up to that time had been designed in Germany and turned out on German-made machinery in Sydney. He played a key role in introducing high artistic standards to the stamped metal products for interior decoration.

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<sup>113</sup>Over sixty coloured plates for Henry's unpublished manual survive to illustrate his intentions in the use of colour.

<sup>114</sup>Phil Goatcher (c.1860-c.1931) English designer. Arrived in Sydney c.1888.

<sup>115</sup>Ernst Wunderlich (1859-c.1940) arrived in Sydney 1885 from London to start business as an agent for European manufacturers. Established manufacturing processes in Sydney in 1887.

<sup>116</sup>Ernest, Alfred (b.1865) and Otto (b.1861) each born in London and united in business in Sydney.

An exotic scheme which he produced early in his career is the interior decoration of the Palace Theatre in Sydney. The entire scheme of elaborate Indian ornamentation was carried out in embossed metal which he designed and decorated. The effect of the decoration was similar to some of the theatre interiors in London created by firms like Campbell Smith and Liberty's.

Although Goatcher's work was principally involved with the design of pressed metal he is also credited with the painted decorations in Singer's Melbourne showroom,<sup>117</sup> a very traditional scheme of mostly freehand painting onto plaster. These decorations, in the style of the French Baroque, include a painted ceiling of billowing clouds and floating goddess in a subtle palette of soft blues, pinks, creams and greens (*fig.85*). When this is compared with Goatcher's other works it suggests he possessed a versatility which probably came from his association with the theatre.

One of Goatcher's best known works, the decoration in painted metal of the Singer showroom in the Queen Victoria building in Sydney,<sup>118</sup> is a very theatrical scheme involving the use of many exotic eastern details to create the *ambience* of an eastern bazaar. This was achieved through the use of wall and ceiling panels stamped with interlaced Moresque designs. These were highlighted by the use of primary and secondary colours which featured in Moresque architecture (*figs 86&87*).

The architectural character of this scheme was assured by the use of the deeper colours on the dado and frieze. Where the pressed metal patterns lacked adequate or specific relief for the sought-after effect Goatcher stencilled over the patterns with his preferred treatment. This unusual technique appears to be unique to Goatcher's work.

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<sup>117</sup>The Showroom of the Singer Sewing Machine Co. in Melbourne occupied a corner shop in the City Block Arcade. It was decorated by Goatcher in 1889.

<sup>118</sup>The shop in the prominent north eastern corner of the Queen Victoria Building was decorated for Singer by Goatcher in 1891.

As the first Australian designer of pressed metal Goatcher worked to produce designs which responded to both the emerging nationalism and the Art Nouveau, a style to which naturalistic Australian plant forms adapted readily. The introduction was slow. In 1905 the Wunderlich catalogue was still 'announcing' the option to eliminate antiquated designs in favour of the most modern Art designs originated by 'Australian artists in Australia'.<sup>119</sup> Although many of the new Art designs were based on native wildflowers their forms are so stylised that they are often mistaken for European Art Nouveau designs.

Goatcher was a skilled colourist. His second significant contribution to the art of decoration in metal was the production of colour schemes for pressed metal. His coloured design proposals were published in response to a problem which Wunderlich described as;

*the frequency with which the aesthetic efforts of our skilled designers have been marred ... by the unsightly colouring of incompetent house-painters styling themselves decorators.*<sup>120</sup>

The coloured designs which Goatcher produced are all relatively subdued. They are based on the use of soft greens, blues, pinks and creams - all safe compositions suitable for use by non-trade painters. Pressed metal was a material which was well suited for use by unskilled fixers and those with minimal artistic skills. It was both appropriate and far-sighted of Wunderlich and Goatcher to produce a safe range of decorative options which would have wide appeal. Judging from the surviving evidence they were successful in their aims.

The work of Goatcher in association with Wunderlich's has endured beyond even their own expectations. Their designs

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<sup>119</sup> Wunderlich catalogue, 1905. In the uncertain period leading up to World War I the Wunderlichs worked hard to reassure their clients that they were devoted to Australia and its Nationalism.

<sup>120</sup> 'The Wunderlich Story', Vogue Living, December 1981, pp. 64-5.

in relief have remained intact and prominent in many situations. In addition to this the designers of fibrous plaster, which overtook the production and use of pressed metal in the first half of the twentieth century, followed Wunderlich's lead in the selection of their patterns, incorporating floral motifs like the Australian flannel flower into a high proportion of their work.

#### 6.4.3 **Federation**

The period leading up to, and following on from, the adoption of the Australian Federal Constitution, in 1901, is known as the Federation period. The term 'Federation' has been recently introduced to describe the architecture and design of the period of nationalistic awakening between 1890 and 1920.

The Federation style spanned the periods of the reign of Edward VII, the Glasgow style, the Art Nouveau period, the late Queen Anne and , most importantly, the federation of the Australian states. Federation design incorporates features from the mainstream design styles of the period and it prominently features the uniquely Australian flora and fauna in the decoration of interiors and some external elements.

Federation domestic architecture incorporates a high degree of timber detailing borrowed from the Californian bungalow. The interiors of buildings in the Federation style featured a moderate amount of decorative detailing, usually incorporating wallpaper, painted friezes, timber fretwork, or even metal and glass electroliers, based on the forms of European or Australian flora. For the most part Federation interiors did not feature significant quantities of coloured paintwork or decorations.

The pages of The Australasian Decorator and Painter, a monthly journal which first appeared in 1905, provides a

record of the reluctant introduction of indigenous designs. In the first issue there was a brief article on the subject of Australian flowers in design:

*The field which the flora and fauna of Australia offers the designer in search of new forms as a basis for design has often been the subject of comment... Artists have frequently given realistic representations of Australian flowers; architects and decorators have followed suit, but none have yet done full justice to the possibilities they offer for purposes of design...Of all Australian flowers the Waratah and Flannel Flower have been the most frequently drawn and painted...<sup>121</sup>*

But conventional designs, based on classical motifs, outweighed the indigenous designs throughout the period. Clearly there was resistance to the direction proposed by Lucien Henry and the proponents of the Australian version. An article specially written for the second issue of The Australasian Decorator and Painter appeared to deliberately ignore the very existence of indigenous flora and fauna:

*Today we delight to introduce some natural object, perhaps a peacock or windmill or a rose, so that the mind of the observer may be carried away to some pleasing surroundings through the medium of art. Absolutely no limit is placed by custom upon the theme of the design, but the most inflexible rules have now asserted themselves as to where the designs must be placed.*

*We are suffering from the domination of the frieze.<sup>122</sup>*

Of course there was legitimate concern about the dominance of the frieze since the painted dado had already disappeared from many interiors, to be replaced by timber panelling, which was often plain. Decorative wall fillings also disappeared, leaving the frieze as the only surviving

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<sup>121</sup>'Australian Flowers in Design', The Australasian Decorator and Painter, 1 October 1905. p.5.

<sup>122</sup>Blamire Young, 'Interior Decoration', The Australasian Decorator and Painter, December 1, 1905. Pp. 49-50.

element of a balanced arrangement. Thus a highly decorated frieze which lacked the balance of an accompanying decorated dado and wall would look strangely isolated.

The use of pressed metal dadoes and wall fillings partially resolved the problem. However concentration of a small amount of decorative painting in the area of the frieze was a feature of a large number of Federation interiors.

Viewers of the Federation style today are delighted by the use of native decorative forms. The knowledge that these made up only a small proportion of examples of the period has been lost for, although there had been a great deal of rhetoric about nationalism at the time, this did not translate into a significant legacy of Australian inspired decorative art. The wonderful examples by Lucien Henry<sup>123</sup> were exceptional.

The Federation style was a transition style. Like the Glasgow style, it marked the end of vigorous and boldly combined patterns and colours which characterised Art interiors, and it preceded the rejection of colours and patterns in modern interior design. By contrast the colonial revival of the late 1920s in Australia was characterised by a misinformed use<sup>124</sup> of white paintwork on all surfaces.

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<sup>123</sup>In 1977 over sixty uncatalogued water colours and drawings by Lucien Henry were discovered at the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences. These have featured in several recently published articles on Australian design.

<sup>124</sup>The use of white paint was inspired by knowledge of the widespread use of whitewash on utilitarian colonial structures.

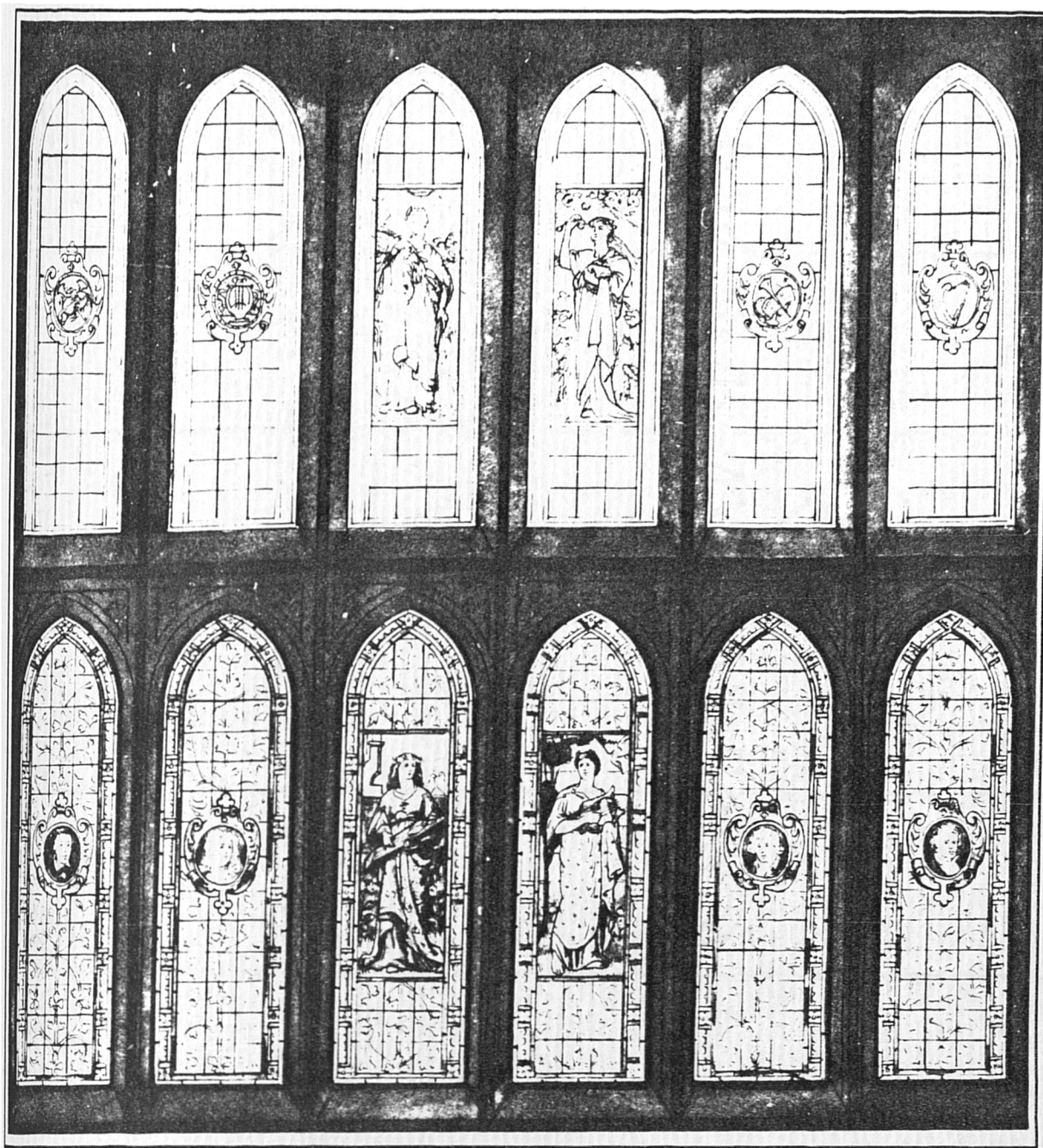
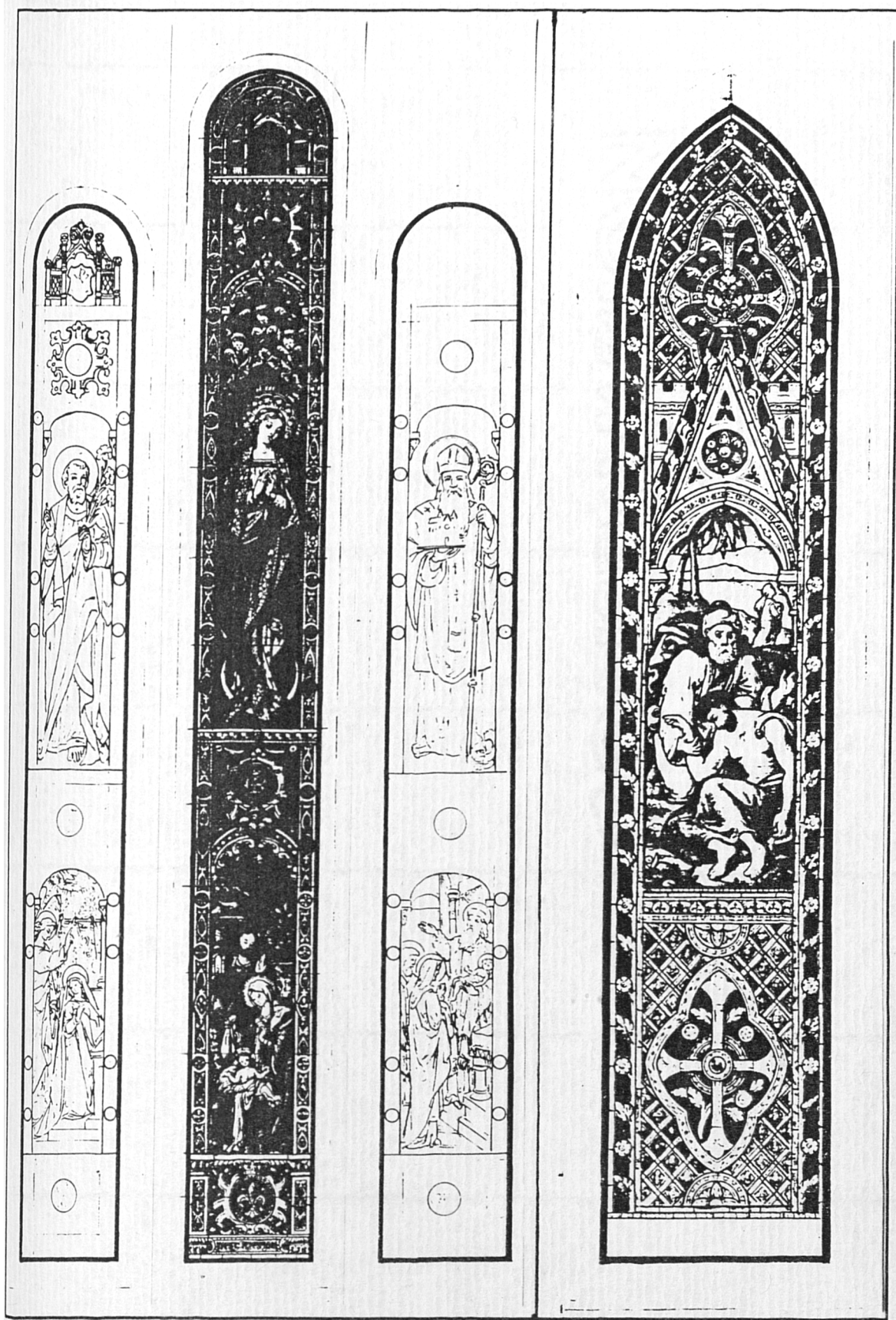


Fig. 60

Design by John Lyon for stained glass in the Music Room of Mr Miles' Residence, Sydney, circa 1875. The style of the portraits is one that Lyon retained throughout his career. The pre-Raphaelite figures representing the Four Seasons derive from Daniel Cottier via Lyon's young assistants who had trained with Cottier. Source: Mitchell Library, Sydney.





Figs 61 and 62

Designs by John Lamb Lyon for church windows, circa 1880. The figures are in the Gothic style of painting which Lyon learned during his apprenticeship and perfected during his career. Source: Mitchell Library, Sydney.

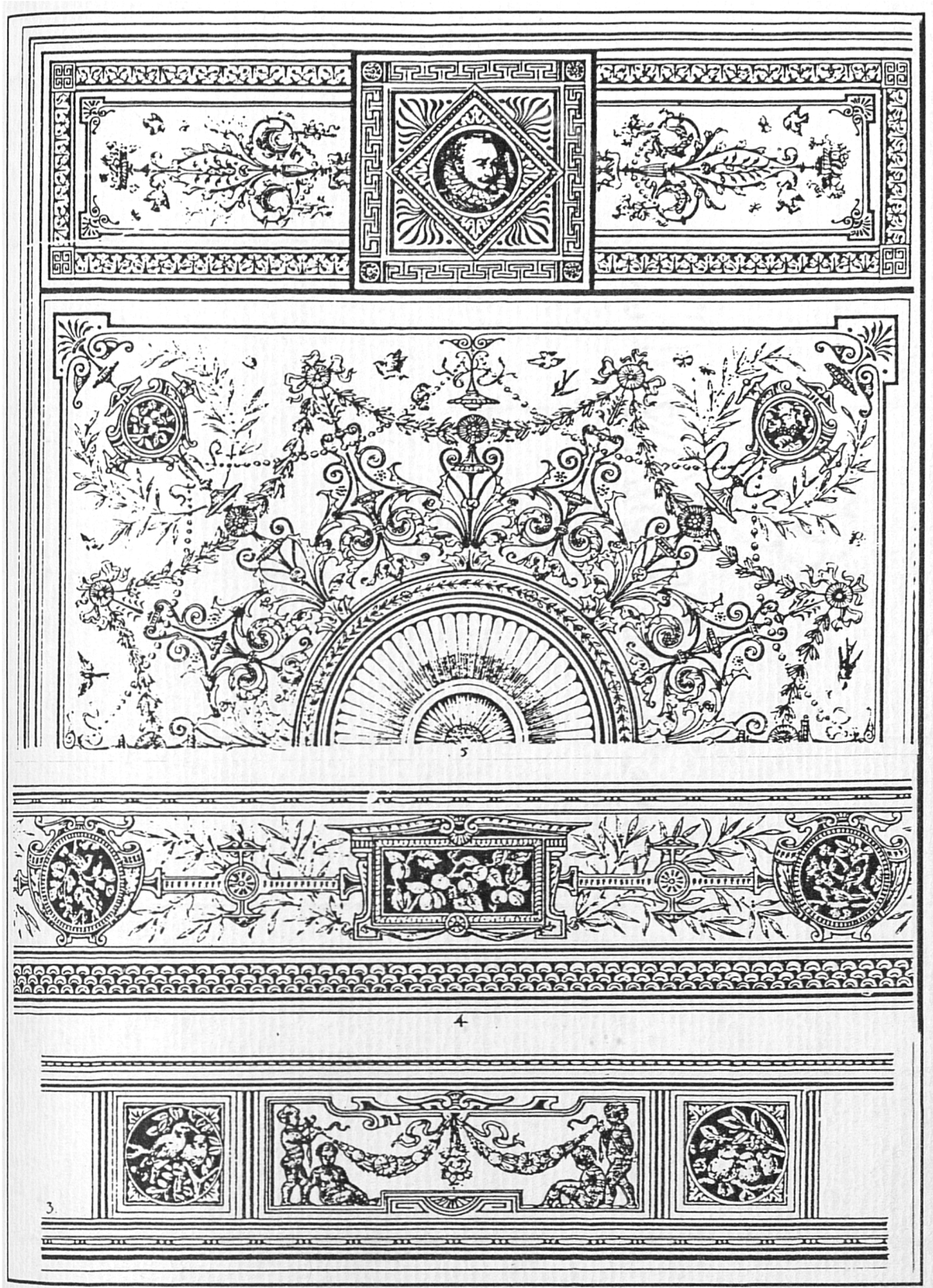


Fig. 63  
 Plate from J. Moyr Smith's journal, *Decoration*, September 1885, Titled, 'Mr Pearce's House, Glasgow, decorated by Andrew Wells'. The two illustrations for ceiling decorations show arrangements and motifs which were directly introduced into Wells' designs in Sydney.

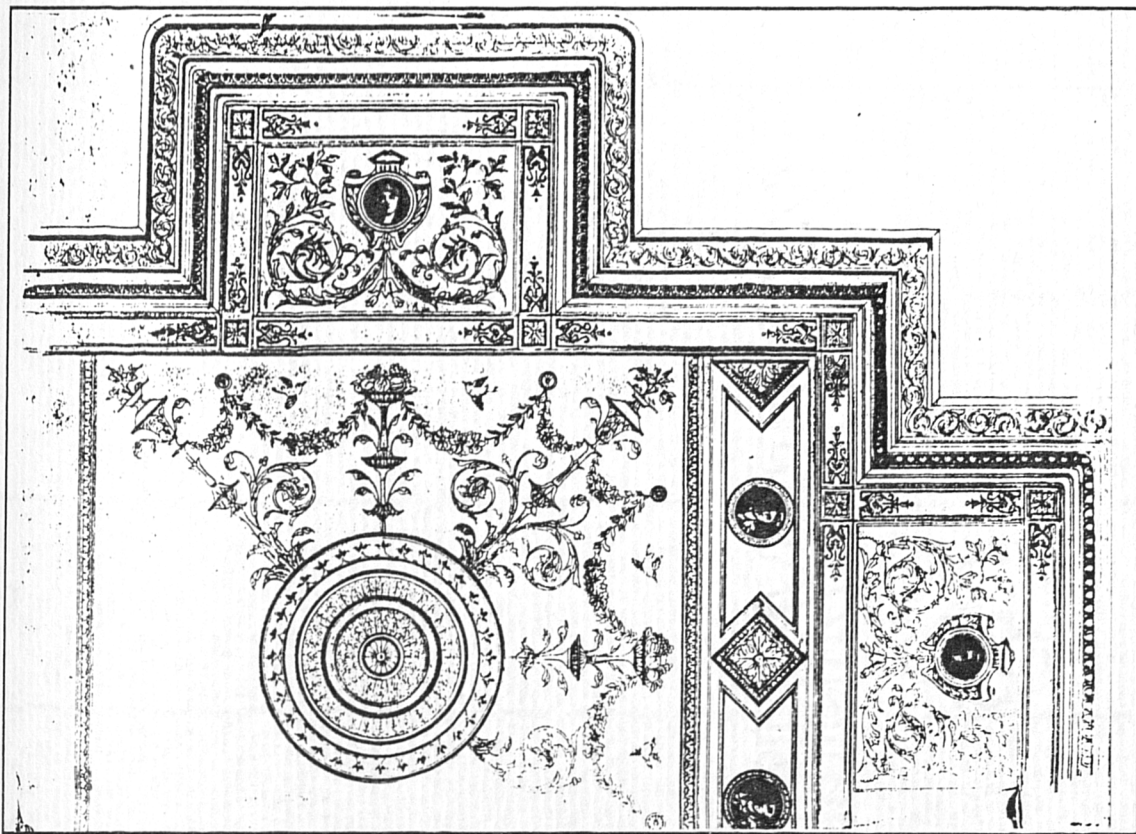


Fig. 64

Design by Lyon, Wells, Cottier and Co. believed to be an example of Andrew Wells's work, circa 1890. Source: Mitchell Library, Sydney.

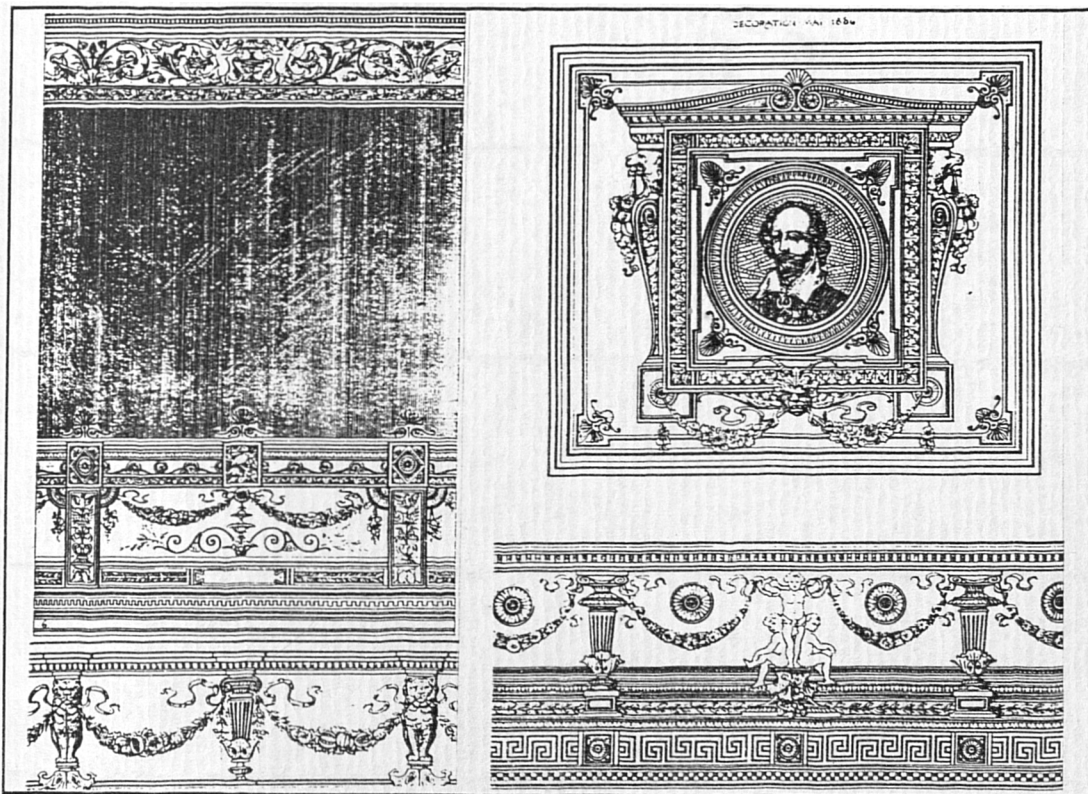


Fig. 65

Wall decorations by Andrew Wells in Mr Pearce's House, Glasgow, 1885. Source: Decoration, September 1885 and May 1886.



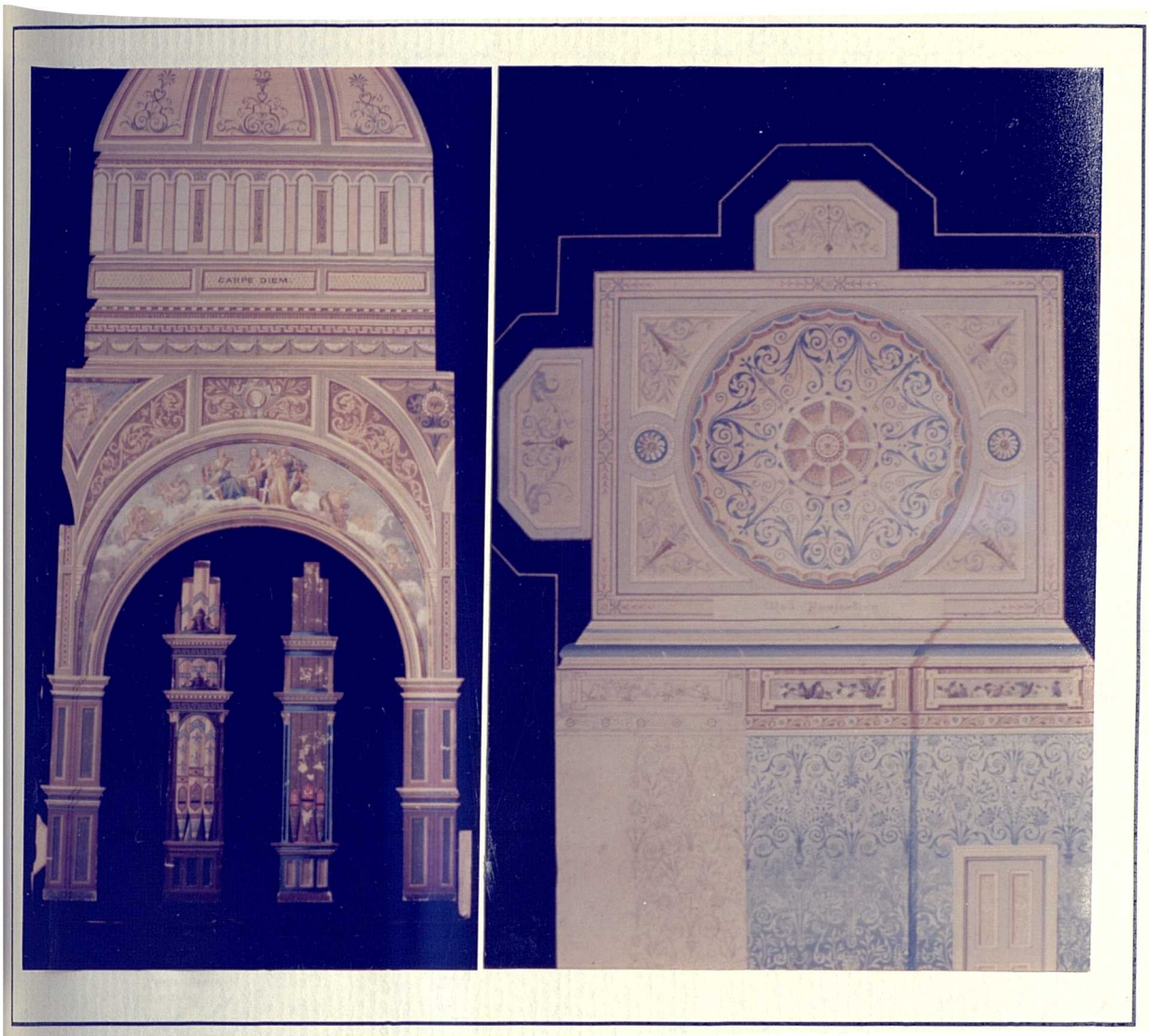


Fig. 68

Design by J. Ross Anderson for the decoration of the Melbourne Exhibition Building for the Opening of the Australian Parliament in 1901.

Fig. 69

Design by J. Ross Anderson for a best bedroom, using the effect of stencils in graduating tint to create the appearance of silk damask.



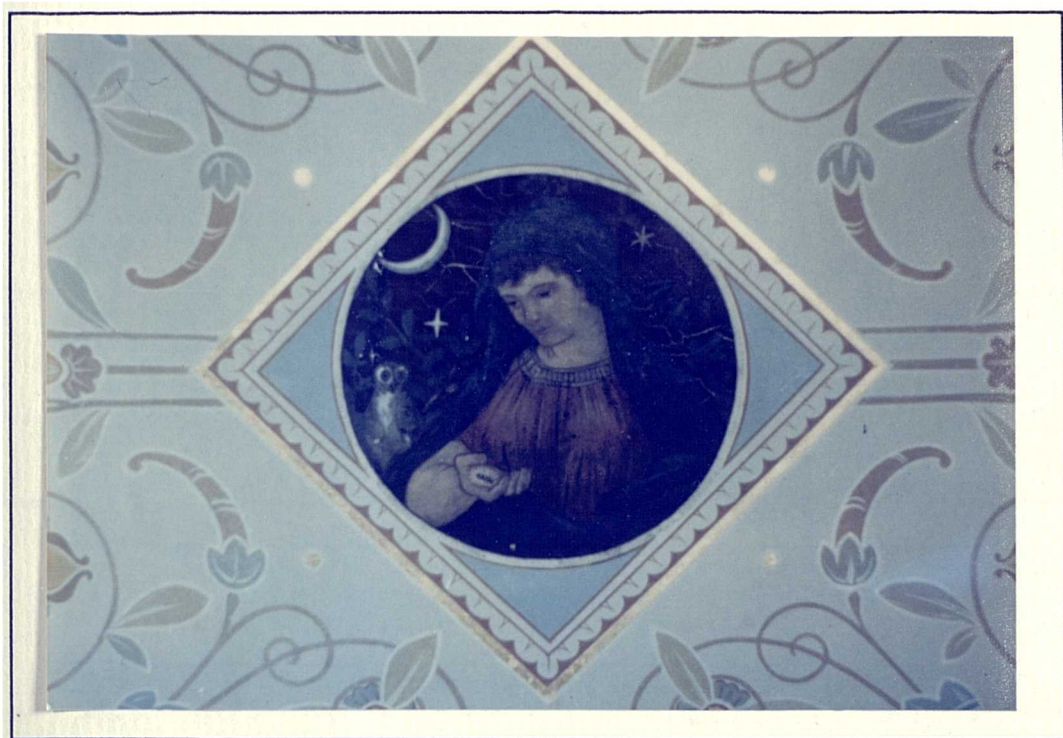


Fig. 70  
Ceiling decorations by Lyon, Cottier and Co. in the Drawing-Room, Government House Sydney, 1878, featuring Aesthetic figures representing the seasons.

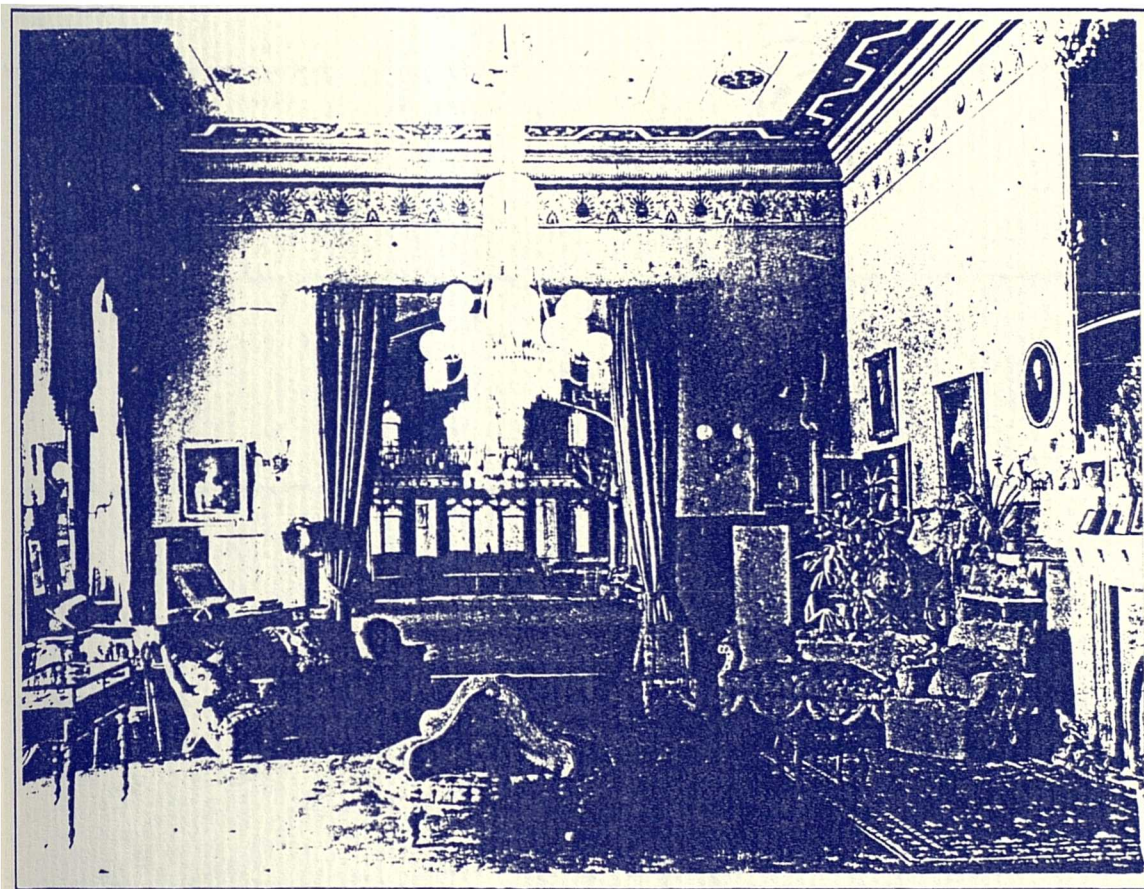


Fig. 71  
View of Government House Drawing Room in 1901. The scheme of decorations in mainly green tones is constructed around the crimson carpets and upholstery.  
Source: NSW Government Printer's Office.





Fig. 72

Detail of painted decorations by Lyon, Cottier and Co. (1878) uncovered during renovation work in the upstairs drawing-room of Government House, Sydney. A cream wall treatment powdered with gold medallions, framed by soft emerald borders with emerald and gold stencils.



Fig. 73

Detail of the circa 1880 scheme of decorations by Lyon, Cottier and Co. in the Assembly Chamber of Parliament House, Sydney. The detail of the ceiling border was preserved under a section of false ceiling introduced in 1904.

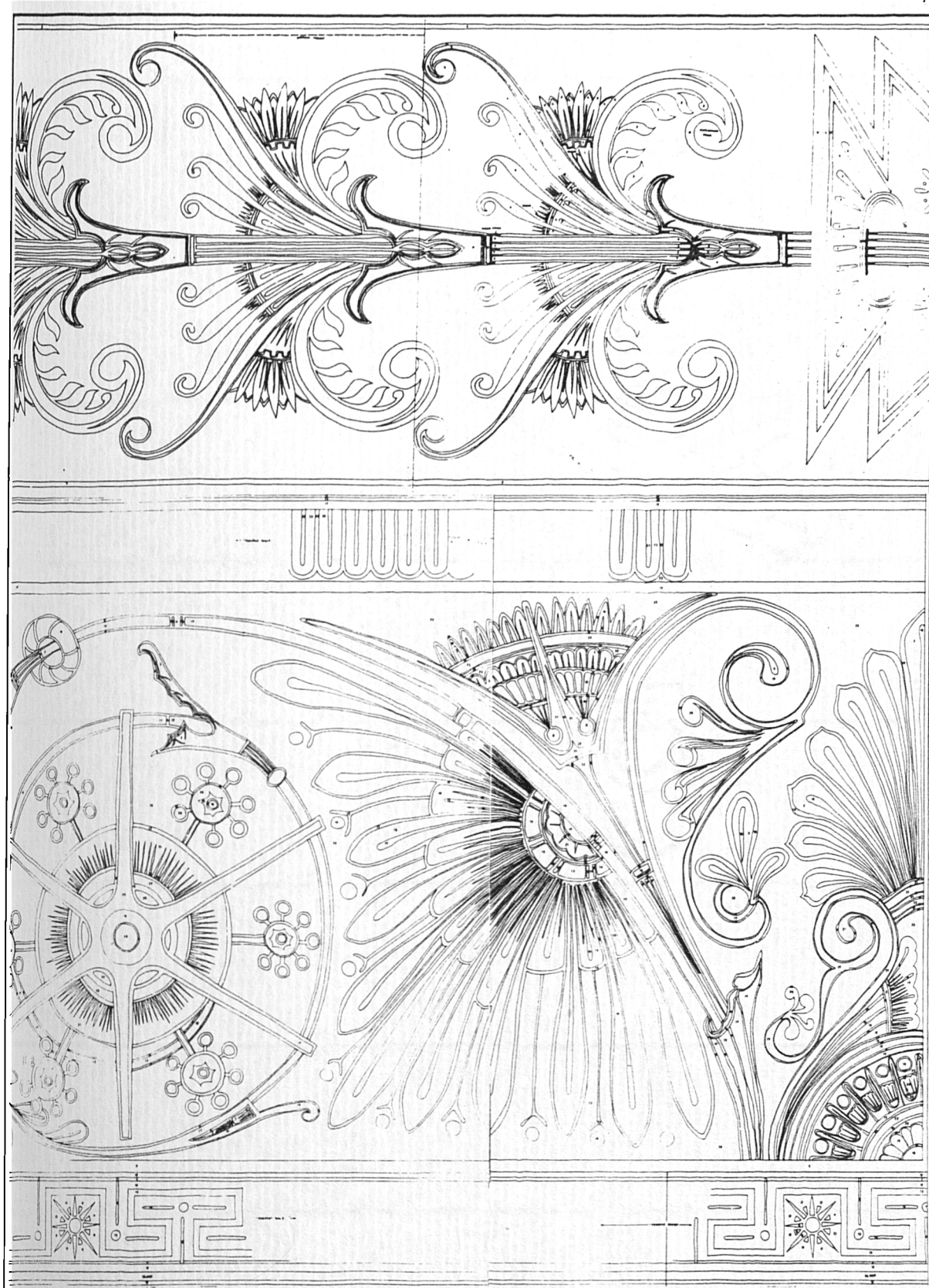


Fig. 74

Record drawings by NSW Public Works Department of the decorations by Walter Renny and Lyon, Cottier and Company in the Lobby of Parliament House, Sydney, 1860 and circa 1880. The collage of decorative motifs illustrates the influence of Daniel Cottier and Alexander Thomson in the Egyptian inspired details which were added to Renny's simple classical running borders.



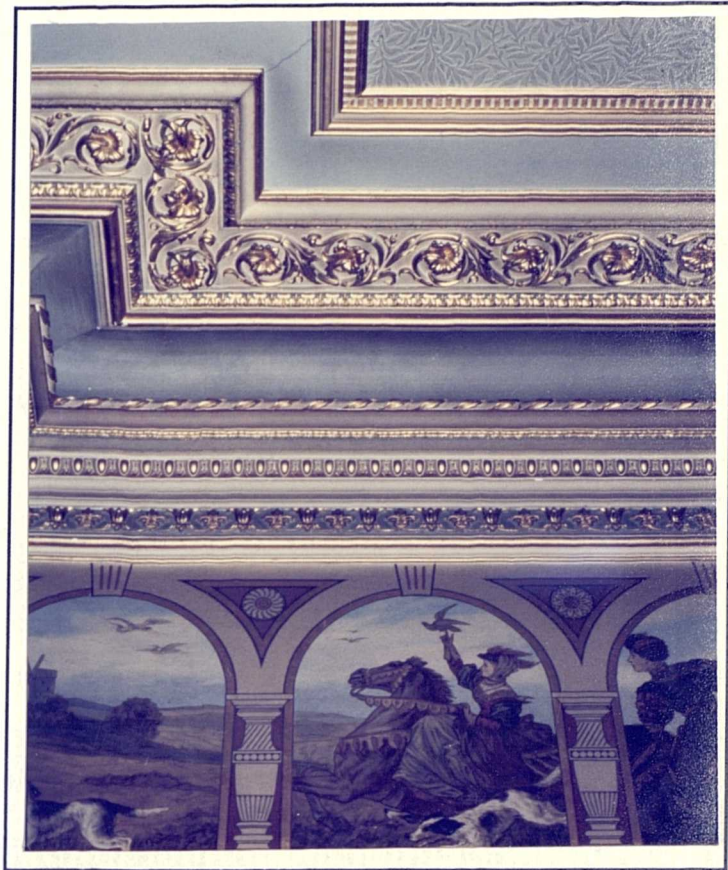


Fig. 75

Detail of the ceiling and frieze of the dining-room at Manderville Hall, Melbourne, decorated by Gillows, 1876. The style is not significantly different from the work of the Scottish decorators such as the Patersons.



Fig. 76

Detail of the ceiling decorations in the library of Parliament House, Melbourne, decorated by the Paterson Brothers, 1882. The colourwork is a rich embellishment of the restrained classical architectural detail.





Fig. 77  
View of the interior of the Garden Palace, Sydney, looking along the nave towards the grand organ. Source: NSW Government Printer's Office.

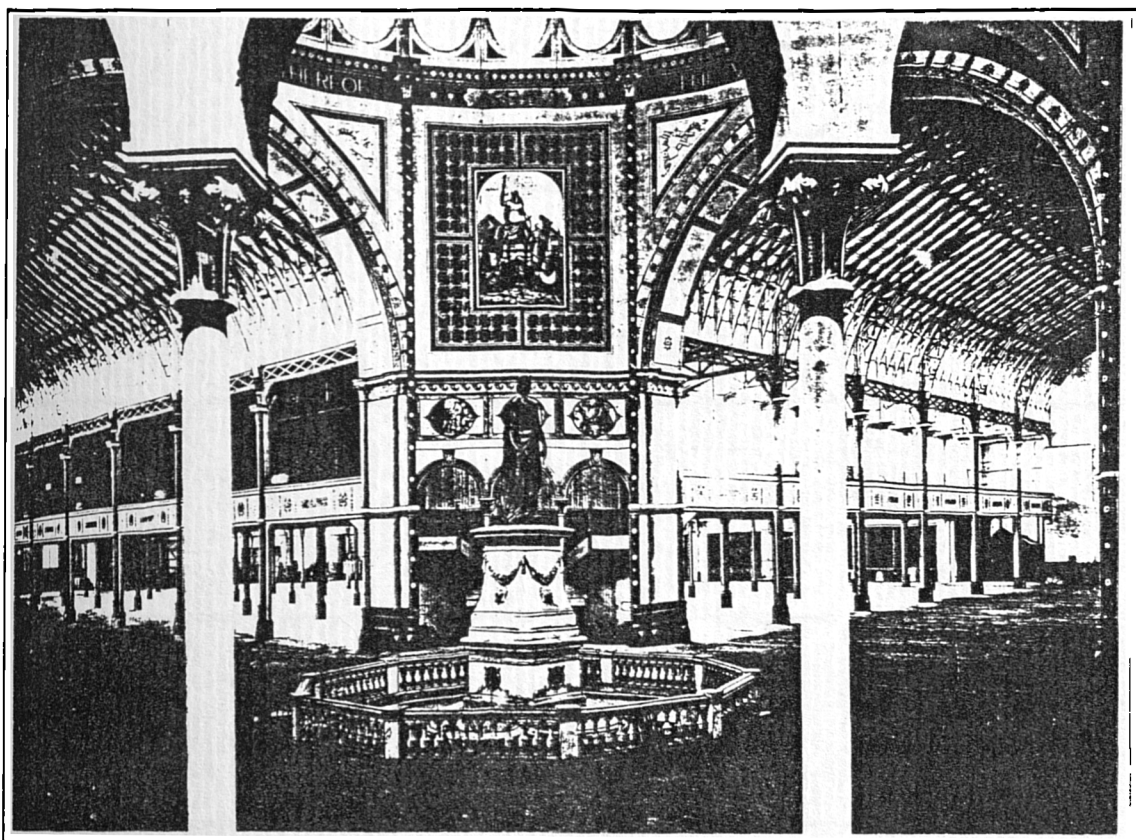


Fig. 78  
View of the crossing under the dome of the Garden Palace exhibition building, 1879. The decorations are similar to those in Government House and 'Cranbrook'.

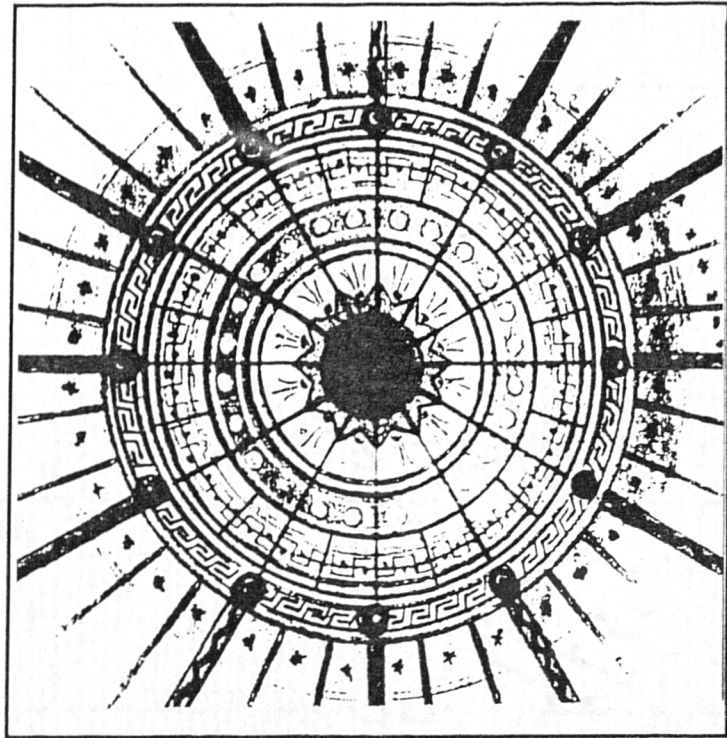


Fig. 79  
Scheme for painted decorations to the lantern of the Exhibition Building, Sydney, 1879 by Lyon, Cottier and Co. Source: Mitchell Library, Sydney.

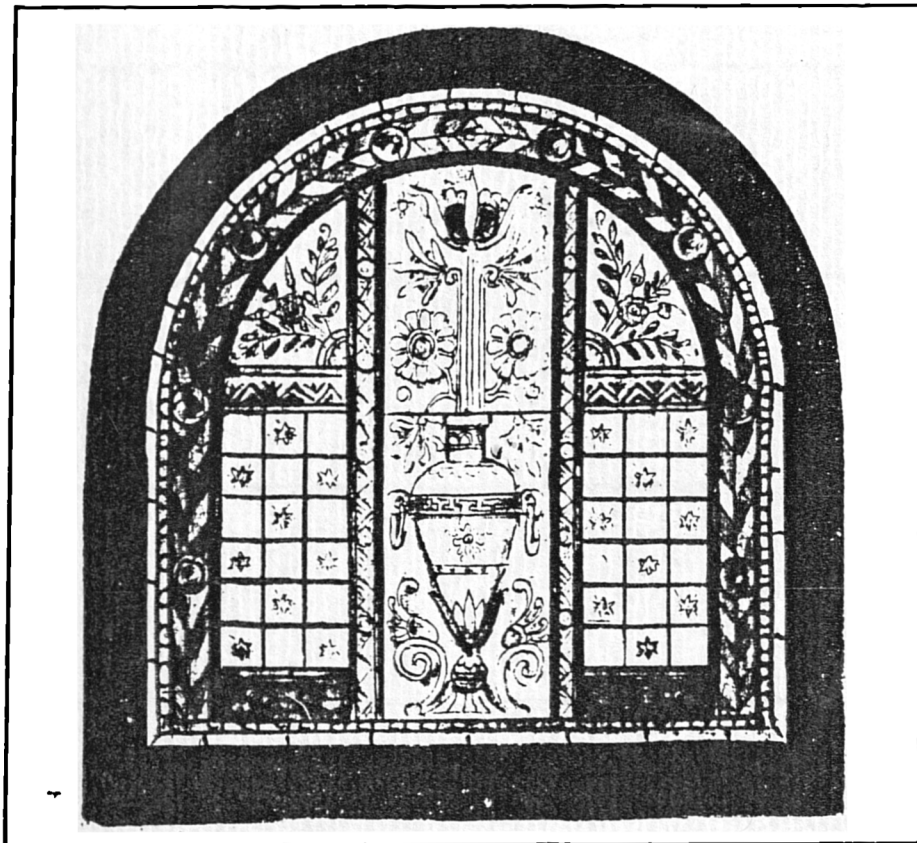


Fig. 80  
Design by Lyon, Cottier and Co (n.d.) for stained glass windows incorporating both the familiar European design motifs and the Australian Waratah. Source: Mitchell Library, Sydney.

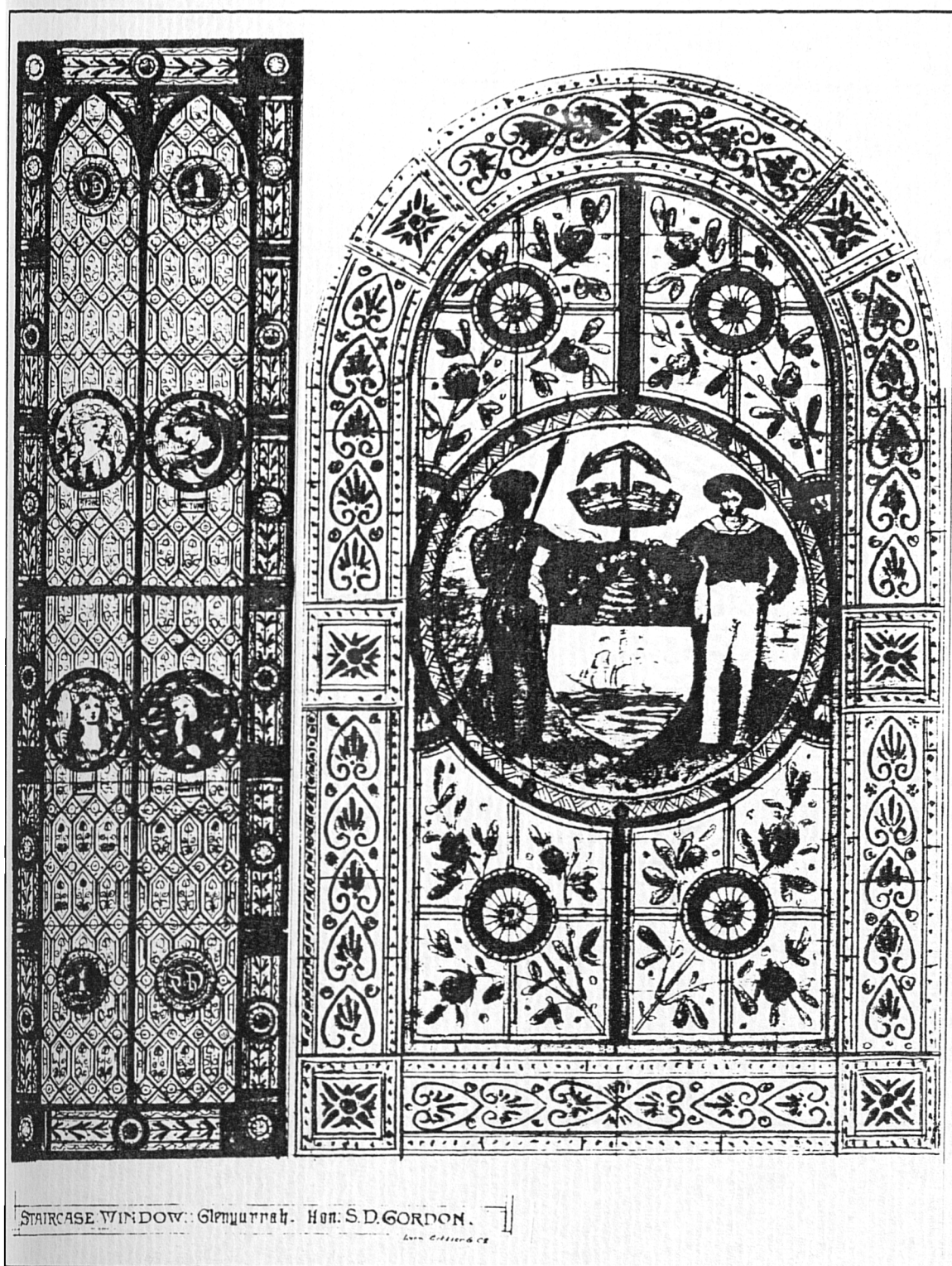


Fig. 81

Design by Lyon, Cottier and Co. in stained glass featuring the Four Seasons, (circa 1875). The figures, painted in the Aesthetic style, are set against a backdrop of familiar European landscape. Source: Mitchell Library, Sydney.

Fig. 82

Unexecuted design by Lyon, Cottier and Co. for stained glass in the Town Hall, Sydney, featuring an Australian aborigine. The figures are bordered by classical motifs and the Australian waratah. Source: Mitchell Library, Sydney.





Fig. 83

Design by Lucien Henry for a dado featuring the Australian waratah, (c.1890). Source: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

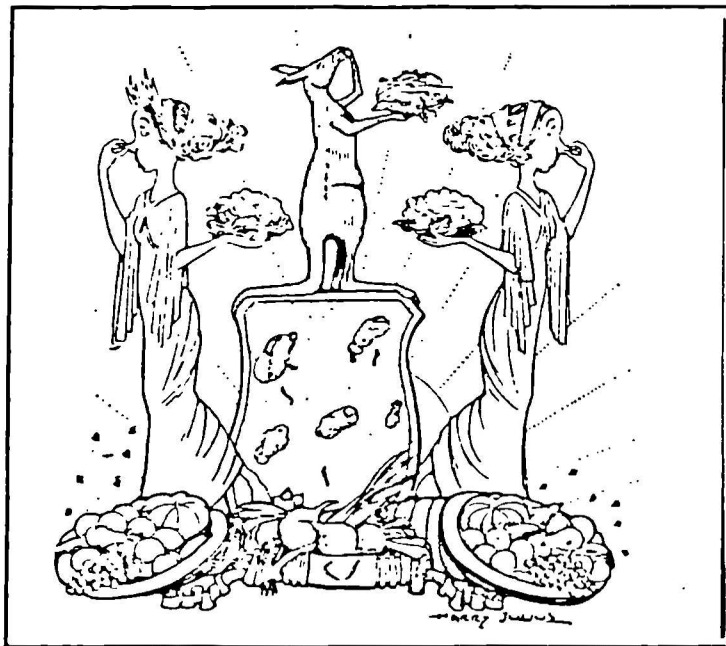


Fig. 84

Proposal by a NSW humorist for a coat of arms for Victoria, produced in 1910 when Sydney merchants were denouncing Victorian produce. *The Australasian Decorator and Painter*, 1 October 1910.



Fig. 85  
Detail of painted decorations by Phil Goatcher in the Singer Showroom,  
Melbourne, 1889. The style is traditionally classical.



Fig. 86  
Detail of painted pressed metal by Phil Goatcher in the Singer Showroom,  
Sydney, 1891. The relief patterns are stencilled to enrich the effect.



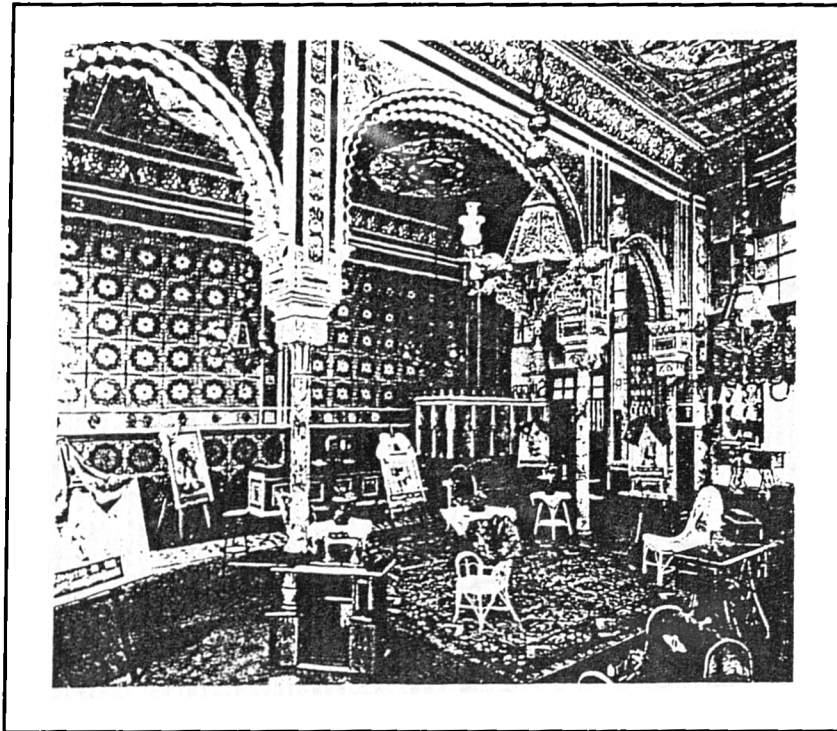


Fig. 87  
The Singer showroom, Queen Victoria Building, Sydney, decorated by Phil Goatcher (circa 1891). Source: Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

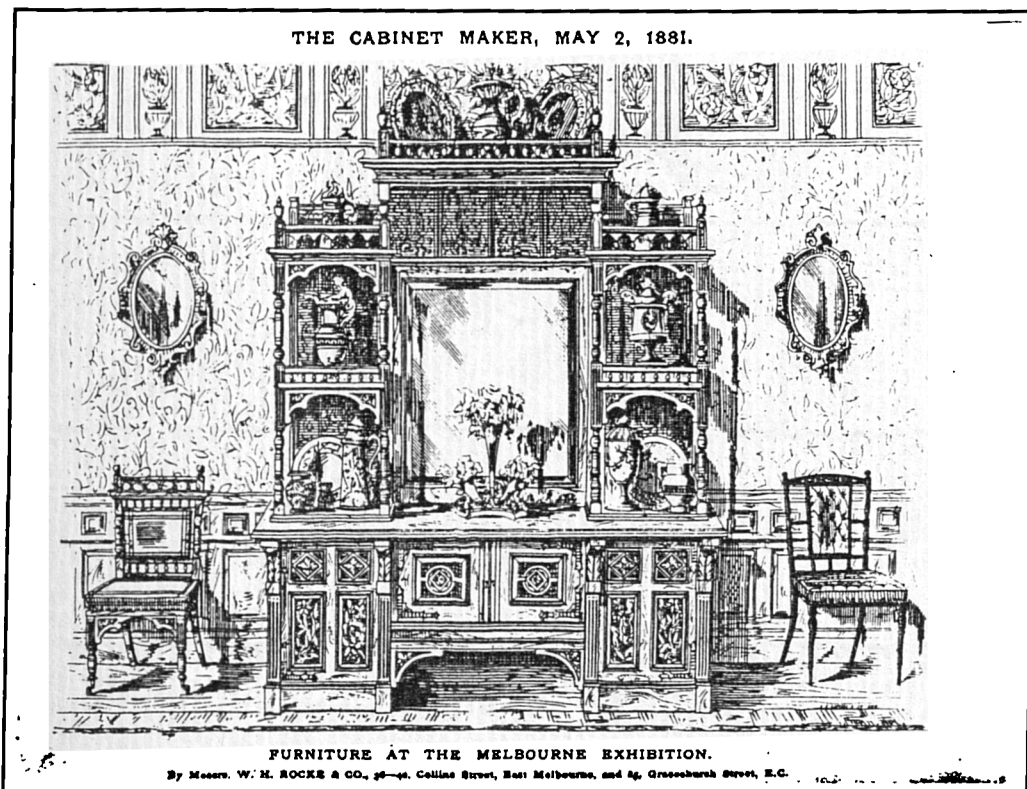


Fig. 88  
An Aesthetic arrangement of furniture and decorations by W.H. Rocke and Co. at the Melbourne Exhibition. The cabinetwork in ebonised wood relieved with gold and Thuya wood is ranged against a wall diapered in lavender with a floral frieze. *The Cabinet Maker*, 2 May 1881.

## PART THREE

### SIGNIFICANCE AND CONSERVATION

#### CHAPTER 7 SIGNIFICANCE OF PAINTED DECORATIONS

##### 7.1 Renaissance of Decorative Painting

The foregoing review of the social and historical developments relevant to the decorative arts and artistic painting in Britain and Australia in the nineteenth century establishes a context for the assessment of the significance of painted decorations. Without a clear understanding of that significance any proposals for conservation could be fundamentally flawed, resulting in the destruction of individual items of significance.

Conversely, by careful analysis of the cultural context of painted decorations it will be possible to confirm the significance of the artform and of individual examples, leading to the development of an appropriate methodology for conservation.

Some writers have adopted the term 'Renaissance' to describe the re-introduction of artistic painting to building interiors of all classes in Britain in the nineteenth century. The editor of the Journal of Decorative Art attributed this renaissance to the impact of the Great Exhibition.

*The Great Exhibition of 1851 gave such a stimulus to the revival of decorative art in England that it may, with some truth, be called the origin of the English Renaissance. After this date the decorative arts seemed, and in fact did, make a sudden leap from darkness into light.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Journal of Decorative Art, Vol I, January 1881, p.1.

It has been noted however that decorative painting had been revived at least two decades earlier by D.R. Hay in Scotland; whereas in England, A.W.N. Pugin had laid the foundations for the all-important Gothic Revival with the publication of his findings and opinions on authentic mediaeval decoration and his many church decorating commissions; but most notably for his achievements in the decoration of the new Houses of Parliament. The preceding chapter on Early Victorian developments attempted to convey a clear understanding of the rich tradition in decorative painting which developed around the work of such near contemporaries as Willement, Jones, Hay and Pugin. The revival of stained glass as a decorative medium for all classes of buildings was also vital to the renaissance of colour.

The fact that there was a renaissance is now recognised by all who have reflected on the amazing artistic production of the last century. It could be observed in all the major centres as well as many isolated pockets of affluence and culture throughout the British Empire.

Edinburgh, Glasgow, London, New York, Sydney and Melbourne were major centres of artistic achievement, each with its own distinctive character deriving from the peculiar circumstances of its wealth and the artists who operated there. Manchester, Liverpool and some other major centres were certainly not isolated from the effects of this revival but they remain largely outside the scope of this study.

At the time that Charles Eastlake was making his important contribution to deliberations on the approach to the decoration of the new Houses of Parliament in Westminster,<sup>2</sup> he was certainly not ignorant of the

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<sup>2</sup>Great Britain and Ireland Commissioners of the Fine Arts Select Committee. See letters written by Sir Charles Eastlake, PRA, as secretary to the Royal Commission, 1840-1861, National Art Library, London.



decorative work of the Adams, the Craces, Hay or Pugin but he, nevertheless, agreed that the subject of the decoration of buildings; whether private or public, had been hitherto neglected. He conceded that everyone was becoming alive to its importance and that this was reflected in formal teaching and the very establishment of the Houses of Parliament Committee.<sup>3</sup> For his own part he had decorated the house of his friend, Harvey Bellenden Ker, M.P. in Regent's Park with arabesque and figurative decoration as an example of the style of ornamentation which he felt would be compatible with even the most modest English interiors.

By way of further illustration, when William Dyce was asked by the Select Committee on the Fine Arts if there was, in 1841, a greater tendency than formerly to employ the arts in the decoration of private houses, he replied:

*I think there is. There is great difficulty now in supplying the demand for it ... that the artists are either artists of the higher class, or they are too low a class to be of any use; painters of pictures will not condescend to paint arabesques, and the other classes are unable to do it.*<sup>4</sup>

Being himself 'of the higher class' it is possible that Dyce was a little out-of-touch with the other classes. Painters from the Hay group in Edinburgh, or the Crace firm, or even the Kershaws in London, were capable of painting the most exquisite arabesques. But it was the Gothic Revival and the related archaeological work and publications of both British and European scholars which placed the application of polychromatic decorations, especially painted decoration of both classical and romantic building interiors, upon a firm new footing.

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<sup>3</sup>Charles Lock Eastlake, Contributions to the Literature of the Fine Arts (London: John Murray, 1870), p.330. Letter to Eastlake from H. Bellenden Ker regarding the decorations of Ker's new residence designed by M. Chateaufneuf.

<sup>4</sup>Great Britain and Ireland Commissioners of the Fine Arts Select Committee Report, I, 1841, Number 498.

The Gothic Revival was and would continue to be for some time responsible for the coordinated revival of painted decoration. By the 1850s a small number of Gothic Revival architects had begun to explore the possibilities of close artistic collaboration with painters and to discuss the 'unity of the arts under the art of architecture'. What resulted was described by William Morris as:

*A very great industry indeed, comprising the trades of house-building, painting, joinery and carpentry, smith's work, pottery and glass-making, weaving and many others: a body of art most important to the public in general, but still more so to us handicraftsmen.*<sup>5</sup>

The importance to the public, to which Morris referred, was a phenomenon of something of which he was more acutely aware than most. The emerging recognition of the significance of painted decoration was a theme which underpinned the renaissance. And although it might seem contradictory to refer to Pugin's tireless efforts to revive painted gothic decoration as part of the renaissance, his achievements were fundamental.

Ruskin, one the foremost critics of the period, succinctly illustrated the significance of painted decoration when he wrote:

*... little by little, it gradually became manifest to me that the sculpture and painting were, in fact, the all in all of the thing to be done; that these, which I have long been in the careless habit of thinking subordinate to the architecture, were in fact the entire masters of the architecture; and that the architect who was not a sculptor or a painter was nothing better than a frame-maker on a large scale.*<sup>6</sup>

Those architects who, like Ruskin, had studied continental and near eastern buildings at first hand soon drew the

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<sup>5</sup>Lucy Crane, Art and the Formation of Taste, p.23, quoting an extract from a lecture by William Morris.

<sup>6</sup>John Ruskin, The Seven Lamps of Architecture (London: Smith, 1855 2nd ed.), p.xii.

same conclusions. Painted decoration is an integral part of traditional architecture and it is therefore not surprising that it plays an important role in the interiors of buildings of architects like Jones, Wild, Street and Burges who had indeed visited classical sites and studied their decoration. From them the knowledge of applied decoration flowed to others who did not have such opportunities. And although the key figures and events of the renaissance have been reviewed in Part One of this study it is as well to re-assess these events in history and to analyse the significance of painted decoration to society both then and now.

#### 7.1.1 **Painted Decoration and the Question of Religious Display**

Architects and decorators used painted decoration to fulfil both an artistic and a social function when applying the artform to the interiors of churches, public buildings and domestic residences. Painted decoration could be decorative, narrative, artistic, spiritual or all of the above. It could convey religious and secular concepts and even evoke romantic notions of far-off lands and exotic pleasures. But British society during the nineteenth century did not readily escape from the national enterprise of manufacturing, trading and building the Empire. Therefore escapist decorations were usually to be found only in the private palaces of the landed gentry and, later, the *nouveaux riches* who could afford to put aside more prosaic concerns.

Church decoration reached to all classes of Anglican and Catholic society in Britain and was thus highly significant socially. And, putting aside the small number of nineteenth-century churches built in classical styles for mostly protestant groups, it can be observed that a principal aim of church decoration was the recreation of the mediaeval Christian interior with its symbolic

decorations and all the legends and superstitions of the middle ages. The revival of painted decoration in church interiors was, for many, fundamental to the revival of their faith.

The decoration of other forms of public architecture was more closely related to wealth and opulence. And since the architecture of public buildings was mostly classical, unlike the churches, so too the decoration was often modelled on the grand classical edifices of Greece and Rome. But, as noted in earlier chapters, the exceptions included the two most significant of all nineteenth-century public buildings: the Houses of Parliament, Westminster, decorated under Pugin's direction in the Gothic style; and the Crystal Palace, which was decorated by Owen Jones and his assistants in the manner of an oriental bazaar.

Town halls, exhibition palaces, railway stations, theatres, hotels and clubs also provided abundant opportunities in the public domain for decoration. The growth in interest in the decoration of these classes of building corresponded with the rise in industrial wealth of British Society. The extremely wealthy cities of Glasgow and Melbourne, in particular, provided outstanding opportunities for decorators to work for the new generation of upper and middle class citizens who could afford to display their wealth in opulent interior decorations. Wealth also accounted for achievements in the decoration of churches, as has been noted in the case of Pugin's church at Cheadle for the Earl of Shrewsbury. Well-endowed parishes could afford to carry their spiritual concepts into various forms of applied decoration.

The model upon which the majority of Victorian Gothic church architecture was developed was the fifteenth-century English church, the same as later described by

Crossley in his extensive work on English church craftsmanship:

*...an interior harmonious in colour, walls, roof, woodwork and windows blended in pictorial fusion - the chancel divided from the nave by a vaulted screen, having a gallery front painted with the saints, which were supplemented by others in the windows and upon the walls, this scheme of beauty would lead up to a sanctuary where the altar was draped in delicate embroidery, the niches of the reredos filled with silver-gilt and jewelled figures, the chantry chapel opening into the chancel fenced by screens, the windows blazoned with the arms of the deceased knight and his lady, sculptured in repose upon an altar tomb, the sides carved with representations of their patron saints, or diminutive figures of mourning relatives, the whole enriched with colour.<sup>7</sup>*

The middle and late nineteenth century was the period of probably the greatest ever output of Christian decoration. It was a period of deep religious feeling and piety, led by Queen Victoria herself. The building and decoration of churches was therefore a subject which drew comment and held the interest of a very large section of British society, as could be noted in religious journals, trade journals and the popular press. The Journal of Decorative Art regularly reported on new schemes of church decoration (fig.89) and reminded readers of the appropriate relationship which should be preserved between the building and the faith;

*...there must be distinctions drawn between different sections of the church, and the true church decorator will immediately recognise this fact and adapt his treatment accordingly. That is to say a Roman Catholic church demands a different treatment to an Anglican church, and in the latter church again, there may be considerable diversity of treatment as the church is "High" or "Evangelical".<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup>Fred H. Crossley, English Church Craftsmanship, (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1941), p.10.

<sup>8</sup>Church Decorations Illustrated, The Journal of Decorative Art, January 1884, p.438.

Knowledge of authentic mediaeval church decoration developed through archaeological research which began early in the nineteenth century with work done in the field by ecclesiologists and students of mediaeval art, a group which included A.W.N.Pugin and Didron.<sup>9</sup> The findings of their research were published<sup>10</sup> and were thus accessible to a broad audience eager to learn more about authentic Christian Art.

At first the debate centred on the relative merits of the different phases of mediaeval art, with the Ecclesiologists promoting the fourteenth century when, in their opinion, Gothic Art and the Christian Church reached their apogee.<sup>11</sup> Pugin conceded that not all Gothic art merited copying. Although in his own work he displayed a preference for the fourteenth century, the fifteenth-century model emerged later as a hybrid of the earlier styles in much the same way as the authentic styles themselves did four centuries earlier.

The walls of the mediaeval church were often emblazoned with images of the saints and apostles or sometimes moralities, historical scenes and incidents from the lives of the saints. When it is remembered that church services were delivered in a foreign tongue the importance of painting the walls and windows with scenes for the purpose of inculcating doctrine becomes more obvious. Accordingly it became necessary for worshippers who attended services in the revived mediaeval church interiors of the last century to develop some acquaintance with the legends and superstitions of the middle ages so that they could

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<sup>9</sup>See 2.2.1. Pugin worked with his father recording the remains of authentic mediaeval buildings. Adolphe-Napoléon Didron was the Gothic propagandist responsible for the publication in France of Annales Archéologiques.

<sup>10</sup>ie. Floreated Ornament, Glossary of Ecclesiastical Ornament and Costume and The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture; The Ecclesiological Society's Ecclesiologist, and Didron's Annales Archéologiques, published between 1844 and 1865.

<sup>11</sup>Georg German, Gothic Revival, p.106.

comprehend the contemporary works which crowded their church chancels and sometimes also the walls and roofs of the entire church. Two remarkable examples of work by Clayton and Bell (*figs 90&91*) survive to illustrate the wholesale use of such decorations. This is not to suggest that such extensive examples were common but these do represent an aspect of the common occurrence of such forms of decoration in nineteenth-century revivals.

In place of the martyrdoms and horrid demises, the Victorian Gothic churches featured medallions in which serene images of the saints and apostles could be framed. Equally, the spandrels of the chancel arches could be used for figurework or figures might feature in an arcade around the walls of the chancel. In altarpieces, it was common to represent saints who lived in different ages, assembled round the enthroned virgin and child. Such an assembly was considered to be an earthly gathering of heavenly beings.<sup>12</sup>

Characters and events of the Old Testament were long preferred to those of the New. In Victorian Society the scenes and personages of the Old Testament were understood to be figurative whereas those of the New Testament were regarded as objects of direct edification, even homage, and were therefore handled with greater caution. In general subjects from the gospels occupied positions relevant to the liturgy and function of the church. Thus Saint John the Baptist appeared in baptisteries while the hosts of heaven occupied the ceilings.

Texts were also used decoratively in Gothic Revival churches. They ran in ribbons around the chancel and nave and over the chancel arch for all to ponder. Sometimes they were used in combination with a powdering of a repeated sacred monogram or some symbolic lettering to create a filling for flat spaces.

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<sup>12</sup>Charles Lock Eastlake, Contributions to the Literature of the Fine Arts , pp.15-19.

The symbolism of Christian art held great significance for Victorian Anglican and Catholic society.<sup>13</sup> Every trefoil symbolised the Holy Trinity, every quatrefoil the four evangelists, every cross the Crucifixion, or the martyrdom of some saint. And into Gothic ornamentation the chalice, the crown of thorns, the dice, the sop, the hammer and nails, the flagellum, and other symbols of The Lord's passion entered.<sup>14</sup>

However, for a long time, non-conformist churches and the Church of Scotland continued to persevere with classical styles in both architecture and painted decoration; the last-named being used in a more abstemious way than their Gothic counterparts. Neither the English and Welsh Non-conformists nor the Scots Presbyterians could be expected to proclaim the Catholic Middle Ages as the most glorious era of Christian history.<sup>15</sup> The modes of decoration of the grand and elaborate churches built by the wealthy Scots has been discussed in the chapters dealing with the work of Alexander (Greek) Thomson and the Scottish decorators.<sup>16</sup>

An aspect of mediaeval decoration which appealed to decorators was the system of arbitrary hieroglyphical signs of the thirteenth century known as heraldry, or armour. Heraldic decorations incorporating the same signs designated various persons: which, during the age of chivalry were blazoned in metals and primary colours upon the shields of knights going into battle. This largely symbolic system of decorative devices was readily adapted to decorative painting. Its significance to the decorators and society of the day derived from its ready association

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<sup>13</sup>See F.E. Hulme, The History, Principles and Practice of Symbolism in Christian Art, (New York: George Allen, 1910).

<sup>14</sup>Christopher Dresser, Principles of Decorative Design, p.12

<sup>15</sup>Warwick Rodwell and James Bentley, Our Christian Heritage, (London: George Philip, 1984), pp.192-3

<sup>16</sup>See 2.4 and 3.3.2 dealing with the work of Alexander (Greek) Thomson and the Scottish decorators.



with the Gothic period. Indeed it was sought out by romantics like Sir Walter Scott, who collected armour from the battlefields, and then used it to good effect in the decorations of his own residence, Abbotsford. Pugin also collected much information about heraldry and incorporated it into his decorative work (*figs 92&93*).

In Scotland a particular style of decoration, based on heraldry, developed in the work of some firms. This was a 'protestant' heraldic style, well suited to the decoration of either churches or secular buildings including rooms whose architectural intention was 'romantic'. The style appears in the work of Thomas Bonnar and Andrew Wells, to name only two (*figs 58,59,94&95*). The innovation possibly passed down to Bonnar, and ultimately to Wells, from David Hay whose earliest commission involved the painting of heraldic devices at Abbotsford.

Wells's 'protestant' heraldic style was eclectic, drawing heavily on Gothic and heraldic devices but using them in an archaeologically inaccurate way which was in itself something new. In it the lion, normally drawn on charges in a rampant pose, was drawn heeling with one paw raised in a submissive way. The chequerboard paly and the quatrefoil were used very freely and, wherever it might serve a useful decorative purpose, Gothic and even Renaissance devices were combined with heraldic devices to complete the work. It was a style well suited to public buildings in which the relationship between painted decorations and furnishings was more free.

#### 1.1.2 **Grand Public Buildings and Private Palaces of Art**

This broad distinction regarding the relationship between painted decoration and furnishing can be drawn between most domestic and church interiors and those intended for a more strictly public use. In public buildings there are no draperies, carpet, or other soft furnishings to

influence the form of the decoration. By contrast, these elements play an important part in the colouring of a chancel of a church. Consequently, the decorative colouring and treatment of public buildings needed to be more complete, more harmonious and more carefully balanced than either church or domestic interiors. Furthermore public buildings, by their very nature, were more accessible and therefore more often critically received. And since public halls, railway stations, commercial chambers, exhibition structures and theatres developed greatly in number, scale and importance in the cities of Britain and Australia during the second half of the nineteenth century there were ample opportunities for public comment and debate.

As a group of buildings with immense symbolic value for the communities they served, town halls reflected the aspirations of the new urban societies which, from the 1850s, made up more than fifty percent of the populations of Britain and Australia. With the coincidental growth in municipal democracy, the town halls took on the role formerly occupied by churches as both landmarks and symbols of power and stability.

It was a key part of the function of a town hall that it should be open to all ranks of society (at least polite society). The opportunity could be taken to display ornament in a public and highly visible way, displaying the wealth of a town and even setting out the mythical or actual history of the town or its principal traditions or trades.

For example, Manchester Town Hall is a richly decorated Gothic building known for the great series of paintings by Ford Madox Brown, justly regarded as a high peak of municipal art patronage. The paintings, illustrating the history of Manchester, took Brown twelve very unhappy

years to complete. But Brown's tribulations were not betrayed in the enthusiastic contemporary reports:

*...Ford Madox Brown has now completed his third painting in the large room of the Manchester Town Hall. The three are without doubt very successful paintings for their purpose, and we are of the opinion that Mr Brown's genius lies in the direction of mural decoration. He is at all events , faithful to his ideals, for whether it be the wife of the Roman general or the Saxon King, the type remains the same in each case. The three paintings are splendid examples of successful colouring.*<sup>17</sup>

The years that Brown spent on the murals were lonely and difficult. He battled all the way through with the committee responsible for making the decisions on subjects, medium and even the terms of payment. All of these points were the source of protracted difficulties and unhappiness. But in the long run all twelve paintings were completed, half in the spirit fresco medium and the rest in oil. Brown abandoned the spirit fresco method when his health began to fail and he could no longer spend long hours on a scaffolding which was usually crowded with human and animal models. The last five murals were painted in oil in his studio and later pasted to the wall (*figs 96&97*).

Manchester Town Hall was considered by its architect, Alfred Waterhouse, as one of his three great works. His ideal, never fully realised, was to unite the arts and crafts in one sublime architectural harmony. He had the ceiling of the Great Hall painted and stencilled in 1877 with the arms of the various cities and countries with which Manchester was most closely connected in trade. These were executed in reds, blues and a profusion of gilding (*fig.98*). Waterhouse also lobbied the Council until 1895 for the continuation of the painted decoration into the lesser areas, but without success.

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<sup>17</sup>*The Journal of Decorative Art*, April 1881, p.44.

At nearby Rochdale, however, Waterhouse had his opportunity in the mid-1880s when he was called in to rebuild the tower of Crossland's building following a fire in 1883. Waterhouse was able to carry out a truly stunning scheme of painted decoration in conjunction with Heaton, Butler and Bayne, with whom he had been working nearby in Cheshire on the decoration of the Duke of Westminster's mansion, Eaton Hall, the second of his great works. The decoration at Rochdale has been beautifully illustrated in the Council's guidebook.<sup>18</sup>

As at Manchester, the themes are directly relevant to the city, down to such details as simple stencil motifs which are conventional representations of cotton flowers, bolls and teasels; and a series of panels depicting technological advances of the textile industry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (*fig.99*). The main feature of the Town Hall is a very large, but disappointing, mural by Henry Holiday, 'The Signing of the Magna Carta'.<sup>19</sup>

Rochdale also illustrates the ideal marriage of stained glass and painted decoration after which leading figures of the Gothic Revival were continually striving. Heaton, Butler and Bayne produced a huge amount of glass for this building illustrating the major events in the history of England, and Rochdale in particular, no doubt with the strong intention of educating the visiting public.

Although there is nothing comparable in Australia to the town halls of Manchester, Rochdale or even Preston, there are schemes of painted decoration in the manner of Leeds Town Hall (decorated with straightforward colouring and stencilling by J.G.Crace in 1858). The most interesting of

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<sup>18</sup>Rochdale Town Hall, an Illustrated Guide, (Rochdale: Environment and Employment Department, Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council, n.d.).

<sup>19</sup>Holiday (1839-1927), a follower of the pre-Raphaelites, who designed much stained glass, researched the historical costumes by studying tomb effigies and mediaeval vestments, and even had a suit of chain mail made to his own design to serve as a model.

the Australian examples is, arguably, the Sydney Town Hall with its striking metal ceiling in the Centennial Hall (one of the first uses of pressed zinc panelling for this purpose) and the array of stained glass and other decorative features by the designer Lucien Henry. This is one of the first examples of the use of Australian flora and fauna in decorative work.

Other classes of public buildings such as railway stations, public halls and commercial buildings also provided rich opportunities for displays of painted decoration. In England, the leading firms (including the Craces and Bonnar and Carfrae), designed some very distinguished schemes for railway stations and their luxurious waiting rooms.<sup>20</sup>

During the second half of the nineteenth century banks and business houses also commissioned important schemes of decoration. The banks were most usually decorated in classical styles in response to the (usually) classical architecture. It was common for the larger banks to feature a central (circular or oval) banking chamber with grand columns and other classical features. The common choice of architectural style was Italian Renaissance.

Other types of business premises became the subjects for painted decoration in the late nineteenth century. Although there are some fine surviving examples of ceiling decoration there is very little surviving wall decoration, for the obvious reason that walls were commonly damaged and periodically repaired. There is insufficient evidence to detect a trend other than to note a wide, possibly arbitrary, range of types and styles.

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<sup>20</sup>A design in the National Monuments Record of Scotland by Bonnar and Carfrae for Queen Victoria's Waiting Room at Paddington Station, London, recalls the high aspirations Bonnar, Crace and other decorators for this class of public building.

The showrooms of the Singer Sewing Machine Company in Melbourne and Sydney were both decorated by the English - trained decorator, Phil Goatcher. The Melbourne shop is in a prominent position in an Italian Renaissance style building. The decorations are in a Baroque style (fig.85). By contrast the Sydney showroom occupied a prominent position in the Romanesque-styled Queen Victoria Building. It was decorated with an extraordinary array of Moorish details and motifs picked out in primary colours (fig.86). Sadly none of this survives intact.

The decorators were quick to publicise their wares in shops of their own. Perhaps D.R.Hay was not the first,<sup>21</sup> but his George Street premises in Edinburgh did a lot to promote this branch of decoration. Many, if not most, of the succeeding generations of decorators followed suit and established premises in which they could display their growing repertoire of skills and wares.<sup>22</sup> Indeed the journals had a difficult task to keep abreast of developments. For example, Daniel Cottier moved his business from Edinburgh to Glasgow and then to London before taking it to New York, where a former colleague, who visited in the 1870s, described it as "sumptuous".<sup>23</sup>

International exhibition buildings comprised a new and very exciting nineteenth-century building type, reaching nearly all the great cities of the British Empire, Europe and the Americas. The greatest and most profoundly significant was, of course, the Crystal Palace, Kensington. It was the prototype for those which followed.

It is well known that the Crystal Palace was a pre-fabricated iron and glass structure designed by Joseph

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<sup>21</sup>J.G.Crace operated from a shop in Wigmore Road, London during the 1830s.

<sup>22</sup>See Ian Gow, The Scottish Interior (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991). A late nineteenth-century photograph of Thomas Bonnar's Edinburgh shop shows an anachronistic array of samples including panels of graining and marbling painted by a competitor, Thomas Kershaw, and decorated doors exhibited in London in 1862.

<sup>23</sup>See diary of John Lamb Lyon, 1886.

Paxton, once a humble gardener. The interpretation of the building, and its being likened to an eastern bazaar, came later. Nevertheless the lightweight bazaar-like structure was the model on which the later Exhibitions were modelled.

The second of the international exhibitions was held in the New York Crystal Palace in 1853. Major exhibitions followed in London (South Kensington, 1862), Berlin, Philadelphia, Dublin (1865), Paris (1867), Chicago (1876), Paris (1878), Sydney (1879), Melbourne (1880) and Adelaide (1881), London, Liverpool and Edinburgh (1886), Manchester (1887), Melbourne and Glasgow (1888), Paris (1889), Munich (1890), Chicago (1892), Paris (1900), Turin (1902) and Glasgow (1911), one of the last. A feature of all these exhibitions was the deployment of spectacular internal painted decoration.

The Sydney International Exhibition building, labelled the Garden Palace, was an heroic construction in timber, masonry, iron and glass executed in the same quick time as its predecessor in Kensington (*figs 77&78*). The decorations by Lyon, Cottier and Co. were significant. The roof was painted light blue; the woodwork was painted buff and green enriched with vermilion and gold. Inside the dome of the lantern the corrugated iron was painted buff with a powdering of gilt stars. Around the cornice was painted in golden letters the universal exhibition inscription which had its origin at Kensington: *The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the World, and they that dwell therein: Ps. XXIV, i.*

Huge allegories of Europe, Asia, Africa and America were painted in the spandrels of the drum at the crossing, together with lunettes depicting labour and the sciences, all judiciously framed with borders from the Lyon and Cottier repertoire (*fig.78*).

Exhibitions had a celebratory function. The Royal Jubilee Exhibition at Manchester in 1887 featured a series of eight paintings, by Ford Madox Brown, on the spandrels over the arches carrying the dome representing commerce and the manufactures of Lancashire. These were painted on a gold ground with a semi-natural treatment of the Egyptian lily, together with angels representing fame. Large-scale allegorical figures of this type became *de rigueur* in exhibition buildings, and prominent local artists were usually invited to paint them. In the Glasgow Exhibition building they were painted by 'Glasgow Boys'.

The exhibitions had a significant underlying economic function. The Glasgow Exhibition was conceived as a vehicle for funding the erection of the proposed new art gallery and museum, indeed which now occupies the site. Its style was variously described as 'Saracenic', 'Moorish', 'a l'Alhambra', and 'Baghdad by Kelvinside'; the painted decorations 'gorgeous and striking' and 'decidedly garish' (*fig.100*). The exhibitions also served to educate and promote culture in the wider sense. Paintings by the old masters and various museum-quality artefacts appeared in most. Painted decorations were contrived to reinforce this educational function.

The decorations of the first Chicago Exhibition (1876) celebrated the centennial of the successful revolution against British rule and the new national identity. However, the second (1892) building broke away from the formula, pioneered by Crace in 1862 and copied by succeeding exhibition decorators, thus ending the series of highly decorated major exhibition buildings. Stencilling was abandoned in favour of paint finishes which reproduced other effects such as aged alabaster. The new aim was to create the feeling of the old world of Europe in an exhibition of the commerce and industry of the New World.



The interior decorations of the Melbourne exhibition of 1888 by J. Clay Beeler adorned a comparatively modest structure. Nevertheless the building was selected for the opening of the first Commonwealth Parliament by the Duke of York in 1901 and re-decorated by J. Ross Anderson for the occasion. The work was executed by Anderson and his team in fifteen weeks at a cost of 4,000 pounds. A drawing of the design proposal, which was selected from the six competitive designs submitted, is in the collection of Anderson's drawings which were presented by himself to the Melbourne Working Mens College prior to his death in 1929 (*figs 68&69*).

After 1900 the Exhibitions became the promotional venues of a new development in painted decoration when the Glasgow Art furnishers and designers began to use them as a vehicle to promote their new artforms. In 1902 Fra Newbery, head teacher at the Glasgow School of Art, organised the Scottish section at the International Exhibition of Decorative Art at Turin. The work of the Mackintoshes, the McNairs, Jessie Newbery, Jessie King and E.A. Taylor was included for the whole of Europe to discover. The subsequent success put Glasgow on the world design map, though somewhat belatedly.

Theatres, Music Halls and Picture Palaces provided rich, unrestrained opportunities for decorators. Indeed the decorators' association with the theatre went back to the early days of scene painting when scene painters developed skills which enabled them to keep the theatres of London and Edinburgh supplied with exciting new backdrops for their vigorous theatrical programmes. Both David Roberts and A.W.N. Pugin gained employment and important early training as theatre scene painters.

Late in the nineteenth century theatres and music halls gained a new popularity, as satirical and serious live entertainment drew greater audiences from the newly

affluent middle classes. This demand was met by more theatres and therefore more decoration resulting from increased competition. Newspapers and journals were quick to report on the new developments including the schemes of decorative painting.

The painted decoration employed in this class of building differed from that found in the more serious building types. Since the theatre goer was envisaged as a somewhat capricious and lighthearted viewer the decoration did not require the same level of technical excellence or harmony it was felt. Rather, the decoration needed to be so contrived as to arrest and amuse the viewer. Frivolous decorations incorporating cupids, muses and scenes of paradise were common (*fig.102*). Predictably, musical instruments also featured in the majority of decorations.

Theatre decorations were executed in remarkably quick time since the theatre owners could not afford any lengthy closures. The 'Gaiety' in Edinburgh was re-decorated in 1883 in only one week:

*On Monday this comfortable little theatre was re-opened after having been closed for one week. During this exceedingly short interval the house has been entirely cleaned, painted and decorated...The decorations are in pale blue and gold...<sup>24</sup>*

The Theatre-Royal in Edinburgh was decorated in an improbably short time:

*The ceiling decorations consist of eight panels. In each is a Cupid with a musical instrument. The frames of these are in imitation of raised plasterwork, the space between being filled in with ornamentation upon a gold ground. The 'cone' is divided into arched and square panels, in which there are eight portraits of composers, actors, and authors- namely, Shakespeare, Beethoven, Mozart, Wagner, Weber, Garrick, Scott, and Murray...On*

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<sup>24</sup>*The Stage*, 11 August 1883, (Newspaper report describing decorations executed by Messrs Dobie and Sons, Decorators of Edinburgh).

*the square panels are harps and flowers on a gold ground.*

*It speaks very highly for the resources of our townsmen, Messrs. George Dobie and Sons, that in nine days they should have been able to design and carry out a work of such magnitude. The medallions and portraits were painted on the spot by their artist...* <sup>25</sup>

It would be reasonable to conclude that some firms of decorators specialised in theatre decoration. In Edinburgh it would seem that George Dobie dominated the field. In Sydney and Melbourne it was an American-trained painter, J. Clay Beeler, who commanded the majority of commissions. His work in the King's Theatre, Melbourne (*fig.103*) was described as one of the finest examples of theatre decoration in Australia and:

*...the twenty fourth place of amusement decorated by Mr Beeler since his arrival in Australia [about twenty years earlier].* <sup>26</sup>

With the arrival of movie pictures in the twentieth century there was a gradual phasing out of the ornately decorated auditoria. To some extent this occurred as a reaction against the gaudiness of earlier theatre models, as was observed in a journal report of the new decorations in the Prince Edward Theatre, Sydney in 1924:

*Picture show proprietors appreciate the advertising value of an attractive building. The fact is so well understood that there is a tendency sometimes shown to overdo matters, with the result that decorative work on buildings of this class is often found to err on the side of showiness.* <sup>27</sup>

Interest in theatre decorations did not really abate until the 1930s when replaced by the plain monotone surfaces of the Art Deco movement. This marked the end of an important era of decoration.

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<sup>25</sup>*The Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 13 December 1883. (Newspaper report).

<sup>26</sup>*The Australasian Decorator and Painter*, 1 September 1908. (Report on the decoration of the King's Theatre, Melbourne).

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.* 1 December 1924. (Report on the newly completed Prince Edward Theatre, Sydney).

Mansions, palaces and large-scale domestic interiors were often sumptuously decorated for their wealthy indulgent owners. There are many remarkable examples including the two Cardiff residences of the Marquis of Bute, Cardiff Castle and Castell Coch, both decorated by Campbell, Smith under the direction of William Burges. Morton Hall, Edinburgh, with its drawing-room walls painted in imitation of diapered damask, panelled ceilings painted and gilded, window shutters featuring oval figure subjects representing the seasons and landscapes illustrative of the divisions of the day is a more representative example of the richly decorated large-scale domestic interior of the middle and late nineteenth century. Thomas Bonner's work in Newbattle Abbey is an outstanding example of the work of the same artists undertaken a few years later, completely in accordance with D.R.Hay's principles of 'harmonious colouring'.

An overwhelming example of very grand scale domestic decoration was undertaken in the 1880s for the Duke of Westminster at Eaton Hall, Cheshire, by Heaton, Butler and Bayne, (*fig.101*) under the direction of Alfred Waterhouse. The decoration involved very elaborate wall stencilling and a series of paintings by Stacy Marks including hunting scenes, bird panels and huge paintings of the Canterbury Pilgrims which were hung in the drawing-room.<sup>28</sup> The scale of this project was so great that it might be more correctly considered with the grand hotels built in the major cities and resort locations during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. Certainly the scale of Eaton Hall puts it in a class of its own amongst residences of the rich and powerful.

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<sup>28</sup>Embassies of Other Days, vol.II, 1923, p.356. Quoted in Charlotte Gere, Nineteenth-Century Decoration. A visitor to a housewarming in 1885 commented that "The Drawing-room, which was never lived in, reminded (her) of a firework of crackers going off in all directions. The Duke, a man of great refinement and some knowledge, but without intuitive taste, knew that things were wrong, but did not know how to mend them".

Middle class houses often had scaled-down decoration of the same type but, in most cases, the painted decoration was confined to entrance halls and main public areas. For the majority, wallpapers and plain painting satisfied their needs in the lesser spaces and sometimes also in the drawing rooms. Of course there are many exceptions, where decorators carried through elaborate decorations to many rooms, but generally speaking the extent of decoration was commensurate with the affluence of those commissioning the decoration.

In Australia the best examples of domestic decoration on the grand scale were to be found in the vice-Regal residences and the prestigious homes of the ruling elite. Woollahra House (now demolished), decorated by Lyon Cottier and Co. for the Sydney merchant, Daniel Cooper, was outstanding for the scale and excellence of the decorations (*figs 104&105*). In Melbourne there were several grand commissions for the decorators including some for London furnishing houses. Mandeville Hall at Toorak in Melbourne was decorated by a team brought out from England for the purpose; an extravagance which can only be interpreted as an attempt by Joseph Clarke, the millionaire owner, to go one better than Melbourne society of the day (*fig.75*). It was reported that:

*The decorations and furnishings are more than usually elaborate, Mr Clarke having gone to the trouble and expense of commissioning Messrs Gillow and Co., of London, to send out artists and workmen specially for the purpose of rendering his new home beautiful to the eye. The interior is decorated and fitted in the early English mediaeval and Oriental Styles, and the whole richly ornamented.*

For the most part high quality domestic decorations could be supplied by the local firms. In Melbourne the Paterson Brothers maintained large experienced teams, while in Sydney it was John Lyon's business which flourished with commissions from Government and private individuals.<sup>29</sup>

### 7.1.3 Public and Social Interest

During the course of the nineteenth century a small number of major public debates revealed a high level of public awareness of the significance to their society of painted decoration. Like any other issue, debate was essential to the development of a mature attitude to the subject. However, unlike the unbridled frankness of debate over public issues in our own times, writers of the last century were usually more guarded and often inaccurate in their reporting. As a result it is not always immediately clear what the writers intended. For instance, major debates in Britain concerned the decoration of the new Houses of Parliament, Westminster, and the Crystal Palace, both of which have been discussed in some detail in earlier chapters.

An early indication of public sentiment on the subject of polychromatic decorations surfaced with the publication of Owen Jones's pioneering work in chromolithograph. For many the appearance of such deliciously exotic illustrations came as a wonderful surprise.

The Athenaeum welcomed the release of the first of his prepared plates for the Alhambra.

*There has rarely, if ever, appeared a more magnificent work for the benefit of the architect or of the decorator.*<sup>30</sup>

The Gentleman's Magazine described the drawing of the *Salon del Tribunal* as:

*The most elaborate drawing we ever witnessed ... the splendid decorations are most brilliantly coloured after the original, giving a dazzling effect to the drawings and conveying the idea of an edifice which, but for these*

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<sup>29</sup>At least thirty large-scale domestic projects undertaken by Lyon Cottier and Co. can be identified.

<sup>30</sup>Athenaeum, 4 August 1838, p.556.

*illustrations, we should have imagined only to have existed in the pages of fiction.*<sup>31</sup>

It is tempting to suggest that public and press were utterly seduced by the extraordinary beauty of these first English-made chromolithographs, the production of which was, in itself, an accomplishment of great significance. However, after more than a decade of their circulation the Builder reflected:

*[The appearance of Alhambra] gave the signal for the introduction of those very liberal and catholic ideas upon the subject of the union of form and colour which are fast finding favour in the minds of the public generally, and in which the successful employment of the profession will most probably be concentrated for the remainder of the century at least.*

This comment can now be seen as almost prescient since the union of form and colour became one of the underpinning themes of all high quality interior decoration. It was a point of which David Hay continued to remind his smaller audiences which he reached with his own, privately published, treatises.

Hay rarely missed an opportunity to promote his art. His self-promotion extended to the re-publication of good press about his publications. He included no less than seven pages of reviews as an addendum to his 1846 edition of A Nomenclature of Colour. For example, on The Laws of Harmonious Colouring, The Spectator observed:

*Mr D.R. Hay, of Edinburgh, affords another and striking proof of the advantages, as well as the pleasure, derivable by a craftsman in intellectualising his labour by scientific study. He thoroughly understands his subject - a merit that does not belong to all writers.*

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<sup>31</sup>Gentleman's Magazine, CLXVIII, 1840. p.69.

This is typical of the very circumspect commentating style of the reviewers with the Athenaeum, The Scotsman, The Edinburgh Review and publications of such obscure relevance as The British and Foreign Medical Review. Taken together they tell us, at most, that Hay's publications were moderately interesting to a wide cross-section of the community - unlike the debate which unfolded in the press regarding Owen Jones's painted decorations in Paxton's Crystal Palace, which was both fervent and vigorous. In the beginning, as the nature of Jones's proposed decorations became known, public reaction was one of alarm. For example:

*the iron pillars and girders have of course to be painted; but instead of a uniform plain tint, it has been proposed to decorate them with 'prismatic' colours of blue, red and green (sic). One portion of the building has thus been coloured as a specimen, and it is well that it has been done, because, after seeing it, we urgently hope that the project may be abandoned ...*<sup>32</sup>

In view of what we now know of the final success of the scheme we can see this comment for what it was; a nervous response by an arch-conservative in the face of a serious challenge to established values. Jones responded in a public lecture delivered to the Royal Institute of British Architects on 16 December 1850. This lecture received wide publicity, being re-printed in several daily newspapers, including The Times. However, rather than satisfying his critics, his lecture merely served to provoke them further. Naturally enough 'experts' from all quarters came forward to offer alternative suggestions for the painted decorations. While the 'great paint question', as The Builder dubbed it, was being argued Jones carried on with the painting with the qualified support of the Commissioners. On seeing the final effect The Times made an improbable volte face.

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<sup>32</sup>Art Journal, December 1850. p.382.



*When a man of Mr Jones' eminence as a decorator is entrusted with a work of this kind, it is only fair that he should be allowed both by the public who criticise, and by the commissioners who employ him, considerable license in the execution of his designs ... the effect ... is not so unfavourable as ... might have been anticipated.*<sup>33</sup>

When the building was opened to the public it received excellent reviews in the press. Curiously, though, Jones was not invited to participate in the decoration of Fowkes's exhibition building at South Kensington in 1862. The story of the decoration of that building was one which involved John Diblee Crace.

Here the interior painted decorations by Crace received much unwarranted criticism. Francis Fowkes's building was like a huge barn with a very austere roof, so Crace chose to carry out a scheme of rich ornamentation to enliven it. However, the work was to be completed in the impossibly brief period of four months and, in a defence which he repeated when his critics continued to attack him, Crace pleaded that there was never an opportunity to view the work in progress without it being obscured by scaffolding. When the scaffolding was finally taken down it revealed something which appeared to viewers to be far from the fine example of High Victorian softness, richness and glow which Crace sought and, to his own satisfaction achieved.

In the eyes of his critics, Crace attempted a scheme which was far too ambitious. They wanted the painted decoration to be as simple and unpretentious as the structure itself.

What Crace gave them was a busy scheme of tertiary colours quite different from the one prepared by Jones for the relocated Crystal Palace: sage green for the walls, with a vellum cornice and lighter green in the cove. The end walls were painted maroon. The stencil patterns on the

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<sup>33</sup>The Times, 30 January 1851.

roof members were considered to be too busy; a succession of discords.<sup>34</sup>

As noted, this experience was repeated time and again as the major cities of Europe and the World, vied to hold even bigger, better and more successful exhibitions. The painted decoration provided for the exhibition buildings continued also to play an important role, and to be a source of debate and sometimes controversy.

#### 7.1.4 Colour Theory and Philosophy

A key aspect of the renaissance of decorative painting in Britain was the way in which the decorators set out to change public opinion and to develop strong public interest in interior decoration. In order to safeguard their stance they needed the protection of a scientific basis, which they found in colour theory.

As was noted by David Hay, the first decorator to compose schemes along lines suggested by recent advances in colour theory and perception, there were two prevailing theories about the nature of colour at the beginning of the nineteenth century. That of Sir Isaac Newton, in which he held that white light was made up of seven different hues analogous with the musical scale and its cycle of octaves, was rapidly becoming discredited. However the one which the German poet and philosopher, Goethe, explained in his Theory of Colours<sup>35</sup> sat comfortably with Hay. In simple terms it explained how light is made up of three primary colours, red, blue and yellow, and that all other colours (primary and secondary colours) are made up of combinations of two or more of these.

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<sup>34</sup>Critic, 12 April 1862; quoted in Robert Kempt, What Do You Think of the Exhibition, (London: 1862), pp.96-8.

<sup>35</sup>Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Theory of Colours, first published 1810 in German, translated by Charles Lock Eastlake in 1820 and published in English under this title in 1840, (London: John Murray, 1840).

Hay believed that the three primaries had a numerical relation to each other; a chromatic scale, which could be employed by the colourist in the manner of the diatonic series of the musician.

Colour theory grew out of the application of scientific principles to explain human responses to colour. Goethe noted that the human eye sought a colourless space in every hue in order to produce the complementary colour upon it. He described these as harmonic contrasts. George Field, the English colour manufacturer went further in his 1817 publication Chromatics: or, an Essay on the Analogy and Harmony of Colours<sup>36</sup> in which he revealed a scientific attitude towards colour mixing.

Then Chevreul published his De la Loi du Contraste Simultané des Couleurs,<sup>37</sup> which explained the common phenomenon of simultaneous contrast which was responsible for the change in appearance of two individual colours when placed side by side. Chevreul, as director of the Dyeing works at Gobelins in France, was propelled to investigate this phenomenon when he received complaints about the lack of purity of the coloured yarns at the Gobelins.

Hay determined that the harmony of colour, unlike that of form, was governed by a few simple fixed laws. The chief of these was that each of the three primary colours; blue, red, and yellow, harmonised best with a colour composed of the other two (which was called a complementary). Thus blue harmonised best with orange, yellow with purple, and red with green. Browns and greys, and other such colours which were further removed from the primaries than their complementaries orange, green, and purple, were eminently

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<sup>36</sup>George Field, Chromatics: or, an Essay on the Analogy and Harmony of Colours, (privately printed, 1817).

<sup>37</sup>Michel Eugene Chevreul, The Laws of Contrast of Colour, (London: Routledge, Warnes and Routledge, 1859) translated from the French (De La Loi du Contraste Simultané des Couleurs et etc, Paris, 1839).

suitable for the general mass, or background, in an arrangement of colour. These were least likely to deaden the details of a composition.

Applying this theory to interior decoration he showed that the secondaries could be introduced also as background colours, but in smaller areas. The primaries could then be used successfully in small proportions only. Hay believed that in decorative work the success of the overall scheme and of the individual colours therein was directly dependent on the achievement of a harmony of contrast and the succession to each of the colours. He further believed that each of the three primaries should be present in all schemes of decoration in either their simple or mixed state.<sup>38</sup>

Hay wrote and published The Laws of Harmonious colouring adapted to House Painting to promote his own work and to advance his campaign to elevate the house-painting trade. He was assiduous in displaying his considerable knowledge of colour and how it should be applied in house decoration. But he was careful to avoid using references to specific colours for particular applications. He clearly wished to protect his professional right to determine the selection of colour in his decorative painting commissions.

For Hay the main considerations in drawing up a colour scheme for interior decorations were 'tint', 'tone', 'depth', 'quantity' and 'situation'. He did not seem to be unnecessarily concerned about hue or the absolute correctness of colour, although he did note that where house-painters' colours were to be seen in full light they should be suitably toned to prevent an unpleasant crudeness. Clear colours, he noted, should always be,

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<sup>38</sup>D.R.Hay, The Laws of Harmonious Colouring, p.50.

*... used with a sparing hand, and only employed to heighten the effect of splendour and richness by their contrasting and attractive qualities.*<sup>39</sup>

There is evidence that Hay followed these principles in his own work and that several of his pupils and followers were, initially, faithful to the same philosophies. At Abbotsford, where Hay undertook his first significant commission, the walls of the library are a smokey bottle green colour which, after 160 years of exposure, are just as Hay described:

*...a sombre hue of green , in order to relieve the red hue of the cedar.*<sup>40</sup>

In the Great Room of the Society of Arts, London, which Hay decorated in 1846, he went to a lot of trouble to impart to the walls a colour and texture which would best display the existing mural paintings by James Barry. His apprentice, Campbell Tait Bowie, later described this selection as a cloth of deep purple hue to absorb, rather than reflect, the light. This accords with Hay's contention that in the case of yellow (or the gold leaf of gilt picture frames), which is the colour next to white in terms of brightness, its contrasting colour is purple in its 'deepest degree'.

Through first-hand study of Islamic architecture Owen Jones discovered that decoration executed in the primary colours alone could produce a harmonious, reposed composition. By then it had been shown by scientific experiment that the three primaries of red, yellow and blue together produced white or neutral light. Jones employed this knowledge successfully in the interior painting of the Crystal Palace in 1851 where he used only primary colours to create an impression of almost

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<sup>39</sup>Ian Bristow, 'Interior House-Painting', p.707.

<sup>40</sup>D.R.Hay, The Laws of Harmonious Colouring, p.195.

limitless space in the vast building (*fig.106*), a fact confirmed in contemporary reports:

*For practical purposes the effect of the interior of the building resembles that of the open air... To a spectator seated in the gallery...the more distant part of the building appears to be enveloped in a blue haze...*<sup>41</sup>

In his other works Owen Jones did not concentrate uniquely on primary colours for, clearly, conventional buildings with solid masonry walls and plastered ceilings could not be decorated in the manner of the Crystal Palace, an engineering structure. Neither could the solid masonry walls and plastered ceilings of English buildings be decorated with a vast array of decorative patterns in primary colours as in the Alhambra.

It was Jones's experience that the primary colours could be used in small proportions<sup>42</sup> when balanced and supported by the secondary or tertiary colours on the larger masses. In general practice the primary colours could be used on the upper portions of objects, the secondary and tertiary colours on the lower. This principle is very much in evidence in surviving examples of cornice decoration, with the juxtaposition of blue and yellow above walls in tertiary tones being common, although it would mean that Jones did not manage to complete a single scheme without adjustments brought about by the client's opposition to the harshness of his pure concepts (*fig.107*).

Jones drew heavily, of course, on the work of such colour scientists as Field and Chevreul,<sup>43</sup> and upon oriental

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<sup>41</sup>Jeremy Taylor, 'The Architectural Medal', *England in the Nineteenth Century*. p.141. reference to appended article in *Art Journal* on 'the Harmony of Colours'.

<sup>42</sup>Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, Proposition 16.

<sup>43</sup>George Field, *Chromatics: or, an Essay on the Analogy and Harmony of Colours*, (privately printed), 1817, and George Field, *Chromatography: or a Treatise on Colours and Pigments, and of their Powers in Painting, etc.*

practice, in the development of his own theories. These are clearly illustrated in the well-documented work at the Crystal Palace, where Jones struggled against the conservatism of the Commissioners to realise his ambitions. Then, when the building was re-erected at Sydenham, where he was not under the same constant critical judgement and badgering from the Commissioners, he applied the colour theory unstintingly.

By the time of publication of his *chef d'oeuvre*, his theories were developed to a point where he could present them in the form of twenty propositions in his *General Principles in the arrangement of form and colour*.<sup>44</sup>

Christopher Dresser, who collaborated with Jones on Grammar, re-worked the earlier published theories of Chevreul, Field, Hay and Jones in developing twenty seven propositions in his 'Principles of Decorative Design'. He observed:

*Colour is the means by which we render form apparent. Colours, when placed together, can only please and satisfy the educated when combined harmoniously, or according to the laws of harmony.*<sup>45</sup>

Throughout the century matters concerning artistic decoration, including colour, continued to be widely debated. Reports aimed at drawing attention to the most recently completed schemes of decoration appeared regularly in the art journals and building news journals of the day.

John D. Crace, who retired at the end of the century to devote his time to writing and teaching, presented his own

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London, 1837.

Michel Eugene Chevreul , De La Loi du Contraste Simultane des Couleurs et etc, (Paris: 1839).

<sup>44</sup>The Grammar of Ornament, pp.5-8.

<sup>45</sup>Christopher Dresser, Principles of Decorative Design, 1873, reprint ed. London: Academy Editions, 1973), p.32.

views formally when he read papers on the subject of his work before learned societies.<sup>46</sup> He was able to speak with the maturity of a long career of practical experience and wisdom inherited from his distinguished family of decorators.

Colour, its use and value, became progressively the province of many educated folk, professionals and amateurs alike, who joyfully entered the public debate. In this context Lucy Crane deserves special mention for the series of lectures she delivered in the north and south of England immediately prior to her untimely fatal illness in 1881. She elaborated on the principles of 'Analogy, Contrast, Variety, Delicacy and Repetition' as safe guides for the use of colour in house-decoration.<sup>47</sup> Her 'Analogy' demanded the use in combination of colours and their close tints.

The underlying tenet of all discussion and propaganda relating to painted decoration and the use of colour in general was that principles, even laws, should be strictly followed. It was no longer satisfactory for designers of painted decoration to work outside the ring of security provided by a set of stated theories, preferably their own.

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<sup>46</sup>John D. Crace, "The Decorative Use of Colour", The Illustrated Carpenter and Builder, June, 1, 1888, pp.380-411.

<sup>47</sup>Lucy Crane, Art and the Formation of Taste, pp.106-109.



## 1.2 The Role of the Painter Decorators

The painter decorators occupy a special place in the history of the decorative arts of Britain and its colonies. Through their work the theories and principles of decoration can be re-interpreted. Their output often involved not just the painted decoration but all the furniture and furnishings which combined to produce the artistic interiors of which much has been written. However, the role of the painter decorator has not always been clearly stated in debates about the respective roles of architects, upholsterers and painters. The issue requires further analysis.

It is now widely realised that Gothic Revival architects began to explore the possibilities of real artistic collaboration with painters in order to promote the unity of the arts under the art of architecture. It was primarily architects who established links with the pre-Raphaelite painters, resulting in a number of Gothic houses being decorated in a variety of so-called mediaeval styles.<sup>48</sup>

Charles Eastlake observed that, in the early part of the century, it was perhaps beneath the dignity of an architect to pay attention to the details of cabinet work, upholstery and decorative painting.<sup>49</sup> The change from such an attitude has been noted in the preceding section on the High Victorian Movement, which outlines the very significant collaboration between 'Art architects' and pre-Raphaelite artists. In the main, however, these collaborations were on new buildings or existing buildings undergoing substantial architectural change. Nevertheless, a very large quantity of decorative work was undertaken on existing and furnished buildings without the direct

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<sup>48</sup>Helen Smith, Decorative Painting in the Domestic Interior in England and Wales c. 1850-1890, (London: Garland, 1984), p.1.

<sup>49</sup>Charles L. Eastlake, Hints on Household Taste, p.59.

involvement of an architect, and it was the painter decorator who had executive control over many of these.

It needs to be remembered that, in all classes of buildings, interior finishes have been regularly renewed in response to an owner's desire to repair physical damage or simply to adopt a new fashion.<sup>50</sup> The architect responsible for the original design of a building would usually have long since departed the scene, and it was therefore exceptional for the architect to be called back to advise on new decorations. It was more likely that a fashionable upholsterer or decorator would be invited to undertake this role, a fact sadly lamented by the Art architects.

William Burges commented that the skill of the architect was required to make each room a work of art, an exaggerated view quite at odds with those of both Ruskin and Morris who believed that it was wrong to separate manual and intellectual labour. Ruskin, for instance, argued:

*We are always in these days endeavouring to separate the two; we want one man to be always thinking, and the other to be always working, and we call one a gentleman and the other an operative; whereas the workman ought often to be thinking and the thinker often to be working, and both should be gentlemen in the best sense.*<sup>51</sup>

#### 7.2.1 Emergence of the Decorator

William Burges, speaking ruefully in a lecture of 1869 of the ill-informed way in which most patrons went about decorating their homes, remarked that a newly-built home could be likened to a skeleton which required 'clothing in flesh', a task requiring the skill of a sensitive

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<sup>50</sup>In his study of the interiors of buildings of the earlier period Ian Bristow ascribed a ten year cycle to this process of renewal. The same cycle has been observed to be usual for the interiors of Victorian buildings.

<sup>51</sup>The Stones of Venice, 'the Nature of Gothic', para. 21.

professional, an architect, who would usually not even be considered for the task. Burges stated:

*This was because the client normally abandoned his architect at this point and called in 'the upholsterer'. With better education 'the English gentleman' would then prefer to employ architects who would direct the decoration as well as the building of his house, and who could sit down there and then, and show him how the figures would come on the walls, or range themselves with regard to the lines of the architecture.*<sup>52</sup>

Without realising it Burges was being rather harsh on such decorators as Crace in London and Hay in Edinburgh who were both willing and competent to carry through appropriate decoration to the highest standards, in complete harmony with the 'skeleton'. Indeed Pugin had discovered, while working with J.G.Crace on their early collaborations, that Crace was quite capable of taking major design decisions alone and sometimes even chided him for troubling Pugin for advice about design decisions which he was perfectly capable of making alone, being consummately skilled as both designer and decorator.<sup>53</sup> Indeed he did design entire suites of rooms after Pugin's death.

At Abney Hall, for which Pugin had prepared designs before his death,<sup>54</sup> Crace adapted the designs and executed a scheme of the highest quality with many new features.<sup>55</sup> This project marked a turning point for Crace and also for the decorating 'shops' which were growing in number throughout Britain and Australia. Significantly, Crace's client at Abney Hall was a wealthy merchant, one of a new

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<sup>52</sup>Architect, I, 1869, p.270.

<sup>53</sup>Alexandra Wedgewood, A.W.N.Pugin and the Pugin Family: Catalogues of Architectural Drawings in the Victoria and Albert Museum, (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1985), p.194

<sup>54</sup>Between 1852 and 1857 Crace worked for Manchester merchant, James Watts, on the re-decoration of his 1840s Gothic brick villa at Cheadle.

<sup>55</sup>Megan Aldrich, The Craces: Royal Decorators 1768-1899, (Brighton: John Murray, 1990), pp.84-89.

class which could afford architects, decorators and rich display in their homes. Decorations were becoming increasingly accessible through shops.

Although it is a rather inadequate and deprecating term, 'shop' is the term adopted by the decorators to describe their businesses; trading in quality painted decorations, furnishings, furniture and much more. The term was freely used in reports from the trade:

*glad to report [from Liverpool] a slight improvement in the trade ... several shops are already making a stir ... The shop I am concerned with has just finished a large plain job ...*<sup>56</sup>

The shops offered a full decorating service as Andrew Wells, the Glasgow decorator, noted in a paper he read before the Sydney Architectural Society during the very productive period he spent working in that city, viz:

*In London and some of the great Midland and North British cities, the leading decorators are also upholsterers, and the entire completion of buildings, from the time they leave the builder's hands, is entrusted to them with or without a superintending architect.*

But he added, lest a potential employing architect should feel redundant;

*A generation ago, architects were seldom employed in these matters, for they very rarely knew much about them; but now-a-days it is very different, and most of the best decorative and furnishing work is superintended, and in many cases actually designed by the architect, or the decorator, or by both working in conjunction; articles of upholstery and cabinet-ware are usually kept in stock by the best-reputed firms rather as samples and for purposes of suggestion than for actual sale...*<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>*The Journal of Decorative Art*, March 1885, p.674.

<sup>57</sup>*Australian Builder and Contractor's News*, 7 May 1892, p. 331.

This both confirms the view stated by Burges more than ten years earlier, and reveals a far more satisfactory situation for both architect and painter decorator. It also suggests that Wells was either unaware of the early work of Pugin, Burges, Street and Bodley, which is possible given that he came from the North, or , more likely, that he was patronising his audience, thinking that they would not have been in a suitable position to know either way. But even in major centres far away from London, the epicentre of Art furnishing and decoration, the swelling ranks of the affluent middle classes were both aware and eager to decorate their homes and public buildings with the best available examples of the art of the decorators.

#### 1.2.2 **Decoration and Ornament**

Decorators of the nineteenth century used colour and decorative motifs in ways which were often novel. They adapted patterns from other media, such as manuscripts and wall hangings. Finding that the repetitive patterns used by mediaeval painters for walls and glass were both crude and symbolic, and thus unsuited to the decoration of broad expanses of other building forms, they set about creating patterns and decorative finishes specifically for application to walls, ceilings and other plain surfaces.

David Hay was the first to explore the possibilities of adapting painting techniques to the creation of sumptuous wall decorations. He introduced the practice of applying stencils and handpainting to specially prepared grounds to fill the flat spaces of walls and sometimes even ceilings, often in imitation of textile hangings. His methods were adopted and applied by those both trained by him and those influenced by him throughout the period of this study. It is therefore not surprising to observe that opinions about such techniques, and the broader issues of applied decorations, were debated at length.

As defined by Ralph Wornum, ornament was generally accepted as being a decoration or adornment without any practical independent existence.<sup>58</sup> The term 'ornament' usually signified natural or organic elements rather than geometric or inorganic elements which, when applied to the surfaces of buildings, became elements of decoration.

Ornament was considered to be the proper enrichment of an object or surface with such forms, or such forms and colours as will give the thing decorated a new beauty, while strictly preserving its shape and character.<sup>59</sup>

The term 'decoration' signified the art or process of applying the various elements.<sup>60</sup> It also denoted the completed result. The term 'Painted decorations' was most commonly used to describe the process and the end result of the application of ornament and decoration in the painter's medium.

Opinions about what constituted good decoration rarely converged during the course of discussion which went on throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

The laws governing the composition of ornament and decoration were many and varied.<sup>61</sup> But some greater principles had ascendancy over the lesser ones, and it is these which need to be mentioned in relation to the construction of painted decoration. As Fred Miller noted, it was the application of principles which elevated painted decoration to a position of legitimacy in the late nineteenth century:

*Surface decoration has only, strictly speaking, been studied artistically during the last few years. Previous to this 'Renaissance' of decorative art, ornament was*

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<sup>58</sup>Ralph W. Wornum, Analysis of Ornament (London: 1856).

<sup>59</sup>James Ward, Principles of Ornament, Fourth Edition (London: Chapman and Hall, 1899), p.19.

<sup>60</sup>Franz Sales Meyer, Handbook of Ornament (Carlsruhe: 1888), p.VII.

<sup>61</sup>James Ward, Principles of Ornament, pp. 40-50.

*either stuck on, or at the utmost confined to the boldest and most uninteresting kind of stencilling and outlining...*<sup>62</sup>

In any detailed study of nineteenth-century philosophy concerning the application of decoration and ornament, the keywords of the era might be taken as subject headings for a study in depth. These would include proportion (a scheme of decoration could never succeed without the correct harmonic proportion between the object and the elements of the decoration); repetition (by the use of repetition the application of decoration could become ornament); contrast (there should always be a degree of enlivening contrast in both form and colour); and repose (this principle could be satisfied in most situations by an adherence to the lesser principles of symmetry, variety and balance).

It was Owen Jones's proposition that all ornament should be based upon a geometrical construction.<sup>63</sup> By this he meant that ornament should have some geometrical arrangement.

Jones's concern for geometry, which presumably derived from his detailed study of the 'Alhambra', was shared by David Hay who believed that the beautiful specimens of such a building as that were becoming too familiar; even debased. Hay attempted to set this to right in two publications dedicated to the subject of geometry and form.<sup>64</sup> He had astutely determined the need for a new approach to the development of designs for painted decorations and the like.

*For, as the carpets of rooms, geometrical pavements, and paper hangings, are all viewed by the spectator with various degrees of obliquity, it would be desirable to*

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<sup>62</sup> Fred Miller, A Practical Treatise, p. 11.

<sup>63</sup> Owen Jones, The Grammar of Ornament, Proposition 8.

<sup>64</sup> D.R. Hay, The Natural Principles and Analogy of the Harmony of Form, (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1842).

*invent patterns which, though they might not be the most beautiful when seen directly, have the power of developing in succession a series of beautiful combinations, when viewed as they must always be, at different obliquities...*<sup>65</sup>

Nature was also a major pre-occupation for theorists and practical decorators alike. During the nineteenth century, as never before, nature was viewed as an inexhaustible fountainhead, providing an endless supply of decorative motifs. One of the first to illustrate the way in which design could be based on natural forms was A.W.N. Pugin in Floriated Ornament. What Pugin illustrated were examples of 'conventional' or stylised representations of natural forms. He did not favour the use of natural forms but rather he promoted the use of flat, two-dimensional stylised figures based on them. Over time others fell into line with this fundamental point of view.

*Flowers or other natural objects should not be used in ornament, but conventional representations of them, sufficiently suggestive to convey the intended image to the mind without destroying the unity of the subject they are employed to decorate.*<sup>66</sup>

Jones's enlightenment on this issue was derived from first-hand observation of the work of some Eastern races, particularly those which came under Muslim, or Islamic influence. Pugin discovered by observation of mediaeval buildings and manuscripts that mediaeval designers (who clearly came into contact with Islamic design through trade and the crusades) drew heavily from nature in their design work.

When schools of design were established in Britain, students received instruction in botany. The results of this investment culminated in the exciting turn-of-the-century styles now identified as the 'Glasgow style' in

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<sup>65</sup>D.R. Hay, Original Geometric Diaper Designs, accompanied by an attempt to develop and elucidate the true principles of Ornamental Design as applied to the Decorative Arts, (London: D. Bogue, 1844).

<sup>66</sup>Ibid, Proposition 13.



the north, 'Art Nouveau' on the continent, and 'Federation style' in the Antipodes. Progressively designers and decorators of genuine talent developed the skills of adaptation which resulted in the outstanding examples of the various phases of decoration, embracing Pugin's Gothic, Hay's Classic, Cottier's Aesthetic and Mackintosh's Free Style; all major contributions to the artform.

### 7.2.3 Decoration and Fitness

The term 'fitness' was consistently applied to mean the appropriateness of decorations; that decorations should be fit for their end. Obviously different forms of decoration should therefore be applied to different forms of architecture, and in different ways according to each situation. Ruskin defined the degree of appropriateness in the following observation:

*The true forms of conventional ornament consist in the bestowal of as much beauty on the object as shall be consistent with its Material, its Place, and its Office.*<sup>67</sup>

In the opinion of most theorists it was the function of ornament to emphasise the forms of the object it decorated, not to hide them. The first principle of ornament, that of fitness, was identified, again by Ruskin, when speaking of Decorative Art:

*The only essential distinction between decorative and other art is that of being fitted for a fixed place; and in that place, related either in subordination or in command, to the effect of other pieces of art. And all the greatest art which the world has produced is thus fitted for a place, and subordinated to a purpose. There is no existing highest-order-art, but that which is decorative. The best sculpture yet produced has been the decoration of a temple front - the best painting, the decoration of a room.*<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Lucy Crane, Art and the Formation of Taste (London: Macmillan, 1882), p.62, referring to Ruskin's, Two Paths.

When considered in isolation, the principle of fitness can appear confusing, since the intention was not to embellish building interiors with decoration of a single appropriate style, but rather to ensure that colours, designs and the construction of the decoration as well as the design motifs should enhance and reinforce the architecture. The Audsleys summarised the principles developed by the theorists of the earlier period:

*...no ornament or disposition of lines should be adopted which are calculated to interfere with the structural features of the architecture, but, on the contrary, everything should be designed with the view of accentuating and enriching them. True architectural decoration is an integral part of architecture, and should grow out of it, assisting its expression and beautifying its constructive elements.*

*In the decoration of walls, their flatness and solidity must be recognised, and no attempt must be made to destroy the appearance of either. All effects of relief or depression should be avoided in whatever ornament is applied. Walls which rise from the floor may be divided horizontally into two or more spaces, each of which may be differently treated. As a rule, that nearest the floor should be kept as solid and quiet in design and colour as possible, serving as a foundation for the lighter and more delicate enrichments above.<sup>69</sup>*

#### 1.2.4 Artists and their Group Following

A highly significant phenomenon of the period under review is the genuine group following which developed around a small number of central figures who clearly had the charismatic qualities to influence and inspire others to adopt their ways and commit themselves to the new decorative art of the nineteenth century. Outstanding amongst these was Daniel Cottier, who somehow managed to motivate younger decorators to produce the highest quality of painted decoration and other art decorations on three

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<sup>68</sup>Fred Miller, A Practical Treatise on Surface Decoration, with Notes on Colour, Stencilling and Panel Painting (London: 1885). Quote in Preface from Ruskin.

<sup>69</sup>W. and G. Audsley, Medieval Ornamental Styles, p. 29.

continents simultaneously. Hardly less important in this respect were David Hay, Owen Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Rossetti's great contribution to decorative art was to inspire William Morris, Burne Jones and Ford Madox Brown to take it up. All three were so well known for their individual genius and their lasting contributions in other artforms that most biographers and historians have neglected to give adequate prominence to their achievements in painted decoration. William Morris's contribution has been sadly overlooked because of his Herculean efforts in other departments. These have tended to overshadow the brief period when he produced a number of outstanding schemes of painted decoration which served as models to other decorators, and especially his last scheme, the Green Dining Room now in the South Kensington Museum.

The quality of Rossetti's art comes today as a pleasant surprise to those who associate him more readily with poetry, philandering and drug addiction. Nevertheless he was obviously a gifted artist and a wonderful motivator: some would say seducer. But to use the term seducer, in the context of his influence over Morris, would be to misjudge both - for Morris was a free spirit who was never ready to conform to anyone else's ideals. It seems therefore that Rossetti was able to cultivate this spirit in Morris and give him the confidence to create poetry, art and, following his joyous introduction to painting and decorating in the Oxford Union, to carry through his deep passion for mediaeval art to a recreation of the spirit of craftsmanship which produced that art. Like Daniel Cottier, Rossetti had the gift of cultivating the artistic spirit of his followers.

David Hay's gift to his pupils was one of technical discipline, or the ability to develop their art through

application. As an artist, Hay was daring and imaginative, but as a teacher Hay appears to have been traditional, demanding and formal in all his dealings. Nevertheless he must have possessed a strong paternal affection for his pupils, even though he related to them from a safe distance. He took delight in being in the role of teacher to his young assistants and, when necessary, exercising what, by today's standards, would be considered to be rather harsh discipline if work did not reach his high standards.<sup>70</sup> In nineteenth-century society such methods were acceptable and, far from being turned off their work, Hay's pupils went on to produce the highest quality work of its type.

In studying Hay and his domination of the Edinburgh scene it becomes clear that he was not universally loved. In the well-reported incident of industrial espionage concerning one of his patented finishes, which Henry Crace used without consent, there is a strong suggestion that Hay's staff co-operated in the matter, perhaps through disgruntlement.<sup>71</sup> A far more public demonstration of the lack of professional affection for Hay arose in 1864 when Crace painted out Hay's scheme in the Society of Arts's meeting room. The Decorator reported it in a waspish manner:

*It will, doubtless, be within the recollection of our readers, that some eighteen or twenty years ago, an announcement was made to the world that the true philosopher's stone of the decorator, or how to ensure good and agreeable effects in decoration, had been discovered by Mr D.R.Hay, of Edinburgh ... Mr Hay published ... and himself came to London, and executed a pattern card by decorating the ceiling of the Great Room*

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<sup>70</sup>The Journal of Decorative Art, August 1888, C.T. Bowie commented that it was common practice in Hay's studio/workshop for the apprentices to be set exercises such as painting cameos on canvas to occupy their time during the damp months. If the work did not reach Hay's standard he would scrub out the still wet work and demand a fresh start.

<sup>71</sup>Megan Aldrich, The Craces: Royal Decorators 1768-1899, (Brighton: John Murray, 1990), p.53.

*at the Society of Arts. Much curiosity was excited as to the result of Mr Hay's theories when reduced to practice; and some disappointment was felt when it was seen that the unintelligible confusion of lines resulting in a kaleidoscopic effect was presented ... no two parts of which appeared to have any relation to each other. Mr Hay's theory, that all beauty of form was based on the oval ... and his relation of the harmony of colours, equally failed ... the Society of Arts having recently had the whole ... painted out.*<sup>72</sup>

A marked feature of the work of the Hay school was its utter conservatism. For, although Hay was personally responsible for major innovations in the trade, introducing a range of new finishes and applying them in accordance with entirely new theories of harmony, contrast and form, his work was strictly a development of the existing framework of painting and decorating. As a result, the work of his successors can be recognised for its very high technical quality and its compliance with community expectations, regardless of whether it is an example of the Pompeian or French Renaissance, Watteauesque style, which Hay favoured above all others.

In contrast to Hay, Owen Jones's work was genuinely radical. His impressive use of colour and its effect on the future course of architectural development was a great contribution. Like Hay, Rossetti and Cottier, he too was a great motivator of others, as Christopher Dresser was pleased to remind people.<sup>73</sup> Dresser's own outstanding contribution, as has been noted, owed much to Jones's influence.

Another whose work was shaped by Jones, was Jacob Mould, who had trained with Jones before moving to New York. There he demonstrated his master's ability to combine vigorous eclectic designs with bright polychromy. Some of his works were highly acclaimed, and the American public

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<sup>72</sup>*The Decorator*, (London: A.C. Hailes), Vol. 1 No. 4, May 1864, p.37.

<sup>73</sup>Michael Darby, *The Islamic Perspective*, p.118.

were not left wondering about the training he had received for the designs which 'dazzled with brightness'.<sup>74</sup> Owen Jones's contribution was well recognised in New York.

Although Jones was a very private man he passed on to others a spirit of enquiry and a love of polychromy. In his early works, which were largely two dimensional, he was able to demonstrate the style of work which contributed to the great aesthetic beauty of Islamic buildings. Later, after struggling to adapt two dimensional systems to three dimensional architecture he was able to discover and reveal the principles which lay behind the forms of Islamic decorations and go on from that point to work tirelessly towards the introduction of a new style of architecture and decoration. Followers, like Mould and Dresser, were able to carry the principles into other design areas, with enduring effect.

Daniel Cottier was arguably the most gifted motivator of all the nineteenth-century painter decorators and by far the most significant in terms of developments in Australia. His art and decorating style had a major impact in Britain, America and Australia.

It has been previously noted that Cottier was able to persuade his young assistants and followers to submit themselves to adventurous and uncertain tours of duty in New York and Sydney. It needs also to be noted that their work had a distinctive character which can be traced back to Cottier and his strongly individualistic approach.

It is depressing to think that Cottier's work, his style and his legacy are so poorly documented. It would be wonderful to think that a body of, as yet, undiscovered material may one day appear to shed more light on this wonderful man. If, like William Morris, he had committed his views to print, then it would be much easier to re-

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<sup>74</sup>Michael Darby, The Islamic Perspective, p. 82

assemble the fragments of information which are spread very widely. However a few salient points emerge from what is known about him.

Cottier was a powerful motivator, deeply loved by his assistants and pupils. They consistently referred to him in later life as 'their old master' in recognition of his role in shaping their art and their early lives. They reported, with affection, on his quirky behaviour before his clients. (It would be impossible to imagine David Hay setting out to shock an elder of the Presbyterian church). They developed strongly individual styles which left its mark in Sydney and presumably also in New York. However they always acknowledged their debt to Cottier in the formation of those styles.

It seems that Cottier was timeless, never growing older, fatter and more dishevelled like Morris, or becoming more introverted like Jones; just pushing forward with his rapidly evolving plans to create and share art. He was extremely generous and helpful to all the talented artists who had the good fortune to come under his influence. In this study Cottier emerges as a highly significant figure of the period but it becomes ever more clear that his story is only just beginning to be told.

### 1.3 The Importance of Glasgow

The main population centres, London, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Melbourne and Sydney, each developed an individual character in the decoration of their building interiors. As a result of the transfer of personnel, the Sydney style can be linked with Glasgow and the Melbourne style has strong similarities with Edinburgh. London, prior to the arrival of a significant number of Scottish artists in the late 1860s, was not noted for the outstanding quality of its painted decoration even though many very fine examples existed in the city. The city had absorbed so many foreign artists and enjoyed such diverse patronage that observers of the day were largely unaware of the threads of consistency which existed in the work of Crace and some establishing firms.

Scottish developments occurred in two distinctly different streams. In the context of this study, Glasgow is most significant because of its broader impact. An important number of Glasgow-trained decorators made major contributions in other cities, including London. Their work and their particular style developed on the solid foundations laid in Edinburgh early in the century. The exciting developments which surrounded Hay in Edinburgh were followed by exciting developments in Glasgow.

The importance of Edinburgh and Glasgow can be traced back to the Scottish Board of Manufactures, whose task it was in the late eighteenth century to stimulate trade in the then impoverished North of Britain. In 1760 the Board established a school of design in Edinburgh, specifically to train young apprentices to such trades as linen and damask weaving, carpet-making and house-painting. In 1826 the Royal Scottish Academy was established to complement the Board. By this time David Hay, who was a product of the Board's school, was planning to reform the trade of



house-painting in the North. Hay introduced the composition of decorative schemes along the lines of colour theory and persuaded his close friend James Ballantine to do the same with stained glass. Together they trained a new generation of artists, who introduced the theories and techniques to other cities and towns in Scotland and abroad.

Certain features characterise developments in Edinburgh and, later, in Glasgow. In the early period in Edinburgh it was the excellence of painting technique and the application of Hay's theories which characterised the artform; whereas in Glasgow the close relationship between stained glass and painted decoration is a strong feature.

The relationship between shipping, or the decoration of the interiors of ships built on the Clyde, and the decoration of building interiors is another very important feature. Moreover, of the greatest importance was Glasgow's phenomenal prosperity. Glasgow became a very rich and imposing city in a brief concentrated period. The rapid expansion, and the high quality of the architecture, provided unique opportunities for decoration.

Glasgow developed a style which can be attributed to non-conformity. Although this is a somewhat dangerous and contradictory attribution for a style (since the dissemination of a style requires a degree of conformity), the term 'non-conformity' fits aptly with the society and the artists who developed the style.

The final phase of Scottish development covered by this study culminated in the universally recognised Glasgow Style, the product of the Glasgow School of Art. This late development has overshadowed the earlier period, partly because the earlier developments had minimal impact on the Continent and partly because the achievements in the field of the decorative arts during the Victorian period have

been more readily associated with heroic contributions by English artists, particularly Pugin and Morris.

The ideal towards which the Glasgow School aspired was to unite realistic truth with decorative beauty. To achieve this, the designers and decorators adopted techniques which appeared unorthodox but which emphasised values such as tonal composition, a carefully studied relationship between colour and mass, and the use of flat colour as a decorative medium. These values can be seen in the work of Charles Rennie Mackintosh and George Walton. But they can be traced back through the Art Decorators to Alexander Thomson and Daniel Cottier, the formerly unheralded heroes of Glasgow's renaissance.

#### 7.3.1 **Affluence and Decoration**

It has been noted that there was a shift in patronage towards the *nouveau riche* industrialists in the middle of the nineteenth century. Throughout Britain it could be seen that the increase in decorative painting corresponded to the increasing prosperity of a society which gained more and more of its wealth through industrialisation. This trend was nowhere more evident than in the cities which boomed in the second half of the century. The high output of painted decoration in Glasgow, Sydney and Melbourne can be directly related to their phenomenal growth from the 1850s onwards.

The change in social and economic circumstances of these cities was remarkable when it is considered that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the populations of Glasgow and Sydney were very small and Melbourne had yet to be laid out. By the end of the century they had grown to be three of the principal cities of the British Empire.

Glasgow developed to be a prosperous city initially through trade, with tobacco being its main source of

wealth. With a sailing time of only fourteen days between Virginia and Glasgow it is not surprising that by 1750 more than half of all tobacco coming into Europe came through the port of Glasgow. However, with the American War of Independence threatening that trade the city responded by turning to the West Indies for trade, and to the textile industry, during the first decades of the nineteenth century. This new era led to a fivefold increase in the population, to 200,000 people by 1830. With the increase in trade, population and wealth the city transformed the river Clyde from a meandering shallow river into a more concentrated, deeper one which could receive ships of considerable size.

The prosperity generated by the increase in water-borne trade led to a massive investment in the development of the iron and heavy engineering industries between 1830 and 1860. Then, with the collapse of the cotton industry in 1864, shipbuilding was added to the existing industrial base and this provided the industrial strength and wealth of the city throughout the remainder of the century. By the 1880s Glasgow's population had grown to over 600,000 and the quays around its busy harbour had stretched to nearly five miles.

The wealth and rapid growth of the cities of Sydney and Melbourne was derived, not from industrialisation, but from commerce and trade. These were the by-products of settlement and agricultural expansion. The settlement was the end result of the mid-century gold rushes which brought the influx of new immigrants from both Europe and America. The rise in population led to the high output of buildings, including the very grand public edifices which were contrived to impart an air of permanence and stability to the fledgling new metropolises. The painted decoration which attended them derived directly from the wealth of a society which had the means to decorate and the desire for immediately recognised status.

Throughout history it has been the case that societies in the ascendancy seek to embellish their edifices with decoration. The increasing prosperity of Glasgow, Sydney and Melbourne led directly to a greater resort to painted decoration as a medium through which to display that prosperity and to create interior environments of enduring value. The decorator's clients included many of the merchants and barons of industry who sought to enrich both their domestic and civic environments.

It is equally true, however, that any decline in prosperity was characterised by a corresponding downturn in the decorating trade. Bulletins from the decorating trade emanating from a city whose economy was so closely linked with shipping in the 1880s, reports from Glasgow featured many ups and downs in that industry. The same was true of the shipbuilding centre of Liverpool:.

*[The correspondent is] glad to report a slight improvement in the trade [of painting and decorating] ... the shipping work along the docks is generally better ... the docks being the thermometer of business in Liverpool ... hopes of better things turning up in the painting trade ... Several shops are already making a little stir...<sup>75</sup>*

The shops to which the correspondent was referring were of course the Art Furnishers and Decorators who had by then been established in every major city. Their trade derived from the wealthy upper and middle classes, and the *nouveaux riches*. Clearly, painted decorations were considered a luxury which could be deferred in uncertain economic times. This fact is important today in assessing the significance of the artform.

As a reflection of the aspirations of a society in the ascendancy; bold and confident, the prosperous nineteenth-

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<sup>75</sup>The Journal of Decorative Art, March 1885, p. 674, printed under the title of 'Trade Notes - Liverpool'.

century cities of Glasgow, Sydney and Melbourne demonstrate a significant aspect of nineteenth-century society. The correspondence between affluence and significance is therefore highly relevant to the development of a mature assessment of the high output of painted decoration in the second half of the last century.

### 7.3.2 Non-Conformity

The output of painted decoration in Scotland is characterised by a high degree of non-conformity.<sup>76</sup> The term is used here to imply a freedom, and a spirit of rebellion against conservative constraints, which characterised the decorative painting of Cottier, Gow, Wells and the Glasgow School in general. This exuberant non-conformity also characterised the work of D.R.Hay and Owen Jones.

Writing of the work of Owen Jones, the leading authority, Michael Darby observed:

*Adherence to any particular style demanded essentially antiquarian, traditional and conservative interests which Jones' radicalism eschewed. He believed in a totally new style of architecture derived, not from the out-dated styles of past ages which merely reflected the state of their development, but from the new materials which recent scientific and industrial achievements made available, and which alone could express the contemporaneity of modern society.*<sup>77</sup>

The implication in this is that the non-conformists totally eschewed all art from the past. However it has been noted that Jones, as much as anyone else, learned a

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<sup>76</sup>The term 'non-conformist' is normally applied to religious non-conformity; with particular reference to churches outside the control of the Church of England. It is a term which nevertheless fits comfortably with descriptions of the extraordinary designs by Alexander 'Creek' Thomson, and the Scottish decorators whose design styles can be attributed, at least in part, to the freedom from Anglican/mediaeval/Gothic conservatism which lay at the root of so much of the British design traversed in this study.

<sup>77</sup>Michael Darby, 'Owen Jones and the Eastern Ideal', p.3.

great deal from the study of the decoration of ancient buildings. Certain immutable principles which he deduced from his studies were fundamental to his campaign to establish a new style. Even Alexander Thomson, whose eccentric design style greatly influenced Daniel Cottier, studied the work of the ancient Greeks through publications and examination of the grand neo-Classical works of Edinburgh. Neither wished to emulate or recreate the past but rather to learn from it and use that knowledge in the development of something entirely new.

In Glasgow this spirit is nowhere more evident than in the city's churches. The plan form and the decoration of the 'Revived Gothic' Church of England in no way suited the Church of Scotland. The Presbyterians preferred the classical preaching box. Nevertheless ecclesiology did make a late entry into Glasgow in 1893 and it gave an impetus to the Gothic. William Leiper, James Sellars and J.J.Stevenson all contributed significant modified Gothic designs with landmark spires and towers, owing allegiance to the French Gothic and to the work of non-conforming English designers such as J.L.Pearson and William Burges. Bodley was one of the very few English designers to be invited to contribute to Glasgow's ecclesiastic heritage.

The entry into Glasgow's ecclesiastical architecture of figurative stained glass was also very late by British standards. The earliest examples were by Morris at Townhead (1866) and by Cottier at Dowanhill (1867). But very soon painted decoration and stained glass assumed critical importance in Glasgow church interiors, accounting for many successful collaborations between Thomson, Leiper, Sellars and Cottier, Wells and Stephen Adams, as observed in earlier chapters.

Non-conformity is a very important characteristic of the neo-Classical style developed by Alexander Thomson. It is significant that Thomson developed such a style without

the benefit of first-hand observation of the classical buildings of the Antique World. Yet in many ways his work conformed to the model which is more readily identified with Pugin, Street and Burges. Like them, Thomson's design work did not finish with the plasterwork and joinery: it extended to the coloured decoration, stencils, furniture, carpets and drapes.

It is curious, but significant, that Thomson's work and his reputation were largely confined to the city of Glasgow, for an architect responsible for such major works should normally have been the centre of much wider recognition. However it needs to be born in mind that Thomson undertook all of his major works at a time when British universities were only beginning to open their doors to Protestant non-conformists.

There was something fiercely parochial about Thomson's work and it is characteristic of most art and design arising in Scotland. As an illustration of this parochialism in the decorative arts it was reported from Glasgow, in a spirit of pride, then outrage, that:

*Within the month the Messrs Kier, of Glasgow, put a large stained-glass window into the West Parish Church, Stirling ... [but] there is an intention of putting stained glass into several windows of Saint David's Church, Glasgow, and there is some talk of getting them from England.*<sup>78</sup>

Clearly it was unacceptable to the decorative artists of Glasgow that others should invade their patch, even though they felt unconstrained to pursue their own careers wherever they pleased. Alexander Thomson, for reasons which have never been obvious, did not work outside the Glasgow region. Daniel Cottier, however, whose work is so closely identified with Thomson in the early years, chose not only to leave Glasgow and make an assault on London,

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<sup>78</sup>Decoration, 2 May 1887, p.55.

but to move from there to export his art to Australia and America. There is no evidence that he or any of the other decorators adopted new styles from their environments of exile other than the general incorporation into their work of new influences like Aestheticism and the Japanesque, which introduced new options for the creation of very rich decorating effects.

Cottier's dealings in art further illustrate the daring non-conformity which characterised the output of his firm. At the time of the sale of his personal art collection, accumulated as a security for his family after his death,<sup>79</sup> it was reported by his biographer that in Scotland, where the historical regard for France was yet a living sentiment, examples of the art of the great modern Frenchmen abounded due to the insight and activity of Daniel Cottier. In England, by contrast, the National Gallery did not have a single example of the work of Corot, Diaz, Daubigny, Rousseau, Monticelli or Delacroix.<sup>80</sup>

The non-conformist spirit remained strong in the Scottish decorators at home and abroad. It effectively united them as a tight-knit group in London, Sydney and Melbourne.

### 7.3.3 Painted Decoration and Shipbuilding

Shipbuilding provided both an avenue of challenging work for the decorators of Glasgow and Liverpool, and a range of new decorating options for buildings through the adaptation of techniques developed for ships.

In 1887 The Journal of Decorative Art reported that the painting and decorating of ships was then becoming an

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<sup>79</sup>Cottier had contracted rheumatic fever when working in Aberdeen in the 1860s. Due to the illness he was unable to obtain insurance on his life so he collected works by modern artists as a provision for his wife and children.

<sup>80</sup>Collection Cottier, Catalogue of the Sale of Pictures of the Late Mr Cottier of London, (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1892).



industry and art of great and increasing importance, and that the work done on some of the British-built steamers vied with the costliest and most artistic decorations of the modern hotels of the day - the '*ne plus ultra*' of sumptuousness.<sup>81</sup> The same journal reported from Glasgow in 1884 that the city, although boasting many industries: (it was at the time the greatest seat of manufacturing chemistry in the world), its prosperity depended almost wholly on shipbuilding, shipping, and the various related industries.<sup>82</sup>

Hardly any of the steamers of the period survive and at this time there are no known authentic examples of their decorations. However the journal descriptions and sketches provide a helpful insight into this class of work and, by relating the descriptions of the work undertaken in ships to the surviving examples of work undertaken by the same decorators in building interiors, a profile of this class of work can be developed.

Charles Gow, Andrew Wells and many other painters from Glasgow earned a substantial portion of their income from the decoration of ships. Prior to his very close association with a steamer, when he sailed in one to Sydney in 1886, Andrew Wells spent a fair amount of time working in the saloons of the new steamers coming off the slipways of the Clyde. His work in the steamship 'Mexican' was described in some detail by T.Raffles Davidson in a contribution to The British Architect in 1883:

*The characteristic of the special form of decoration applied in this steamship is that it is executed in transparent stains, and gives the effect of real inlaid work at a very modest cost... Other ships for the Union Steamship Company have been executed in a similar manner by Mr Wells...*<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>The Journal of Decorative Art, August, 1887.

<sup>82</sup>Rambling Sketches, 114, by T.Raffles Davidson: The British Architect, 16 February 1883, p.82.

The stained timberwork would have been highlighted with gilding and stencilling in the manner of the stained timber ceiling at 'Cairndhu', Helensburgh, which survives as a very precious example of this class of work (figs 37&38). 'Cairndhu' was decorated a decade earlier by Daniel Cottier, with assistance from Andrew Wells and Charles Gow.

Ships' varnish-work was the starting point for such decoration. Ships with steel hull and superstructure were lined with timber, although increasingly metal was used for this purpose.<sup>84</sup> It was clearly not possible to finish the interiors of ships' cabins with plaster and the more common finishes used in buildings on land.

Most ships' decoration conformed to quasi-domestic models, as reported in the 'Roslin Castle' (figs 108&109):

*The style of decoration which has been adopted is of a light Italian character, and of course the principal ornamentation is focussed in the chief saloon...The prevailing tone of colouring is a soft bluish grey, intermixed with vellum tints, and relieved with gold and ornament and line, which harmonises admirably with the rich satinwood panelling of the walls...Portraits of men of note, including Hogarth, Wren, Milton, Spencer, Watts, Beethoven, Stephenson, etc. painted on panels of raw sycamore wood by a permanent process, are introduced with happy effect...*<sup>85</sup>

The aim in ships' decoration was to render the 'below decks' as homely and comfortable as possible; to make passengers feel at ease. The choice of style was mostly Italian, although it could have been otherwise since the

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<sup>83</sup>The Journal of Decorative Art, August 1887, pp.

<sup>84</sup>The Journal of Decorative Art, October 1911, p.355. Report of a new varnish developed to protect the interiors of ships from the humidity caused by condensation upon the metallic walls due to sudden changes of temperature. The varnish, which incorporated ground cork, was developed by the Italian Marine.

<sup>85</sup>The Journal of Decorative Art, February 1889, p.25. The decoration was undertaken by the London decorator, G. Duncan, on the Castle Line vessel for the rich Glasgow merchant, Donald Currie.

vessels did not have any distinctive architectural style of their own. In some vessels a more exotic eastern style was introduced in the smoking rooms. However, Italianate surroundings might have been the most familiar to passengers. In any event it was noted in one account that;

*Old Neptune is robbed of his terrors by spacious saloons sumptuously upholstered and harmoniously decorated.*<sup>86</sup>

J.G.Crace was decorating ships' interiors in the 1830s. In 1838 he decorated the saloon of Brunel's 'Great Western' steamer in the Old French style.<sup>87</sup> Several more commissions by Crace, mostly in the renaissance styles, are recorded. A rather bizarre early recorded example of a decorated ships' interior, which might have influenced more exotic essays, appeared in the London Illustrated News in 1848. It was a report of a Chinese junk, gorgeously painted on the exterior and interior.<sup>88</sup>

The decoration of ships' interiors demanded a higher level of sophistication and technique due to the close viewing distance on board and the potentially long viewing time. Accordingly reports of this class of work usually emphasised the richness of the finishes and the precision of their execution. A careful selection of timber for the interior panelling could provide an ideal surface for decoration as the following report confirms:

*The grand saloon [of the 'Hawarden Castle'] is a most beautiful, spacious and elaborately furnished apartment ... finished in a classic style of architecture, specially designed, the principal woods used in the decorations being walnut and oak.*<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>The Journal of Decorative Art, February 1889, p.25.

<sup>87</sup>Megan Aldrich, The Craces, p.99, referring to The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction, Number 31, 1838, pp.242-53.

<sup>88</sup>Charlotte Gere, Nineteenth-Century Decoration, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989), p.32. Reference to Illustrated London News, 1848. The Chinese junk, 'Keying', was smuggled out of Chinese waters by a consortium of British traders, arriving in London via New York.

Andrew Wells and Charles Gow, Daniel Cottier's earliest and most talented collaborators in decorative painting, readily transferred the skills they developed in the saloons of ships to building interiors. Wells explained the relevance of ships' painting to a dining room:

*The woodwork should be painted good solid colours of Indian red or walnut shades, or black and resembling ebony with thin hand-painted ornament in ivory colour resembling inlaid work ... if the wood is of good quality the panels may be decorated with various stains in full and rich designs ... I have decorated the saloons of many of the great ocean steamships in this manner.*<sup>89</sup>

A good illustration of the technique described by Wells survives in the former dining room of 'Ayers House', Adelaide, painted in the 1870s by his colleague, Charles Gow. This, and the ceiling at 'Cairndhu', are two of the finest surviving examples of late nineteenth-century decoration. Their quality and importance owes a huge debt to the principal industry of their city of origin, Glasgow.

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<sup>89</sup>Decoration, Vol.V, Number XXIX, May 1883, p.36.

<sup>90</sup>The Australasian Builder and Contractors News, 7 May 1892, pp 332-333.

#### 7.4 Transfer of Ideals, Styles and Personnel

In his lifelong study of the Western interior and its decoration, Peter Thornton concluded from his observation of a large body of illustrations that ideas about fashionable decoration spread very rapidly in the nineteenth century.<sup>91</sup> He was amazed to see novel features appearing in scenes of the same date from places widely separated geographically. This suggested to him that information could swiftly be obtained from the centres where fashion was created almost anywhere in the western world, even in weeks. Of course decorative ideas in painting required more time than, say, furniture arrangements, but it is certainly true that the will of the Australian colonists to keep abreast of European fashions was met with enthusiasm by the painter decorators despite their remoteness from the source of the artform.

There can be no better illustration of the energetic transfer of ideas across vast geographical distances than the work of Daniel Cottier and his close circle of associates. Cottier operated fashionable decorating shops in Glasgow, London, New York and Sydney simultaneously. He was able to do this by maintaining a vigorous personal regime, involving much travel, and by developing close working relationships with a select group of close associates who each maintained a deep affection and strong professional commitment to Cottier and his art.

When Cottier transferred his principal business from Glasgow to London he left his junior associate, Andrew Wells, in charge of all work in the north. In New York he put James Inglis in charge of the very substantial new business, which he closely supervised through constant travel back and forth across the Atlantic. The Sydney business was managed by John Lyon, with whom he had been apprenticed in Edinburgh, and with whom he maintained a close personal friendship which was only severed by Cottier's death in America in 1891. The artistic control

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<sup>91</sup>Peter Thornton, Authentic Decor, p.8.

of the Sydney business was maintained by Cottier through travel (by both Lyon and himself), and by the steady stream to and from Australia of Cottier's most talented assistants from London and Glasgow. It is a curious fact that even John Lyon, who lived in Australia continuously for fifty years, always considered Scotland to be his home, and returned there for personal contact and professional inspiration whenever he was able.

From the very earliest period of artistic development in the Australian colonies builders, designers and decorators sought inspiration from Britain. A survey of references in public libraries and the libraries of the church builders of the early period revealed a significant number of key English publications.<sup>92</sup> It has already been observed that important decorating references such as Jones's, Grammar of Ornament, and Audsley's, Polychromatic Decoration, were in the libraries of the architects and decorators of the later period.

Andrew Wells made much of his contributions to Moyr Smith's Ornamental Interiors. It is clear that this publication served him well as a *carte de visite* during his introduction to a new working environment in Australia where there were undoubtedly many who traded on false credentials brought by them from the larger European centres. Published works on decoration clearly played a vital linking role in the transfer of ideas and styles. However the transfer of ideas and influences was not all one way as the example of America shows.

It is useful to reflect on the success in America of the work of Eastlake and Morris. Hints on Household Taste, published in 1868, inspired a decorative movement in America appropriately christened the 'Eastlake Style'. This was a style of considerable substance, which had far

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<sup>92</sup>Eleanor Joan Kerr, "Designing a Colonial Church: Church Building in New South Wales 1788-1888" (D.Phil dissertation, University of York, 1977), Appendix: 'Books Owned by Australian Architects', and 'Books in Libraries, New South Wales'.

greater impact there than the original did in Britain. William Morris was revered in America. His example was the basis for many, if not all, of the Utopian craft-based communities that sprang up across the United States.<sup>93</sup>

Daniel Cottier's influence in America is still to be fully assessed. It has already been observed that Cottier might have been responsible for the introduction to America of the Aesthetic Style.<sup>94</sup> This view is based on Cottier's contributions to Scribner's Weekly.<sup>95</sup> The examples of Cottier's work which were published in America were so similar to work by E.W. Godwin that many attributed them to Godwin. But quite possibly the reverse is true, given that the articles containing Cottier's work were re-drawn and published by MacMillan in England in the Art at Home series.<sup>96</sup>

The outward spread of British influence, not to mention the return flow, and the movement of artists between Europe and the New World, was greatly facilitated by the ever increasing speed and safety of the steamships. The east coast of America could be reached from the west coast of Britain within days rather than weeks before the end of the century. The voyage to the east coast of Australia took several weeks but this soon ceased to be seen as an impediment to nineteenth-century travellers. America and Australia provided rich incentives to those wishing to contribute to the vigorous output of decorative art in the burgeoning new cities.

America offered unlimited scope to those involved in painting and decorating. As one mid-century writer on house-painting observed, the old city of New York was almost entirely rebuilt in his lifetime and many, like

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<sup>93</sup>Charlotte Gere, Nineteenth-Century Decoration, p.40.

<sup>94</sup>See Mark Girouard, Sweetness and Light, p.211.

<sup>95</sup>See 4.2.3, Cottier was acknowledged as a major contributor to Clarence Cook's articles and the book in which he published them.

<sup>96</sup>See Mark Girouard, Sweetness and Light, p.211, and Jeremy Cooper, Victorian and Edwardian Furniture and Interiors, London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), p.136.

himself, had witnessed the erection and demolition of houses which were considered, in their day, to be models of architectural design and finish, and the erection in their place of even more elegant and costly structures.<sup>97</sup> The added attraction for some was that America and Australia each offered warmer, drier working environments in which they could hope to recover from the poor health which afflicted so many involved in the painting trades in Europe.

The combination of poor health, ambition and an unshakable faith in their own ability to succeed, were characteristics common to the figures who loom large in this study.

#### 7.4.1 A Global Community of Artists

Throughout the period of this study artists moved freely across borders to contribute to the creation of artistic interiors at home and abroad. At the beginning of the century in Britain there was a heavy reliance on artists from the Continent. French and Italian artists worked with the leading architects on the better quality commissions. J.G.Crace called in foreign artists to assist with works as required:

*Mr John Crace, the upholsterer, was the magician who transformed [the lower Library at Chatsworth House for sixth Duke of Devonshire, who], wished to have one room in the new style of decoration, and in a short time two or three bearded artists in blouses were imported from Paris, and completed the ceiling and pilasters.*<sup>98</sup>

David Hay was the first to work towards a break from dependency on foreign artists for the higher classes of decoration, even training his artists to imitate the work of his beloved Watteau. But even within a few short years

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<sup>97</sup>John W. Masury, How Shall we Paint our Houses? A Popular Treatise on the Art of House-Painting: Plain and Decorative, (New York: D.Appleton and Co., 1868).pp. 192-3.

<sup>98</sup>Charlotte Gere, Nineteenth-Century Decoration, p.51, quoting from the Duke of Devonshire's Hand Book of Chatsworth, 1844.



the young painters whom Hay trained so skilfully, branched out to make contributions outside Edinburgh and outside Scotland. They became members of a new global artistic community.

Owen Jones owed the success he achieved in a career of design and decoration to the education he received on foreign soil. The adventure which led to his introduction to Islamic art was not without considerable personal risk, as the death of his close collaborator Jules Goury demonstrated. But, as the years passed, the ease of movement across borders increased. Indeed Islamic craftsmen even travelled to Britain to carry out work on English projects. At 16 Carlton Terrace, London, Jones was able to increase his understanding of eastern design by observing the work of Islamic craftsmen imported by the owner, Alfred Morrison, to carry out Jones's marquetry designs.<sup>99</sup>

Jones was indirectly responsible for a major contribution of Islamic design to America when one of his most talented assistants moved there in the 1850s. Jacob Mould<sup>100</sup> moved to New York after completing his training with Jones. After completing several works he was hailed as the most successful colorist in architecture to work in New York. The locals found the demonstration of the vigorous eclectic designs in polychromy, which he had studied and learned in Jones's office, to be compelling.<sup>101</sup>

Developments of the second half of the century have been detailed in earlier chapters. These were characterised by the free transfer of ideas and personnel across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The key figures, Jones, Mould, Cottier, Wells and Gow were the first decorative artists to view the whole world as a potential theatre in which to perform their art. The better-known artists of the later

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<sup>99</sup>Michael Darby, Islamic Perspective, p.98.

<sup>100</sup>Jacob Wrey Mould (1825-86). After finishing an apprenticeship with Owen Jones, moved to New York c.1852.

<sup>101</sup>Michael Darby, Islamic Perspective, p. 82 and p.141.

period, Mackintosh and fellow members of the Glasgow School, arguably made a more enduring contribution to the developing international style, but it is as well to recall that their recognition owed much to their English, Welsh and Scottish predecessors who laid the path to global recognition.

#### **7.4.2 Australia: Towards Artistic Identity**

The artistic identity which began to emerge in Australia at the end of the nineteenth century matured rapidly. It was inevitable that, with the desperate search for a national identity to legitimise the federation of the separate states (formerly colonies) into one independent nation, there would be a concerted attempt to define or create a national artform to celebrate nationhood. The faltering debut of the style which emerged would not have been possible had the solid foundations not been laid with the output of decorative art derived from Britain, most pertinently from Scotland.

In the early years of cultural development in the colonies, the new urban classes were entirely dependant on Britain for art and artists. The discovery of gold brought an influx of migrants from Europe and elsewhere, some via America, but their influence on art and culture was limited in the British Colonies.

The earliest patrons of the arts, the colonial governors, looked initially to England for cultural and artistic inspiration. The grand vice-regal residences they built in Sydney and Hobart were designed by the English architects Blore and Porden, and they were decorated with furnishings supplied by Gillows and Crace. Most of the early churches were either designed by or inspired by English ecclesiologists. The dependence on Britain was only challenged after the mid-century arrival of the genuinely free-thinking architects Wardell and Barnet.

With the subsequent arrival of the first of the Scottish decorators, Gow, in Sydney, and Paterson, in Melbourne, the foundations were laid for artistic collaboration 'at home'. Wardell and Barnet were quick to seize the opportunity to create (initially) examples of the new London style of decorated interiors, but soon thereafter to collaborate with the decorators in producing original examples with slowly emerging regional characteristics.

From the mid-1870s the artistic environment grew confidently with the steady arrival from Britain and Europe of more painter decorators, and the energetic pursuit by the new establishment of fine examples of decoration to rival, or even to surpass, their antecedents. The passage of these developments is outlined in preceding chapters.

British designers in Australia initially clung to old ideas. In studying the work of Lyon, Cottier and Co. it can be observed that Lyon, the chief designer, regressed as his work drifted naturally to old familiar themes and motifs. For, although he exhibited examples of uniquely Australian themes as early as 1875,<sup>102</sup> the firm was still persevering with old favourites like nostalgic views of old Scottish towns, as late as 1888.<sup>103</sup>

The first moves away from conservative British themes and styles were made initially by Charles Gow, then by Andrew Wells, when they introduced the styles they had developed with Cottier in Glasgow. Wells's own style had developed in a twenty year period of highly acclaimed work in Glasgow where he had broken free of the conservatism which constrained less gifted decorators. He was the first

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<sup>102</sup>The staircase window exhibited at the Melbourne International Exhibition of 1880 depicted Captain Cook surrounded by a border of Australian native flora and fauna.

<sup>103</sup>A window showing this theme was included in a large exhibit shown by the firm at Centennial International Exhibition of 1888.

decorator to be able to show clients in Australia published illustrations of work undertaken by him prior to his arrival in Australia.<sup>104</sup>

The emergence of a national style was first marked by the appearance of native flora and fauna in distinctly European contexts. With familiarisation and maturity these forms were transformed into bold and emphatic symbols of an emerging national style. However the style itself required several decades to mature.

There are parallels in the cult of Scottish nationalism; the Celtic Revival, which Glasgow artists were drawing upon at the time. The distinctive Glasgow style which emerged from their work has been shown to have had far reaching significance and, in its own way, the Australian example was also highly significant. In both, the outstanding work of the Glasgow artists and decorators of the preceding decades established the confidence and daring to pursue the modern styles of the new century.

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<sup>104</sup>See G.W.Hardy, Living Stones, the Story of St Stephen's, Sydney, (Sydney: Anzea, 1985), The church of St Stephen's was painted and decorated in 1888 by Andrew Wells in a style then considered rare in Sydney. It was 'inspired by some Glasgow Churches' almost certainly Bellhaven and St Andrew's which were illustrated in Decoration.

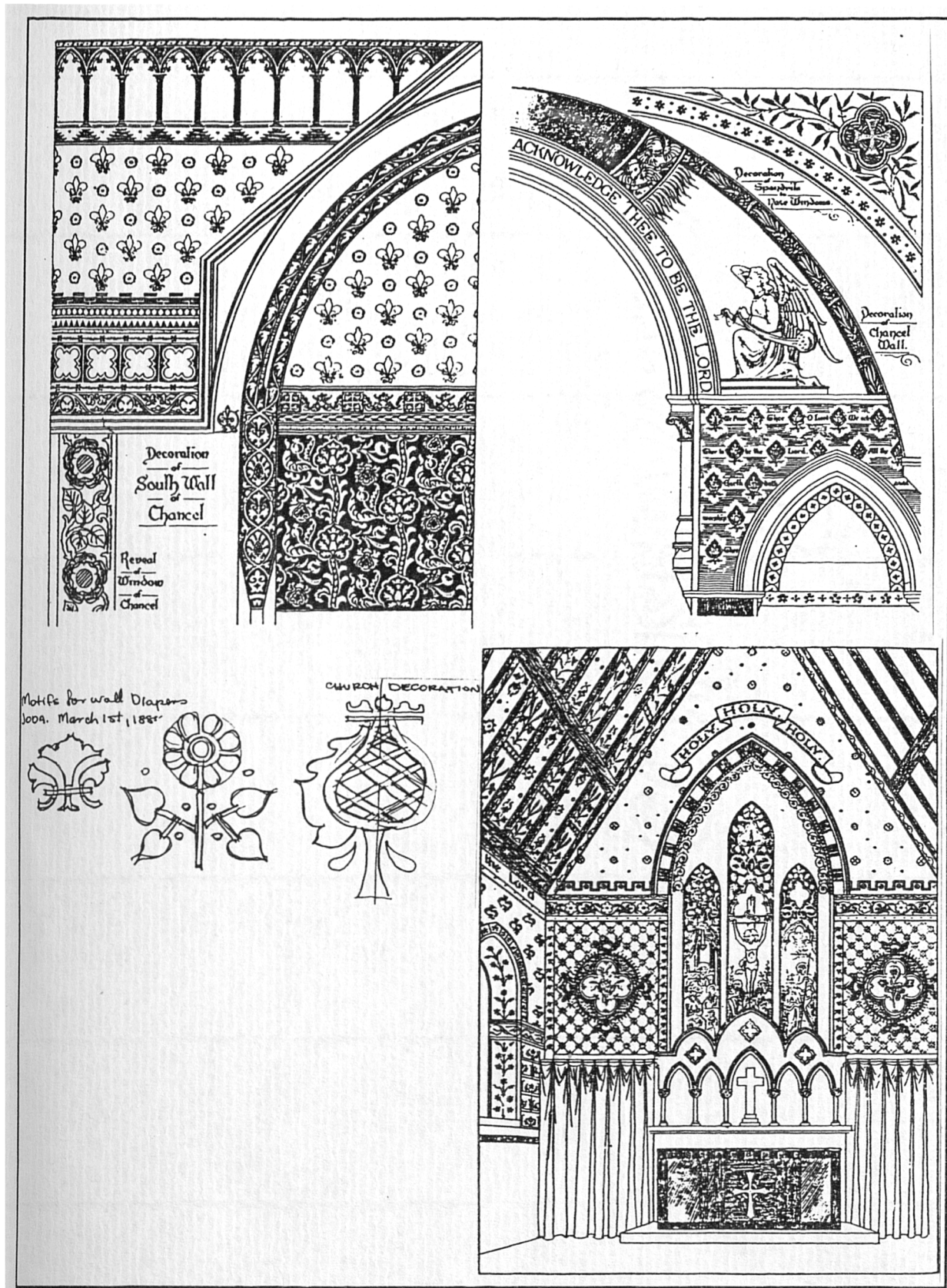


Fig. 89

Examples of painted decorations for churches illustrated over a series of issues in *The Journal of Decorative Art*, 1884-89. The Chancel decorations by Grant Brothers of Frome, are by the same hand as those at St. Issey, Cornwall.





Fig. 90  
Wallpaintings by Clayton and Bell on the north wall of St Michael's Church, Garton-on-the-Wolds, 1872-76. The scene, depicting the Fall of Man, was painted in the spirit fresco technique.



Fig. 91  
Wallpaintings by Clayton and Bell in the Church of St Leonard, Newland, 1868-77. These remarkable decorations were carried out in the spirit fresco medium with assistance from Thomas Gambier Parry, inventor of the spirit fresco technique.





Fig. 92  
Roof decorations by A.W.N. Pugin in the Church of St Mary (Our Lady and St Wilfred) Warwick Bridge, 1840.



Fig. 93  
Roof decorations by A.W.N. Pugin in the Rolle Mortuary Chapel, Bicton, Devon, 1850. This scheme and the one above involve the use of Gothic Heraldic motifs.





Fig. 94

Design proposal by Thomas Bonnar for ceiling decorations in the Heraldic style, (circa 1870). Source: Royal and Ancient Monuments of Scotland.



Fig. 95

Design proposal by Thomas Bonnar for a church interior with heraldic decorations, circa 1860. Source: Royal and Ancient Monuments of Scotland.



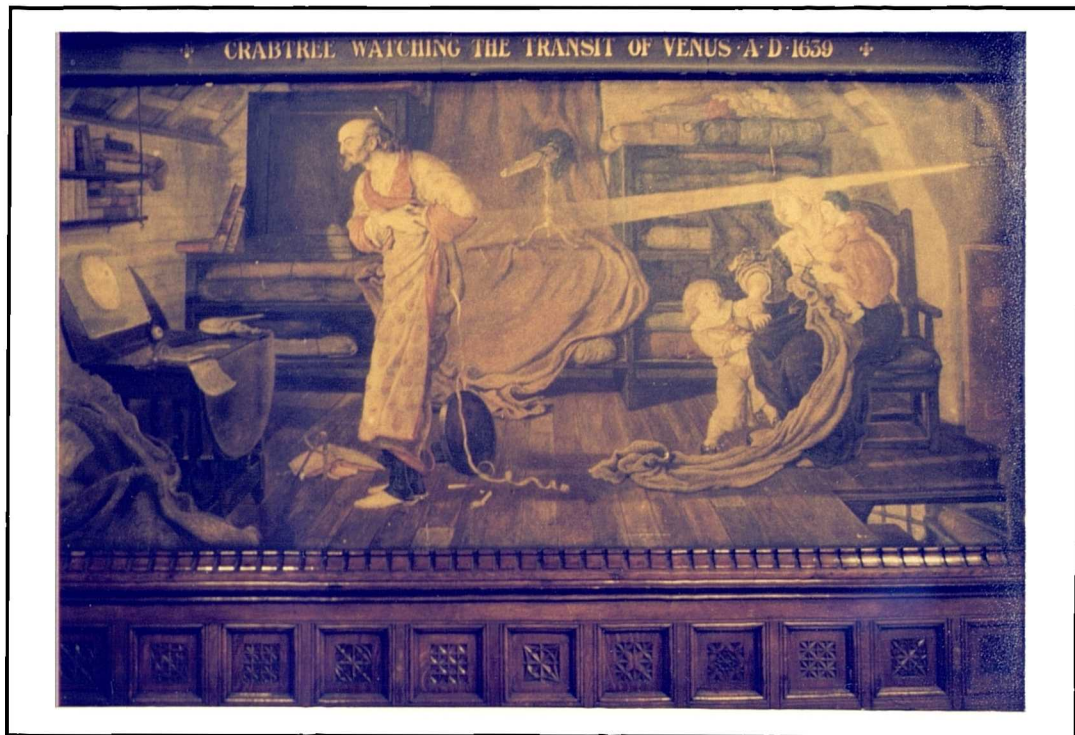


Fig. 96

Mural of 'Crabtree Watching the Transit of Venus' painted by Ford Madox Brown in the spirit fresco technique in Manchester Town Hall in 1881-82.



Fig. 97

Mural of 'The Opening of the Bridgewater Canal' painted by Ford Madox Brown in Manchester Town Hall in oil on canvas, 1890-92 after abandoning the spirit fresco technique.





Fig. 98  
 Detail of the painted roof of the Great Hall at Manchester, 1877. The architect, Alfred Waterhouse, incorporated the arms of Manchester's trading partners in a scheme of decoration which would have extended to the minor spaces in the building if Waterhouse had gained the Council's approval.



Fig. 99  
 Detail of painted decorations in nearby Rochdale Town Hall painted by Heaton Butler and Bayne for Waterhouse in the mid 1880s. The decorative devices include conventional representations of the elements of cotton production and panels depicting technological advances in the industry.

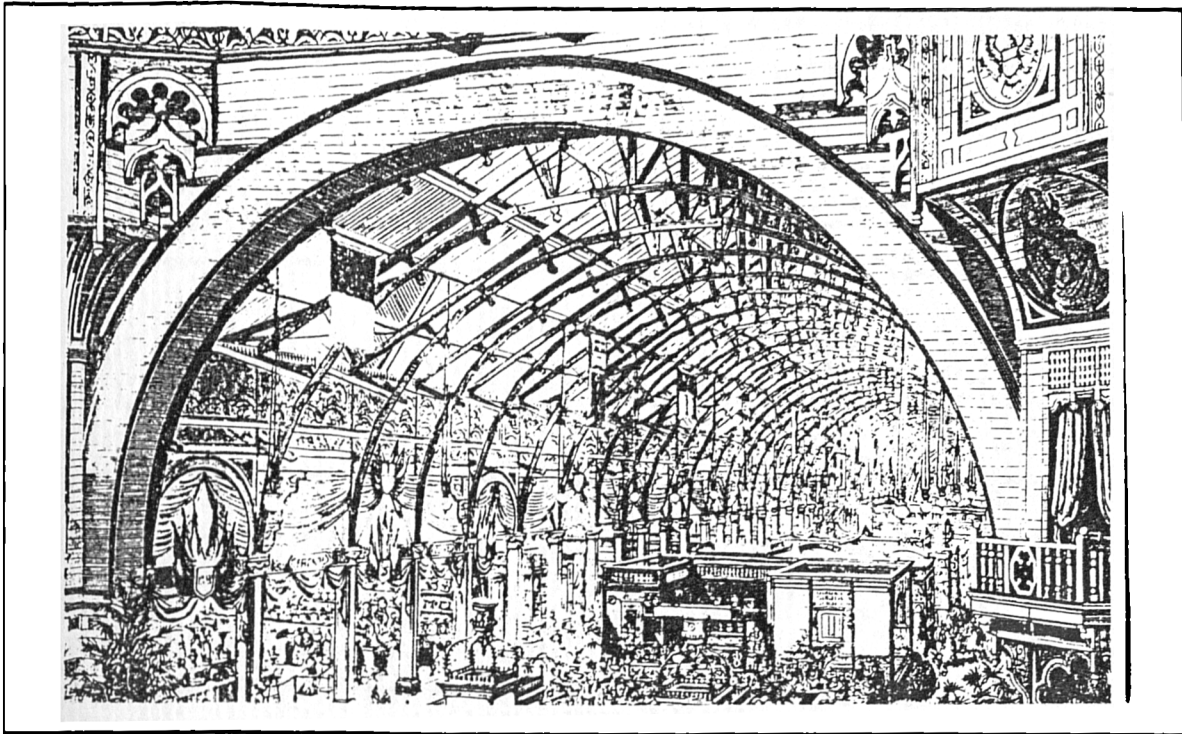


Fig. 100  
Looking from the Dome down the Main Avenue West in the Glasgow International Exhibition Building, 1888. The decorations in yellows, greens, reds and blues featured arabesques extensively. Source: *Illustrated London News*.

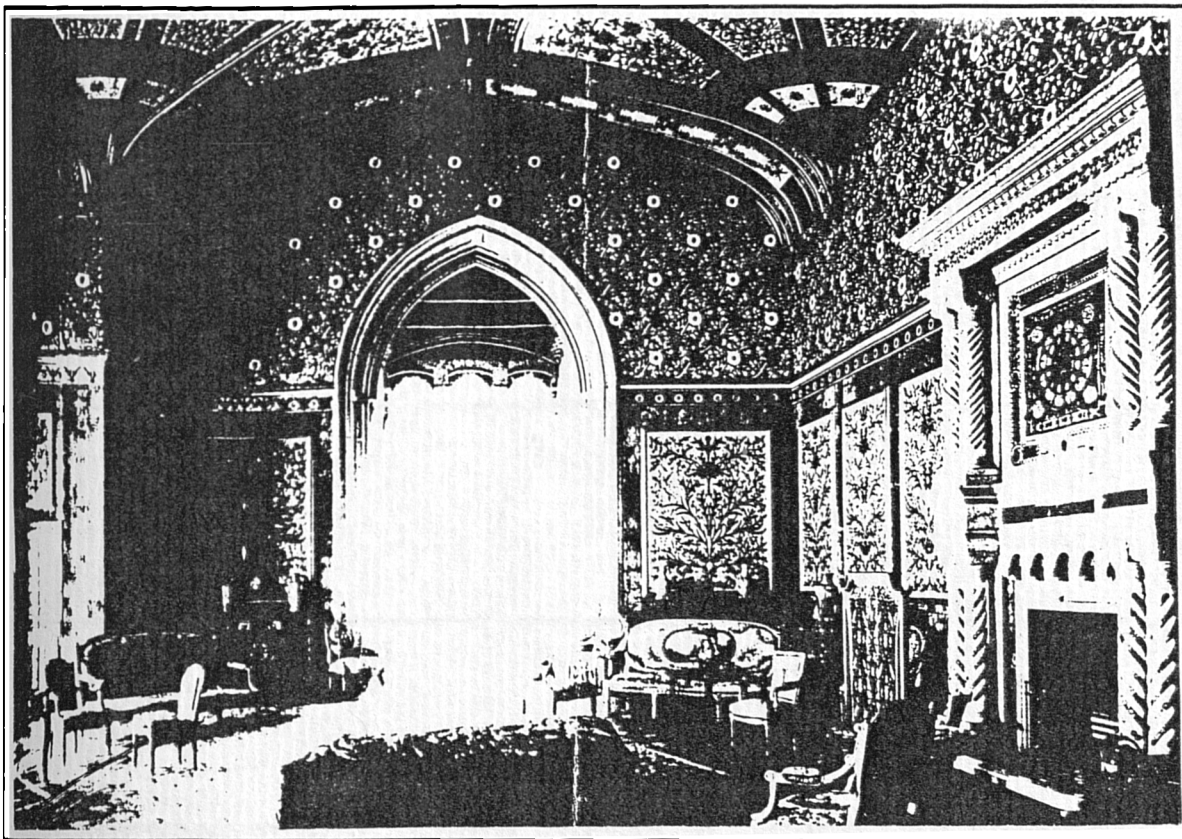


Fig. 101  
The Breakfast Room at Eaton Hall, Cheshire, decorated with elaborate stencilling by Heaton Butler and Bayne. Source: Victoria and Albert Museum.



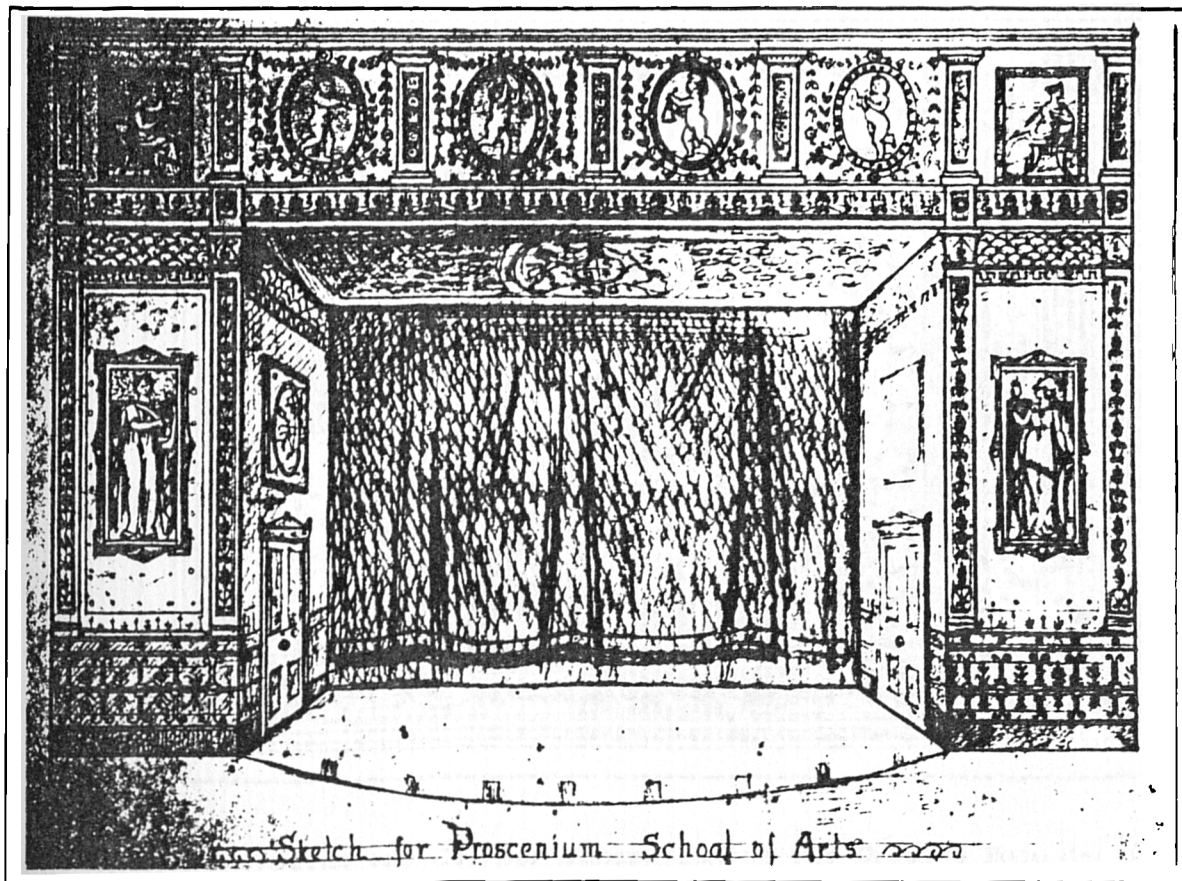


Fig. 102  
 Sketch proposal by Lyon, Cottier and Co. for the Proscenium of the School of Arts, Pitt Street, Sydney, c.1880. Source: Mitchell Library, Sydney.

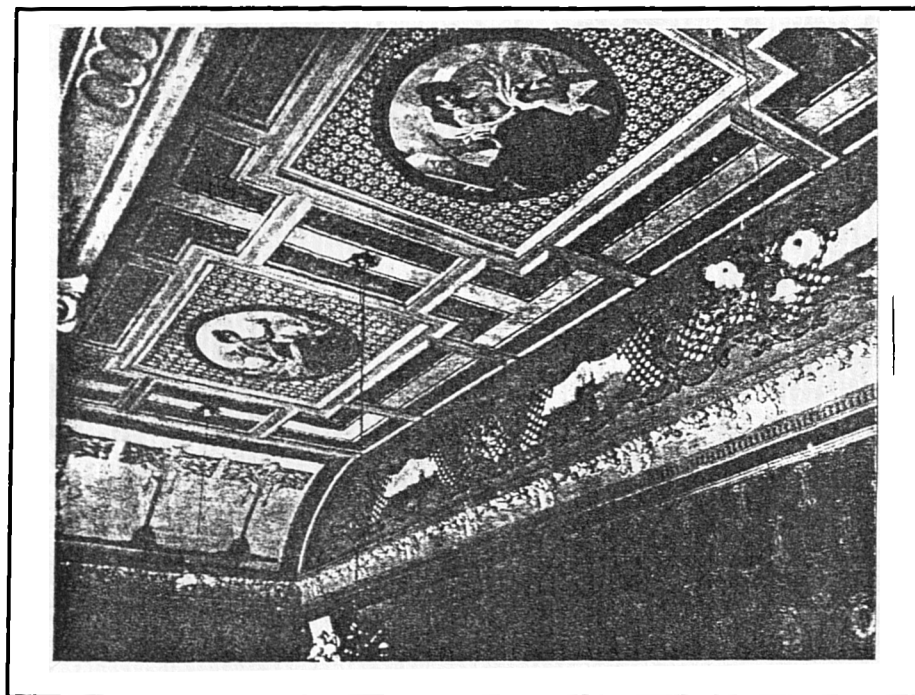


Fig. 103  
 Portion of the ceiling of the Crush Room in the King's Theatre, Melbourne, decorated by J. Clay Beeler in 1908. The Australasian Decorator and Painter, 1 September 1908.

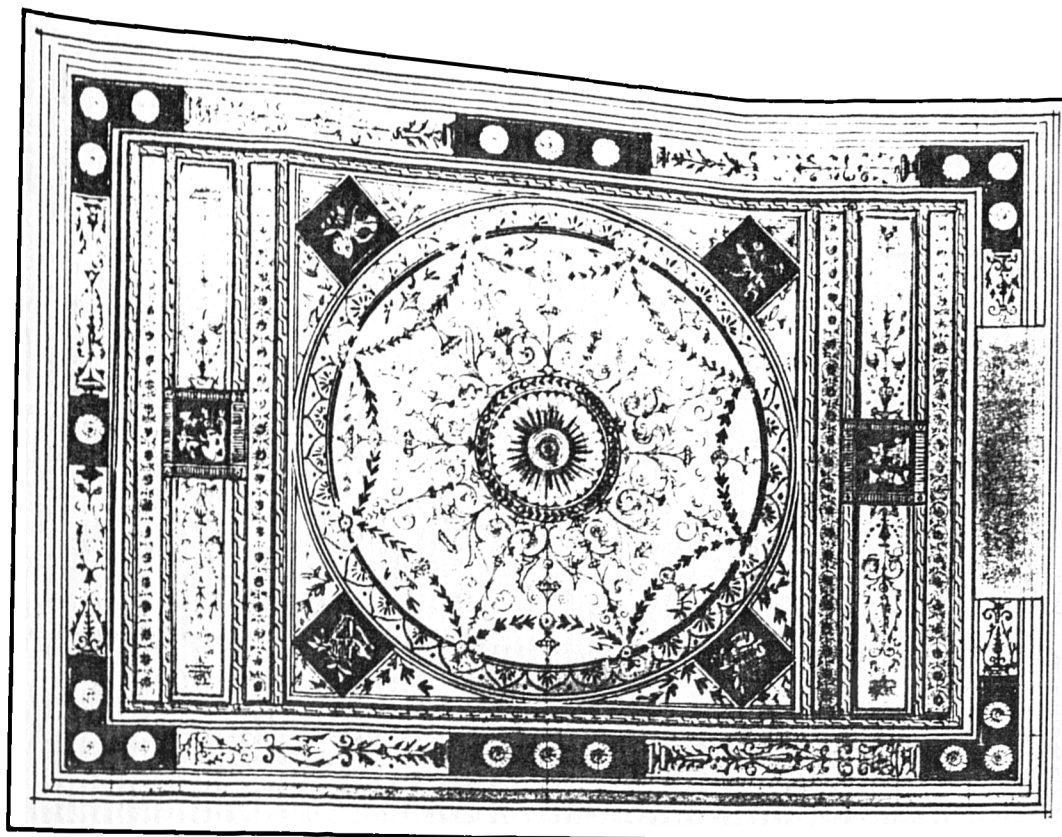


Fig. 104

Design by Lyon, Cottier and Co. for decoration of the Drawing Room ceiling of Woollahrah House, Sydney, 1886. The layout of the decorations is based on the work at Government House in 1879, but with more fluent classical forms introduced by Andrew Wells. Source: Mitchell Library, Sydney.

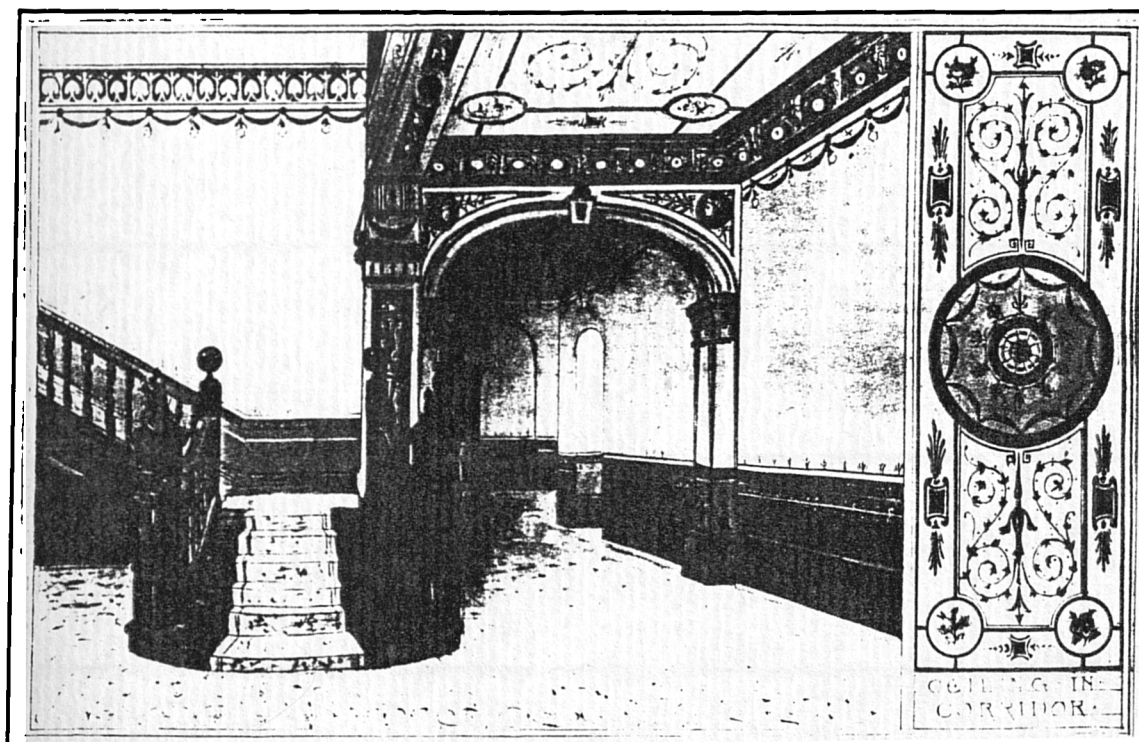


Fig. 105

Design proposal for the Hall at Woollahrah House, Sydney, showing a relatively simple scheme for walls and ceiling. Source: Lyon, Cottier and Co. Collection, Mitchell Library, Sydney.





Fig. 106  
Hand-coloured Delamotte lithograph of the Crystal Palace following its relocation to Sydenham, showing the use by Owen Jones of the primaries red, blue and yellow on the structural members. Source: Engineering Journal.



Fig. 107  
Detail of decoration in St Bartholomew's, Sutton Waldron, Dorset, 1847. It is believed that Owen Jones had an involvement in the decorations which adhere to his propositions on the use of the primary colours, although he never succeeded in reproducing classical polychromy completely restored as he believed it should have been. Therefore the background is cream only.

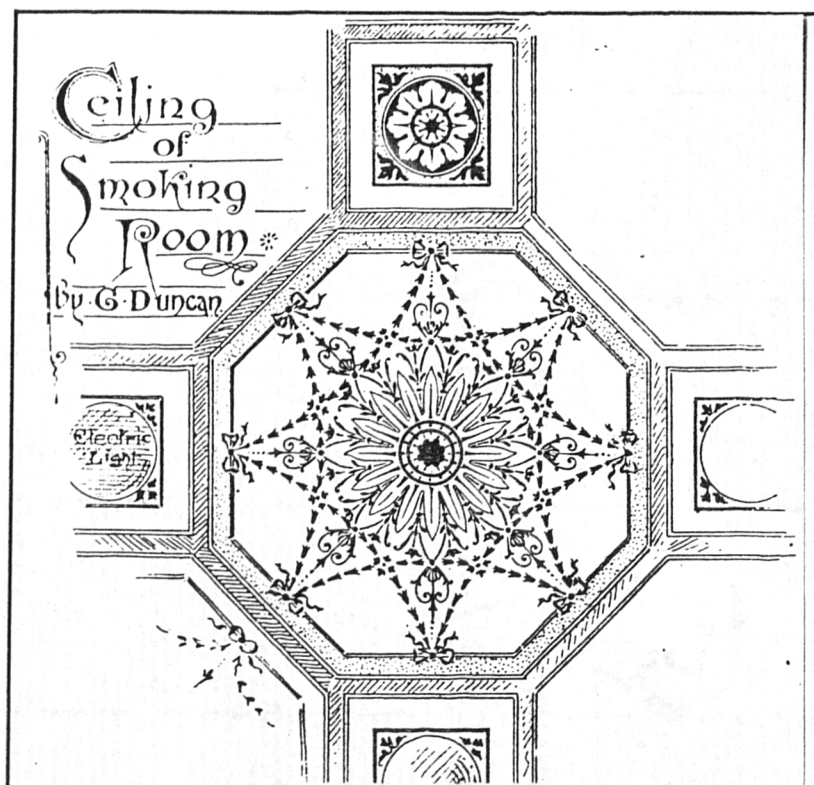


Fig. 108  
Ceiling of the Smoking Room on the 'Roslin Castle' by London Decorator,  
G. Duncan.

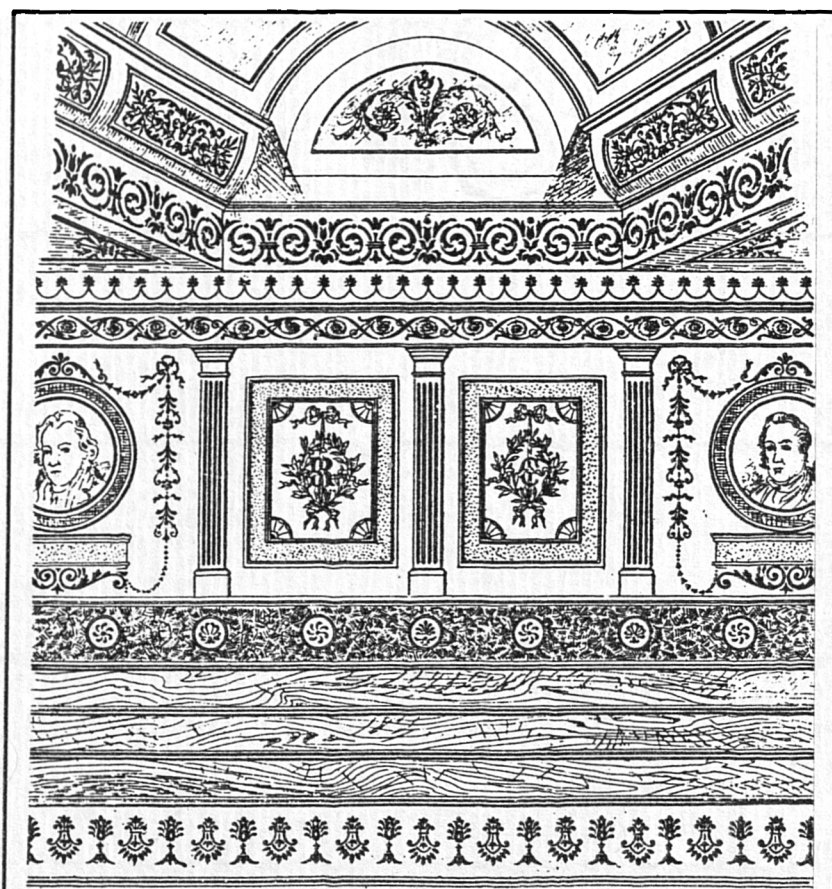


Fig. 109  
Decoration of the end of the Saloon on the 'Roslin Castle' by the London  
decorator, G. Duncan. *The Journal of Decorative Art* , February 1889.

## CHAPTER 8 CONSERVATION

### 8.1 Cultural Significance

Conservation treatments today are planned with reference to principles which have been formulated to address the need, in all conservation work, to respect the cultural significance of the artefact, place or fabric of the place being treated.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years conservation practitioners have worked cooperatively to formulate a methodology for the conservation of man-made works, both large and small. In this regard, the Venice Charter<sup>2</sup> has international recognition and is respected in conservation work on highly significant works such as the items of World Heritage.

The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, the Burra Charter,<sup>3</sup> has been in circulation since 1979. It is now widely used in the assessment and planning for conservation of buildings, sites and even museum artefacts. As yet it has not been applied specifically to the conservation of nineteenth-century painted decorations, although it has been applied to the conservation of building interiors.<sup>4</sup>

The Burra Charter, which has developed from the Venice Charter, provides practical guidelines for a very wide

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<sup>1</sup>In this context place means site, area, building or other work, group of buildings or other works together with pertinent contents and surroundings. Artefact means any work created by skilled hands, such as a building.

<sup>2</sup>International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (Venice 1966).

<sup>3</sup>Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance, The Burra Charter, 1979 (revised April 1988), prepared by The Australian Committee of ICOMOS.

<sup>4</sup>The Burra Charter was first applied to the project of conserving the interiors of an historic building in 1980 when the NSW Heritage Council made this a condition of approval for work proposed by the NSW Government Architects Branch on the former Mint building in Macquarie Street, Sydney.



range of building conservation projects. The articles of the Charter apply directly to the conservation of nineteenth-century painted decorations and, accordingly, the definitions of the Charter have been adopted in this study. The definition of conservation is therefore:

*all the processes of looking after [the interior decoration of a building] so as to retain its cultural significance. It includes maintenance and may according to circumstances include preservation, restoration, reconstruction and adaptation and will be commonly a combination of more than one of these.*<sup>5</sup>

Most of the principles outlined in the Charter are pertinent to the development of conservation strategies for the treatment of painted decoration. For example:

*Conservation is based on a respect for the existing fabric and should involve the least possible physical intervention.*<sup>6</sup>

Of critical importance in determining appropriate procedures for the conservation of painted decoration is the formulation of an appropriate policy.

*The conservation policy appropriate to [the interior decoration of a building] must first be determined by an understanding of its cultural significance and its physical condition.*<sup>7</sup>

In the following discussion conservation treatment processes ranging from preservation to reconstruction are proposed for application to nineteenth-century painted decorations. However, the selection of an appropriate process cannot be divorced from the assessment of the cultural significance, and the condition, of the fabric to be treated. The usual research methodologies are discussed in some detail in what follows.

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<sup>5</sup>Burra Charter, Article 1.4 'Definitions', p.1.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., Article 3 'Conservation Principles', p.2

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., Article 6 'Conservation Principles', p.2

### 8.1.1 Value of nineteenth-century Painted Decoration

An accurate assessment of the cultural significance of painted decorations, and the preparation of a statement of cultural significance, embodied in a report, are essential pre-requisites to the formulation of appropriate conservation procedures. Cultural significance, a concept defined in the Burra Charter, is assessed in terms of the aesthetic, historic, scientific, or social value of the decoration, for past, present or future generations.<sup>8</sup>

Relevant information would normally include the rarity or technical interest of the decoration, the cultural circumstances which influenced their form, their significance to the people who first viewed them, their historical context and their relationship with other examples of similar work, or other examples by the same decorators.<sup>9</sup> The assessment requires a methodical approach to researching and analysing the subject, using the methods detailed below.

By adhering to the procedures described in the Burra Charter, particularly those dealing with the assessment of significance, subjectivity is removed from the processes of physical intervention. The resulting conservation approach can thus be free of whim and predilection.

### 8.1.2 The Conservation Analysis

In times past, many examples of painted decoration were dismissed as errors of Victorian bad taste (rather than the achievements of men of genius) resulting in their destruction. Many very fine examples have been submerged by more fashionable schemes whilst others have been painted out in total ignorance of their real value.

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<sup>8</sup>Burra Charter, Article 1.2 'Definitions', p.1

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. 'Guidelines to the Burra Charter: Cultural Significance', p.4.

Often decorations are found adrift in a non-contemporaneous setting, long separated from the soft furnishings and other features of the origin *ensemble* in which they played a unifying role. The challenge today is therefore to place them in an appropriate context by figuratively reconstructing the authentic interiors with their full complement of furniture and furnishings. This study commenced with this very objective.

The aim of the study has been to reconstruct the context of nineteenth-century painted decorations executed in Australia by decorators whose art developed outside the country under influences which had little relevance to Australia; or so it seemed. The results have been surprising, largely because the decorators emerge as men of immense talent and importance. Accordingly, it is now possible to show that examples of their work are highly significant. But the same cannot be said of all examples of the artform since significance ranges from low to high according to context. However the methodology followed in this study can be applied in greater or lesser degree to all examples, with the result that an accurate assessment of cultural significance of all examples is attainable.

When painted decoration is encountered certain questions arise; 'when was it painted', 'by whom' and 'in what context'. These questions require plausible answers, but even when the information is not available, it should be possible with the benefit of this work, to place the decorations in a context. It should be possible to piece together enough information, from the physical evidence alone, to arrive at an assessment of significance, embracing a conjectural description, at least, of the missing components of the original *ensemble*. Then, having determined the significance of the subject by theoretical, scientific or empirical means, it becomes possible to develop a conservation policy and an appropriate conservation plan for the ongoing care of the subject.

## 8.2 Philosophy of Conservation

There is a small body only of information in published sources on the conservation of impervious paint finishes and interior painted decorations. The majority of nineteenth-century painted decorations were applied in impervious oil mediums.

The conservation processes developed for the conservation of frescoes, for which there is a substantial body of published information, cannot be directly applied to nineteenth-century painted decorations. The application processes were different and the conservation treatments therefore require different techniques.

Frescoes have long been considered to have great cultural significance. By contrast nineteenth-century decoration executed in oil paint or distemper has received little attention and, accordingly, there is a dearth of written material on its conservation. Indeed, until quite recently there had been little attention paid to any of the Victorian decorative arts.

Notwithstanding this imbalance it is salutary to study published information on the conservation of frescoes and, in particular, the approach to the consolidation and repair of grounds and supports, and the philosophical considerations and approaches to the infilling and repair of losses. The approach has been well documented.<sup>10</sup> Because of the lack of documentation on the theory and practice of conservation of impervious paint finishes it has been necessary in this study to draw from complementary material on frescos and mediaeval wallpaintings.

Nineteenth-century painted decorations were often modelled on early examples of religious wallpaintings and sometimes

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<sup>10</sup>Paola Mora, Laura Mora and Paul Philippot, Conservation of Wall Paintings. (London: Butterworths, 1984).

on fresco paintings. However there is a significant contextual difference between these artforms which has been covered in the preceding discussion<sup>11</sup> and it must be taken into account when making comparisons.

It is not possible when considering the conservation of nineteenth-century painted decorations to divorce these from the architecture and interior decoration of the spaces they occupied. Isolated examples rarely have a high degree of archaeological value in the way that fragments of mediaeval wall paintings or classical frescoes can have high value even in isolation from their original architectural context.

This is not simply a function of age and rarity, but rather of the relationship between the painted decorations and their authentic architectural environment. Fragments of simple decorative stencilling surviving in isolation from their authentic context do not usually have high value in themselves. They survive as examples only of a system of painted decoration which was contrived and executed in subordination to an overall decorative scheme.

Representative fragments of nineteenth-century painted decoration can be preserved in the same way as the revered examples of early wallpainting if they hold the key to an understanding of an earlier artform and culture. But in most cases it is necessary to supplement the fragments with reconstructions. Unlike the pure archaeological approach adopted for mediaeval wallpaintings and classical frescoes, nineteenth-century painted decorations require some further enhancement or supplementation to provide a reasonable interpretation for modern viewers.

The most conventional approach to the interpretation of surviving fragments of nineteenth-century painted decorations is to display a contemporary photograph of the

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<sup>11</sup>See 7.1.1.

full original scheme with the surviving example - the museum approach. This is a wholly inadequate approach. It is usually preferable to reconstruct the attendant decoration, with small windows of the original painted decoration being retained as 'building blocks' around which the scheme of decoration can be erected - the museo-archaeological approach.<sup>12</sup>

The conservation of nineteenth-century painted decoration can be approached in either of three ways. Painted decorations can be preserved, restored or reconstructed, according to their significance. One of the more common approaches is to ensure that surviving examples of painted decoration are preserved in conjunction with a reconstruction of the appropriate contemporary scheme. This approach was adopted in the work undertaken by the New South Wales Public Works Department in the 1980s in Government House and Parliament House, Sydney.<sup>13</sup>

The process involved very detailed off-site research prior to physical intervention to reveal 'windows' of the authentic decorations from which their precise nature could be determined. The formerly incomplete decoration was then reconstructed on a sound new substrate without interference to the authentic underlying paint layers.

It must be emphasised that nineteenth-century painted decoration cannot exist alone in the context of a modern day re-use without adequate explanation or, preferably, reconstruction or reinstatement of the attendant decorative elements - particularly the upholstery, carpets, and lighting. The painted decorations were contrived to draw together all of the various elements of interior decoration and accordingly it is not reasonable to reconstruct one without due reference to the other.

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<sup>12</sup>See Case Study No 5.

<sup>13</sup>See Case Studies Nos 3 to 6.

### 8.2.1 Preservation

In all classes of conservation the first option is preservation.<sup>14</sup> This approach, widely followed in museum conservation, poses no threat to the authentic object or fabric. Only essential work need be undertaken to clean, stabilise or consolidate.

This approach is illustrated in the work undertaken in the Drawing Rooms of Government House in Sydney, where the outstanding painted ceiling decorations of 1878 were cleaned with water only; no chemical cleaning agents were used. Areas of loose and flaking paint were consolidated and the losses infilled with tinted fillers. There was no attempt to reconstruct the losses or remove evidence of crude repairs from the past.<sup>15</sup>

The celebrated treatment of the Sistine Chapel in Rome involved the application of highly sophisticated scientific equipment to enable the cleaning and consolidation of Michelangelo's famous frescoes without the introduction of new material.<sup>16</sup> The main aspect of this preservative treatment, the removal of a disfiguring protective coating from the past,<sup>17</sup> is indicative of the main task which is common to most preservation work today - which is the safeguarding of the authentic fabric or work of art (*fig.110*).

Since surface build-ups of naturally deposited or introduced material can be harmful to the item being

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<sup>14</sup>Burra Charter, Definitions, Article 1.6. Preservation means maintaining the fabric of a place in its existing state and retarding deterioration.

<sup>15</sup>See Case Study No.4.

<sup>16</sup>Dario Camuffo and Adriana Bernardi, 'Microclimate-Induced Weathering on the Sistine Chapel', European Cultural Heritage, Newsletter on Research, Vol.2 No.1, January 1988.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid. An unskilled restoration in the past resulted in the application of a coating of animal glue to reduce the effects of contamination and efflorescence. The aged coating formed an opaque film which obliterated the paintings. The removal of this coating was one of the major tasks of the conservation treatment.

conserved it is essential to devise appropriate techniques for the removal of such deposits without damage to the authentic decoration. The scientific work done in support of materials conservation has made available a substantial body of information on the solubility of commonly-encountered materials and on solvents which can be used to remove overlayers of these materials with relative safety. Armed with such information the skilled technician can safely 'reveal' hitherto unappreciated examples of decorative painting.

### 8.2.2 Restoration

The process of restoration<sup>18</sup> can be justified only if there is sound evidence of an earlier state to which decoration can be reinstated without the loss of significant fabric. In this context the removal of wallpaper or overlayers of paint, to reveal earlier painted decoration, might be appropriate if it can be demonstrated that the loss of the wallpaper or the overlying paint does not result in the loss of significant material or information, and that the underlying decoration is far more significant.

It is common to find that nineteenth-century painted decorations have been overpainted or covered up at a time when tastes were very different from those prevailing at the time of execution of the decorations or now (*fig.111*). Unlike classical frescoes and mediaeval wallpaintings, nineteenth-century painted decorations have not been ascribed any special artistic value until very recently.

Viewers of the impressive schemes of decoration recently restored in Parliament House, Sydney,<sup>19</sup> and in Friday

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<sup>18</sup>Burra Charter, Definitions, Article 1.6. Restoration means returning the existing fabric to a known earlier state by removing [overlayers].

<sup>19</sup>See Case Study No.5.



Hill House, Chigford, Essex,<sup>20</sup> are at a loss to understand how such skilled work could have been wilfully suppressed. But it was common for very handsome schemes such as these to be painted out in favour of the monochrome finishes associated with the modern art movements. However, since nineteenth-century decorations are commonly found to be elements of an authentic architectural form in the spaces they occupy it is often appropriate for such decorations to be restored at the expense of the loss of the later painting.

Restoration is valid also in situations where there has been the loss of a large, but not major, portion of a decorative scheme. In such situations it can be important to restore a section of decoration in order to complete an otherwise intact scheme. The situation arises commonly where losses of, say, ceiling decorations due to plaster failure, result in a visually distracting break in the continuity of the work.

The first aim in conserving damaged decorations must be to recover and re-attach the damaged plaster with its authentic decorations intact. However it is very difficult to repair plasterwork, particularly lath and plaster, without a degree of new plastering. Thus it is sometimes necessary to repair the plaster substrate by traditional plastering methods before treating the painted decoration.

Restoration, involving the reconstruction of small areas of lost or damaged decoration, is also appropriate where decorated surfaces have been damaged as a result of past building alterations. The situation arises frequently when buildings undergo a process of adaptation for a new use. Indeed building restoration is undertaken specifically to rectify damage arising from unsympathetic past alterations and abuses from an earlier period.

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<sup>20</sup>See Case Study No.2.

### 8.2.3 Reconstruction

It is important to consider decoration in the context of the conservation of the buildings it occupies. The reconstruction of painted decorations can be as important as the reconstruction of other damaged or missing components of architectural detail. Reconstruction normally involves the reinstatement of decoration in equivalent new materials.<sup>21</sup> The approach is illustrated in contemporary examples such as the ongoing programme of works, commenced in the 1980s, to reconstruct ceiling decorations in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and work by the New South Wales Public Works Department in Government House and Parliament House, Sydney.<sup>22</sup>

The procedure commences with off-site research to determine the extent and nature of the earlier form of the decoration, without the removal of significant material. At the conclusion of the off-site work it is acceptable, and usually necessary, to reveal small areas of the painted finishes in order to determine the precise form and colours of the decoration. This step does involve the removal of overlayers of paint or other superimposed material to expose 'windows' of the authentic finishes.

Paint removal methods are confined to the chemical and physical techniques which allow for the removal of each layer, or group of layers, without interference to the contiguous underlying layer. In most situations a grimy film of surface deposits on early finish coats will act as a releasing agent, preventing real adhesion and facilitating the removal of overlayers with a sharp implement such as a scalpel or blade scraper.

In rare situations the overlying finishes will be soluble

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<sup>21</sup>Burra Charter, Definitions, Article 1.6. Reconstruction means returning the [painted decorations] as nearly as possible to a known earlier state and is distinguished by the introduction of materials (new and old).

<sup>22</sup>See Case Studies 3 and 6.

in water, allowing ready removal without causing any harm to the underlying scheme of oil painted decoration.<sup>23</sup> However, in most cases it is necessary to test a range of solvents to find ones which will soften each layer without damage to the immediate adjacent underlying finish.<sup>24</sup>

A method of selective paint using a commercial paint stripper and a blade scraper is efficient and suitable in many situations.<sup>25</sup> It is however potentially damaging to the underlying paintwork and must be used with great care. Its main value is that it is fast and economical for use on projects where resources are limited

The success and accuracy of reconstruction is often determined in the preparation. It may equally be determined by the choice of finishes. The selection of both the medium and the gloss level is critical. The choice is usually between an alkyd enamel or an acrylic medium and either a matt or low gloss finish. However it is important to understand that the manufacture of modern paints involves refinements which were not possible in the last century and that the paint finishes are therefore significantly different from their antecedents. There is no practical reason (other than economic constraints) why the original decorator's materials cannot be precisely replicated, however, in practice this is feasible only when dealing with a limited palette of colours.

For small projects and for minor areas of decoration, requiring only small quantities of paint, artists oils are normally used.<sup>26</sup> On large projects commercially manufactured or prepared paint is preferred. Some manufacturers are willing to accurately match colours

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<sup>23</sup>See Case Study No.2.

<sup>24</sup>See Case Study No.5.

<sup>25</sup>See Case Studies 4 - 6.

<sup>26</sup>Artists oils in tubes are available in the full range of traditional colours. It is a straightforward matter to mix colours on site and to adjust gloss levels to accurately reproduce authentic decorations.

within their standard range of commercial paints <sup>27</sup> but it has been found in practice that only small manufacturers can meet the needs of the conservation industry for accurate reproductions.

The accurate reproduction of deep colours in modern materials is difficult. To obtain them in matt finishes it is sometimes necessary to modify the medium to produce a paint of reasonable quality. However, in practice, it is sometimes found necessary to accept a gloss finish to obtain the correct colour for situations where the original finish was not gloss.

Flatted finishes were generally preferred to gloss in the higher classes of work. The low gloss levels of most intact examples of painted decorations are assumed to be near to the original intended finishes. It is nevertheless likely that many of the deep contrast colours were not flatted because of the extra work involved. Their low gloss levels can be attributed to chalking from exposure over the long term.

For all practical purposes, therefore, it is often necessary in reconstruction work to accept low to medium gloss levels. Such a choice will facilitate the use of a full palette of commercially produced colours as well as affording a finish which is both serviceable and plausibly accurate. Matt and low gloss finishes can usually be obtained for the broad expanses of the lighter background colours.

When new work adjoins old the subtle difference in gloss levels and the lack of visual uniformity is desirable in aiding the comprehension of the new work. It will, in time, usually dull off to a comparable appearance.

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<sup>27</sup>Pascol Paints Australia Pty Ltd mixed all of the required colours for the major conservation projects undertaken in Sydney's Parliament House and Government House.

### **8.3 Conservation Methodology**

Sound conservation practice demands that any conservation intervention should be preceded by a thorough study of the physical and documentary evidence of the subject, and a detailed record of its form and condition prepared. This procedure has been standard practice in museums and galleries for many years and it is now becoming more strictly observed in building conservation practice.

#### **8.3.1 Research**

When researching nineteenth-century painted decoration it is important to reconstruct the context of the decoration as well as its physical form and condition. Only in this way can the theme of the decorations, and their relationship to the architecture, the natural and artificial lighting, and the soft furnishings, be understood. Thus preliminary research must be directed to documentary, contextual and physical evidence.

Documentary evidence can exist in the form of archival material such as letters of commission and tenders, drawings, specifications, bills, correspondence and photographs. Details of major works can be located in secondary references such as newspaper and journal reports. The purpose of researching such material is to establish the age of the work and thence the broad context or social climate in which it was undertaken. The research must be specific to the individual work and it should be directed to an understanding of the history, the circumstances and the environment of the work.

The findings of documentary research can be used together with the findings of physical and chemical analyses in developing a conservation policy from which appropriate forms of conservation treatment can evolve.

Photographs provide the richest sources of information from the 1850s. The photographic recording of room interiors commenced around 1850 and increased steadily over the following decades. In the last decades of the nineteenth century room interiors became fashionable subjects. Photographs of this period provide valuable detail of the ephemeral items of decoration, such as the extent and placement of furniture; a subject which is rarely mentioned in written documents (*fig.112*).

Photographs provide an accurate record of the form and nature of decoration, although painted decorations and other details of room decoration are often captured only as a bonus in photographs of important people or events. However, photographs do throw up challenging information which it is not always possible to resolve without supplementary site research. For example, some early photographic plates were coated with emulsions of uneven colour sensitivity.

Design drawings were prepared by the decorators for most, but not all schemes. However it is unusual to find design proposals which match the finished work in all aspects of colour and design. But when they are available it is commonly found that the general range of watercolour hues is a reliable guide to the artist's intent (*fig.113*). When this information is matched with black and white photographs it is possible to gauge with reasonable accuracy the form of the original decoration.<sup>28</sup>

The wonderfully accurate drawings prepared in Australia by the firms Lyon, Cottier and Co.<sup>29</sup>, and J.Ross Anderson<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>See Case Study No.4 regarding the reconstruction of the decorations of the ballroom of Government House, Sydney.

<sup>29</sup>John Lamb Lyon, Designs (drawings of the firm Lyon, Cottier and Co) for stained glass windows and painted walls and ceilings. MS DGD30 Mitchell Library, Sydney. 106 pencil and wash drawings.

<sup>30</sup>J.Ross Anderson, folio of drawings presented in 1929 to the Working Men's College (now the Royal Melbourne Institute of Decoration). Melbourne College of Decoration. 29 drawings in tempera.

have been employed directly in the conservation of the decorations by those firms. In Britain there are very important surviving portfolios of decorator's drawings, including those of the Adams<sup>31</sup> and Thomas Bonnar<sup>32</sup>. Many others have been lost through human error. Important collections like the drawings of Clayton and Bell<sup>33</sup>, and Heaton, Butler and Bayne<sup>34</sup> survived until quite recently.

Newspaper and journal reports, occasionally accompanied by drawings, provide good contextual information and sometimes relevant detail about schemes which have been lost from view. However there is inherent risk in analysing line illustrations of schemes of painted decoration. Line illustrations did not capture the subtleties of handpainting, shading and texture.

The important issue of contextual research requires attention to the peculiar circumstances of each example on a case by case basis. There is a distinct difference in approach to the conservation of an intact interior which is contemporaneous with its architectural framework and one which was created at a later epoch in the history of its host building. Some outstanding examples of decoration appeared in buildings which were built many years earlier. Painted decoration commonly accompanied building alterations or substantial work on the building fabric such as the installation of gas or electric lighting; or making good wall surfaces and joinery damaged by rough furniture placement and handling. Changes of use also resulted in changes in decoration.

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<sup>31</sup>Although many of the Adams' drawings are held in private collections there are large numbers of drawings in the Soane Museum, London, and in the Drawings Collection, Royal Institute of British Architects, London.

<sup>32</sup>Drawings of Purdie, Bonnar and Carfrae, Decorators, in the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh.

<sup>33</sup>The Records of Clayton and Bell were destroyed during World War II.

<sup>34</sup>The surviving collection of drawings of the firm was sold at Auction by Christie's on 22 July 1975 and is now widely dispersed. Some were bought by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and the Stained Glass Museum, Ely.

Soft furnishings had a limited life. It has been shown that in the better classes of decorative work these had a fundamental relationship with the paintwork. Well-used rooms suffered the greatest damage from human occupation and the effects of sunlight and other sources of degradation.

Since architectural paintwork was a renewable finish it is common in research to find that a ten year cycle applied to the renewal of the paint finishes. This cycle did not always apply to schemes of painted decoration, which were appreciated as works of art, but even these were frequently painted out with undistinguished paint schemes which were then also painted over once every ten years or so. It is no longer surprising during research to discover that significant schemes of painted decoration often survive under many overlayers of plain paintwork.

The task which confronts the conservator today is therefore to place the decorations in an appropriate context to facilitate a clear understanding of their significance. This can be assisted by looking further at sources used by the decorators themselves and also by studying contemporary social ideals which will shed light on the values applied by the decorators and their clients.

Physical evidence, the third source of vital information, is studied by means of a number of techniques and procedures developed over recent years. Methods will differ from one project to the next in accordance with the level of information sought and required. In some situations it will be necessary to undertake detailed analyses of the materials and in other situations only analyses of designs will be needed. Vital data can be collected without resort to elaborate procedures and expensive equipment. Visual examination reveals useful base data to the experienced examiner and simple stereo microscopy will suffice for the analysis of many finishes.



Where painted decorations have been overpainted, small windows can be opened up with a scalpel blade for visual examination of the underlying paint colours, at least, with the aid of a hand-held illuminating magnifier. The same light source can be used to throw a raking light across surfaces believed to hold painted decorations. If present they will appear as forms in relief.

When further analysis is deemed to be necessary, paint samples can be removed for laboratory examination for which there is no limit, other than cost, to the tests and analyses which can be made. Simple cross-sectioning of samples can verify the presence and nature of painted decorations in many cases (*figs 114&115*).

Given that painted decoration is sometimes preserved intact underneath later layers of paint, preliminary site investigation can be undertaken by the researcher to gain access to the underlying painted decorations by penetrating the superimposed layers of paint or other finishes. The researcher can work back through the layers of paint on a wall or joinery surface with a scalpel to expose the finish coats one at a time.

A commonly-used method of opening up windows of information on the layering and colours of painted surfaces is the method of selective paint removal using chemical solvents. By this method small windows can be opened to view underlayers of paint in patches of about one square centimetre called 'ladders'.

When it is clear that painted decorations survive under overlayers of paint finishes, and their removal is deemed to be wise, painting conservators have developed techniques to uncover paint finishes layer by layer without damage to the underlying finishes. These were developed in conservation laboratories for use in the cleaning and removal of varnishes from oil paintings.

The method requires an understanding of the solubility of each paint layer so that a suitable solvent can be determined to enable removal of each layer without affecting the underlying layer.

Paints encountered in site research are routinely analysed for two principal reasons. Firstly it is important to know the composition of a paint in order to appreciate the intended appearance of the finish. Secondly, it is valid to gather historical facts about painting materials and techniques to build on the reserve of knowledge of this aspect of nineteenth-century decorating. The samples are analysed by microscopical or microchemical methods.

The sampling procedure, which has been described in several useful publications<sup>35</sup> demands that a record of each sample should be kept so that it can be matched with other information to create a complete picture of the total area under examination.<sup>36</sup> In certain instances, samples may be submitted to pigment analysis.

The process of characterising the pigments in a decorative paint serves three principal purposes. The accurate analysis of pigments will simplify the process of matching the paint colour and it will provide a means of determining how the original colour might have altered over the years. In some cases it will also provide a means of dating the paint.

It is now a straightforward matter to identify common nineteenth-century pigments. But many new pigments were

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<sup>35</sup>See: Penelope Hartsford Batchelor, "Paint Colour Research and Restoration," published as Technical Leaflet 15 in History News, Vol. 23, No. 10 (October, 1968); and Don Ellsmore, "Preservation and Restoration Technology; Applied Finishes", published in proceedings of a course, 'Building Preservation and Restoration', Graduate School of the Built Environment, University of New South Wales, February 5-9, 1979.

<sup>36</sup>The normal procedure is to collect several different samples from the same surface to ensure that small variations between samples might serve as clues to the age of individual layers and the history of painting.

introduced to paints in the nineteenth century and some of these involved complex chemical manufacture.<sup>37</sup> It is therefore sometimes difficult to distinguish between similar pigments.<sup>38</sup> Others have such distinctive characteristics that it is sometimes possible to identify the colours visually from experience.<sup>39</sup> It is nevertheless advisable to supplement site analyses with reliable studio and laboratory research procedures.

In recent years sophisticated methods of analysis have become accessible.<sup>40</sup> However for most practical paint colour research it is useful for researchers to develop their own analytical resources to supplement the commonly used stereo-microscope. Specialists in the conservation of architectural finishes ideally need to develop a research data base (or library of known samples) for use in the comparative analyses of pigments using either transmitted light or polarising light microscopy.

Under the effects of polarised light, each individual pigment will demonstrate unique characteristics by the phenomenon of birefringence.<sup>41</sup> These can be interpreted

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<sup>37</sup>Since the discovery of the first aniline dyestuff, mauve, by William Perkin in England in 1856, many thousands of coal tar dyes, suitable for lake pigments, have been produced by processes of synthetic organic chemistry.

<sup>38</sup>For example, the process of production of vermilion changed from a dry to a wet production process with significant implications for modern-day researchers. Dry process vermilion (red mercuric sulphide) was produced from natural cinnabar or formed by the union of sulphur and mercury. The dry process vermilion is coarsely crystalline and slightly red-violet in colour whereas the wet method, which found favour in England, is fine and approaches orange in colour. However the chemical composition of each is identical.

<sup>39</sup>In New South Wales during the period 1870-1910 the ubiquitous joinery paint colour of Brunswick green was mixed from Prussian blue and chrome yellow. This colour, when exposed to light over a long period of time, takes on a bluish cast due to the loss of chroma from the fugitive yellow. If the surface of this colour is disturbed it will reveal the dense green colour beneath the degraded outer surface, thus betraying its true identity.

<sup>40</sup>Robert L. Feller, 'Deterioration of Organic Substances and the Analysis of Paints and Varnishes', Preservation and Conservation : Principles and Practices, (Williamsburg and Philadelphia, 1972), p.7.

<sup>41</sup>The phenomenon of birefringence observable in the spectral region from about 380 to 780nm is the result of the microstructure of the substance examined and hence provides revealing identifying characteristics.

accurately, in the manner of an individual 'fingerprint', to identify the sample. With the benefit of a reliable 'library' of reference samples, analyses are readily facilitated.

By contrast, the laboratory methods of X-ray diffraction, X-ray fluorescence and scanning electron microscopy are expensive and often inaccessible.<sup>42</sup> They also require a higher level of knowledge of the chemical composition of the pigments to enable identification (*fig.118*).

Expensive and complex pigment analyses should be reserved therefore for those situations where the precise matching of an individual colour is critical, or where an academic interest will be served. Wherever possible simple methods should be exploited.<sup>43</sup>

The analysis of a paint medium is sometimes necessary to facilitate the choice of an appropriate conservation treatment.<sup>44</sup> Knowledge of the paint medium will lead to a better understanding of the materials and techniques to be conserved. And, since water is the preferred cleaning agent for painted decorations,<sup>45</sup> it is essential to know if a medium is soluble in water. Analyses of mediums can be undertaken on site and in the laboratory.

Thin layer chromatography is a simple laboratory technique for the characterisation of oil, tempera, glue, casein, water-soluble gum or organic-soluble resin mediums. The

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<sup>42</sup>See Case Study Number 13. The main drawback of the method is that it does not identify pigments, only their constituent elements. They will readily assist in identifying simple pigments like white lead but not complex pigments like Prussian blue (ferrocyanide prepared by calcining animal products such as horn).

<sup>43</sup>See Marie L. Carden, 'The Use of Ultraviolet Light as an Aid to Pigment Identification', APT Bulletin, Vol. XXII, Number 3, 1991, p.26-38. The fluorescence of pigments under ultraviolet light can provide clues for dating the paint layers in architectural finishes.

<sup>44</sup>Taking the example of high class nineteenth-century ceiling finishes it may be necessary to know whether painted decorations have been carried out in washable distemper or flatted oil, both of which have similar visual characteristics and would not be readily distinguished without analysis.

<sup>45</sup>Distilled and de-ionised water is the safest of all cleaning agents.

method is used routinely in museum laboratories to identify painting varnishes. Gas chromatography has been used in England with success in the identification of oils, but with aged oil paints it is not a simple matter to identify the type of oil.<sup>46</sup> Pyrolysis (destructive vaporisation of the sample) can be used in conjunction with gas chromatography to provide characteristic 'fingerprints' of mediums.<sup>47</sup> A staining method for cross-section analysis developed in France is possibly the most simple method for general use.<sup>48</sup>

The ultimate aim of much of the research will be the determination of colour, rather than finish, although the latter is no less important. The colour of pigments is determined by their chemical composition and their capacity to absorb or reflect light of different wavelengths. The perceived colour of a pigment will alter according to the nature of the illumination and the effect of its vehicle and partnering pigments.

The accurate identification of colours can be complicated since colours change in complex ways over time under different influences. The perception of colour can be also complex due to well-known differences between individuals and phenomena such as metamerism.<sup>49</sup>

The names used to identify colours have also changed over

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<sup>46</sup>J.S.Mills, 'The Gas Chromatographic Examination of Paint Media', Part I. Fatty Acid Composition and Identification of Dried Oil Films', Studies in Conservation, No.11, 1966. pp.92-107.

<sup>47</sup>George de Witt Rogers, 'An Improved Pyrolytic Technique for Quantitative Characterization of the Media of Works of Art', Conservation and Restoration of Pictorial Art, (London, Butterworths, 1976), pp.93-100.

<sup>48</sup>Marie Christine Gay, 'Application of the Staining Method to Cross-Sections in the Study of the Media of Various Italian Paintings of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries', Conservation and Restoration of Pictorial Art, London: Butterworths, 1976, pp78-83. By the application of various solutions to the exposed section of the cross-sectioned sample, and by observation of the reactions under reflected and transmitted light, it is possible to isolate oils, proteins and starches such as size.

<sup>49</sup>Metamerism is the phenomenon whereby colours which match under one set of viewing conditions do not match under others.

the years. As Seymour Jennings has noted there were no exact names for colours.<sup>50</sup> Names such as buff, pearl, chestnut, chocolate, drab, rose, lemon, dove, cream, salmon and straw no doubt identified these colours to the satisfaction of nineteenth-century decorators, but research confirms that these colours varied from project to project.

Therefore, when endeavouring to match samples on site, every effort should be made to locate areas of original decoration which have not been exposed to excessive light or overcoated with a medium which might have altered visual characteristics. Ideally they should be samples which have been covered by some form of protection, perhaps a service fitting,<sup>51</sup> whose removal will reveal information which might require many hours of site or laboratory work to replicate.<sup>52</sup> However, if the finish is believed to have been affected by degradation of the oil medium it is sometimes possible to revive this by a technique such as exposure to ultraviolet light.<sup>53</sup>

### 8.3.2 Analysis

The procedures to be followed in the examination and analysis of painted decoration involve more than those covered in the foregoing section. A detailed understanding of the total environment of the decorations is essential in framing conservation treatments. In particular the condition and environment of the supporting fabric must be

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<sup>50</sup>The Australasian Decorator and Painter, 1 March 1911, p.146. Jennings stated, *We have no exact names for colours notwithstanding the earliest efforts that have been made by scientific men for many years to that end ... so far as paint is concerned the nomenclature is in chaos.*

<sup>51</sup>Samples of preserved colour can be found under the mounting blocks of (former) gas brackets or electric light switches, timber conduits etc.

<sup>52</sup>See *fig.111*. The removal of an overdoor pediment revealed a well preserved area of the original wall stencilling in Villa Alba, Melbourne.

<sup>53</sup>Morgan W. Phillips, *Discoloration of Old House Paints: Restoration of Paint Colours at the Harrison Gray Otis House, Boston*, Paint Colour Research and Restoration of Historic Paint, APT, Publication Supplement, 1975.

fully understood. No conservation treatments can be initiated without a thorough analysis of the condition of the substrate and a full investigation of the causes of any deterioration. Clearly, an assessment of the likely consequence of the proposed treatment is also essential.

The potential for failure with conservation treatments is well known. The risks are real and conservators are wise to employ reversible methods wherever possible. However, in building conservation, the opportunity for the use of entirely safe reversible treatments is limited because of the scale and cost.

In recent years there have been many examples of paint removal which have either failed or created secondary conservation problems. A common consequence of an intervention involving the removal of overlayers of paint is a rapid acceleration in the deterioration of the exposed paint layer due to the failure of the aged paint medium.<sup>54</sup> This consequence can be anticipated and avoided by analysis and testing of the underlying surfaces prior to removal of the overlayers.

Although it seems very obvious, it is important to recall that the conservation of painted decoration cannot succeed without paying attention to the supporting media and surrounding environment. While it is essential to determine the condition of paint surfaces and the causes and effects of any deterioration, it is equally important to examine and monitor the immediate environment of those surfaces. It is necessary also to record every significant detail regarding the history, condition and treatment of the work, including the treatments proposed.

The procedure to follow in the examination of wallpaintings has been outlined in detail by Mora and Philippot in their major study.<sup>55</sup> By adopting this

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<sup>54</sup>Adam Karpowicz, 'Ageing and Deterioration of Proteinaceous Media', Studies in Conservation, Vol.26, No.4, November 1981.

procedure in any examination of painted decoration it should be possible to trace the causes of any deterioration; such as condensation or desiccation related to room heating; water damage and salt activity relating to building failure; or even the build-up of surface deposits due to draughts and air movement.

The storage of records accumulated during examinations and analyses requires some consideration. It is desirable that the information should be retained in archives at the site if this is feasible. However, where this is not practical, it is recommended that they should be transferred to the archives of a relevant central agency.<sup>56</sup> The accumulation of such records would be very beneficial to the development of a substantial body of knowledge on painted decorations.

### 8.3.3 Routine Procedures

It is now widely understood that conservation processes need to be determined on a case-by-case basis. Each project will require careful analysis to determine appropriate procedures and treatments prior to any physical intervention.

Notwithstanding, some procedures are common to many conservation projects. Most common are substrate repair, consolidation of paintwork, surface cleaning, infill and reconstruction.

The repair and infilling of losses, although still common, is now undertaken with a high degree of circumspection. There is growing awareness of the effect on paintwork of environmental influences, especially the effect of light,

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<sup>55</sup>P.Mora, L.Mora and P.Philippot, Conservation of Wallpaintings, pp.17-35.

<sup>56</sup>Records could be retained by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, (for Scottish properties), English Heritage (for English properties) or the New South Wales Heritage Council (for properties in New South Wales).



which predetermines the choice of materials for infilling. Upon close inspection, new materials must be readily distinguishable from the old and they must be proven to be stable over the long term. The practise of overpainting to brighten up soiled or damaged finishes has been discredited.

Substrate repair is a common characteristic of most work on nineteenth-century painted decorations due to the common failure of substrates, in particular timber and plaster. Timber shrinks and cracks due to the reduction over time of the moisture content of the wood. In conditions of unstable relative humidity such as exist commonly in the majority of occupied historic buildings shrinkage cracks in timber substrates commonly exist and require filling with appropriate gap fillers.<sup>57</sup>

Repairing plaster substrates by traditional means usually results in damage to the painted decoration since plasters are made up with a high content of moisture which is lost into the atmosphere or into the contiguous plaster during setting. This loss of moisture is accompanied by shrinkage of the new plaster and potential swelling of the adjacent plaster or the paint film with a risk of localised failure, especially cupping of the paint film at the border. In most respects traditional plastering methods are unsuitable for all but the repair of large areas where the reconstruction of the painted decoration is projected.

The formulation of alkali resistant cement modifying agents in recent years has led to the use of acrylic resin adhesives in the repair and re-attachment of plaster substrates.<sup>58</sup> The advantages of the acrylic adhesives and

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<sup>57</sup> See D.W.Grattan and R.L.Barclay, 'A Study of Gap Fillers for Wooden Objects', Studies in Conservation, Vol.33, No.2, May 1988; and, R.Barclay and C.Mathias, 'An Epoxy/Microballoon Mixture for Gap Filling in Wooden Objects', Journal of the American Institute for Conservation, Vol.28, No.1, 1989.

<sup>58</sup> Morgan W.Phillips, 'Adhesives for the Reattachment of Loose Plaster', The APT Journal, Vol XII, No.2, 1980. pp.37-63. Research undertaken by Morgan

acrylic modified plasters is that they can be formulated to suit individual tasks.<sup>59</sup>

Painted decoration on lath and plaster is very vulnerable to damage resulting from failure of the plaster substrate or the supporting timber laths. The failure can relate to water penetration and corrosion of the metal nails or rotting of the timber laths, causing the plaster to sag and crack. It can also become detached from the laths due to breakage of the keys.<sup>60</sup> However, traditional methods of plaster repair can cause damage to the painted surfaces.<sup>61</sup> By contrast, acrylic adhesive techniques facilitate solutions in such situations.<sup>62</sup>

The processes of re-adhesion and consolidation are urgently needed in situations where painted surfaces show cupping, crazing, cracking or flaking of the paint film. Any such break in the continuity of the paint film will lead to losses unless the unstable paintwork is consolidated. The selection of a compatible adhesive or consolidant is obviously critical.<sup>63</sup> There are very few

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Phillips in the United States into the use of Rohm and Haas Rhoplex, Primal and Acryloid adhesives for plaster consolidation.

<sup>59</sup>According to the available research and the findings of accelerated aging tests, acrylic-modified plasters have sufficient strength and long-term stability to replace many of the traditional methods which are dependent on mechanical fixings for their long-term stability.

<sup>60</sup>The plaster is bonded to the laths by the keys which form during the process of application when the wet plaster is pressed between the laths.

<sup>61</sup>The traditional methods of re-adhering sagging plaster involve either screw fixing from below, with resulting damage to the painted surface, or the application of an additional bedding coat of plaster applied from above.

<sup>62</sup>The acrylic adhesives are capable of re-bonding all of the components of the ceiling construction by bridging the gaps between the plaster and the keys or the laths. The acrylic adhesive will even form a bond around the nails and adhere the laths to the ceiling joists (or to wall studs).

<sup>63</sup>See P.Mora, L.Mora and P.Philippot, Conservation of Wall Paintings. See chapter 9, 'Fixation and Consolidation', pp.216-236. Adhesives and consolidants must be compatible in all respects with both the paintwork and the substrate. They must have either proven long-term stability or guaranteed reversibility. Their desirable properties are assessed in terms of adhesive strength, penetration, flexibility, optical properties, resistance to biological attack, reversibility, non-toxicity and resistance to dust and surface accumulations.

adhesives reliable for use in damp-affected areas. By contrast there are quite a few adhesives which will function effectively on dry, stable wood and plaster substrates.<sup>64</sup>

Consolidants need to be unobtrusive, and non-visible in situations where they are not to be overpainted. The shiny finish of some consolidants is to be avoided.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore consolidants and adhesives must be resistant to biological attack and environmental degradation.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, adhesives and consolidants should not attract or hold dust and surface deposits as this might lead to unevenness and discoloration during exposure.

Modern technology has provided a very wide range of options to supplement the traditional adhesives and consolidants such as shellac, beeswax and animal glues. However, rigorous assessment of these should be undertaken before they are introduced to the job.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>It is not essential for adhesives to penetrate either the substrate or the paint film. The adhesives should have similar properties to the paint film. For this reason it is not advisable to use resins in solvents which penetrate deep into the substrate causing a rigid bond in localised areas. On the other hand, adhesives which do not penetrate but nevertheless create strong adhesion and thus localised bonding, must be avoided. Adhesives should not be too rigid or too brittle, but rather they should have properties similar to the paint film itself and behave similarly under the effects of environmental change. Where paintwork has broken down into a network of unconnected parts, consolidants are required to anchor the small islands of paint firmly enough to withstand the forces of air currents or even physical abrasion.

<sup>65</sup>The shiny appearance mostly relates to the method of application rather than the chemical composition. An excess of solid in an undiluted material, or the rapid drying of the solvent, will cause the formation of a film which is, in effect, a varnish. The emulsion types are have been found to be best due to their larger particle size and better dispersion of the solids in the solvent.

<sup>66</sup>The starch types can attract bacteria and some of the resins can darken and yellow with age and exposure to ultraviolet light. The resins are usually to be avoided also because of their irreversibility. Those which darken usually do so because of the cross-linking of their molecules. This renders them insoluble in all but the most aggressive and dangerous solvents.

<sup>67</sup>A standard testing procedure should involve analyses of appearance (an optical assessment by the unaided eye), resistance to abrasion, biological resistance, behaviour during accelerated aging and resistance to detachment. When a limited range of options has been identified these can be evaluated

Cleaning is recommended to remove dirt and visually disfiguring surface deposits. In conservation, dirt is understood to mean material in the wrong place, which should be removed. Dirt can sometimes contain deleterious material<sup>68</sup>. However methods of removal must be carefully tested prior to use.<sup>69</sup> The temptation to clean painted decorations to restore them to some assumed earlier condition is fraught with risk. It is important to remember that the removal by cleaning, of all non-original materials does not restore the work to its original state (ie the state in which it was left by the artist on completing the original work). It simply reveals the present state of the original material.<sup>70</sup>

Surface cleaning can only be undertaken on sound, well-consolidated surfaces. The process of consolidation must precede work on any surfaces which are not sound.

The choice of cleaning materials and methods will depend upon the nature of the substances to be removed and fundamentally upon the resistance of the paintwork. The cleaning operation should not proceed ahead of the exhaustive assessment of the effect on the paintwork of the proposed method. When the cleaning operation is begun it should be confined initially to a representative area which is preferably not visible to the normal viewer (in case the effect is not desirable) and to allow refinement of the methods prior to work on the prominent parts.

Painted decorations become soiled by a variety of materials, including atmospheric dust particles, greasy materials from human contact; fossil fuel heating systems and lighting systems; superimposed varnishes (in rare cases); salt efflorescences, and biological agents.

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against practical criteria such as cost and ease of application.

<sup>68</sup>See Case Study No.4

<sup>69</sup>See Case Study No.10

<sup>70</sup>Mora, Mora and Philippot, Conservation of Wallpaintings, p.282.

Cleaning methods include the use of abrasives and mechanical methods, the use of solvents coupled with physical action, and the application of chemical agents, detergents and biological agents.

Mechanical cleaning methods are not common, although fine abrasive powder has been used successfully in the cleaning of painted wall surfaces.<sup>71</sup> The most common methods involve the use of mild solvents in conjunction with physical action. By far the safest and most reliable method for the cleaning of oil painted surfaces is to use distilled water as the solvent.<sup>72</sup> The role of the solvent is to soften and dissolve the deposits.<sup>73</sup> Triangular diagrams of solubility parameters have been developed to assist with the selection of suitable solvents.<sup>74</sup> In most instances mild abrasives and de-ionised or distilled water, possibly modified with a detergent<sup>75</sup> or chemical cleaning agent, will suffice.<sup>76</sup> However these must be completely removed following their application.

A cautionary note should be sounded regarding all cleaning, lest the impression be given that cleaning is aimed at removing all of the surface deposits. Surface dirt and deleterious matter must be distinguished from patina, which is the desirable evidence of age.

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<sup>71</sup>See Case Study No.10

<sup>72</sup>When applied by means of cotton swabs, the dissolved dirt can be picked up with the swabs. This is the usual approach to the application of most solvents in the treatment of museum artefacts.

<sup>73</sup>Any solid will dissolve when the molecules of a liquid insert themselves between the molecules of the solid thus breaking down the molecular bonds.

<sup>74</sup>Robert L. Feller, 'The Relevant Solvent Power Needed to Remove Various Aged Solvent-Type Coatings', Conservation and Restoration of Pictorial Art, pp. 158-161.

<sup>75</sup>Detergents, or surfactants are long-chain hydrocarbons to which polar groups are attached thus enabling them to dissolve in water. They act by increasing the wetting power of water increasing its cleaning action.

<sup>76</sup>Chemical agents react by breaking the primary bonds of the solid dirt deposits. Weak acids such as acetic, and alkalis; such as sodium hydroxide, potassium hydroxide and ammonia can be used safely in some situations, but they leave a residue on the painted surface. The modern enzyme-active biological cleaning agents usually have moderate success.

It is now understood in conservation circles that dirt is material in the wrong place. It is not material discoloured by age and service. With painted decoration there may be significant patina deriving from the darkening of oil varnish on gilding, subtle colour variations due to orientation or environmental factors and other desirable characteristics due to the age and history of exposure of the decorations. These should not be removed during the cleaning process.

The removal of overlayers of paint, or varnish, by chemical means, follows closely the pattern of analysis and testing outlined above. Sometimes the process is straightforward and mechanical.<sup>77</sup> However, paintwork which is exposed by the removal of overlayers will not have the same properties as painted surfaces which have not been overpainted.<sup>78</sup>

The subject of infill and reconstruction is always vexed. The treatment of losses is a philosophical issue without, as yet, any clearly defined guidelines. Since painted decorations are not simply works of art, which can exist in isolation of their architectural context, the approach to the subject of infill and reconstruction must be broadened to embrace the concept of cultural significance.

Painted decorations were produced by processes which have less intrinsic worth and they are not usually able to be regarded as works of art in the normal sense of the use of

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<sup>77</sup>See Case Study No.2. The surface grime which adheres to almost any painted decorations which have been exposed in an environment rich with dust and the grimy by-products of fossil fuel burning lamps and heaters can work substantially in favour of a successful removal. This surface film of dirt and grease is a reliable isolating layer which prevents any further layer from truly adhering to the first. It is this layer which makes it possible to sometimes use mechanical methods to remove overlayers of paint.

<sup>78</sup>There is a relationship between painted decorations and their substrate and also with the overlayers. An overlayer of oil paint may leach oil into the layer beneath or conversely draw oil from it. Thus the ability of the exposed paint layer to survive as an independent finish will be severely compromised by its history of overpainting.

this description. Rather they are part of an *ensemble* of painted decoration; furnishings and other items of decoration. Hence traditional art conservation methods of infilling with tinted fillers can be applied only in rare instances.<sup>79</sup> Reconstruction is usually more appropriate.

With painted decorations there is a strong argument in favour of reconstruction because buildings are living, functioning organisms which suffer wear and require regular maintenance as a legitimate function of conservation. Unlike works of art, which merit preservation, decorated building interiors require conservation treatments embracing all of the processes of preservation, restoration, reconstruction, maintenance and sometimes adaptation.

Two principles should be followed in determining the nature and extent of reconstruction. The first is that the method of treatment should be determined by the process of rational analysis and assessment of cultural significance. The second is that the reconstructed portions should be subordinate to the authentic surviving decorations.

As a general rule colours for reconstruction should be toned down slightly from the original since it is highly unlikely that colours matched closely to fair samples of the original would be in harmony with other elements of the paintwork and furnishings. Furthermore, the selection of paints should be confined to those finishes which are known to be stable over the long-term, and care should be exercised to avoid situations whereby colours which match under one set of viewing conditions but do match under others.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>See Case Study No.5. This approach was followed in the treatment of a spandrel of decorations in the Lobby, where the art conservators involved in the work elected to use pigmented plaster fillers to restore continuity to the painted decorations, without the introduction of any of the missing stencilling, even though the full extent of the missing work was known.

<sup>80</sup>Sarah Staniforth, 'Retouching and Colour Matching: the Restorer and Metamerism', Studies in Conservation, Vol.30, No.3, August 1985.

Modern painting materials lack the subtle characteristics of traditional paints which were produced by hand or with relatively unsophisticated equipment. It is therefore not easy to accurately reproduce nineteenth-century paint finishes. However, experience gained over recent years, provides a base of knowledge of the period which makes it now more likely that sound results can be achieved. Indeed some very fine examples of conservation have been undertaken in recent years in Britain and Australia. A small number of these are included in the case studies which follow.



#### 8.4 Conclusion

Of all the rooms examined during the course of this study, one stands out from the rest - the former drawing room at Newbattle Abbey. It has rightly been described as 'the finest room in Scotland'<sup>81</sup> and it illustrates, better than any other, the principles of nineteenth-century decoration and the aspirations of this study. It is the most poignant example of a nineteenth-century interior, painted by one of the leading Scottish decorators in accordance with David Hay's theories, and it remains largely intact with its soft furnishings. There are no distracting introduced features save for some concealed artificial lighting.

Newbattle Abbey is a rare and precious reminder of the beauty and sophistication of some nineteenth-century decorated interiors and more can be learned from studying this one interior than can be learned from years of study of secondary sources. Most other examples are either incomplete or have been modified in ways which diminish their integrity. Their value in illustrating the principles and practices of interior decoration of the period are accordingly limited to greater or lesser degree.

The drawing room at Newbattle Abbey is a surprise. Viewers are taken aback by the sombre 'giraffe' coloured walls and the combinations of elements (*figs 119&120*). Yet it is precisely the presence of the 'giraffe' coloured walls which creates the harmony and success of the scheme. The sophistication and brilliance of the coloured ceiling decorations (*fig.121*), the gilding and the rich red upholstery, now very faded, fall more easily into accepted patterns and our general understanding of what constituted nineteenth-century interior decoration.

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<sup>81</sup>Ian Gow, "The Finest Room in Scotland: Thomas Bonnar's Decoration of the Great Drawing Room at Newbattle Abbey for the Eighth Marquess of Lothian", Scottish Society for Art History Yearbook, 1988.

Although many scholars visit Newbattle Abbey for the purpose of study, most students of nineteenth-century painted decoration do not have this opportunity. Therefore the key messages about harmonious colouring and the nineteenth-century approach to the construction of decorative schemes around fixed starting points remain largely undiscovered. This study began slowly, but accelerated following an introduction to Newbattle Abbey. Since this introduction many subtle aspects of the subject have revealed themselves.

The greatest enjoyment in researching and writing up the subject has come with an increasing awareness of the principles and patterns which underlie the schemes of decoration and how these differ from our modern day understanding. As a result of greater knowledge and awareness, to which this study is contributing, it must be hoped that fewer such schemes will be destroyed. No longer should it be possible for painted decorations to be dismissed in accordance with an earlier prevailing, misguided view that these must be examples of 'Victorian bad taste'.<sup>82</sup>

#### **8.4.1 Placing Painted Decorations in the Context of Nineteenth-Century Cultural Developments**

Until recently the nineteenth-century decorative arts were not considered to be greatly significant. Although the period was one of great industrial activity and social change, with unprecedented developments in architecture and the social arts, the remarkable achievements of the decorative arts were overshadowed. Furthermore the arts of earlier periods were assigned a greater status.

This situation began to change in reaction to the destruction of large tracts of Georgian and Victorian

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<sup>82</sup>Ian Gow, "The Northern Athenian Room: Sources for the Scottish Interior", The Review of Scottish Culture, Number 5, 1989, pp.1-11.

architecture during the post World War II re-building of major industrial centres in Britain. The Victorian Society, established in 1958 with the aim of preserving the best examples of Victorian and Edwardian architecture, art and history, began to promote discussion on the decorative arts in the 1980s. Seminars sponsored by the Society on the subject of Victorian Art and Painted Decorations have served to accelerate discussion on this subject.<sup>83</sup>

Today the value of the nineteenth-century decorative arts is better understood. However even some *aficionados* still struggle to appreciate the significant place occupied by painted decoration in the decorative arts. Examples of painted decoration need to be placed in the context of other nineteenth-century artistic developments.

The foregoing discussion dealing with the incorporation of painted decoration into major works of architecture such as prestigious residences, churches, exhibition buildings and Houses of Parliament, establishes the relevance of this artform to architecture and, hence, society of the period. It is no longer possible to visualise these structures with the type of bland monochrome decoration which is characteristic of the preceding and succeeding periods, even though caretakers of our own time have debased many of these structures with inappropriate decorative schemes of our own time.

Not all surviving examples of nineteenth-century painted decoration are good examples. But even poor examples will, upon careful analysis be found to be significant for the information they convey about the period. Even very modest

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<sup>83</sup>In particular three seminars were of direct relevance to this study, viz. 'Sources of Inspiration for Victorian Art and Architecture', a seminar organised jointly by the Society of Antiquaries of London and the Victorian Society held in London on 25 November 1983; 'Victorian Painted Decoration', a seminar organised by the Victorian Society held in London on 26 January 1985, and 'the Decorative Arts and Crafts in the Victorian Period', a seminar organised jointly by the Society of Antiquaries of London and the Victorian Society held in London on 22 November 1985.

examples of the artform are relevant to an understanding of the range, diversity and social value of this form of decoration.

#### 8.4.2 **Interpreting and Communicating Nineteenth-Century Ideals**

Since examples of nineteenth-century painted decoration are rarely found intact in an authentic environment it is difficult readily to interpret them accurately. The task is made easier with access to historic records but in the absence of documentation the process of concluding an accurate interpretation can be very painstaking, involving detailed scientific analysis and documentary research.

The problem was experienced by nineteenth-century students seeking to interpret painted decoration from earlier periods. Owen Jones observed changes in the colour of paintwork at the Alhambra and interpreted these changes in a way which might not have been supported by scientific analysis:

*The grounds of many of the ornaments are found to be green ... in all cases however, it will be seen, on minute examination that the colour originally employed was blue, which, being a metallic colour, has become green from the effects of time.*<sup>84</sup>

Jones wished to respect the authenticity of the decoration he studied and to convey this accurately to his readers. However this strategy involved the same risks then as now. Unless the various considerations which shaped the decoration are known fully a degree of subjectivity will be introduced with the possible consequence that the issue may be misrepresented. Authenticity in painted decoration can be a broad issue.

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<sup>84</sup>Owen Jones, Alhambra, letterpress to plate XXXVIII.

Authenticity of fabric can be established, although Jones might have misinterpreted the authenticity of the fabric outlined in the earlier example through lack of scientific corroboration. Authenticity of concept is less easy to establish and it is interesting to speculate about the possible result of an attempted restoration of a David Hay scheme of decoration if it were to be undertaken in ignorance of the full details of the furnishings which accompanied the painted decoration. Indeed this situation has arisen in the past and it very nearly arose in the example of the reconstruction of the full scheme of decoration in the drawing rooms of Government House in Sydney when the essential element in the concept of the scheme, the crimson upholstery, was not fully appreciated.<sup>85</sup> However in this example the authenticity of the concept was of the utmost importance to the success of the conservation treatment.

It has been found through practical experience that while it is a straightforward matter to achieve the conservation of partial examples and full schemes of painted decoration in public buildings, especially museum buildings, there is often considerable occupier resistance to the conservation of nineteenth-century painted decoration in domestic buildings and those in which there is a more intimate relationship between the user and the decoration. Nineteenth-century decoration is often seen as not relevant to today's lifestyle. Hence it becomes essential, in order to safeguard the artform, to ensure that it is perceived as being relevant.

Since painted decoration is integral with its host structure it follows that this integrity should be respected in conservation treatments. However, while it is necessary to conserve the fabric which supports decoration in order to conserve the decoration, the conservation of that decoration is sometimes seen as optional, especially

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<sup>85</sup>See Case Study No.3.

if there are economic constraints. In many cases the conservation of the building fabric is assigned a higher order of importance than the conservation of the painted decoration. For this reason it is critical to establish the relevance of the decoration and to explain the important relationship between the decoration and the structure.

It is also important to confirm the sound economic rationale which applies to the conservation of painted decoration. To achieve this, a cost comparison can be made between re-decoration (depreciated over a ten year cycle) and conservation treatment (depreciated over a fifty year cycle). The greater character, uniqueness and cultural significance of the painted decoration, which can be established by empirical means if necessary, should adequately re-confirm the benefits of appropriate conservation treatment over the alternative approach.

This thesis establishes clearly the very great value and significance of nineteenth-century painted decoration and the corollary that conservation of this form of decoration should be a high priority in all building conservation.

#### **8.4.3 Lighting and Environmental Control**

Having established broad conservation parameters, a few concluding words about environment seem appropriate. Environmental factors bear directly on the selection of treatment processes and, more importantly, on the result over the long term. In this regard, moisture and light are the key factors to be taken into account.

The presence of moisture in the supporting fabric can lead to rapid deterioration of painted decorations, mainly through the formation of damaging salts. The main causes and effects are detailed in Appendix B. To some extent these can be addressed in conservation treatments.

However, damage caused by light cannot be reversed.<sup>86</sup> Light, in any form, will cause damage to painted decoration by way of its effect on both pigments and media.

More pertinently, however, light has a close relationship with the viewer's perception of painted decoration - a fact which is as relevant today as it was to the colour scientists and the colour theorists. Each attempted to analyse the effects of light on the human eye and thus determine how visual perceptions might be relevant to the construction of schemes of painted decoration. The balance of colours in a building interior is closely related to the source of light.

Artificial light is easily taken for granted. However it is an important factor to consider for, without light, painted decoration does not exist. It is therefore important to establish how the interior was illuminated in the first place.

The use of stained glass in domestic interiors in the late eighteenth century was intended to admit light of a certain quality. At Abbotsford Scott filled the windows with stained glass and lit the interiors with gas. However, during the first half of the nineteenth century artificial lighting was a great luxury - one which was not available to all classes of society. Notwithstanding the introduction of acetylene lamps and reticulated gas, which certainly expanded options for entertainment and socialising at night, the evolution of artificial lighting did not occur fast enough to have a general effect on the way decoration was constructed.

For practical reasons the study of nineteenth-century painted decoration should be undertaken in the context of

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<sup>86</sup>Hermoine Sandwith and Sheila Stainton, The national Trust Manual of Housekeeping (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984) p.19.

a natural environment. Colours should be analysed and conserved under conditions of daylight and artificial lighting should be designed to emulate daylight conditions unless there is very strong evidence to support the reconstruction of the authentic artificial conditions which existed in the spaces being conserved.

This high ideal is really very difficult to achieve in practice because of modern constraints which arise out of the need to fit the space for a purpose and to an extent which was not originally necessary or possible. In such cases lighting designers are usually called upon to provide discreet lighting. Discretion can be achieved when the source of artificial lighting is unobtrusive and the light does not concentrate attention on individual elements at the expense of the overall harmony.

It has been found through practical experience that the best results are achieved when the original fittings are able to be adapted to accommodate modern lamps to deliver an output near to, but greater than, the original lamps. This method can be very successful provided the colour balance is fully respected (*fig.122*).

The true test of the success of the conservation treatment of a scheme of interior decoration will be its authenticity. Treatments which convey an immediate impression of harmony and authenticity might be considered to be successful. However, success when measured by today's standards, although desirable, is not necessarily the ideal outcome. Many schemes of painted decoration have been destroyed in the past by well-intentioned intervention and it would be conceited to assume that future generations will not develop a new standard for the assessment of this artform.

This thesis establishes the cultural significance of nineteenth-century painted decorations in a way which is



relevant today. It offers a approach to conservation which could ensure that future generations will not be denied the opportunity to appreciate the artistic achievements of this period.

If more information emerges in the future, to throw new light on the subject and provide a basis for re-assessment, this will be a cause for rejoicing.

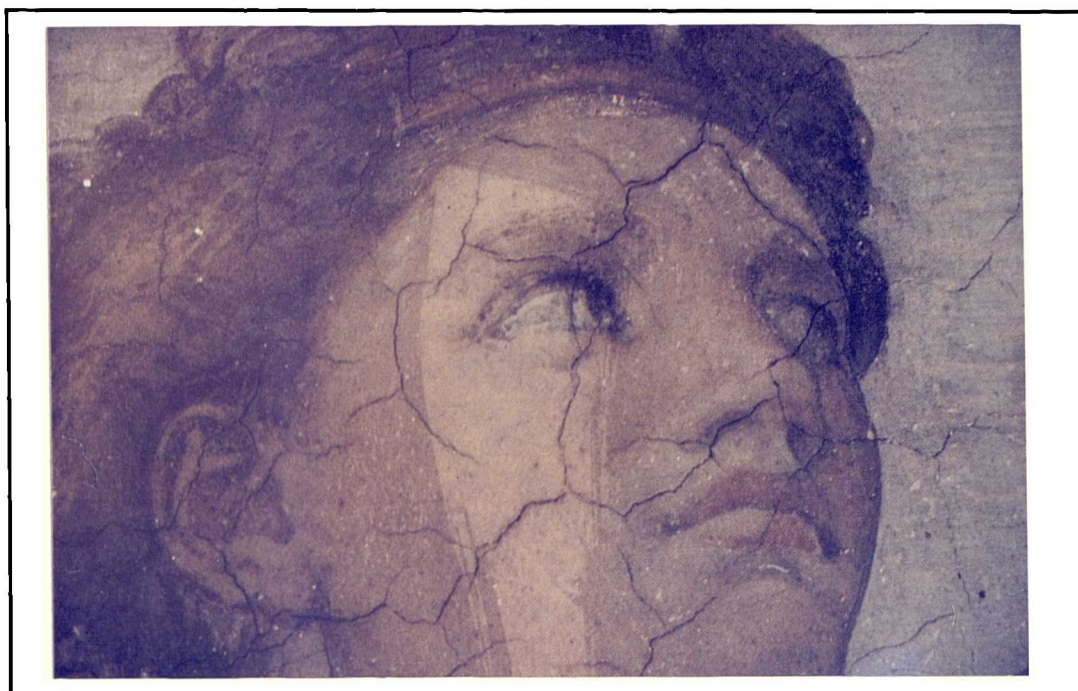


Fig. 110

Detail of Eve's face in the painting of 'The Original Sin' by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, Rome. The area of bright, clear colour was not overpainted with animal glue in a past attempt to consolidate the painting. Source: Commission of the European Communities, Directorate General for Science, Research and Dev't.



Fig. 111

Villa Alba, Melbourne. The removal of a decorative overdoor mantle has revealed the stencilled wall filling from the early scheme of decorations, believed to be an imitation fabric painted by the Paterson Brothers.





Fig. 112

View of the Ballroom at Government House, Sydney, taken in 1887 prior to the construction of the orchestra gallery. The walls are decorated with a graduated stencil pattern in imitation of silk damask. Source: NSW Government Printers Office.



Fig. 113

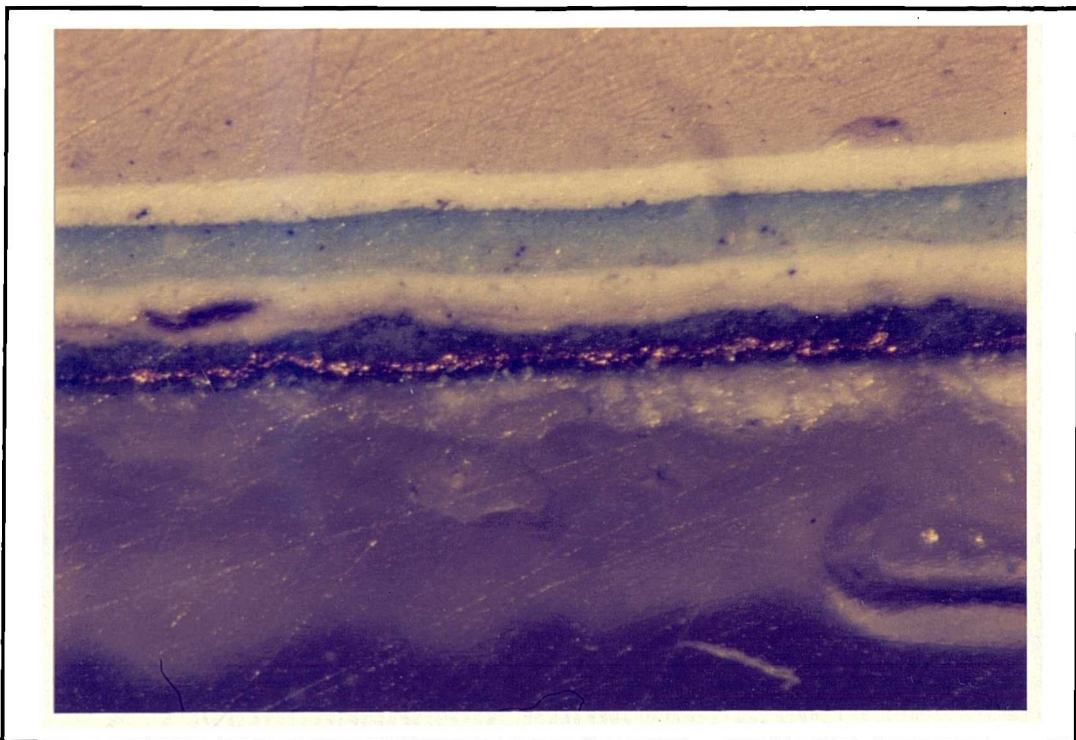
Design drawing by Lyon, Cottier and Co. for the ceiling decorations of the Ballroom, Government House, Sydney, 1878. The drawing was retained by John Lyon, separate from the rest of the firm's design drawings. It was discovered and identified during research on the Government house project. Source: Ian Zammit, Sydney.





*Fig. 114*

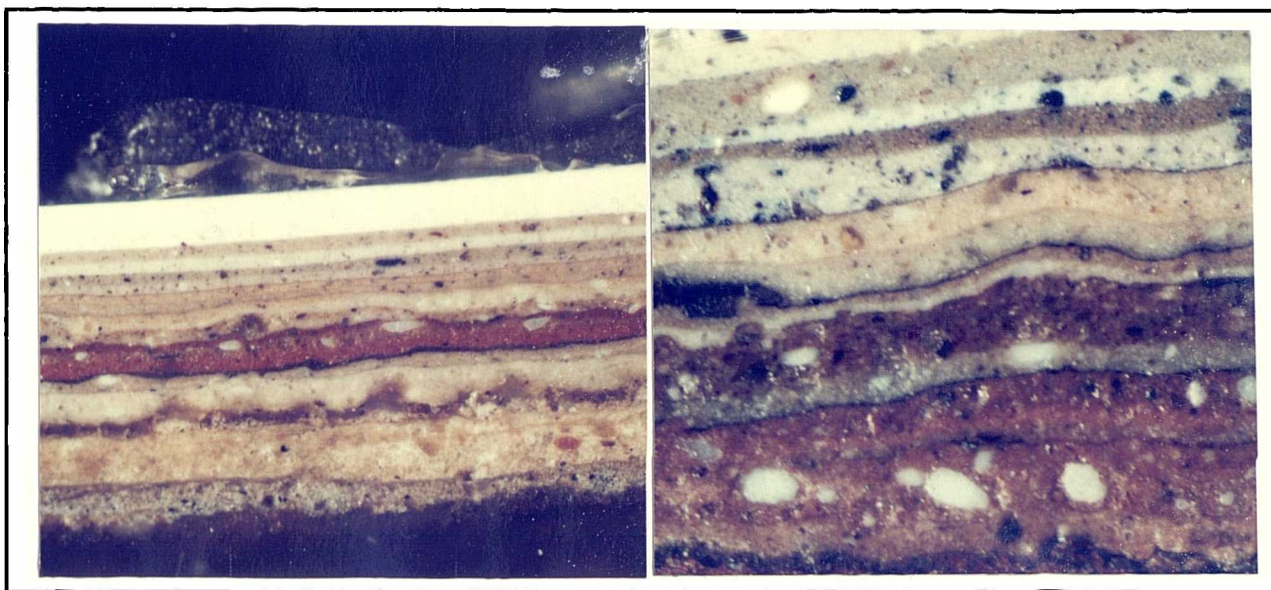
*Cross-section of a wall paint sample taken from the first chapel at St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney. The walls were decorated by Lyon, Cottier and Co. with overall stencils in red on a green ground. The stencil shows as a broken line in the sample.*



*Fig. 115*

*Cross-section of a wall paint sample taken from the second (1887) chapel at St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney, (now demolished). The painted decorations include some artificial gold work which shows as a line of glitter in the sample. These are particles of bronze powder.*





Figs 116 and 117.

Photomicrographs at 40X and 100X magnification of exterior paint samples taken from the NSW Houses of Parliament. The samples illustrate the grouping of layers (ie. preparation and finish coats) between which dirt deposits show as dark uneven lines. Source: NSW Institute of Technology.

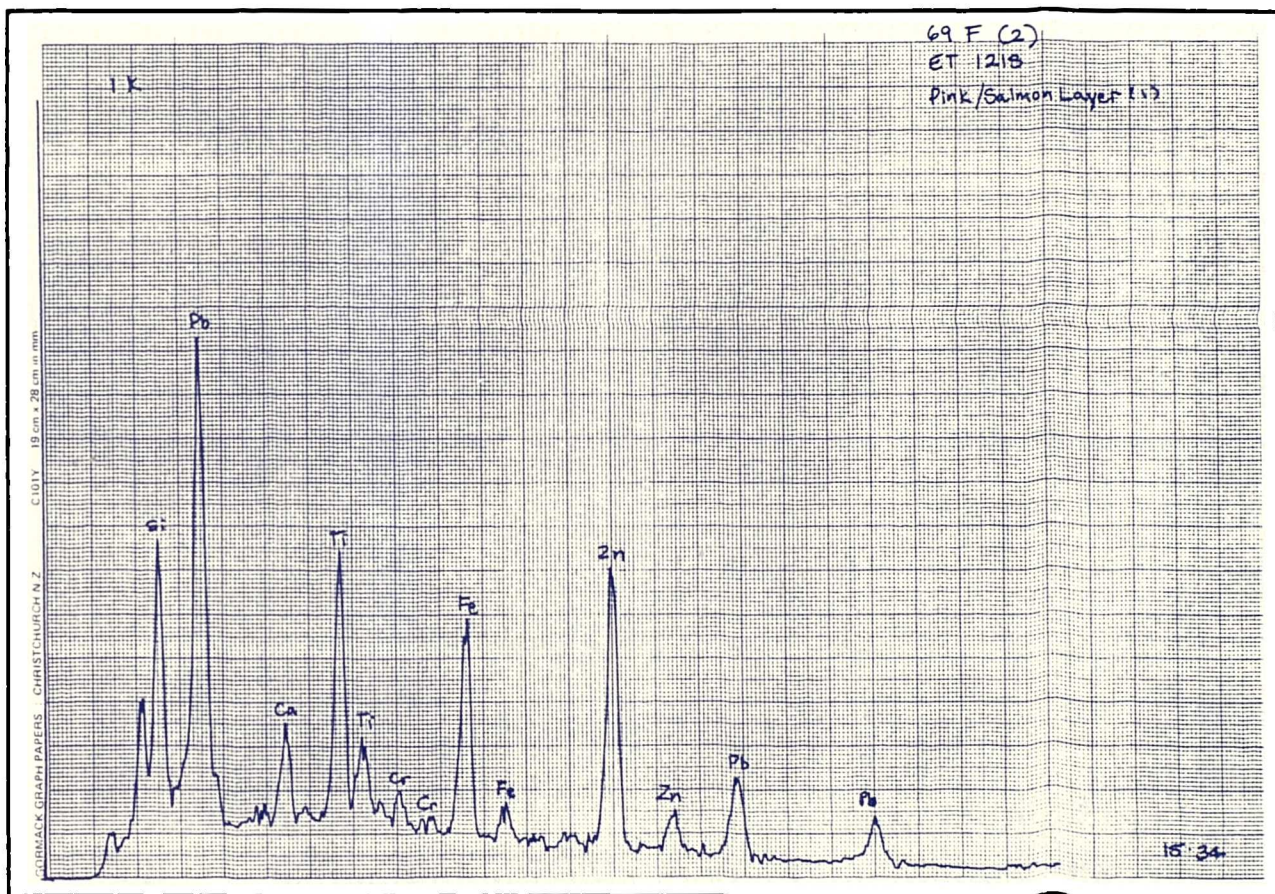
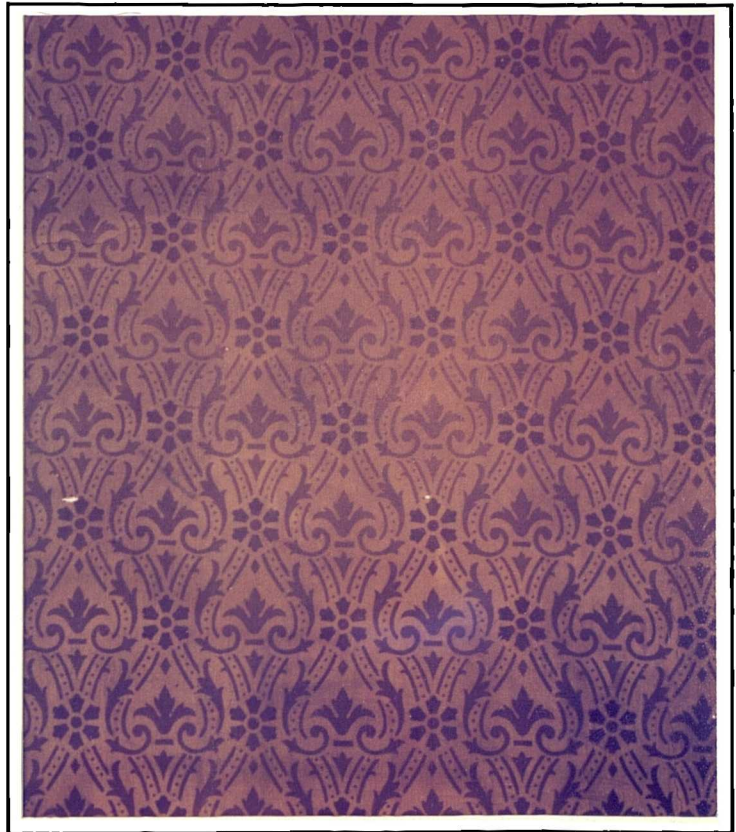


Fig. 118

Scanning Electron Microscope analysis of a salmon coloured paint layer. The principal elements present are lead, zinc and iron, suggesting a conventional white lead and zinc oxide-based paint with red iron oxide pigment. Source: NSW Institute of Technology.





*Fig.119*  
*Detail of giraffe coloured imitation Morocco leather wall finish in the*  
*Drawing-Room of Newbattle Abbey, Dalkeith, Scotland by Thomas Bonnar, 1870.*



*Fig.120*  
*Drawing Room of Newbattle Abbey with crimson carpet and upholstery set against*  
*the giraffe wall filling and chocolate dado all highlighted with gilding.*





Fig. 121  
Detail of the ceiling decorations of the Drawing Room of Newbattle Abbey painted by Thomas Bonnar in 1870.



Fig. 122  
View of the restored Ballroom of Government House, Sydney. The historic gas chandelier and wall bracket lights were wired for electricity thus conserving the authentic illumination, albeit modified to today's requirements.