REVIVAL
MEMORIES, IDENTITIES, UTOPIAS

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# CONTENTS

List of Illustrations 5
Notes on Contributors 9
Acknowledgements 11

Foreword: The Interval of Revival 12
WHITNEY DAVIS

Introduction 17
AYLA LEPINE, MATT LODDER, ROSALIND MCKEVER

## I. MEMORIES

‘Nostalgia’, Matt Lodder 27

The Ghost Begins by Coming Back. Revenants And Returns In Maud Sulter’s Photomontages 29
DEBORAH CHERRY

1937 and Victorian Revivalism 45
ALAN POWERS

The Retrieval of Revival: Recollecting and Revising the Evan Roberts Wax Cylinder 67
JOHN HARVEY

The Problem of Expiration of Style and the Historiography of Architecture 86
MARTIN HORÁČEK

## II. IDENTITIES

‘Historicism’, Ayla Lepine 101

The New Old Style: Tradition, Archetype and Rhetoric in Contemporary Western Tattooing 103
MATT LODDER

Longing for Past and Future: Cultural Identity and Central European Revivalist Glassware Designs 120
MICHELLE JACKSON
Henri De Braekeleer and Belgium’s Nineteenth-Century Revivalist Movement
ALISON HOKANSON

Armenian Architects and ‘Other’ Revivalism
ALYSON WHARTON

III. UTOPIAS

‘Anachronism’, Rosalind McKeever

Ferro-concrete and the Search for Style in the ‘American Renaissance’
PHIL JACKS

Echoes of Manhattan in Parliament Square: Transatlantic Medievalism for the Twentieth Century
AYLA LEPINE

JONATHAN MEKINDA

Babylon Electrified: Orientalist Hybridity as Futurism in Victorian Utopian Architecture
NATHANIEL WALKER

Photograph Credits
CHAPTER 10

ECHOES OF MANHATTAN IN PARLIAMENT SQUARE: TRANSATLANTIC MEDIEVALISM FOR THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

AYLA LEPINE

In Alfred Tennyson’s poem *Idylls of the King*, published in 1872, knights become uneasy about the fragile and uncanny quality of their surroundings as they ride towards Camelot: ‘Lord there is no such city anywhere, but all vision’ they remark. At the threshold of this dream-city is a guarded gate. Here, they find that ‘new things and old co-twisted, as if Time were nothing, so inveterately that men were giddy’.¹ The powerful magician Merlin keeps these giddy beholders at bay as a blast of sound fills the air. The medieval dream, Merlin explains, is perpetual and elusive.² For those seeking it and marvelling at its spatial ambiguities, the city itself is the quest. It is sustained by an ineffable holiness, and it constitutes an ultimately unreachable yet nearly attainable goal. As Merlin explains, concealing as much as he reveals in Tennyson’s deliberately poetic and languidly opaque text:

They are building still, seeing the city is built
To music, therefore never built at all,
And therefore built forever.³

This essay considers the elusive, entrancing search for an architecture in which time could be co-twisted to build a city of the future by looking keenly to the dream-cities and material remains of many layered pasts. Homing in on this revivalist phenomenon, my research explores three ideas that connect two modern Gothic Revival buildings. The medievalist sites situated within metropolitan centres are St Thomas Church at Fifth Avenue

10.1 Ralph Adams Cram and Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, St Thomas Church, New York City, United States, 1907–16.
10.2 James S. Gibson and Frank Peyton Skipwith, Middlesex Guildhall (now the Supreme Court), London, United Kingdom, 1911–13.
and 53rd Street in New York City’s Manhattan, and the Middlesex Guildhall—which is now the Supreme Court—on the north side of Parliament Square in Westminster, London. Both buildings were prominent projects in globally significant and rapidly changing cities, produced at a time when the Gothic style was no longer an obvious choice for civic or religious buildings on either side of the Atlantic. Both projects used medievalist forms and ideas to integrate past and present, deploying sculpture and architectural motifs to tell an old story of governance, leadership, and faith in a new way.

St Thomas Church was designed by the prominent American firm of Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson in 1906 and consecrated in April 1916 (fig. 10.1). Its building process was arduous, complex, and highly publicized. Westminster Guildhall had a shorter gestation period and a less famous architect. Designed by James Gibson with his partner Frank Peyton Skipwith, the building was planned in 1911 and opened in December 1913 (fig. 10.2).

The three ideas that cohere into a framework for a comparative interpretation of these structures concern style, temporality, and identity. Additionally, Marvin Trachtenberg’s recent explication of time as an architectural tool and what he has identified as the pressing obstacle of ‘chronophobia’ in modern architectural design and discourse are marshaled in relation to key structures in London and New York. Both of the buildings could be dismissed as late and eccentrically conservative fruits of a gnarled tree that grew up as the young sapling of the optimistic and ecclesiastically powered Gothic Revival in the nineteenth century. By the twentieth century, as Kenneth Clark put it in his history of the Gothic Revival, published in 1928, the style was lifeless. Clark put this conviction vividly: ‘Its fruits are stale and have turned to dust in our mouths. The words conjure up the vision … of an age too recently dead’.4

Not everyone felt this way, however. The architect and critic Harry Stuart Goodhart-Rendel gave a lecture at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in 1924 in which he asserted, ‘That the Gothic style in England has ever become a corpse I will not allow’.5 At the height of the Gothic Revival in Victorian Britain and its empire, the use of later Gothic motifs from the fourteenth, fifteenth and even sixteenth centuries was often seen as anathema. By the late Victorian period, architects like G.F. Bodley, George Gilbert Scott Jr, and a new generation including J.D. Sedding and John Ninian Comper saw the Gothic world differently.6 Later Gothic forms were not only embraced, but they were also blended with classical architectural language, expanding medievalism’s possibilities and blurring its definitions, particularly in relation to the rise of the Arts and Crafts movement with the arrival of C.R. Ashbee and W.R. Lethaby at the turn of the twentieth century.7 Indeed, Lethaby wrote about architecture of the Middle Ages not so much as a style but a language or ethos of building.8

The relationship between the Arts and Crafts ideology, the Gothic Revival, and transatlantic dialogue regarding architecture and architectural sculpture offers rich possibilities for further research, as much of the exploration of these cultural phenomena has been done in a relatively nationalistic, monographic, or stylistically narrow way.9 Moreover, in light of the recent challenges to periodization raised in art and architectural history and the increasing attention paid to the values and meanings of layered and interlacing anachronisms, ‘late’ seems somewhat facile in its devotion to stylistic and temporal linearity. Additionally, without recourse to major strides in recent critical theory, there is the simple
evidence that the Gothic style carried on well into the twentieth century and the manner in which designers manipulated Gothic forms had its own distinctive and vital character. One of the most important factors in a new interpretation of these two buildings and others constructed in the twentieth century is that they are products not of a single revivalist impulse, but of multiple interlacing revivalist strands. For architects like Goodhue and Gibson, source material from the Middle Ages was co-twisted with later Gothic Revival reworkings of the medieval world. In their twentieth-century designs, Goodhue, Cram and Gibson produced multiple revivalist iterations in a single plan, crafting neo-neo-neo-Gothic forms.

In Trachtenberg’s 2010 book, *Building-in-Time*, the architectural historian gives next to no attention to the nineteenth century’s rampant historicism and stylistic skirmishes. Instead he focuses on reconfiguring histories of late medieval and early Renaissance Italian architecture in relation to time as a tool for architects, allowing complex sites to be built up cumulatively and sophisticatedly over many decades and generations. Trachtenberg compares this with ‘modern oblivion’, the modernist architectural culture dominant since the dawn of the twentieth century but with roots in the Renaissance and Leon Battista Alberti, in which time itself has become the enemy of architecture because of its threatening promise of decay and erosion. Building in a Gothic mode in a modern period is, to take up Trachtenberg’s position and reframe it to question patterns of architectural revivalism, an opportunity to harness temporality and re-invest it into the built environment, at least conceptually and aesthetically. Relative to a medieval cathedral, the buildings under consideration were built swiftly and under the guidance of a single architectural firm rather than multiple guiding minds and hands across numerous generations. I would argue that particularly in the Gothic motifs and structures employed at the Middlesex Guildhall in London and St Thomas Church in New York—and many others from this period around and after 1900—the Gothic dream was a series of spaces in which time’s layers undulated and mingled with the sinuous simultaneity of multiple sites bound together in a single resonant place. Transatlantic modern Gothic sites are resonating chambers for historical interplay, in which the building speaks with multiple histories at once, activated primarily through architectural sculpture adorning interior and exterior surfaces. The New York and London studies reflect upon the formulation of architectural histories themselves, asserting how the Gothic style makes meaning and declares identity in the twentieth century.

Architects for these projects were distinctly different in their approaches to their commissions. Indeed, the Scottish architect James Gibson who took the lead on his firm’s design for the Middlesex Guildhall was as at ease with classicism and the popular forms of the Renaissance and the Baroque as he was working in the Gothic mode. Ralph Adams Cram and Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue were less inclined towards this degree of stylistic experimentation, at least in the period of the St Thomas project in New York. They were committed and even zealous medievalists. In 1913, Goodhue would go on to set up his own practice in New York, and split from Cram’s headquarters in Boston. From c.1910, Goodhue became increasingly drawn to streamline curves, Byzantine ornament, the nascent Art Deco style, and the stylistic vocabulary of a range of architectural forms from Latin
America's colonial history to the new materials and clean lines of Modernism. Goodhue also continued to design with a Gothic framework, and his 1920s work for the Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago is a characteristic and bold essay in his bespoke kind of Gothic Deco.

Ralph Adams Cram was the most prominent advocate for the Gothic Revival in twentieth-century America. His work includes All Saints Church, Ashmont (1892), designs for the Cathedral of St John the Divine in New York (1912), Princeton University Chapel (1928) and Rice University in Texas (1910–16). From 1915 until 1922 he was head of the architecture school at MIT. Cram's practice began in Boston and though his career was based there across his long career, his projects spanned the US. Together with his partner Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, Cram worked to further the cause of what he called 'the Gothic Quest', often figuring himself as a knight or prophet preaching in the American modern architectural wilderness. For Cram, modern Gothicists should 'go back to the 16th century not to endeavour to build churches that shall pretend to have been built in that century' but to 'work steadily and seriously towards something more consistent with our temper and the times in which we live'. Inspired by Victorian Gothic Revival architects Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812–52) and George Frederick Bodley's (1827–1907) approaches to the medieval world, Cram's Gothic was an American translation of late Victorian visual culture. Significantly, this particular iteration of the Gothic Revival was a revived revival—a neo-neo Gothic—that he perceived as passed to him from earlier British exponents. Like numerous architects, including Gibson at the Middlesex Guildhall in London—Cram's unique interpretation of the Gothic style was not drawn entirely from the Middle Ages or from a single source. Rather it was an amalgam of medieval and nineteenth-century examples of the Gothic Revival. Gothic itself was a language charged with sacred meaning. Cram's rhetoric regarding the future of architecture in America as a Gothic future is telling in its transatlantic energy: 'On this strong stock would be grafted all the beauty that could be gathered from the world … through the whole marvellous growth … the vigorous vital principle of Christian and English civilization'.

Cram's Christian Gothic Revival quest was delivered repeatedly in his writing and lectures couched in Arthurian language and inspired by Victorian struggles for a new architecture and a new world. Envisioning architectural radicals like a band of knights in pursuit of divine knowledge, Cram enthused:

They rode in search of Beauty and Truth, and these are attributes of God, not of man, and not to be perceived by eyes of flesh and blood. Yet, as with the grail, the hopeless quest brought marvellous adventure, and more, for it established forever a type of beauty … and they brought back a wonderful thing, the mystical knowledge of Art. This was the Gothic Quest, and if we think of it as an historical episode … we think foolishly.

As the architectural historian Phoebe Stanton’s research on mid-nineteenth-century American architecture shows, A.W.N. Pugin and the Ecclesiological Society in England
had an enormous impact on American Gothic Revival architecture from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The relationship between progress, professionalization and the Gothic Revival was a particularly tight one in the United States. Richard Upjohn, whose Gothic Revival Trinity Church, constructed in Midtown Manhattan in the 1840s, was closely based on Pugin’s designs for the Roman Catholic cathedral at Southwark in London.\textsuperscript{14} Upjohn was also the founder and first President of the American Institute of Architects, hosting the inaugural meeting at his New York City office amongst designs for Gothic Revival churches.\textsuperscript{15} Perhaps Cram was at his most Puginian and most polemical when railing against stylistic eclecticism in American architecture, envisioning stylistic choice as akin to a bit of shopping in a vast department store:

\begin{quote}
College buildings? You will find a complete line of Greco-Georgian articles down the alley to the right. Post offices? Certainly. Guaranteed real Renaissance. No madam, we do not carry any chateau-esque Fifth Avenue palaces just now. No need for them. An office building? Fitted while you wait, take the elevator to the 32nd floor. Church? Yes sir, we cater especially to the Cloth, all real Gothic and twenty yards high, 13th, 14th, 15th century … take the subway to the medieval annexe.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

For Cram as for Pugin, Christian and Gothic were interchangeable terms. Cram and Goodhue’s beliefs in the endurance of Christianity through the perpetuation of a Gothic architectural legacy were articulated at St Thomas, but the project began with destruction.

The Gothic Revival architect Richard Upjohn designed the previous St Thomas in the mid-1860s and it was completed in 1870. Cram and Goodhue’s design, with its block-harnessing corner tower and dynamic asymmetry, was in truth a weighty homage to Upjohn’s previous building. The specific history of the site made St Thomas a revival of a revival, with Cram and Goodhue’s design responsive not only to European Gothic architecture’s potential in modern America, but also to Upjohn’s design from the previous generation of the Gothic Revivalists in the US. The Upjohn building’s interior included a reredos of angels adoring the Cross, designed by Augustus St Gaudens. Upjohn’s building was destroyed by fire in 1905, and little survived. After the fire, the church’s vicar Ernest Stires wrote, ‘We shall have a church which, for its beauty and reverent appropriateness will be almost as worthy of visiting and of thoughtful study, as the famous parish churches of England’.\textsuperscript{17} The parish approved new designs in 1907. Notably, these were published by the Merrymount Press, a Boston-based publishing firm directly inspired by William Morris’ 1890s Kelmscott Press. When Bertram Goodhue designed the reredos for the new St Thomas’, which would be carved by the eminent sculptor Lee Lawrie, the vast interconnected system of sculpted figures was positioned around a central image: a replication of the form of the earlier St Gaudens altarpiece destroyed in the previous church.

The rector Ernest Stires wrote a description of the reredos soon after its completion, charting its figures and their significance from Old Testament imagery through to prominent politicians and clerics in the history of the Church of England and the Episcopal traditions in America. Adam and Eve took their place alongside presidents and prime ministers. Stires listed:
Richard Hooker and Bishop Butler. Beneath them is ... Liddon, the great dean and preacher of St Paul’s, London. And the last of this line is Gladstone, England’s great layman. Leaving the British line, and coming over now to the extreme right, we come to the American line. At the top are Bishop Seabury and Bishop White, the first bishops of our American Church. They have in their hands the first American Prayer Book. Just beneath them is a great layman of the American Church, George Washington. ... This row of figures concludes with one who was living when this statue was placed there—dear beloved Bishop Tuttle ... Presiding Bishop of the Church for many years.  

From the first man and woman to an Episcopalian cleric living in America in the first years of the twentieth century, the political and theological history of Anglicanism and Anglophilia ranges across the wall. The reredos within Cram and Goodhue’s St Thomas is a memorial to a previous building (fig. 10.3). It is also a declaration of Anglican identity across times and places between Britain and America and through empire’s missionary context stretching further into India and New Zealand. Medieval style sustained and gave shape to modern religion.
In his essay on St Thomas in *Scribner’s* in December 1913, the architectural critic Montgomery Schuyler singled out this new church as ‘one of the chief architectural ornaments of New York’, highlighting its sculptural and assertive Gothic bulk as an asset in the changing architectural landscape of Midtown Manhattan. St Thomas’ bulk, its sinuously traceried rose window, and its proliferation of sculpture inside and out made it a recognisable monument in Manhattan that swiftly gained as much notoriety as Richard Upjohn’s Trinity Church had more than half a century earlier. In 1917 Frederick Childe Hassam painted *Allies Day, May 1917*, an image within his ‘flag series’, which he begun three years before at the start of the first world war (fig. 10.4). The impressionistic painting presents us with insistent images of identity, nationalism and patriotism and the mutable fluttering objects of territories and allegiances gain a solidity through their prominent, painterly rendering. Fifth Avenue became known as the Avenue of the Allies and its significance as an urban thoroughfare which was also a symbol of expected triumph sign of conflict elsewhere with major implications at home was not lost on Hassam. In the spring of 1917 America burst into action and the atmosphere Hassam captures is simultaneously resolute
and celebratory, anticipating victory. Arrangements of the French tricolour, British union flag and the American flag ran sequentially along the wide, bustling street. As C.S. Burchell has noted:

More than simply the playground of the rich, the Avenue was a focus for many events important in the history of the country. A precedent was long established … By the last decades of the nineteenth century, the great parades of national groups were underway as well … Fifth Ave had watched innumerable other marching men, too—American soldiers and sailors and marines returning in victory from faraway battles.20

A transnational argument can be made that links war alliances to a very different kind of allegiance. The section of Fifth Avenue Hassam selected for this red, white and blue image is significant. At the start of the war, a complex sculptural surface was being installed, figure by figure, over a ten-month period. It too was a symbol of allegiances—old and new—and it formed an iconography of American Episcopal identity and cultural memory in an unprecedented manner. This sculpture group was the reredos for St Thomas, the church that can be seen in Hassam’s image sandwiched between two commercial buildings on the left. Hassam’s image offers a streetscape in which St Thomas stands integrated and set apart, declaring a wider identity framework in the midst of American culture’s exponential development and growth in New York in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Unlike Ralph Adams Cram, James S. Gibson was neither a monumental force for the ideology of modern medievalism, nor did he have such a high profile or such a prolific career. Gibson began practicing architecture in Dundee with Ireland and Maclaren. He moved to London and began independent practice in the late 1880s. With his partner S.B. Russell, he won numerous competitions including the London County Council Hostel in Drury Lane in 1891, and the West Riding County Offices in Wakefield in 1894.21 The Scottish architect James Maclaren’s stylistic lessons were taken to heart in Gibson’s firm. Sheer bulk, diagonally intersecting surfaces, and the light yet insistent application of Gothic detail can all be seen in Middlesex Guildhall as well as in Maclaren’s earlier work, such as the new wing and observatory tower at Stirling High School of 1887–89 and No. 22 Avonmore Road, a domestic commission in West Kensington that Maclaren completed in 1889.22

That said, the Middlesex Guildhall was something of a departure for both Gibson and his architectural sculptors. When it opened in 1913, at the same time that the reredos at St Thomas was being constructed, The Times reported that Middlesex Guildhall ‘looks as if it had been designed and built with some enjoyment, and as if its absurdities expressed a genuine taste and were not merely sentimental imitations of the absurdities of the past’.23 In his report on the building as part of a SAVE Britain’s Heritage campaign to preserve its interiors, the architectural historian Gavin Stamp observed that there were aesthetic simi-
larities between Gibson’s design and the distinctive modern Gothic of Cram and Good-hue. Middlesex Guildhall is situated between Broad Sanctuary, Little George Street, and Parliament Square in London. Built of brown Portland stone, with a similar patina to portions of neighbouring Westminster Abbey, the Guildhall’s architect James Gibson anticipated that it would look better as it weathered. Describing the building as ‘a dainty piece of ornament’, Gibson went on to explain how Gothic forms enlivened the structure:

The detail employed, while preserving many of the features and mouldings of the later Gothic, has been imbued with a modern spirit of freshness in precisely the same way as the original Gothic must have been kept virile by the introduction of new detail. ‘Dainty piece of ornament’ is a strange way to describe a major building of national civic importance in such a key location. Gibson seemed to suggest two things with this unsettling phrase: first, that the building was a kind of ornamentation of the Abbey and Parliament nearby and therefore reliant on their stylistic cues; and second, that the building design’s strength was in its delicate surface treatment. Akin to the art historian David Peters Corbett’s suggestion that Edward Burne-Jones’ 1869 painting Laus Veneris is powerful because its attention to ornament complicates negotiation between surface and depth, the sculpture within and without is the Middlesex Guildhall’s most arresting and complex feature. With Westminster Abbey and the New Palace of Westminster as neighbours, could the building have been anything other than Gothic? Nikolaus Pevsner thought that the building’s style was a case of necessity. With the Classical pomp of Whitehall expanding through the Edwardian period, and Aston Webb’s monumentalization of Westminster in the ‘Wrenaissance’ style, was the choice of Gothic truly an obvious and necessary one?

Moreover, not everyone was convinced about the building’s Gothic style, suggesting that there were many paths the architect could have chosen and that proximity to the Houses of Parliament and the Abbey would need not determine the building’s form so dominantly. The Builder’s comments are worth quoting at length:

We are told that a Gothic design was decided upon on account of the proximity of the new Guildhall to the Abbey. Would it not therefore follow that any new building in proximity to the Guildhall should also be designed in the Gothic manner, and what about building in proximity to the latter? Arguments as to the sustainability or otherwise of a particular style would, according to such methods of reasoning, always be decided by their relative position to some other building. … we are afraid the result might prejudice the future of architectural development if we are to get ahead at last. Rather, we believe, we should honestly try to work in the style which is most characteristic of our times.
What precisely was the architecture of the time meant to be, however? The future was uncertain, and the present offered few clear paths towards architectural and ideological coherence.

Two months after its anxious discussion of style and contextual locality in relation to Middlesex Guildhall, *The Builder* ran a further large feature on the project, in which it made much of its modern construction techniques. In New York, the Gothic evangelist Ralph Adams Cram tended to avoid reinforced steel and concrete. Not so for James Gibson in London: the Guildhall featured ‘load-bearing outer walls with internal steel frame. … concrete footings constructed by the Concrete Steel Company Ltd. … the roof over Council Chamber was carried by two steel trusses supporting rolled-steel purlins’. As the architectural historian Jeremy Musson explains, the building’s ‘homages to the massive structural timber in Westminster Hall are, then, entirely decorative’. Medievalism and new building techniques went hand in hand: reputedly the first use of reinforced concrete in the UK was John Dando Sedding’s Holy Trinity Sloane Square. According to architectural historians Murray Fraser and Joe Kerr, new building techniques such as reinforced steel framing was a particularly American concept brought into British architecture to enliven it, especially in projects like Richard D’Oyly Carte’s Savoy Hotel and those undertaken by American patrons like William Waldorf Astor. When Astor arrived in London from the United States in 1891, he was one of the world’s wealthiest people. His eclectically styled Neo-Gothic-Neo-Renaissance mansion on the Embankment was completed by 1895 and designed by the Gothic Revival architect John Loughborough Pearson with stained glass by Clayton and Bell and an interior teeming with sculpture. American capitalism, architecturally progressive techniques, and the Gothic Revival, were closely intertwined in the heart of London in the final years of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth.

As historian and curator Peter Cormack has written, the sculptural programme at Middlesex Guildhall is intriguing and complex, ranging across a multitude of allegorical and narrative themes. There are, indeed, vestiges of the allegorical scheme designed by George Gilbert Scott for the Albert Memorial nearly fifty years before the Guildhall’s completion. Representations of the arts and industry were popular architectural sculptural features in both the Gothic and the Classical style, but while Classical buildings in the Victorian period focused primarily on historical figures as architectural embellishment, Gothic Revival buildings were opportunities for a plethora of symbolic figurative ornament which could combine to offer a coherent and often didactic image of specific cultural values. Like the Albert Memorial, Middlesex Guildhall’s surfaces incorporated both sculptural modes. At Scott’s Albert Memorial, the gleaming golden body of the Prince Consort was surrounded by sculptural groups representing everything from Agriculture and Chemistry to Painting and Music. At the Middlesex Guildhall, this practice continued, albeit with different stylistic and grouping nuances. The play between friezes of interactive figures presenting historical narratives and the grouped allegories was itself an
element of revivalist strategy that Gibson, Skipwith, and their sculptors Henry Fehr and Carlo Magnoni deployed.

Allegorical figures holding attributes associated with Industry take their place along those representing winds, human qualities, cultural concepts, and the arts. Cormack refers to these figures as 'Fehr maidens', playing on the sculptor’s name to get the point across that these figures are a fusion of Edwardian faces and medievalist form. On the west side of the building to the right of the main entrance are sculptures representing Dance, Communications, Astronomy, Mechanics, Engineering, Painting, Classical Architecture, and Gothic Architecture (fig. 10.5). On the building’s eastern façade, the figures represent maritime industries—fishing and ship building—and agricultural industries: fruit farming and sheep rearing. The building’s north side, which is tucked out of the way down a small side alley, features two representations of learning: a monk and a scholar. A figure of Justice, flanked by figures representing Law, crowns the northwest door. The only two pairs of allegorical figures that represent a single concept—as opposed to figures which reiterate the same concept, such as those representing Law—are Architecture and Learning. In both cases, medievalism takes a prominent role. Architecture is represented by both the Classical and the Gothic style, and learning pairs the serenity of monastic study with a more furtive looking scholar.

On the building’s south façade, sculptures designed by Fehr populate the south elevation with full-length historical and allegorical figures, which flank an isolated and lightly carved architectural detail (fig. 10.6). Figures representing Wisdom, Architecture, Literature, Government, Sculpture, Britannia, Music, Truth, Law, Shipping, Education are situated above the main entrance. The western side of the façade features King John and the Magna Carta at Runnymede. The eastern side depicts Jane Grey at Syon House. Both these historical acts—fusions of monarchy and wide-reaching politics with major national consequences—took place within the county of Middlesex. The life of the nation and region was embedded within the building’s purpose as a guild hall—a meeting place that is in itself a medieval concept. In the central sculptural group, Fehr represented King Henry III granting the Charter to Westminster Abbey, in a sculptural programme that oscil-
lates between Middlesex places and the historical fabric of the Guildhall’s location. In the
centre of the tripartite frieze, beneath the Middlesex arms, is an echo of another building.
This is the great hall at Hampton Court, also within the county and also a late Gothic
building whose status, style, site, and sustained inspiration for Victorian and Edwardian
architects indicate potential reasons for its placement here, above the entrance amidst
medieval and Tudor histories of British law and religion. Sculpture and medieval forms
define Middlesex’s identity for twentieth-century viewers, law-makers, and even criminals
imprisoned in the basement cells.

If there is indeed a traceable modern transatlantic Gothic impulse sustaining and pro-
ducing innovative architecture in the early twentieth century, one of its most fascinat-
ing outcomes is not in New York or in London, but in Chicago. The Chicago Tribune
Tower, designed by Howells and Hood in 1923, includes a foyer in which ornamental text
dominate every surface. The building speaks and educates. Surrounded by bon mots from
presidents, philosophers, and politicians, a circle of Gothic letters sits on the floor. The
quotation is from John Ruskin’s ‘Lamp of Memory’, a chapter within his 1849 Seven Lamps
of Architecture. It is a powerful notion, which the architectural historian Adrian Forty also
quotes in full in his essay on memory and architecture in his influential study, Words and
Buildings.⁶¹ Ruskin’s imperative to modern architects who looked to the past with more
than a mere nostalgic romanticism enlivens the sense of purpose of the Tribune Tower’s
function and its style:

When we build let us think we build forever. Let it not be for present delight
nor for present use alone. Let it be such work that our descendants will thank
us for, and let us think, as we lay stone upon stone, that a time is to come when these stones will be held sacred because our hands have touched them, and that men will say, as they look upon the labour and wrought substance of them, ‘See! This our fathers did for us.’  

The Gothic spiritual exercise of imagining that a building could be eternal and express qualities of eternity, even in the midst of decay and change, was a concept that sustained modern American architecture, positioned at the core of one of the most prominent and technically innovative skyscrapers of its time. Transatlantic Gothic was a significant force in shaping the modern city; this is a completely different architectural historical trajectory from the rather insular British one that tends to claim buildings like Middlesex Guildhall as outliers and anomalies, determined only by the buildings around them, and clinging onto a dying style for the sake of its immediate neighbours. Alternatively, I argue that Gothic dreaming in the early twentieth century offered a progressive architectural mode, and informed much that was to come after it. In Marvin Trachtenberg’s view of the challenging and rewarding position of temporality in pre-modern and modern design, ‘time itself—especially when of long duration—was made a vital asset in the creation of highly complex, multidimensional works of art.’ He believes that this impulse was all but lost following the Renaissance—and was a crisis moment in the dawn of modernity—and that we are now in a period of so-called ‘modern oblivion’. Revivalism resists this oblivion. It is the sense of temporality’s stretch, rich intersection, and layering that the progressive Gothic style of the Guildhall, St Thomas, and indeed the Tribune Tower were seeking to reclaim through ornament that sinuously bound past to present.

In the debates surrounding how modern architectural projects might be fuelled by traditional styles and ornament, there were numerous positions and options. Then as now, temporality’s place in architecture and its signals in ornament in particular, was vigorously contested. Medievalism continued to offer fresh points of engagement for new architecture well into the first decades of the twentieth century, and the loss of ornament in general in much architecture from the 1930s onwards was not welcomed unanimously or unproblematically. In 1942 Clark, who was then director of the National Gallery, wrote a lengthy, witty, and angry article on ornament and its detractors for the Architectural Review. For Clark, the absence of ornament could be ominously read as a sign of the departure or suppression of a rich and flourishing culture. In his pointed text, he asked, ‘Why are modern buildings without ornament? Is it a reaction? After the debauches of the nineteenth century our architects have such indigestion that they are condemned to a diet of Ryvita and Vichy water’. No, he concluded: ‘the complete absence of ornament in modern architecture is something far more radical than that’. In emphatic rhetoric not dissimilar to Cram’s, Clark ties the loss of ornament to a loss of coherence in the arts and widespread cultural fragmentation. ‘The unpleasant question crosses our minds,’ Clark concluded. ‘Do we believe any more in the dignity of man and the harmony of the universe? ... We shall
have no ceremony in life and no ornament in architecture, until some new and more promising faith reintegrates our lives'.

Returning to Trachtenberg’s view may offer a further depth of perspective to Clark’s concerns in the 1940s. For Trachtenberg, ‘time itself—especially when of long duration—was made a vital asset in the creation of highly complex, multidimensional works of art’. In the nineteenth century, historicism was a method of legitimation for architecture, but this never created an obvious path without obstacles, despite the establishment of what Trachtenberg calls the nineteenth century’s ‘comprehensive system of knowledge and practice’ based on historical precedent and its reworking through revivalist selectivity. As historicism was increasingly overturned by the rising tide of Modernism, the persistence of historicism constituted no less than a threat to an increasingly dominant system of architectural writing and design. In Timothy Brittain-Catlin’s view, this architectural problem produced an architectural history in which the use of ornament and historical precedent was a sign of failure. Trachtenberg has a different but not uncomplementary view, in which ‘chronocide’ is an outcome of ‘chronophobia’, particularly the fear of decay, dissolution, and change over time. The inevitability of change was both an innate condition and anathema within architectural practice and theory. This fear—above anything else—characterises modernity’s architectural production. Architects in the early twentieth century like James Gibson, Ralph Adams Cram, Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, Edwin Lutyens and E.S. Prior, whose work anticipated and welcomed the patina of age on their buildings’ façades were, unwittingly or consciously, resisting an increasingly powerful chronophobic stance.

In 1900, Prior wrote The History of Gothic Art in England, asserting that ‘The first symptom of decline is the birth of artistic individuality… the making of art of a personal rather than a collective ambition’. The so-called ‘chronophobic syndrome’ Trachtenberg has identified is an essential component in reassessing the meanings and impacts of Gothic Revival buildings in the twentieth century. The consequences of chronophobia upon architectural history are obvious once one begins to look, and it explains the limited attention buildings like the Middlesex Guildhall have received. If Trachtenberg is correct, then the horror of historicism has caused ‘large blocks of the architecture of the past to be overlooked or undervalued, and often it forces historical works whose importance is recognised to be misinterpreted and distorted’.

Henry Adams, the American writer whose paean to the Middle Ages, Mont St Michel and Chartres included an introductory essay by Cram in the popular second edition, invented the word ‘dynamo’ and spent much of his career arguing for a fusion of medieval histories with the radical newness of an oncoming machine age. As the architectural historian Michael Clark elucidates, Adams saw the Middle Ages as a prefiguration of the modern American experience they saw around them. In Adams’ view the Middle Ages were times of dynamic civilisation and the relentless pursuit of change and progress. A typical Adams analogy reads, ‘the nineteenth century moved fast and furious, so that one
who moved in it felt sometimes giddy, watching it spin … but the eleventh moved faster and more furiously still. If buildings machines that generate and express meaning, then there is always a great deal at stake in the deployment of stylistic language, particularly when the chosen language is disruptive, controversial, or threatening. In the early twentieth century, perhaps more than ever before, a cluster of architects wielded style and historicism as a sustaining recovery operation, blending it with new materials and techniques.

For Prior, as for Cram, Gothic was a combination of style and ethos, and though both were important perhaps the ethos was the most fundamental and desirable aspect of medieval architecture to be preserved. Ornament and Gothic form were important, but a Gothic spirit, elusive and spurring the ‘Gothic quest’ was a foundational component of architectural history that was essential to uncover, utilise, and maintain. In 1900 Prior wrote, ‘It is hard to justify any special admiration for Gothic architecture, if its forms be separated from the great truth of Gothic life … We conclude that the art of the medieval ages was not architectural dress, but something underneath it’. This intimation persisted and continued to drive architectural innovation in both Britain and America well into the twentieth century. Style, temporality and identity were inextricably linked to one another in many iterations of medievalism, even when their expression was less aesthetically overt in an architect’s practice. In his 1932 essay, ‘The Disappearing City’, Frank Lloyd Wright wrote that Gothic forms were key source material for modern architects because ‘the medieval spirit was nearest the communal, democratic spirit of anything we know’. In a framework of gargoyles and reinforced concrete where ‘new and old co-twisted, as if Time were nothing’, time itself is the meaning the building makes. Beyond the last visible gargoyle, tradition could be studied, absorbed and intuited, and the Gothic, as Ruskin and Prior hoped it would be, could be spiritualised and could remain as a perpetual echo. As the twentieth century pressed on, it was the continued pressures and mounting sense of temporality’s capacity to stretch, overlap, and layer that the progressive Gothic style of the Middlesex Guildhall, St Thomas, and indeed the Tribune Tower were seeking to reclaim. They did this by accessing and deploying a Gothic style that sinuously bound past to present.
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30. The *Builder*, 19 Sept, 1913, p. 287.


34. For a full account of the architectural history of Two Temple Place, see Barbara Bryant, *Two Temple Place* (London: Bulldog Trust, 2013).


36. For a discussion of the Gothic style and the production of meaning through iconography within the Albert Memorial, see Chris Brooks (ed.), *The Albert Memorial* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).


