By the mid 1890s, Britain’s position in the world was far from comfortable. The nation was diplomatically isolated, engaged in defending rather than extending its frontiers, and the industrial fervor that was practically indigenous to England had begun to wane. Moreover, incongruities characterized industry, technology and commerce — the trinity that dominated British culture for nearly a century. Architectural critics, led by Ruskin and Morris, sought to tame the dangerous engines of progress with rural myths that promulgated the blessings of the countryside; ancient, stable, and spiritual, it symbolized everything the industry was not. Through the influence of social commentators from Matthew Arnold to Charles Dickens, a culture took root that put the ideals of economic growth and material progress in their place. For the rapidly growing upper middle and professional classes, the outward acceptance of modernity endured without the power of inner convictions. As a result, a new national self-image of Englishness, conceived in the trappings of an older tradition, was born. Remarkably, after a century of being known as the world’s workshop, British identity virtually excluded industrialism. Instead, imperial anxieties fostered explorations of rural life as a repository of the national character. Gradually, an cultural dialectic emerged between Englishness, identified with the pastoral vision (“the green and pleasant land”), and industrialism (“the dark satanic mill”).

No building type better captures England’s nostalgia for an earlier, albeit idealized, rural past than does the church. As late as 1941, Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple avowed: “Churches clad in medieval revival styles remain reservoirs of rural romanticism and uneasiness with industrial and economic growth.” The turn of the century, however, was a period of general decline in church building with one prominent exception, the construction of great cathedrals, those of the Roman Catholics at Westminster and Leeds, and that of the Anglicans at Liverpool. They were large churches built to suit modern urban conditions, a new order of cathedrals where sermons and processions were intended for masses of people. New urban cathedrals gave the often-disparaged modern centers of commerce and industry an appearance of antiquity that may have served to dampen social tensions and minimize disruptive effects of change. What’s more, particularly for the Anglicans, the church was a powerful force in shaping public attitudes, behavior, and policy. Since the reformation, the Church of England had been embedded into the national political system, and Anglicanism remained central to the durability of the ancien régime, and the church stayed an essential part of English society leader’s concept of a nation united by a common set of political and religious values.

The turn of the century, the cathedral architect’s dilemma was formidable. Could a cathedral speak to thousands of years of tradition in building and negotiate England’s image as “workshop to the world”? Or, as new antiquarians demanded, should it be rich in historical associations, recalling the past “to redress the balance of the new—to legitimate to revivify, and to provide relief from the stresses of the present.” For the Liverpool Cathedral Committee, the answer to the century-old question, “what style should a cathedral be?” was self-evident. “The style shall be Gothic” they proclaimed in their 1902 call of competition for the design of their cathedral. This paper discusses Liverpool Cathedral, focusing on the design of its Lady Chapel, the first component of the cathedral constructed (1903 to 1910). As the earliest, and arguably most conservative, part of the cathedral the Lady Chapel affords an opportunity for tracing the survival and transformation of the late nineteenth century’s Gothic Revivals into the twentieth century. The expression of British national identity, as the Victorian age of empire and industrial expansion drew to a close, in the enduring language of the Gothic provides a potent subtext for the study.

THE CATHEDRAL AND THE COMPETITIONS, AN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It is worthwhile to recap the circumstances of Liverpool Cathedral’s construction. Liverpool, previously under the Bishop of Lichfield and the Bishop of Chester, became a separate diocese in 1880. Five years later, an Act of Parliament incorporated the Liverpool Cathedral Committee and authorized the erection of a cathedral on a site west of St.
George's Hall where St. John's Church then stood. An 1886 competition, won by William Emerson, yielded the first design for the cathedral. Remarkably, there was little characteristically English about the Emerson scheme. Its plan based on medieval spatial divisions, but with a short nave and a very large octagonal space at the crossing covered by a large dome. According to The Builder, the project was nothing short of a declaration that "with all deference to the Ecclesiologists...the medieval cathedral plan is passé...the spirit of modern worship demands a corresponding alteration of the cathedral plan." As controversy raged about the restrictive site and insufficient funds, plans to build were abandoned and the Emerson scheme jettisoned.

With the designation of a new bishop in 1900, the diocese again sought to build. This time they selected a dramatic site on St. James Mount. Removed from the dense center of the dynamic commercial city, the cathedral would occupy a pastoral zone, reminiscent of the congenial cathedral towns of the middle age that so pleased a cultural that preferred the harmony of the rural village to the efficiency of the modern machine. The cathedral, however, would also be highly visible from the river. As it rose on high ground above the city, its prescribed Gothic syntax, a recognizable symbol of Anglican traditions would also provide a conspicuous reminder to Liverpool's significant population of Irish immigrants and growing community of evangelicals that the Church of England was the national church.

In June 1902, architects were invited by public advertisement to submit not designs for a cathedral but "portfolios of work." Five architects — C.E. Nicholson, Malcolm Stark, J. Tapper, Austin & Paley, and Giles Gilbert Scott, then still in apprenticeship with unsuccessful competitor Temple Moore— were asked to take part in the final competition. George F. Bodley (1827-1907) and Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912) served as assessors for both phases of the competition. While Shaw never gained widespread popularity as an ecclesiastical architect, Bodley wielded greater influence on church architecture after the death of Street than any other architect during the last years of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Once again, controversy enveloped the project as the Cathedral Committee's demand for a Gothic building in a modern port polarized the architectural community. The Gothic Revival had been the most visible expression of a broader reaction to the industrial revolution, but after nearly a century's promulgation of the Gothic as the only proper Christian style, literal resuscitation of dead styles was anathema to most British architects. So too were the picturesque modes of High Victorian Gothic out of favor. J.D. Sedding, well known as a "Gothic man who rocked the Gothic boat" in his Holy Trinity, Sloane Street, went so far as to suggest that the (Gothic) "Revival was a unique event against the laws of nature." Rhetorical battles in the press challenged the Cathedral Committee's endorsement of a medieval vocabulary for a twentieth-century building. "A foolish, mischievous resolution," it was according to The Builder: a choice likely to invoke a "deadly spirit of plagiarism," according to the Times. "Style" is not the making of architectural religiosity, argued Edward Prior, one of late nineteenth-century Britain's most knowledgeable scholars of the Gothic and also one of its most inventive designers. "The faith that would make an enthusiastic copy of a Gothic unity," he continued, "(was) equally hopeless." Nor did it escape critics of the competition announcement that modern Liverpool was built of docks, railways, and commercial buildings; if its public realm had established symbols of place they were the classical St. George's Hall and the commercial vernacular of C.R. Cockerell. Moreover, Liverpool was a notorious hub of sub-standard housing and unseemly sanitary conditions. By the end of the century, it was the most populous port in the empire; it was also deemed the most unhealthy town in England. To impress upon the committee how little they were appealing to the prevailing spirit of the age by prescribing a strict adherence to any historical style, a cadre of architects ranging from C.F.A. Voysey, Aston Webb, and C.R. Ashbee, to Paul Waterhouse, Beresford Pite, and Edward Luytens joined Prior in signing a petition protesting the decision that "the style of the new cathedral shall be Gothic. Such a proposition was fundamentally opposed to the principles which govern architectural progress."
Yielding to the pressure of the professional press, the Cathedral Committee soon surrendered the prescription of style. Nevertheless, the competition winner indicated that the Committee—old-fashioned men with old fashioned ideas—got what they wanted: a lucid expression of time-tried cathedral architecture. Giles Gilbert Scott’s self-effacingly Gothic scheme (Figs. 1 and 2) triumphed over works of designers on the cutting edge of British modernism, including W.R. Lethaby and C.R. Mackintosh, and entries by established historicists, from Beresford Pite, Edward Goldie, and C.A. Nicholson to the Americans Cram, Goodhue, and Ferguson, alike. Giles Gilbert Scott (1880–1960) was the grandson of Sir Gilbert Scott, the preeminent nineteenth-century restorer of medieval cathedrals as well as the author of precedent-setting original works; Bodley himself had taken his articles with the elder Scott.

Scott’s plan, comprised of six bay nave and three-bay choir with enclosed bays at the external corners of the crossing outside the transepts, adhered more closely to the traditional cruciform cathedral than any other submission. In this original scheme, the Lady Chapel, reached by a transverse ambulatory behind the reredos, terminates the east end immediately behind the altar, replicating the paradigmatic position of the Lady Chapel exemplified at Salisbury and at nearby Lichfield. In lieu of crossing tower, Scott created two towers over the transepts and a single tower at the entrance end. This relieved the plan of the heavy piers that would have been required to support a crossing tower, affording an openness of the crossing dictated by the Committee’s demand for a large central space.

Once resigned to the Gothic aspirations of the Cathedral Committee, the professional press judged the scheme favorably. The square, sturdy and massive competition scheme was judged a decisive statement in the spirit of English Gothic. It was reminiscent of Durham Cathedral, according to The Builder, which asserted the drawing "might almost pass for a measured drawing from a medieval cathedral." The cathedral commission was not so easily pleased; they hesitated to turn so lofty a task as the construction of their cathedral to a twenty-two year old Roman Catholic. In another gesture that appalled British architects concerned with professional ethics, the Cathedral Committee invited Bodley to serve as joint architect of the building; to the surprise of much of the architectural community, the elderly architect accepted. Work on Liverpool Cathedral commenced with the construction of its Lady Chapel in June 1903. So too began the uneasy partnership of Bodley, one of late nineteen-century Britain’s most influential and scholarly proponents of late Gothic style, and Scott, barely out of his articles and attempting to come to terms with the sharp dialectics between medievalism and modernism.

DESIGNING THE LIVERPOOL LADY CHAPEL

More than three-quarters of the twentieth century passed before the cathedral was completed in 1978, and a litany of changes and alterations mark its construction. In 1904, the architects published a revised scheme fundamentally the same as the competition winner, but differing in articulation of the east end (Figs. 3 and 4). No longer is the east end terminated on axis by the Lady Chapel. The 1904 scheme shifts the Lady Chapel to the cathedral’s southeast corner, balancing it with a Chapter House to the northeast. In section, the chapel is manipulated to enhance the integrity of the traditional east window. Set against the soaring southeast transept and choir, the Lady Chapel appears diminutive; nevertheless, the visual effect of buttresses that appear to carry the composition to the ground vest the Chapel with a verticality that echoes that of the center tower, both strong signifiers of the Gothic.

Pevsner judged the Liverpool Lady Chapel as “conventionally though competently Gothic of the late Bodley kind.” His suggestion that the Chapel reflects the subtle refinements of the older architect’s hand is accurate. In contrast to the competition proposal, the Lady Chapel is quite high, articulated with buttresses with many offsets, rather closely spaced in proportion to their height, and tall two-light decorated windows (Fig. 5). Its lofty section and light-filled elevation generate comparison of Liverpool Lady Chapel with Sainte Chapelle, a model Sir Gilbert Scott employed in his modifi-
More significantly, Bodley's high regard for the Gothic art of the fourteenth century was well known; the influence of the English paradigms he preferred together with precedents in his own work are apparent in the Liverpool Lady Chapel.

Bodley's 1886 entry to the first Liverpool Competition underscores his mastery of this vocabulary. With partner Thomas Garner he produced a very large, though still gracefully proportioned essay in late-Gothic style. Derived to some extent from Lichfield, it merged the decorative syntax of the early decorated period with geometrical tracery, a solution The Builder called "English Gothic of pure type." Among Bodley's works, St. Augustine, Pendlebury (1869) and the Church of Holy Angels, Hoar Cross (1872-76) demand attention as antecedents of the profound verticality created in Liverpool's Lady Chapel. At Pendlebury, the nave and chancel are united without structural division, resulting in a towering interior which is expressed in the high and contiguous envelop of the building; at Hoar Cross, the chancel, articulated with slender windows ornamented with decorated ogee tracery and buttresses placed closely together, soars higher than the nave.

Although Scott could not boast Bodley's refined emulation of Gothic building, he too was well schooled in the medieval vocabulary beginning in his childhood with sketching tours of the ancient buildings of Kent and Sussex. At Liverpool, Bodley's archaeological fidelity is tempered by Scott's ability to "modernize" the Gothic through abstraction and manipulation, as evidenced by the Arts and Crafts spirit of the Cathedral's south porch. The influence of Scott's master Temple Moore (1856-1920) is apparent in the wide flat arch that commands the full width of the porch. Moore had been a pupil of and an assistant to Scott's father, George Gilbert Scott; from Moore he learned about his father's taste for late Gothic architecture and decoration, but Moore's own work eschewed strict historicism. Scott would have known well his inventiveness at St. Colomba's Middlesbrough (1902-06) and his parish church at Carlton-in-Cleveland (1903).

In his discourse on "English Architecture of the Middle Ages," Bodley asserted that the inside of a building was more important than the outside. Liverpool Lady Chapel recalls the self-consciously decorative treatment of fourteenth-century chapels; its smooth ashlar walls reflect Bodley's affinity for interior surfaces susceptible to the receipt of color and the reflection of light. While its height and ample clerestory invite comparison with French Gothic exemplars, it is the Lady Chapels of English Gothic cathedrals, Lichfield and Ely, that — while far from offering the sources of literal imitation — inform the integration of space, light, and decoration attained at Liverpool.

Matters of appropriate expression and sources also figure in analysis of the Lady Chapel vault, an elaborate construction with curved ribs. Bodley's scholarly mastery of Anglican tradition is apparent in the ribs that appear throughout his St. Mary, Eccleston, (1899), a refined treatment likely drawn from a regionally specific paradigm, Chester Cathedral. At Hoar Cross, the choir vault features curved ribs, but the Liverpool Lady Chapel vault is, in all probability, Scott's design. His sources, however, were not British. Shortly after the start of cathedral construction, Scott spent a holiday in Spain where he visited and photographed the cathedrals at Toledo, Burgos, Seville, Sergovia, and Valladolid. The vault of S. Nicholas, Burgos displays a quatrefoil rib pattern that may well be the source for the Liverpool Lady Chapel vault.

Do the combined efforts of Scott and Bodley in the Lady Chapel produce a "modern English Gothic; a design expression and strategy that signify the traditions of the Anglican church desired by the Cathedral Committee, yet satisfy the hunger for a progressive cathedral typology liberated from the constraints of "dead" styles demanded by the profession (Fig. 6)? Shaw viewed their collaboration with enthusiasm, noting: "Scott's work is no fluke...it is somehow in his blood (while) Bodley is beyond all doubt the most accomplished and refined architect in Europe." However unique, theirs was not the happiest of architectural marriages. If the majority of the work is by Scott, it was constantly modified by minor changes dictated by Bodley, who a younger architect called "the master of detail." Bodley went on altering a bit
here and a bit there, “Scott recalled, “until I was very dissatisfied with the result.” His corollary admission that he was not content with the original competition design may be read as an indication of the schism between Bodley’s scholasticism and Scott’s growing desire to produce a Gothic architecture based in “the effect of mass.”

By 1907, tensions peaked. Scott, frustrated by the situation, offered his letter of registration; Bodley’s death—virtually at the same moment—changed the scenario. Soon, Scott proposed a nearly complete reworking of the design. Ultimately, the completion of the building would demonstrate that building a modern cathedral was as much a matter of space as of style (Figs. 7 and 8). The twin towers and transepts of the choir and nave—the heart of the competition scheme—were abandoned. A single tower, flooding an immense central space with light, became the spiritual and physical center of the new cathedral.

CONCLUSIONS

Should the Liverpool Lady Chapel be judged as a relic “of a past that can never be recovered” or as a harbinger of a future that could embody, concomitantly, modern liturgical programs and national patrimony through signification and transformation of ancient models? Though the forces of conservatism had won a considerable victory at Liverpool, the more extreme mid-nineteenth-century “religio-architectural ethics” of Ecclesiology had been shown to be dead. Time-tied notions of national identity prevailed in the enduring Gothic character of the building, but as aesthetic medievalism was modernized and popularized, it also was parted from much of its ideological baggage.

Scott family biographer Gavin Stamp observes that the competition design was in the tradition of the taut, crisp Gothic of Bodley and G. G. Scott Jr., conceived of comparatively small elements put together as the building rises to compose a picturesque mass. It is an approach that bears the legacy of Ruskin and Pugin; it is the aesthetic and ethos that provides the conceptual framework for the Lady Chapel. In contrast, the choir and nave not only depict the consequences of their attenuated period of construction, they also represent the taste of a mature Scott. His work remains Gothic in detail, but becomes almost Classical in plan. The cathedrals “center space,” no longer a true crossing, rises to a massive yet sublime space which is difficult to seize. While its style is, in essence and heritage, Gothic, by the mid-century, Scott’s vocabulary could not be limited by conformance to the
nineteenth-century revivalist's prescriptions to emulate Early English, Decorated or Perpendicular architecture. As a result, Liverpool Cathedral is the product of an architect caught between the power of tradition and the seduction of modernity.

Perhaps this is what assessors Bodley and Shaw had in mind when they chose the Scott scheme in 1900. "We had to look to the real effect of the building...we had to look at the practical and feasible aspects of the design...we had to look for a fine and noble proportion combined with an evident knowledge of detail...we had to look for that power combined with beauty that makes a great and noble building." These are design problems that engage shared collective histories found in popular expectations of what a church should be that are informed by but never limited to discourse on style. In this context, a course was cast for Gothic survival into the twentieth-century; a church could be both "modern" and "medieval."

Liverpool Cathedral’s legacy is not "sham Medievalism," as The Builder feared it would be. Scott took the Gothic "beyond historicism to something original and modern, monumental, and sublime, yet delicate and romantic." With Bodley, his Lady Chapel established that creating a modern architecture was not merely a matter of shedding the burdens beyond paradigms, fulfilling the requirements for modern worship, and engaging the memory of the Gothic as a Christian style and as a symbol of British national identity. Just as England’s industrial revolution had been "slow, bloodless and undramatic," as the Liverpool Cathedral demonstrates, its twentieth-century architecture was evolutionary, not revolutionary; in it, the legacy of an historical collective overarched the power of technologies and machines. Embedded in that elevation of the past over the present was a critique of industrial capitalism and its material ethos. Architectural modernism in England could not develop with the same machine age fervor that characterized early twentieth-century building on the continent for, by the time Victoria died, England’s early enthusiasm for technology was thrown into disrepute. In the face of the twentieth-century's uncertainties, the impressive cultural capital embodied in the scenery and buildings of the country helped commit Britain to its past, and to an essentially antique image of national memory and identity.

NOTES
3 Ibid., p. 81.
7 Their advertisement in the London newspapers early in 1902 invited the submission of portfolios of work for the consideration of the Committee which was "desirous of obtaining Designs for a Cathedral in the Gothic Style of Architecture."
9 Ewan Christian was the assessor for this competition.
10 "Suggested Design for Liverpool Cathedral," The Builder, 9 October 1886, p. 518.
11 Other sites considered were St. Peter's, St. Luke's, and Monument Place—the triangular site at London Road and Pembroke place. The first too alternatives were too restricted. Although many preferred the Monument Place site, the acquisition of St. James Mount for approximately £10,000 proved more feasible.
16 Neal, Sectarian Violence, p. 12.
18 See The Builder, 2 November, 1901, p. 379. A "note" called attention to the Liverpool Cathedral Committee’s announcement to "withdraw its requirement as to the copying of a particular historical style of architecture for the proposed cathedral."
19 See "The Designs for Liverpool Cathedral Competition," The Builder, 30 May 1903, p. 556.
20 Ibid.
21 Further changes to the east end proposed in 1907 had little bearing on the plan of the Lady Chapel, but resulted in the refueling of the Chapter House into an octagon.
23 George F. Bodley, "English Architecture in the Middle Ages," paper presented to the Royal Academy, 1886.
24 "The Liverpool Cathedral Scheme," The Builder, 9 January 1866, 69. With regard to Bodley’s churches, the article notes: “It might become very difficult to say whether they were genuine medieval works or modern reproductions, so completely has the spirit of the Gothic been mastered in them.”
26 Construction of the vault commenced after Bodley’s death. As late as 1908, drawings for the exterior elevation of the Chapel were approved only to the heads of the windows. The eventual height of the Chapel remained uncertain, and the question of whether the vault would be stone or timber was unresolved. See Peter Kennerly, The Building of Liverpool Cathedral (Preston, Lancashire: Carnegie Publishing, 1991), p. 44.
27 Shaw to Cathedral Executive Committee cited in Kennerly, Building of Liverpool Cathedral, p. 34. See also Verey, "George Frederick Bodley," pp. 94-96. Bodley’s biographer includes Scott among a list of the next generation of designers upon whom
Bodley had an influence. Verey, however, does not discuss the
Liverpool Cathedral project.

28 According to an interview with Giles Gilbert Scott, *(Journal of
the Royal Institute of British Architects*, April 1953, pp. 220-26),
all the mouldings were designed by Bodley.

29 Scott cited in Vere E. Cotton, *The Book of Liverpool Cathedral*


31 Pevsner, *South Lancashire*, p. 188

32 John Thomas, "The Style Shall be Gothic...a discussion of the
1901 Liverpool Cathedral Design Competition," *Architectural
Review*, vol. 158 (1975), p. 162

33 See Cotton, *Liverpool Cathedral*, pp. 13-14; 33 for a discussion
of style.

34 Bodley and Shaw, "Report of the Advisory Architects to the
Executive Committee," Liverpool, 1907.
