A.W.N. Pugin's "True Principles" Gothic Furniture

Evolutionary, Revolutionary, Reactionary?

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However much we may be indebted to those ancient supporters of Pointed Architecture who, faithfully adhering to its traditions at a period when the style fell into general disuse, strove earnestly, and in some instances ably, to preserve its character; whatever value in the cause which we may attach to the crude and isolated examples of Gothic which belong to the eighteenth century, or to the efforts of such men as Nash and Wyatt, there can be little doubt that the revival of Mediæval design received its chief impulse in our own day from the energy and talents of one architect whose name marks an epoch in the history of British art, which, while art exists at all, can never be forgotten […] Augustus Northmore Welby Pugin.[1]

As the above passage indicates, Charles Locke Eastlake (1833-1906) considered A.W.N. Pugin (1812-1852) to be the most important architect for the advancement of the Gothic Revival in nineteenth-century Britain. He and Charles Barry (1795-1860) designed and executed the most prestigious and visible Gothic Revival commission of the century - the Palace of Westminster (1840-1860) - and Pugin's tracts, including *Contrasts* (1836 and 1841) and *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (1841), promoted new research and manifesto-like interpretations of Gothic architecture and design. Subsequent authors have shared Eastlake's perspective, and established collectively Pugin as the pre-eminent exponent and reformer of the Gothic Revival. Paul Atterbury, for example, states that Pugin's *Contrasts* (1836) was "a revolutionary book whose outspoken text and polemical il-

lustrations laid down for the first time the design principles that were to establish the genuinely structural and medievally based Gothic, as opposed to the decorative and fanciful Gothic, as the primary style of the nineteenth century".[2]

The importance and influence of *Contrasts* and *The True Principles* can not be disputed.[3] Unpublished manuscript sources, however, indicate that the core idea in Pugin's polemical outpourings in *The True Principles* - the identification and restoration of medieval design's essential nature - is not particularly revolutionary. This is especially the case when examining his and other architects' designs for furniture. Although the religious and moral aspects of Pugin's Gothic were certainly ground breaking, the desire to produce Gothic Revival furniture based upon a sound understanding and detailed examination of medieval sources was not. This chapter begins by examining the genesis of Pugin's "true principles" Gothic design rationale, especially as applied to, and manifested in, furniture. It continues by challenging the originality of Pugin's reforming theory of Gothic by considering the work of other designers, architects and gentlemen that predate, or are contemporary with, Pugin's output, and which reflect a desire to develop Gothic based upon a renewed understanding of medieval precedents. It concludes by offering a nuanced reading of Pugin's reformed Gothic and situating him within the broader antiquarian context of Georgian and Victorian Britain.

15.1 Illustration of the extravagant style of modern Gothic furniture and decoration, published in A.W.N. Pugin, The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture. *[New Haven, CT, Yale Center for British Art: NA440 P9 1841]*

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1   Eastlake, *A History of the Gothic Revival*, 145.
2   Atterbury, *A.W.N. Pugin: Master of Gothic Revival*, 9.
3   See, for example, Hill, "Reformation to Millennium", and Id., *God's Architect*, 241, 243, 246.

The rationale behind Pugin's "True Principles" Gothic

In his manifesto of 1841, *The True Principles*, Pugin succinctly outlines the "two great rules for [Gothic] design":

> 1st, that there should be no features about a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction, or propriety; 2nd, that all ornament should consist of enrichment of the essential construction of the building.[4]

Although referring to architecture, these points had a widespread influence upon the decorative arts. Sir George Gilbert Scott (1811-1878) in 1857 observes that Pugin's "principle of truthfulness is universally acknowledged as the [...] guiding star".[5] These ideas were extended to furniture, and Pugin used them as a yardstick by which to judge the work of his predecessors and contemporaries. Their furniture was, of course, found wanting. Indeed, Pugin represents the advent of his "true principles" Gothic as a watershed in the history of Gothic Revival design: earlier "whimsical" Gothic Revival furniture were essentially misconceived copies of architecture and religious furniture - choir stalls - inappropriate for, and incompatible with, the nineteenth-century domestic setting.

Ultimately, such work failed to observe his two great rules, or "real principles of Gothic", and, thus, was subject to criticism.[6] In a typically scathing and exaggerated manner, Pugin states that:

> In pointed decoration too much is generally attempted; every room in what is called a Gothic house must be fitted with niches, pinnacles, groining, tracery, and tabernacle work, after the manner of a chantry chapel [...]. These observations apply equally to furniture; - upholsterers seem to think that nothing can be Gothic unless it is found in some church. Hence your modern man designs a sofa or occasional table from details culled out of Britton's Cathedrals, and all the ordinary articles of furniture, which require to be simple and convenient, are made not only very expensive but very uneasy. We find diminutive flying buttresses about an armchair; every thing is crocketed with angular projections, innumerable mitres, sharp ornaments, and turreted extremities. A man who remains any length of time in a modern Gothic room, and escapes without being wounded by some of its minutiæ, may consider himself extremely fortunate. There are often as many pinnacles and gablets about a pierglass frame as are to be found in an ordinary church, and not unfrequently the whole canopy of a tomb has been transformed for the purpose, as at Strawberry Hill.[7]

Pugin's illustration accompanying this text [15.1] is clearly exaggerated to amplify his main point: the absurdity of micro-architectural ornament applied to modern Gothic furniture. It makes the reader thankful not to have lost an eye when moving through the room - especially near the coronation-throne-like chair with its manifold crockets, pinnacles, finials and flying buttress.[8] Pugin identifies this misapplication of Gothic sources and motifs as an historical problem. Blame is placed on furniture designers and makers culling inappropriate details from plates in Britton's *Cathedral Antiquities of Britain* (1814-1835): details from medieval choir-stalls clearly, for Pugin, had no place on beds' testers.

Censure was not restricted to other designers, for Pugin criticises his own adolescent work:

> I have perpetrated many of these enormities in the furniture I designed some years ago for Windsor Castle. At that time I had not the least idea of the principles I am now explaining; all my knowledge of Pointed Architecture was confined to a tolerably good no-

4 Pugin, *True Principles*, 1.
5 Scott, *Remarks on Secular and Domestic Architecture*, 237.
6 Pugin, *True Principles*, 40.
7 Ibid., 40-41.
8 Such furniture was not widely produced between 1740 and 1841, and the closest examples are reserved in comparison. They are Robert Adam's chairs for Croome Court, Worcestershire, and Alnwick Castle, Northumberland, as well as a derivative for Audley End, Essex. For Croome and Alnwick see Harris, *The Genius of Robert Adam*, 43, 90-92, and for Audley End: see Sutherill, "John Hobcroft and James Essex at Audley End House", 24. The other notable example is the President's chair of Magdalen College, Oxford, designed by Richard Paget in 1789. See Magdalen College Archives, Oxford, MS 641, 22 July 1789.
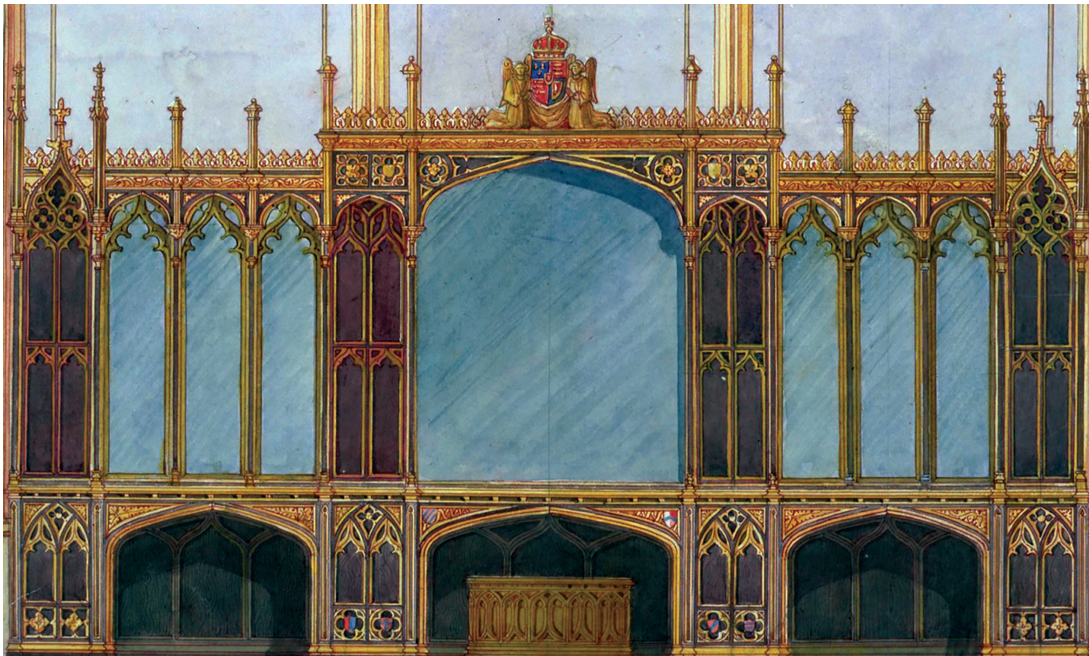
tion of details in the abstract; but these I employed with so little judgement or propriety, that, although the parts were correct and exceedingly well executed, collectively they appeared a complete burlesque of pointed design.[9]

This passage amplifies the gulf and methodological shift not only between his reformed work and that of others, but between his old, apparently uninformed, furniture at Windsor Castle [15.2], and his new "true principle" Gothic.[10] Pugin's criticism, tellingly, extends back to one of the most important and influential sites for the mid-eighteenth-century Gothic Revival: Horace Walpole's (1717-1797) villa, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham (Gothicised and extended c.1750-1780).[11] Despite exaggerating the whimsical state of modern Gothic furniture - especially in figure 15.1 - Pugin's criticism is understandable and also justified if the popular nineteenth-century designs contained in George Smith's *A Collection of Designs for Household Furniture* (1808) are considered, not least in light of Pugin's two great rules. Smith's furniture designs are not concerned with reproducing medieval domestic furniture or woodwork, but instead are covered in a confection of

Gothic motifs designed to produce a decidedly un-archaeological and overwhelmingly decorative effect.

Pugin's satire of modern Gothic furniture also resonates with the work of his father, Auguste Charles Pugin (1768/9-1832), including highly cusped Regency-style designs reproduced in Rudolph Ackermann's *The Repository of Arts* (1825-1827), and the frontispiece to *Pugin's Gothic Furniture* (1827) [15.3].[12] The similarity between the style, type and arrangement of furniture in A.C. Pugin's frontispiece and A.W.N. Pugin's modern Gothic plate [15.1] is no accident, and it actively promotes comparison with, and criticism of, the former.

Read together, A.W.N. Pugin's text and illustration in *The True Principles* establish a clear break between his new "true principles" Gothic and modern "burlesques of pointed design" stretching back to Strawberry Hill (c.1750-1780). A few pieces of furniture from Pugin's career illustrate the outcome of this new approach. His design (1827) for the dining room sideboard and canopy in George IV's private apartments at Windsor Castle [15.2] is encrusted richly with architectural ornament throughout, whereas later pieces, such as a chair for Scarisbrick Hall,

9   Pugin, *True Principles*, 41-42.
10 In his diary for 16 June 1827 Pugin records that he "went to design and make working drawings for the Gothic furniture of Windsor Castle at £1 1s per day, for the following rooms. The long gallery, the coffee room, the vestibule anti-room, halls, grand staircase, octagon in the Brunswick Tower and great Dining Room" (National Art Library, London, MSL/1969/5204, f. 20r). Sir Hugh Roberts has recently observed that Pugin's role at Windsor was partially exaggerated. See Roberts, *For the King's Pleasure*, 37.
11 Strawberry Hill's importance to the early Gothic Revival in eighteenth-century Britain can be seen in Snodin, *Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill*, and McCarthy's landmark monograph *The Origins of the Gothic Revival*.
12 This publication is a compilation of A.C. Pugin's designs for Gothic furniture published in *The Repository of Arts*.
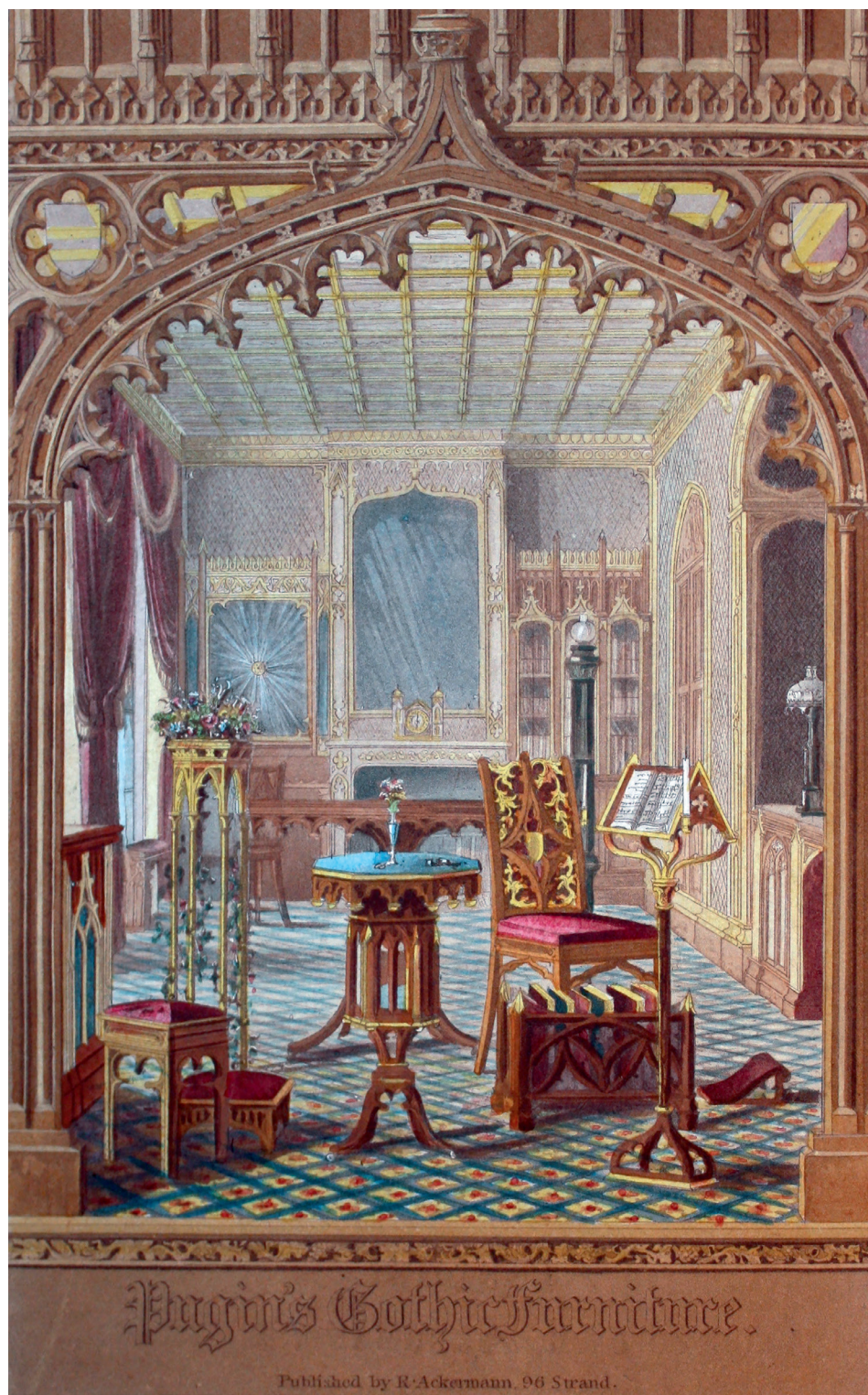
15.3. Frontispiece from A.C. Pugin,
Pugin's Gothic Furniture (London:
Ackermann, 1827).
[New Haven, CT, Yale Center for British
Art: NK2542 P8 1830z]

Lancashire (c.1838) [15.4], and a simple X-framed table (1852-1853) [15.5], demonstrate Pugin's new "honest" and "structural" approach.[13] These later pieces are pared back and not overloaded with the sideboard's overtly architectural motifs, and the decoration is restricted to the chair's structure - especially the legs and cresting. Indeed, the table's chamfered framing is a decorative element in its own right, and does not require a mass of architectural ornament to establish its Gothic character. Both pieces, therefore, correspond with Pugin's two great principles of Gothic design. The differences between the pre- and post-"true principle" Gothic, explained by a robustly argued theoretical treatise, has propelled the significance of Pugin's self-determined Gothic watershed, as reflected in Eastlake's *History*, and this break c.1841 has remained largely unchallenged. Pugin's Gothic watershed is, however, an oversimplification of the history of the Gothic Revival, for a number of his contemporaries and predecessors were concerned with reforming Gothic design based upon a new and detailed understanding of medieval architecture and furniture, which ultimately challenge the originality of Pugin's "true principles" Gothic.

Pugin's "true principles" Gothic prefigured?

Pugin's "true principles" Gothic appears to be a revolutionary and reactionary step change in the Gothic Revival's history. It clearly departed from mainstream and fashionable Gothic Revival design which saw designers and craftsmen deploy the vocabulary of medieval architecture - clustered columns, pointed and ogee lancets, trefoils, quatrefoils, cusps, pinnacles, finials, and crockets - wherever possible, and according to individuals' whims. A number of Pugin's predecessors and a contemporary, however, strove to produce Gothic Revival furniture based upon ancient domestic examples, and according to an increasingly robust understanding of

medieval sources. This furniture is not simply archaeologically informed, but directly opposed to the mainstream Gothic Revival fashions that Pugin railed against so strongly in figure 15.2.

The first site for this type of furniture will potentially surprise, especially given Pugin's remarks quoted above. Two chairs - tripod and X-frame - made in the 1750s for Horace Walpole's villa, Strawberry Hill, are probably the earliest pieces of Gothic Revival furniture to exhibit Pugin's design principles of honesty, structural decoration and non-miniaturised church architecture. They were based upon furniture depicted in ancient painted glass bought to furnish Strawberry Hill's windows, and even though neither chair is obviously Gothic (especially in ornamental terms) a preparatory sketch for these two chairs by Richard Bentley (c.1708-1782) [15.6] is labelled "Gothic chairs at Strawberry Hill".[14] Contrary to visual appearance, they were thought to possess and convey medieval associations without needing to include tracery, buttressing, or the other motifs from medieval architecture typically harnessed for Gothic Revival designs.[15] Whilst Strawberry

Hill is generally considered to possess the "decorative freedom of mid-century Gothick buildings", these chairs were intended to supplement a collection of supposedly ancient "Gothic" furniture, including turned ebony examples associated with Cardinal Wolsey and termed the "true black blood".[16] Walpole appreciated these chairs because of their distinctiveness, which he thought were adapted well to the:

13 The sideboard was made after Pugin's design, however it was destroyed in the 1992 Windsor Castle fire. For Pugin's work at Windsor Castle see Roberts, *For the King's Pleasure*, 36-37. The Scarisbrick chair is based upon medieval examples illustrated in illuminated manuscripts and is closely related to one of his designs in Pugin's *Gothic Furniture of the 15th Century*, pl. 6.

14 Lewis Walpole Library, Farmington CT, 49 3585, f. 43.

15 This tripod form, however, was later Gothicised with the addition of tracery by John Chute in an uncharacteristically whimsical

15.4 A.W.N. Pugin (designer), chair made for Charles Scarisbrick of Scarisbrick Hall, Lancashire, c. 1838. Carved oak, the upholstery covered in imitation leather, 110.5 x 47 x 60 cm.
[London, Victoria and Albert Museum: CIRC.236-1951]

15.5 A.W.N. Pugin (designer) and John Webb (manufacturer), table, 1852-1853. Oak, 76 x 114 x 75 cm.
[London, Victoria and Albert Museum: W.26-1972]

manner. See Lindfield, "Georgian Gothic Fabrications in the Antiquarian Style", 51.

16 Strawberry Hill: Robinson, *James Wyatt (1746-1813)*, 219. Walpole associated turned ebony furniture with Cardinal Wolsey because he had seen some at Esher Place, once home to the Cardinal. See Wainwright, "Only the True Black Blood". This furniture, however, originates on the Coromandel Coast of India from the seventeenth century. See Jaffer, Corrigan and Jones, *Furniture from British India and Ceylon*, 130-136.
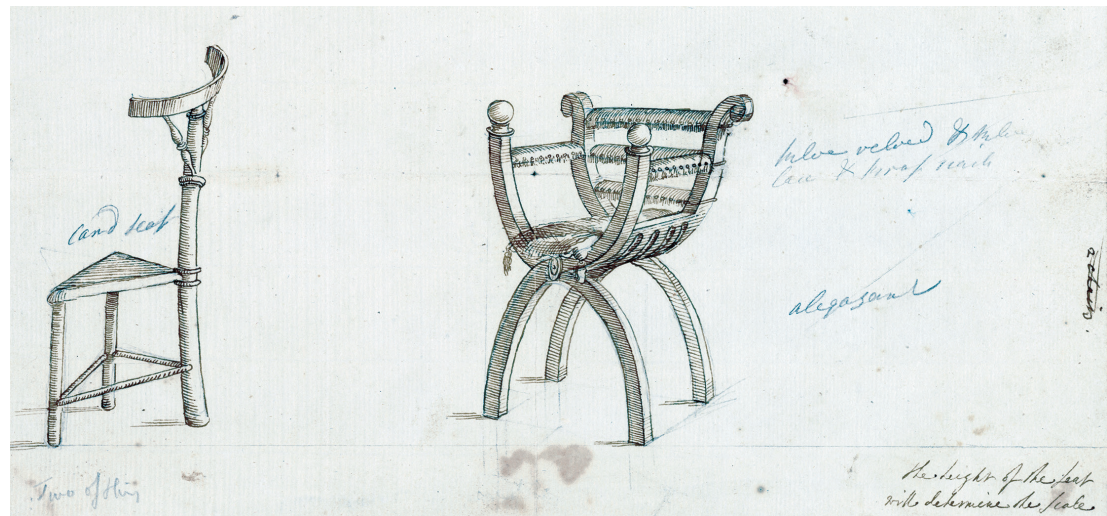
squareness of a Gothic dowager's rump. And by the way I do not see how the uneasiness and uncomfortableness of a coronation-chair can be any objection with you: every chair that is easy is modern, and unknown to our ancestors. As I remember, there were certain low chairs, that looked like ebony, at Esher, and were old and pretty.[17]

Walpole's approbation of the coronation throne for domestic use is irreconcilable with Pugin's criticism, yet he also meant for Strawberry Hill to be comfortable. In the preface to *The Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole* (1784), Walpole states that Strawberry Hill was designed not "to exclude convenience, and modern refinements in luxury".[18] Although antiquarian rather than modern, these chairs help challenge Pugin's opinion of Strawberry Hill as a collage of whimsically arranged Gothic motifs and funerary monuments conflated into chimney-pieces.[19]

Walpole's preference for supposedly antiquarian furniture, and especially Gothic Revival furniture designed in an ancient mode, was largely isolated in the eighteenth century. In the early nineteenth century, however, architects began designing furniture directly informed by a detailed understanding of Gothic architecture and woodwork. The first examples form part of
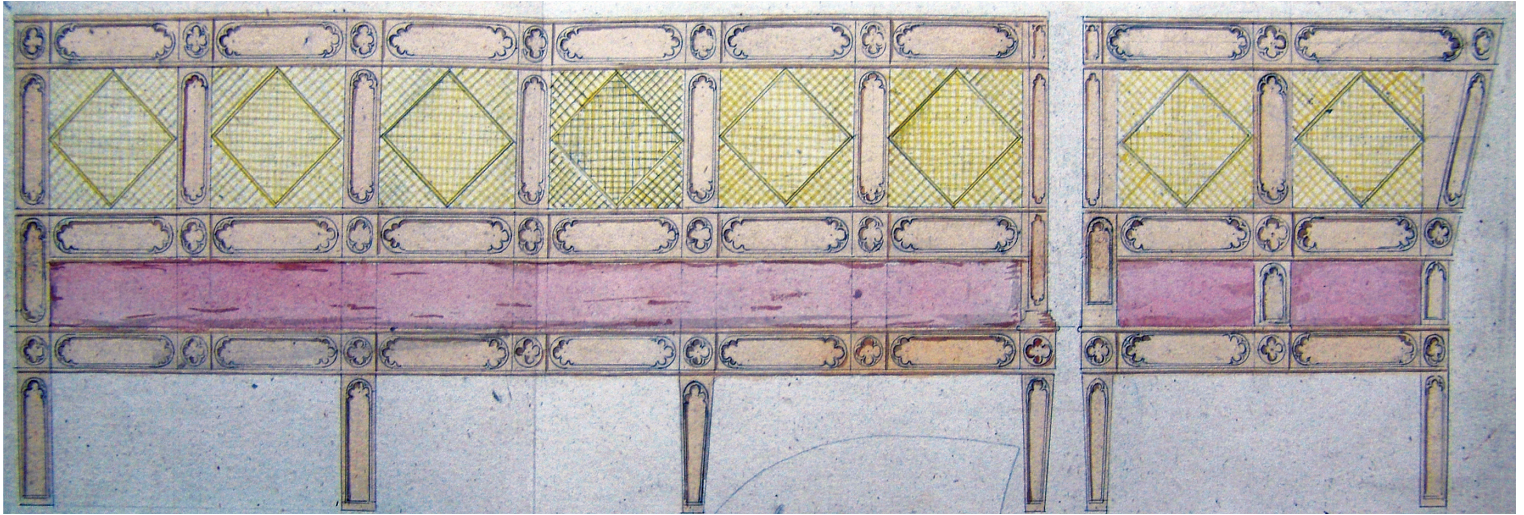
William Porden's (1755-1822) modifications to Eaton Hall, Cheshire (1803-1821). Robert Grosvenor (1767-1845), from 1831 the First Marquess of Westminster, inherited Eaton in 1802 and in the following year remodelling and extension work began. Under Porden's control, Eaton was developed from a modest Caroline house into a sprawling Gothic edifice conveying the power, status and nobility of the new Lord Grosvenor.[20]

When setting out his vision for an aristocratic and "exclusive" Gothic edifice, Porden repeatedly emphasises his expertise in the style and its ornament. This was intended to add extra credibility to the Gothic design, particularly given that he had proposed, presumably under direction, a Neoclassical alternative, and simultaneously reassured the Earl that a Gothic Eaton would truly be in the style "of our Ancestors and not of yesterday".[21] Emphasising his ability, Porden recalls that "my Cradle was rocked in Yorkminster and that I can tell the place where every [Gothic] ornament you have looked at may be found and many more not represented by Mr. Halfpenny".[22] He also credits himself with turning James Wyatt - the most fashionable architect of late eighteenth-century Britain, and designer of the Pantheon, Oxford Street, London - to Gothic: "In the year 1777 I seduced Mr. James Wyatt there who till then was little sensible of the beauties of gothic Architecture".[23] Porden contin-

17 Toynbee and Whibley, eds, *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, 364.

18 Walpole, *The Description of the Villa of Mr. Horace Walpole*, iii.

19 This analysis corresponds with recent efforts to emphasise the seriousness of Walpole's Gothic from the later 1750s. See Rogers, "Walpole's Gothic", 61-62.

20 For an analysis of Porden's architectural work see Lindfield, "The Furnishing of a Gothic Fantasy", and Id., "Porden's Eaton".

21 Eaton Hall Archive, Chester, 9/278, 19 Jan. 1803, f 2v.

22 Ibid., 10 Dec. 1803 f. 2r. This refers to Halfpenny, *Gothic Ornaments in the Cathedral Church of York Drawn and Etched by Joseph Halfpenny* of 1795 which is an important exploration of Gothic architecture and ornament at York Minster.

23 Eaton Hall Archive, 9/278, 10 Dec. 1803 f. 2r. For Wyatt see Robinson, *James Wyatt*, ix, 15-27, 65, 210-214, 218-245.

15.7 William Porden, Design for a settee for Eaton Hall, Cheshire, c. 1807. [Chester, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies: ZCR 63/2/791]

ues by emphasising his direct engagement with medieval architecture under Wyatt's direction:

> [James Wyatt] employed me for two months in drawing from the building [York Minster] and since then I at intervals measured and studied many parts of the fabrick with an intention of publishing the whole on a more magnificent Scale but was deterred by the enormous expense of the engraving.[24]

If his connection with Wyatt, the most fashionable British architect of the day, was not sufficient to establish his Gothic credentials, Porden also associated himself with Joseph Halfpenny, who produced the landmark antiquarian study of York Minster:

> Mr. Halfpenny is an old acquaintance of mine, I was one of his earliest Subscribers and he received some hints from me relative to his work; but as he was not an Architect he did not find it convenient to adopt all of them. His work is of the first merit in my eyes.[25]

In his correspondence with Lord Grosvenor, Porden observes that his understanding of medieval architecture sets him apart from the majority of architects and designers: he considers them ignorant. Porden, on the other hand, could apply his deep and systematic knowledge of medieval architecture to the design of Eaton Hall and its furniture. Indeed, he is highly critical of mainstream fashionable Gothic and Neoclassical furniture proposed for Eaton by the then well-known and respected furniture-maker, Gillows. In 1807 Porden

> prepared [designs for furniture] and will send Mr Gillows if I can get them that your Lordship may decide between them and the work of a mere Mechanic. […] I do not by this interference mean to prejudice your Lordship against Mr Gillow who is an excellent Workman, and able to execute whatever may be directed, but I see nothing that distinguishes him as a man of superior taste.[26]

Porden's design for a settee [15.7] is representative of his "superior taste". It is certainly removed from 1807 furniture fashions in term of construction and the application of Gothic motifs [15.3]. Instead, it reflects his idiosyncratic handling of architectural ornament that he also applied to the interior of Eaton Hall.[27] It is very interesting and noteworthy, particularly given the content and thrust of Pugin's dictates in *The True Principles,* that Porden's settee design is of a simple rectilinear form. A simple selection

24 Eaton Hall Archive, 9/278, 10 Dec. 1803 f. 2r.
25 Ibid., 10 Dec. 1803 f. 2r.
26 Ibid., 23 Nov. 1807 f. 1r.
27 Lindfield, "The Furnishing of a Gothic Fantasy".

15.8 James Wyatt (probably designer) and John Russell (maker), chair for the Speaker's House, Westminster, 1807. Gilded beech, gilt bronze, velvet, 99.5 x 67.0 x 61.0 cm.
[Royal Collection © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II: RICN 28728]

of Gothic motifs that similarly prefigure Pugin's advice offered in *The True Principles*, including the cusped lancet, is applied in an equally restrained manner. Gothic motifs are not added wherever possible to this pared-back structure, as seen in Pugin's critique of Gothic Revival furniture [15.1], but, instead, they decorate the structure. Although Porden's furniture is very different from Pugin's work, there are distinct similarities in the application of ornament to the essential structure, and the application of an archaeological knowledge of medieval architecture to produce archaeologically-informed furniture removed from contemporary fashionable forms. Porden's Gothic shares Pugin's reforming and scholarly ethos, but it is not as well known because he did not publicise it.

Whilst Porden was Gothicising Eaton, James Wyatt, his former master, was busy regenerating Westminster. Wyatt's work was criticised notably by the antiquarian topographer John Carter (1748-1817) as "cement influenza of that august pile of brick bats and stucco, with its debased windows constructed by the united efforts of the Smith,

Bricklayers, and Compo-ists […a] Judicious triumvirate of modern art!"[28] Despite this opposition, Wyatt created three Gothic parade rooms in the Speaker's House, Westminster, between 1802 and 1808.[29] For these a suite of Gothic furniture - 26 arm chairs, 30 side chairs, 6 sofas, 5 tables, 6 screens, and a pair of lantern tripods - was supplied in 1807 almost certainly according to Wyatt's designs.[30]

In contrast with his heavily criticised architecture, the arm chairs [15.8] and *en suite* sofas demonstrate a sound understanding of medieval woodwork and its ornamentation. John Russell's bill for the chairs twice mentions their Gothic character:

> 26 large Gothic Elbow chair frames with black frames for Stuffing Cane Seats turn'd and moulded feet Rails Stumps Elbows and feet Richly carv'd with Gothic ornaments and bands of fretwork carved Brackets under seat rails and top to backs 4 strong upright brass Casters and 4 Water Guilt brass moulded Knobs to each Chair the whole of the Chairs Japann'd mock black Ebony Ground and the ornaments and bands Guilt in Burnished Gold.
> £25 5s   £656 10s[31]

Like Porden's furniture for Eaton, ornament on Wyatt's chairs is restricted to the essential structure, including the legs and framing of the seat and back. This is a central facet of Pugin's "true principles" Gothic. But unlike Porden's furniture, which uses clearly identifiable Gothic motifs, the "Gothic ornaments" on Wyatt's chairs are much less obviously Gothic: only the cusped panels sunk into the legs and depressed Tudor arches on the back and seat rails conform to mainstream Gothic design. The remainder of the chair's structural surface ornament is derived from mouldings on the medieval choir-stalls in Henry VII's Chapel, Westminster Abbey, which Wyatt would have known from his restorations of the chapel in 1793.[32] The bill for the Speaker's sofas and library tables is

28 Quoted in Colvin, Crook, and Port, *The History of the King's Works*, VI, 517-518.
29 See Roberts, "James Wyatt's Furniture for the Palace of Westminster" and Colvin, Crook, and Port, *The History of the King's Works*, VI, 533.
30 Only chairs and settees are known to have survived. See Roberts, "James Wyatt's Furniture for the Palace of Westminster", 101.
31 Quoted in Ibid.
32 It is assumed that Wyatt was responsible for this furniture based upon the commission's scale, location, importance, and his knowledge of Westminster Abbey (Ibid., 105).

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more explicit in this regard, and mentions that the ornament is taken from "the abbey". The Gothic rooms in the Speaker's House, therefore, were fitted out with furniture decorated with ornament taken from medieval sources, and, in the case of the chairs and settees, they avoid the architectural exuberance of Gothic choir-stall canopies that the younger Pugin railed against.

These chairs are Gothic in another less obvious way. Originally the relief detail was gilded and Russell's bill specifies that they were japanned black to look like ebony, a wood connected with the Tudors, and the colour of the "true black blood": ebony furniture collected by Walpole because of its supposedly medieval origins, despite originating from seventeenth-century India. Pugin himself made the connection between ebony and Henry VIII in a drawing of "ancient furniture" reproduced in *Illustrations; Landscape, Historical, and Antiquarian, to the Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott* (1834). This popular connection between black and medieval almost certainly influenced the ebony finish of Wyatt's Speaker's chairs, with the resulting contrast between black and gold necessarily heightened the chairs' and sofas' Gothic patterning. They, therefore, were doubly Gothic in terms of material and carved surface design.

The final architect considered here is Lewis Nockalls Cottingham (1787-1847). Like Pugin, medieval remains inspired Cottingham's architecture and furniture. Despite this similarity, Cottingham's efforts as an antiquary, architect and furniture designer, within the broader context of Pugin's "true principles" Gothic, have been relatively side lined.[33] The most important influences upon Cottingham were the medieval buildings, objects and fragments that he collected, documented and preserved. He played an important role in sustaining the preservationist and documentary approaches to medieval architecture that rose to prominence in the late eighteenth century under the leadership of Richard Gough (1735-1809), Director of the Society of Antiquaries of London, and

John Carter. Cottingham, consequently, was not a typical early nineteenth-century designer, and he examined and interpreted medieval architecture: its structure and decoration, as well as stylistic development. These results, ultimately, were put to practical use and informed his architectural practice. Referring to Henry VII's Chapel:

> I shall now close my account of this incomparable piece of the latest of the third class of pointed architecture, to which an hundred visits may be paid, and something new and valuable discovered each time: it is an inexhaustible magazine of the rectilineal style. For domestic architecture, it may be consulted by the student with the greatest advantage.[34]

To realise the structural analysis of Gothic architecture, Cottingham amassed 31,000 pieces of medieval remains at 43 Waterloo Bridge Road, London. They ranged from vaulting and architectural fragments to woodwork and furniture. Cottingham's museum was the medieval equivalent of Sir John Soane's Classical collection at Lincoln's Inn Fields.[35] And because the contents of Cottingham's museum were arranged chronologically, he, along with students and visitors, could understand the development of medieval architecture and woodwork.[36] Sir Henry Shaw noted that it was

> a complete illustration of the study of English Architecture, Ecclesiastical and Domestic, from the Norman invasion to the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign and is presumed to be the most ample and varied series of examples of Mediæval Architecture ever brought together.[37]

Whilst the benefit of this museum for the study of medieval architecture has been recognised, its role in informing the style and quality of his furniture has not. Sold off in 1850, the sale catalogue indicates that at least ten percent of his collection was woodwork,

33 Janet Myles has increased the awareness of Cottingham, but he remains a marginal figure in Pugin's shadow. See Myles, *L.N. Cottingham*, 8-156.

34 Cottingham, *Plans, Elevations, Sections, Details, and Views of the Magnificent Chapel of King Henry the Seventh, at Westminster Abbey Church*, II, 17.

35 See Myles, *L.N. Cottingham*, 28-35.

36 Ibid., 32.

37 Shaw, *A Descriptive Memoir*, iii. The museum's importance was recorded in "Notes and Correspondence of the Month" in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 33 (1850), 629: "We hear with no little regret and apprehension of the sale and possible dispersion of the Museum of mediæval architecture and sculpture formed by the late Mr. Cottingham. The preference which has been shown at the British Museum to the remains of classical antiquity, and even to the barbarous sculptures of nations less cultivated, so long as they come from a distance, has always been a subject of complaint with English antiquaries; and the collection formed by Mr. Cottingham, in the contracted basement of his private residence, has hitherto formed the only example of what might be accomplished by a more systematic pursuit of the same plan."
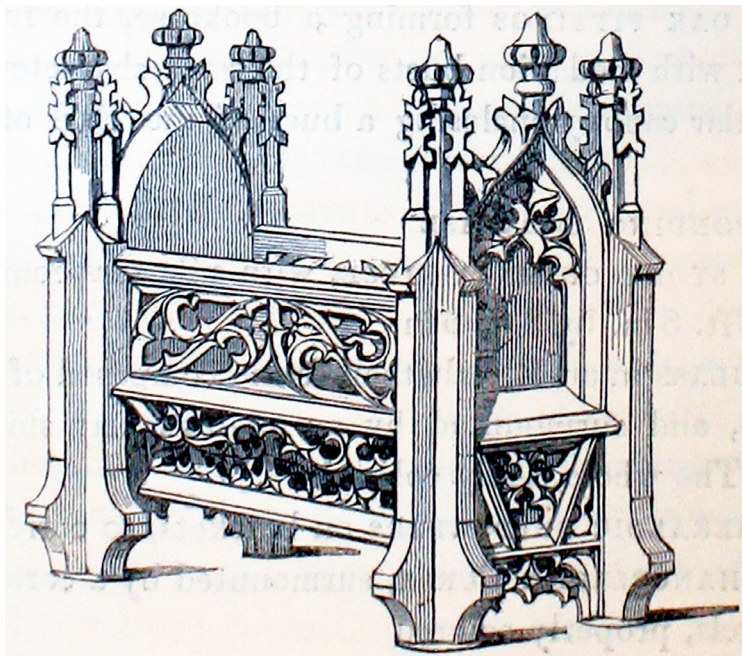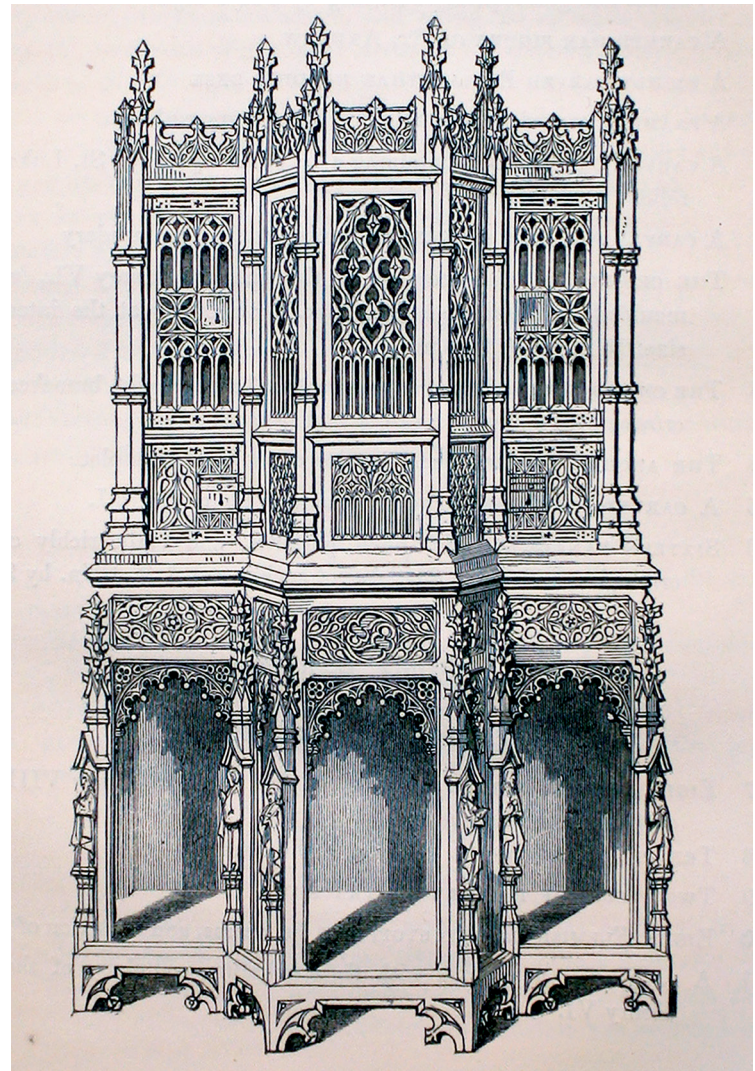
and seventy lots in the sale were articles of furniture. Given the paucity of medieval furniture in the nineteenth century, Cottingham's museum provided readily accessible templates for his own Gothic Revival furniture. The woodwork was primarily later medieval and Tudor, and included:

6   A carved oak coffer covered with arabesque ornaments.

41 The Carved Oak Fittings forming a bookcase, the front containing ten panels filled with medallion busts of the same character as the door, and a semicircular canopy enclosing a bust of the Earl of Essex in a sunk panel.

51 A Small Cradle very richly carved in oak and gilt, of Flemish workmanship of the latter part of the 15th century. Our wood-cut shows the general arrangement of this very elegant design.

291 A Highly Enriched Panelled Ceiling, of oak, with its corbels, spandrils, pendants, &c., painted and gilt. It is lighted by a lantern which occupies the position of the original opening for the Louvre. This interesting ceiling (which is in the highest state of preservation) was taken from the Council Chamber of Crosby Hall, anciently called Crosby-place, the greater part of which still exists, and is remarkable as one of the finest examples of the Domestic Architecture of the

15th century now remaining. […] It is rendered still more famous by Shakespeare's allusion to it in the third act of his tragedy of Richard III:

Gloster – Shall we hear from you, Catesby, ere we sleep?
Catesby – You shall, my Lord.
Gloster – At Crosby-place, there shall you find us both.

296 A Richly Carved Bookcase, 24ft. long by 7ft. 2 in high, divided into four large compartments, four smaller ones, and the return at the end; the lower part projecting six inches, with two rows of shelves above; the whole lined with original linen panels of oak.
335 A Very Elaborate Carved Oak Cabinet of open-work tracery.
336 A Dwarf Bookcase of oak, with two tiers of shelves, divided into compartments by six richly carved twisted columns with capitals formed of marks and grotesques, 14ft. long by 3ft. 9 high.[38]

Both the cradle (lot 51) [15.9] and cabinet (lot 335) [15.10] are illustrated in the catalogue. They are extremely ornate and covered with a profusion of architecturally-derived motifs: every panel on the oak cabinet is covered with lancets and Decorated Gothic tracery, and all of the stiles are ornamented with buttresses finishing in ornately crocketed pinnacles. Whilst illustrated because of their elaborate decoration, they indicate Cottingham's collection contained at least some prize specimens of richly decorated woodwork. Although Pugin disapproved of such architecturally decorated furniture, they correspond with surviving medieval furniture, such as the sideboard of St Mary's Hall, Coventry, or that illustrated in medieval manuscripts, including French buffets, and a highly ornate table found in MS Bodley 264 [15.11].[39]

Cottingham adopted this method of applying Gothic motifs to furniture in his own work. For Snelston Hall, Derbyshire, he produced furniture designs informed by, and directly based upon, examples in his museum.

15.11 The Romance of Alexander *in French verse.*
[Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS Bodley 264, f. 142v.]

15.12 L.N. Cottingham, Drawing-room Cabinet, *1843. Watercolour, pen and ink, 35.25 x 50.8 cm.*
[London, Victoria and Albert Museum: E.521-1951]

38 Shaw, *Catalogue of the Museum of Mediaeval Art*, 1, 3, 16, 18.
39 Examples were gathered together and illustrated in Shaw and Meyrick, *Specimens of Ancient Furniture Drawn from Existing Authorities*, pl. 8 (sideboard), 9 (table) and 25 (buffets). Penelope Eames' study of medieval furniture similarly records furniture decorated with highly ornate tracery, such as the chests, buffet of estate and chairs. Eames, *Furniture in England, France and the Netherlands*, 231. See also Pickvance, "Medieval Tracery-Carved Clamp-Fronted Chests".

15.13 L.N. Cottingham, Divan Couch for Angle of Room, 1843. Water colour, pen and ink, 33.7 x 50.8 cm. [London, Victoria and Albert Museum: E.522-1951]

For an octagonal table, identified as being of "Temp Henry 7", Cottingham's museum contained a number of pieces from this date that he could have used as points of reference.[40] An almost direct link can be made between the *Drawing-room Cabinet* [15.12] and lot 335 - carved oak cabinet [15.10].[41] In the design Cottingham has covered the doors and panels with a profusion of Decorated reticulations very similar to those seen on lot 335. Like lot 335, all the rails have applied ornament, however they are not architectural in form, but instead are turned columns like those found on Walpole's ebony chairs - the "true black blood".

Cottingham's cabinet also is an early example of polychromed Gothic Revival furniture - colour used to pick out forms and highlight decorative patterns - and the prominent application of ironwork for the locks and hinges: a feature emphasised by Pugin in *The True Principles*.[42] This cabinet design consequently demonstrates a thorough understanding of medieval furniture's structure, form, and decoration, and is a scholarly work informed by antiquarian collecting and analysis, which parallels Pugin's development of his "true principle" Gothic. Cottingham's work at Magdalen College, Oxford (1829-1833) also received Pugin's approbation: he felt it to be "one of the most

beautiful specimens of modern design that I have ever seen & executed both in wood & stone in the best manner".[43]

Cottingham also applied his understanding of medieval woodwork to contemporary forms [15.13]. The arms on his design for a *Divan Couch for Angle of Room* are inspired by medieval choir-stall standards.[44] The structure is decidedly un-medieval, however the surface is covered with antiquarian-derived Decorated motifs, polychromy and turning, as found on the drawing-room cabinet. This mixture is also seen in his *Conversational Sofa* with its thoroughly modern frame composed of sinuous lines, yet it features a trio of circlets decorated with heraldry and reticulations stretched over the curved footboard.[45]

These designs for a divan couch and a conversational sofa clearly depart from Pugin's "true principles" in terms of form, however they reveal an alternative application of scholarly knowledge acquired through the in-depth study of medieval remains. Cottingham effectively drew on his collection to medievalise furniture and make it fit for modern convenience. As indicated by Janet Myles in her monograph on Cottingham, his work deserves serious attention and contextualisation within the broader medieval revival and Pugin's "true principles"

40 Victoria and Albert Museum, London, E.518 1951. Woodwork in the Cottingham sale dating from this period include lots 187, "a very beautiful double panel" and 326, "a pair of oak doors".

41 Victoria and Albert Museum, London, E.521 1951.

42 Pugin, *True Principles*, 20.

43 Belcher, *The Collected Letters of A.W.N. Pugin*, I, 23. For details of Cottingham's work at Magdalen, see White and Darwell-Smith, *The Architectural Drawings of Magdalen College Oxford*, xlvi-xlvii, 115-116, and Brockliss, *Magdalen College Oxford*, 362-363.

44 Victoria and Albert Museum, London, E.522 1951.

45 Ibid., E.520 1951.

46 Myles, *Cottingham: Architect of the Gothic Revival*, 65.

Gothic.[46] Although Cottingham applied his understanding of medieval architecture and its vocabulary of decorative forms to a different, not always antiquarian structure, he can be seen frequently to draw upon the invaluable resource of his medieval museum to direct the design of his furniture.

Conclusion

The importance allotted to Pugin's "true principles" Gothic has sidelined efforts by other architects and designers in the early nineteenth century, as well as Walpole in the mid-eighteenth century, to create Gothic Revival furniture, interiors and architecture based upon the principles and forms of medieval remains. Pugin's widespread criticism of Gothic Revival furniture, and of his own teenage work Windsor Castle, established an inflexible division between Pugin's "true principle" Gothic, and the rest. This model holds that pre-"true principles" design, including furniture, is largely whimsical and inauthentic, whereas his "true principles" Gothic possess the refined dignity of antiquarian sobriety. Ultimately this isolates and promotes Pugin's "true principles" Gothic as a revolutionary departure from the work of his predecessors and contemporaries.

This chapter has shown that, despite the originality of Pugin's manifestoes, a number of architects produced Gothic Revival furniture based upon a considered example of medieval prototypes and precedents decades before *The True Principles* appeared. The form, character and appearance of this furniture vary, and they are certainly unlike Pugin's. Despite the material differences, Walpole, Porden, Wyatt, and Cottingham each reacted against mainstream Gothic design to create a Gothic furniture based upon medieval precedent. Thus, Pugin's concern over "truthfulness", "honesty of design" and "realism" had actually been creeping into the Gothic Revival since the 1750s, with an increasingly sophisticated manifestation from the early nineteenth century. What isolates Pugin's Gothic, therefore, is the way it was written about and publicised. As such, Walpole, Porden, Wyatt and Cottingham, and their work, should be given greater consideration in the development and antiquarian revisions of the nineteenth-century Gothic Revival in Britain. Pugin remains one of the most important figures to the British Gothic Revival, but his approach is not as revolutionary in spirit as he, Eastlake and subsequent authors have framed it.