

Notes on the History of Design Reform in Queen Victoria's Britain

Alf Boe, ***From Gothic revival to functional form: a study in Victorian theories of design***, 1957

&

Ernst H Gombrich, ***The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Art***, 1979

In chapter 2, on "Gothic Reform", [***From Gothic revival to functional form: a study in Victorian art and design***, 1957] Alf Boe argues that, in part through the theoretical arguments, and pragmatic sketching of August Northmore Welby Pugin, Britain was probably the first European nation to be concerned about the conditions of her arts and crafts. One of the most influential figures in what would soon be called the 'design reform movement' was Henry Cole. Expansion of this concern about educating British citizens about design became the passion of Cole, ultimately the leading organizer of the 1851 Great Exhibition and first director of the Victoria and Albert Museum and related institutions.

In this [pdf](#) – part of Gombrich's ***The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Art*** – and this [pdf](#) – part of Alf Boe's ***From Gothic revival to functional form: a study in Victorian theories of design, 1957***, Ernst Hans Gombrich and Alf Boe, among other things, argue the case for Pugin's role in "the Reform of Design".

Below are some highlights of the event as it played out over the rest of the 19th century.

1841

in ***The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture***, Pugin articulates his famous dictum about design:

“Ornament Construction, Don't Construct Ornament”

Sources: Rosemary Hill, ***God's Architect: Pugin and the Building of Romantic Britain*** 2009, page 426, and several individual chapters by Clive Wainwright.

In 2005, [*Designs of the times: using key movements and styles for ...*]
Lakshmi Bhaskaran argued that,

One of the first to make the connection between declining esthetic standards and the nation's moral standing was designer Augustus WN Pugin. Steadfast in the belief that it was possible to reform society through good design, Pugin chose ...

1852

Richard Redgrave, [Supplementary Report on Design](#)

copy of text in Harry Francis Mallgrave, *Architectural Theory*, v 1, page 495

1853

George E Street "[On the Revival of the Ancient Style of Domestic Architecture](#)", *The Ecclesiologist* 14 1853, page 76 [ref in clive wainwright's chap of festschrift-type book on awn pugin] in google book research, results are not conclusive

1856

George Wallis, "[Recent Progress in Design as Applied to Manufacture](#)"

Another British architect, Owen Jones responded to Pugin's theories with his 1856 *Grammar of Ornament: design, ornament, architecture, and theory in an age ...* For Carol A. Hrvol Flores, in *Owen Jones: design, ornament, architecture, and theory in an age ...*, 2006, page not given. Owen Jones "opus" remains one of the most influential works on design ever published and is a source for many artists and designers today.

1874

[Letter](#) to Architect and Contract Reporter v 11, February 1874, page 121

the so-called "Modern European Style"

1880s

By the 1880s, reform lay in the hands of the designers of the Arts and Crafts Movement, impelled by the revulsion against the debased standards of Victorian commercial design experienced by Pugin and the Gothic Revivalists.

In her 2009 ***The craftsman and the critic: defining usefulness and beauty in*** p 32, Beverly Kay Brandt claims that, in essays such as his 1880 "The Beauty of Life", William Morris passionately embraced the role of championing the desirability of a high national standards in the production of arts and crafts (1880),[who] admonished consumers to take personal responsibility for the standards evident in their immediate surroundings. Taken together, over a half Pugin, Ruskin, and Morris, each in a unique way, launched and/or continued the campaign for design reform in Britain. . . .

1893

C R Ashbee, On the Meaning of Design [Work](#) no 240 october 21, 1893

This has two figures, one is ornament constructed, the other constructed ornament

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