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In the heart of the town of Whitby, Ontario stands a massive castle. It is now hidden by large trees and by the surrounding suburban shield of identical, unremarkable homes and their parasitical strip malls. As such, this building, known as Trafalgar Castle, stands as a reminder of the town's former importance in the nineteenth century. As any anomaly in a relatively small town, Trafalgar Castle has its fair share of legends complete with scandal, rumours of secret tunnels to the lake as well as its fair share of ghost stories. Curiously enough, though, for such a building, there has been little written about it architecturally. It is my belief that this magnificent building and its architectural history, standing where it does, has been overshadowed by the nearby goliath that is the city of Toronto. The intriguing style and influences for Trafalgar Castle appear to have risen from a desire for the reflection of the homeowner's personality as well as the desire to be recognized as a status symbol in a burgeoning town, which is communicated through the building's massive size and confident style.

Now not much more than a bedroom community for Toronto, Whitby, which is just east of Toronto, has an interesting history and correspondingly, an interesting architectural history. The buildings in Whitby have, however, from its foundations and onwards, gone largely overlooked or are seen as complementary to what was happening in nearby Toronto at the time. The truth is that in the nineteenth century, Whitby was in fact an important town itself. In 1852, Whitby was named the county seat,

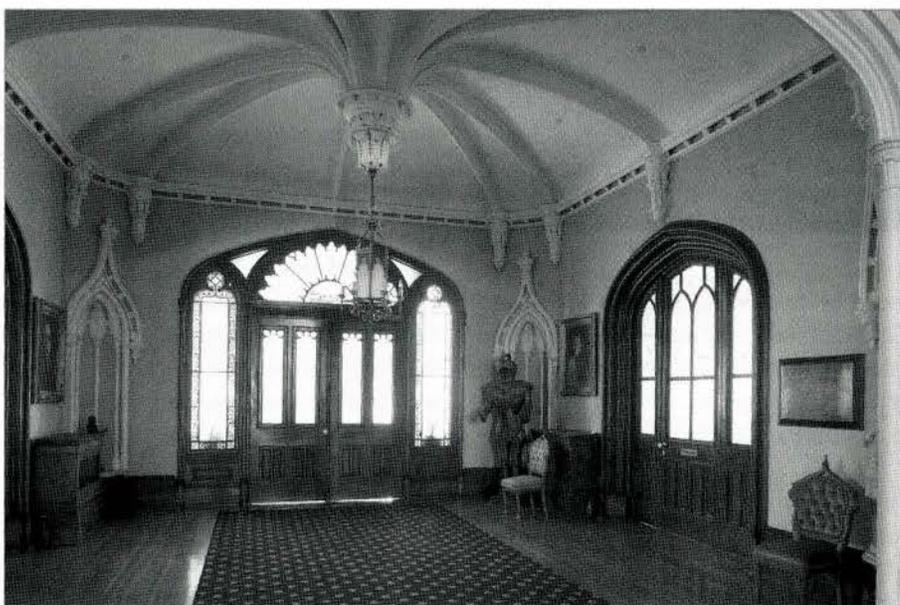


FIG. 1. FOYER. | PHOTO: MALCOLM THURLBY.

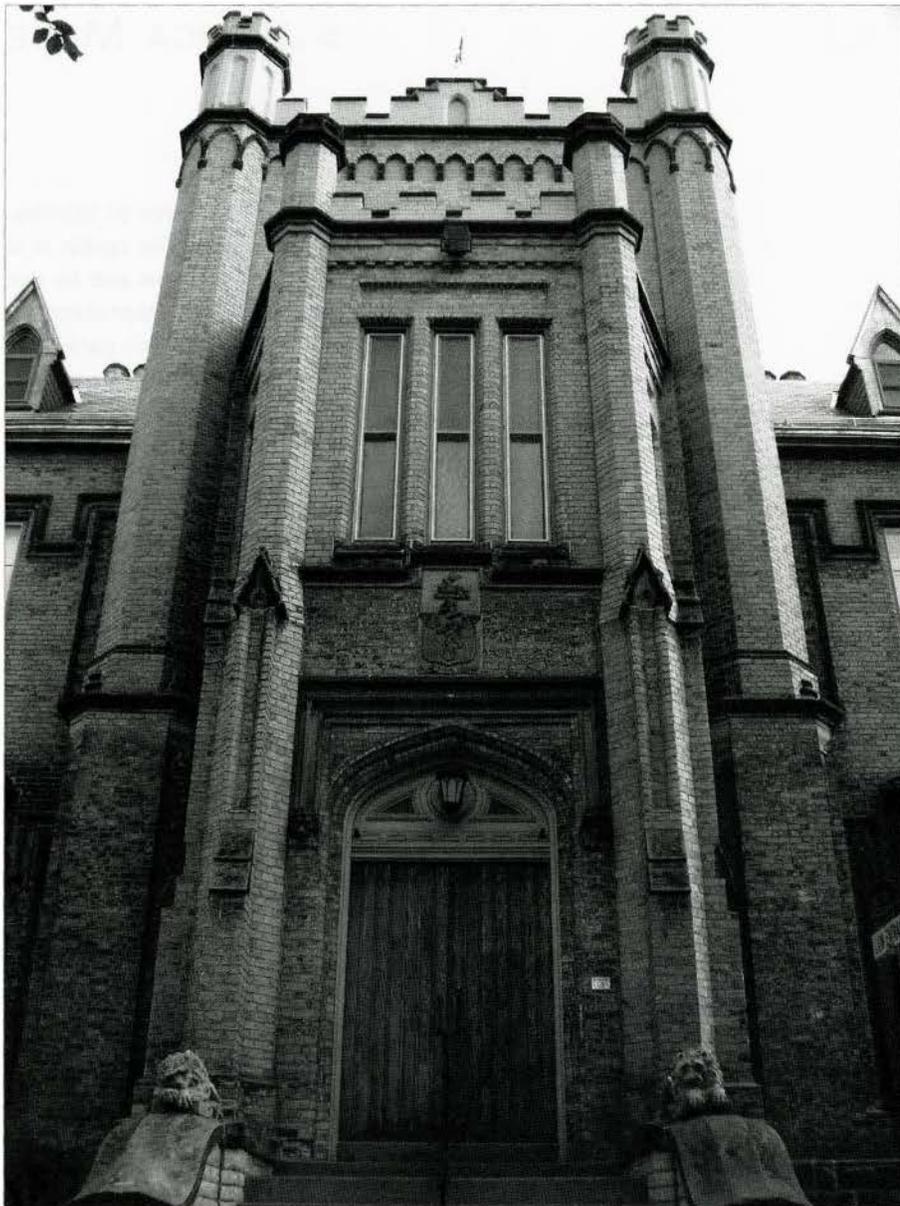


FIG. 2. FRONT ENTRANCE. | PHOTO: JESSICA MACE

or “County Town” for Ontario County, now distinct from York and Peel.<sup>2</sup> As such, Whitby became a desirable place to live as new important jobs became available. In addition to the town’s new status, it featured a naturally protected harbour with a railway in close proximity, making it an ideal place for shipping.<sup>3</sup> While the growth of Whitby nowhere near paralleled that of Toronto, it held

merit in its own right. With such rapid expansion and new money being poured into the community, it is no wonder that Whitby contains an architectural gem like Trafalgar Castle (fig. 1).

The history of the events of Trafalgar castle are of legendary status in the town of Whitby, but just as in any legend, the facts are often vague and exaggerated.

The actual history of Trafalgar Castle has been roughly sketched in a few books, but has mostly been extracted from local newspapers at the time of its construction. Built between 1859 and 1862, Trafalgar castle was designed by Toronto architect Joseph Sheard. It was originally designed for Whitby’s sheriff, Nelson Gilbert Reynolds, who is even said to have had a hand in the design, although there is no proof of this. Named after Lord Nelson, Nelson Gilbert Reynolds baptised his grandiose home “Trafalgar Castle” after his namesake’s victory at the battle of Trafalgar in 1815.<sup>4</sup> There is no better way to describe Reynolds than as a larger-than-life character. He was a jack-of-all-trades with many accomplishments under his belt, such as businessman, politician, soldier, railway director, college director, church warden, and sheriff.<sup>5</sup> His ego followed suit, as can be guessed simply by glancing at his massive home. While the dimensions are not as large as those of European castles, they were certainly large for a Canadian colonial home, especially at a time in which modesty was the order of the day.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the palatial size of the house was out of necessity since he fathered twenty-four children by two wives.

Attracted to the new job opportunities that Whitby afforded, Reynolds moved to the County Town in 1852 and rose quickly through the ranks, achieving the position of sheriff in 1854. It is rumoured that Reynolds had Trafalgar Castle constructed as part of a fierce rivalry with the town Registrar, John Ham Perry.<sup>7</sup> It is even said that Reynolds went to England to study architecture since he wanted his home to be authentic; this same source claims that “much of the structure was designed by Reynolds himself.”<sup>8</sup> This appears to be largely speculative as he supposedly first learned about Perry’s home upon his return from England and there is no

record of where he actually went, so we do not know what, if anything, he actually studied. It may have even been made up by Reynolds himself, as he had no architectural training and may have wanted to boost his own image by adding yet another notch to his belt.

At the time of its construction, Trafalgar Castle was the largest private residence in all of Canada, and perhaps even, as the local newspapers—*The Whitby Chronicle*, *The Oshawa Vindicator*, and *The Globe* in Toronto—would have it, all of North America. Even before its construction was complete, it was a major attraction that reportedly drew flocks of visitors.<sup>9</sup> One of the earliest reports in the *Whitby Chronicle* claimed that “The whole building in a word is a Canadian wonder, and to give an idea of its immense size and costliness one will have to bear in mind more than a million of bricks were consumed in its erection.”<sup>10</sup> Different articles gave escalating sizes and costs as its construction went on, with the end result being that the mansion cost about seven thousand dollars to build at a time when even large homes cost less than a tenth of that.

In April 1874, Reynolds was forced to sell his home due to bankruptcy. It was sold for thirty-five thousand dollars, only half of the original cost, to the Methodist Church of Canada.<sup>11</sup> With its seventy-three rooms and nine surrounding acres, Trafalgar Castle was chosen by the Methodists as the perfect location for the new Ontario Ladies’ College, which it still houses to this day.<sup>12</sup> Subsequent additions have been made throughout its occupation by the college in order to make it more accommodating for changing standards of living, for instance Henry Langley’s addition of Ryerson Hall, but many of the original features still remain.

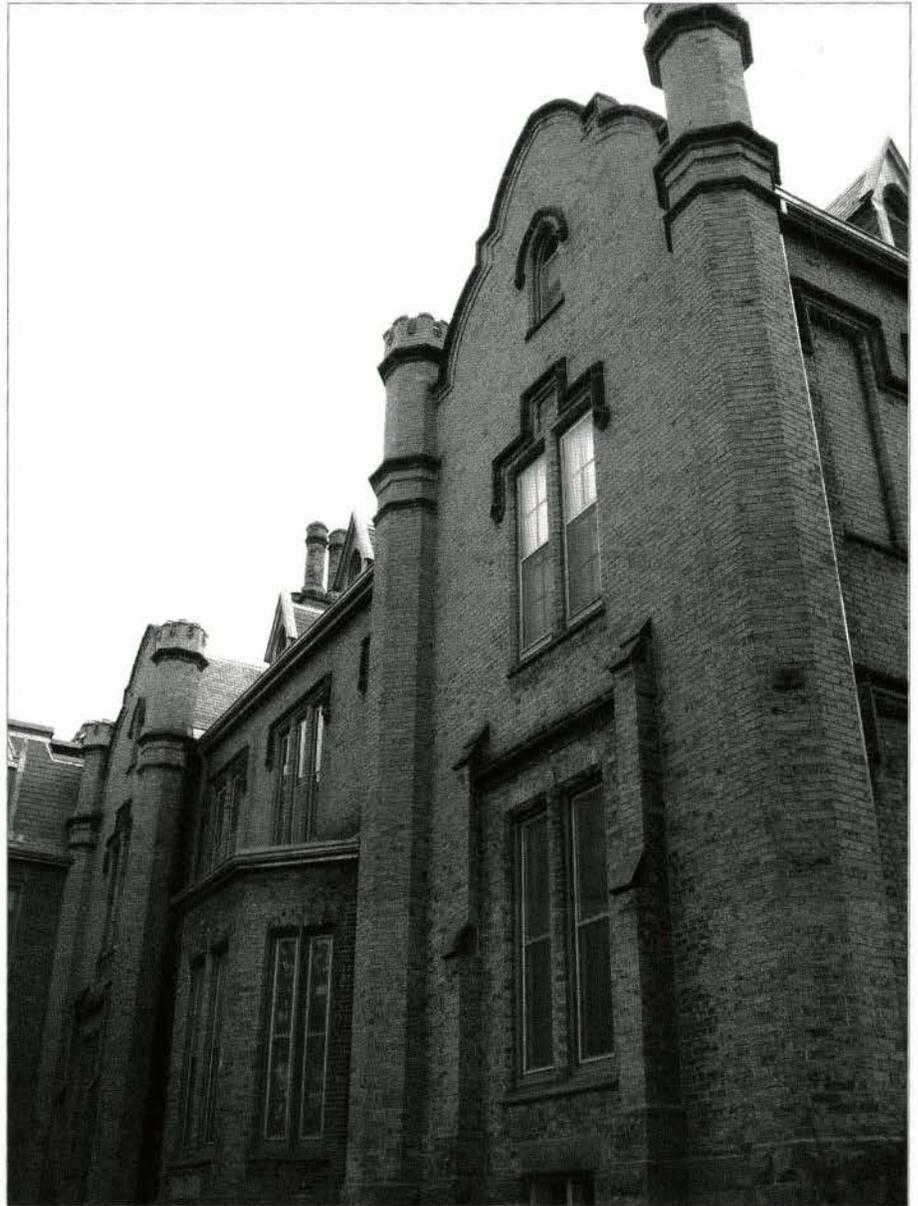


FIG. 3. GABLE, NORTH SIDE. | PHOTO: JESSICA MACE.

The original yellow brick building is roughly square in plan, rising up three stories, confronting the viewer boldly and just as egoistically as Reynolds’s own personality. The facade consists of three bays with the central bay projecting forward in the form of a rectangular tower from which there is another projection, this time in a ballooning half hexagonal version of its larger back drop (fig. 2). The

tower is locked in by clasping octagonal towers as is the three-part projection; each time there is a change in direction of the facade, there is a tower anchoring the building in place as though holding each section solidly in place. There is an undeniable rhythm to the facade as the surface pulses rigidly with projections, setbacks, and towers in a methodical order. The horizontal rhythm is emphasized



FIG. 4. RIGHT BAY OF FAÇADE. | PHOTO: JESSICA MACE.

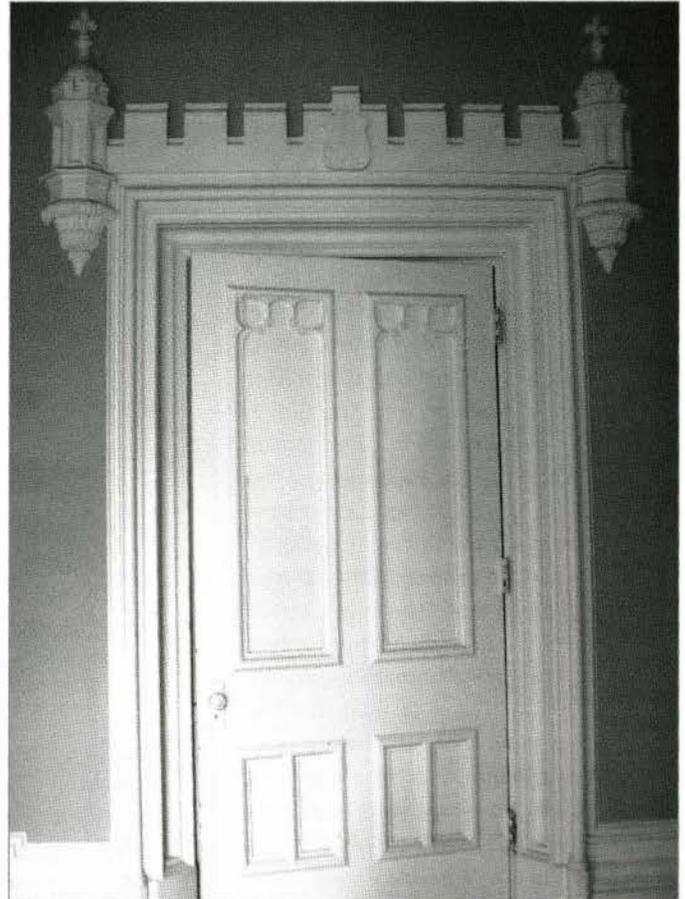


FIG. 5. DOORWAY IN GREAT ROOM. | PHOTO: JESSICA MACE.

through the use of string course banding that runs across each tower and clasping buttress as well as through the hood mouldings on the second story that echo the roof's crenellation.

The towers shift attention towards the verticality of the building, drawing the eye upwards with their varying heights corresponding with different sections of the building. The skyline, while varied, has a regularity about it; it rises and falls like a wave just as the horizontals pulse in and out. The smoothness of the rise and fall of the roof is accentuated by the distinct curvilinear gables that help the eye to roll over the pitched roof (fig. 3). The constant linear rhythm of

the horizontals and the smoother rhythm of the verticals create a constant, but complementary tension.

This interaction between horizontal and vertical is played out further through the placement and the shape of the windows. The verticality of the facade is emphasized by the tall, narrow, square-headed windows, while their uniform level and grouping in pairs or in triplets serve to once again draw the eye back to the horizontal flow (fig. 4). Carrying on the pattern are blank niches the same size as each window, filling in the rest of the blank areas, helping the surface's rhythmic movement. The only pointed windows are found in the dormers and

on the flagstaff tower, once again leading the eye upwards, perhaps making the viewer aware of the building's towering height. This further serves to distinguish Trafalgar Castle's unending tension between horizontal and vertical.

The doorway too is pointed, but here its upwards guidance directs the spectator to a limestone coat of arms. This is the Reynolds coat of arms, making it absolutely clear to whom this home belongs. As yet another reminder, the limestone label stops above the door are carved lion heads and two stone lions also stand guard, perched on the railings of the stairs. The lion is the Reynolds family symbol.



FIG. 6. TRIM IN AN UPSTAIRS ROOM. | PHOTO: MALCOLM THURLBY.

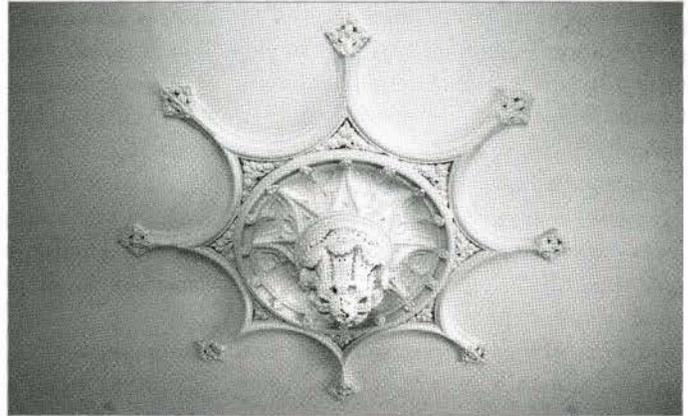


FIG. 7. CEILING MEDALLION, GREAT ROOM. | PHOTO: MALCOLM THURLBY.

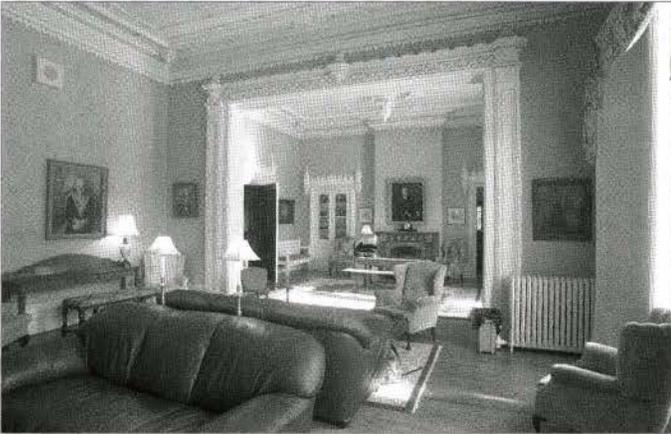


FIG. 8. GREAT ROOM. | PHOTO: MALCOLM THURLBY.



FIG. 9. VIEW FROM MAIN ENTRANCE TO STAIRCASE. | PHOTO: MALCOLM THURLBY.

While the exterior of Trafalgar Castle makes a bold statement, the interior is rather more delicate. This is done through the use of plaster mouldings and decorations. The permeation of floral patterns throughout the interior is in stark contrast to the massive, bold exterior. The ceiling of the main hallway is shallowly vaulted in lath and plaster with fine accents and delicately formed niches below. These plaster features appear like lace in contrast to the dark sturdy wood used for the doors and the main staircase. Here it would seem that nature meets artifice. Perhaps funds ran short and so only very important features were carried out in wood, or perhaps this was simply the style chosen. Inside the castle,

the Gothic blends with the classical; the classical tradition of plaster work is manipulated to be made Gothic through the insertion of elements such as trefoils, quatrefoils, and shields (fig. 5). Not only are Gothic motifs inserted, but classical elements are subtly modified, becoming Gothic themselves, for instance the egg-and-dart motif lining the recessed pilasters repeated throughout the house. In Trafalgar Castle, it is as though this classical pattern has been compressed with a rolling pin, flattening and elongating it to make it gothically pointed rather than rounded. (fig. 6)

If there is any doubt as to the classical influence for the interior, it is only necessary

to examine the plaster medallions, the sweeping staircase, and the division of pairs of rooms through the use of a sliding door; all elements distinctly classical in their origins following in the tradition of Robert Adam (1728-1792) (figs. 7-8).<sup>13</sup> Not only are the decorative details classically based, but the plan of the whole house is as well (fig. 9). Unlike traditionally Gothic-inspired buildings that make use of agglutinative planning, such as William Butterfield's domestic designs, Trafalgar Castle was clearly planned on axis with all rooms easily accessible to the other rooms through the main hallway. Typically, Gothic plans are designed from the inside out rather than first creating the outside frame which limits



FIG. 10. EXTERIOR VIEW; LEFT: MAIN BUILDING; RIGHT: RYERSON HALL ADDITION. | PHOTO: MALCOLM THURLBY.

what can be achieved on the inside.<sup>14</sup> Some examples of nineteenth-century-Gothic planning are Butterfield's cottages at Baldersby St. James in Yorkshire (c. 1860) as well as his parsonages, two examples of which are Great Woolstone in Buckinghamshire (1851) and Bamford in Derbyshire (1862).<sup>15</sup> Trafalgar Castle is rather more symmetrical and clearly laid out, as can be seen from a quick glance at the exterior or into the front entrance (fig. 10). With its blend of Gothic and classical elements, inside and out, this house defies simple classification.

Trafalgar Castle is popularly categorized as Elizabethan or Tudor in Style.<sup>16</sup> As such, it would seem that its influences would be relatively simple to trace, but that is

not the case. Through closer examination, it becomes apparent that its influences and sources are more complicated than that. One of the reasons is that little is known about the architect Joseph Sheard and his work. Sheard is typically most recognized, not for his buildings, but rather for his position as architect and mayor of Toronto in 1871-1872.

Sheard was born in Yorkshire, England, in 1813 and arrived in Toronto in 1832.<sup>17</sup> He began his career as a contractor, getting into architectural commissions as well as politics in the 1850s. His high ranking political standing surely contributed to his reputation and correspondingly, his architectural practice as many of his commissions appear to have been

for important patrons. While architectural information on Sheard is scarce, it would appear that he worked in a variety of styles for different types of buildings. One of his most famous works was a house for the wealthy William Cawthra built in 1852 in Toronto, in the Classical Revival style. It was very lavish in that unlike most Canadian homes in the classical tradition, it was constructed using stone rather than wood and brick.<sup>18</sup> The home was reported to be the finest classical home in Toronto through its use of authentic details and proportions. Although constructed in different styles, parallels can be drawn between Cawthra House and Trafalgar Castle; they were both large private residences whose patrons clearly wanted no

detail spared in order to achieve the dream homes they desired.

Another notable piece is his small, but remarkable mortuary vault for Saint Michael's Cemetery in Toronto, built in 1855.<sup>19</sup> This octagonal structure is in the Gothic style featuring pointed arches, a spire and small buttresses. While on a small scale, it is quite beautiful and authentic in its Gothic detail.

Some time after the completion of these works, Sheard's design was chosen for the Yorkville Town Hall. Peculiarly, during the excavation of the site in 1859, the Board of Works was told to carry out William Hay's design instead.<sup>20</sup> There is no explanation given for this, but incidentally, 1859 is the same year in which construction began on Trafalgar Castle. Perhaps Sheard was too preoccupied with the great task of Reynolds's home.

Other than Cawthra House and Saint Michael's mortuary vault, many other projects by Sheard have either since been destroyed or little has been written about them. To list a few, he reportedly built four schools, the Ontario Bank, several other large homes, and a cottage for a wealthy Toronto family, all of these situated in Toronto.<sup>21</sup> On the whole, it would appear that with Sheard's upstanding reputation and his specialization in secular, wealthy, prestigious commissions, Trafalgar Castle fits the pattern perfectly.

With Trafalgar Castle, much like with the Cawthra House, few expenses were spared; the sheer size of the building stands as proof of this. In terms of its construction, the majority of Trafalgar Castle is constructed of brick, but the finer details are carried out in limestone, such as the hood mouldings and label stops. Many of the features of the building

are similar to those that can be found in many Gothic Revival buildings earlier in the century, while many have been sampled from different styles. The notably Gothic features are the pointed arches in the doorway and pointed windows in the dormers, buttresses including the clasping octagonal buttresses, moulded corbels, a projecting porch, and a coat of arms, to name a few. Some of the features that are less traditionally Gothic, specifically in terms of a Gothic home, are the rectangular paneled windows, the curving shape of the gables at the sides of the house, and, notably, in contrast to strictly Gothic styles, the symmetrical, regular appearance of the exterior.

Trafalgar Castle was clearly constructed at a time when there was less focus on the rigid rules laid down earlier in the nineteenth century that prescribed a strict adherence to either Classical or Gothic styles. The construction of the sheriff's home seems to coincide with a shift towards eclecticism and Renaissance influence.<sup>22</sup> Nearby, in Toronto, William Thomas, perhaps one of the city's most important architects, was working in a similar style, also drawing inspiration from Renaissance sources; for example, his British Bank of North America was influenced by Roman Renaissance architecture.<sup>23</sup> There are indeed many examples of Italian Renaissance-influenced buildings in Canada, but in a country that drew much of its influence from English buildings, it is no great wonder that some architects could have drawn inspiration from English Renaissance buildings as well.

One notable example of that style, and one that can be loosely compared to Trafalgar Castle, is Hampton Court Palace, the home built for Thomas Wolsey that later fell into the hands of King Henry VIII.<sup>24</sup> Sheard may have been

familiar with British styles and perhaps this building in particular as he lived in England until he was about nineteen years of age, so he may have been drawing on his own image bank for Trafalgar Castle. In addition, for someone with an ego as large as that of N.G. Reynolds, imitating the home of the king would surely have been an appealing choice, and may have even been a place that Reynolds could have taken note of during his travels. The general layout of the facade is quite similar to that of Trafalgar Castle with three bays all framed by octagonal towers, although the outside towers are inflated versions of those that frame the edges of Trafalgar Castle. The entrance is similar in the arrangement of the doorway, the windows above and their framing by octagonal buttresses. On both, there is also a coat of arms above the door, clearly marking their owners, as well as crenellation on the roof showing each building as a place of prestige. Hampton Court Palace would surely have been a prominent and well-known precedent in terms of concept, but likely did not act as a direct model for Trafalgar Castle.

Some other potential influences for the building could be any number of things; since there is little documentation about the building and no surviving drawings, it is difficult to pinpoint what exactly the architect was looking at, imitating, or studying. Since at the time Ontario architecture was a blend of local, American, and British tradition, it could be any combination of the three.

In terms of Canadian influences, William Thomas, as briefly mentioned earlier, was probably the biggest name in Toronto architecture and so he could have swayed Joseph Sheard's design. Having moved from England in 1843 and

having already had a successful career there, Thomas would have brought new ideas, and more specifically Gothic ideas, with him to Toronto.<sup>25</sup> Some of his designs, both from his time in England and from his time in Toronto, are reminiscent of Trafalgar Castle in their style, for example Grafton Villa in Milverton, England, built in 1834, and Oakham House, in Toronto, built in 1848. Thomas's preferred style for homes appears to have been in the Gothic vein, whether through the use of Gothic Revival or Elizabethan and Tudor motifs for their "romantic associations."<sup>26</sup> Both Thomas and Sheard, with Trafalgar Castle, projected a certain style of sturdiness and confidence, which, as pointed out in Thomas's monograph, is a quality that was prescribed by John Ruskin in his writings, when he said "I do not believe that ever any building was truly great unless it had mighty masses, vigorous and deep, of shadow mingled with its surface."<sup>27</sup> This passage seems to describe the appearance of Trafalgar Castle perfectly.

Looking a little further south at the American context, we could examine Trafalgar Castle in relation to Andrew Jackson Downing's *The Architecture of Country Houses* published in 1850 and *Victorian Cottage Residences*<sup>28</sup> published in 1842, given that they were two widely circulated books concerning the construction of homes. It is nevertheless problematic to look at specific American sources since we know little about Sheard's studies and travels. An architect by profession, it is likely that Sheard had come into contact with these types of books, but to what extent he interacted with them remains unknown. In these texts, Downing gives advice on what features should be incorporated into homes in order to classify them as a certain style. Some of these categories

include the "Italianate Style," the "Norman Style," the "Pointed Style," the "Rural Gothic," and the "Elizabethan or Renaissance Style," to name a few.

If Sheard had been paying close attention to Downing, however, the outcome of Trafalgar castle would have been completely different. For one thing, he disapproved of crenellation, which can be found on Trafalgar Castle in abundance.<sup>29</sup> Also, while Downing did say that larger homes should have a regularity about them, rather than the irregular massing prescribed to smaller Gothic cottages, he warned against the kind of size and extravagance that Trafalgar Castle exudes.<sup>30</sup> Downing also suggested in *Country Homes* that the house should echo the homeowner's character (which in the case of Trafalgar Castle is quite blatant), but he also said that homes should not be extravagant or cost too much because a home of that nature was sure to be a failure.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps Downing was correct in a sense; while Trafalgar Castle was not an architectural failure, it was certainly a financial one. It would seem that had Sheard read these books, he took little advice from them.

Looking at the British context, in addition to Hampton Court Palace, the Gothic Revival movement, imported from England, had an impact on Trafalgar Castle. The major figure in the resurgence of the Gothic style was Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812-1852), and while his strict rules regarding the application of the Gothic style were directed mainly at churches, he did design a few homes, notably his own home at Ramsgate in Kent built in 1843-1844. Trafalgar Castle has many features similar to Pugin's house at Ramsgate, but it is also clear that Pugin was more focused on a picturesque appearance.<sup>32</sup> Here Pugin appears to have built the

house from the inside out rather than starting with the exterior frame as did Sheard, as the rhythmic regularity and ground plan of Trafalgar Castle imply. While there are some parts of Trafalgar Castle that clearly articulate the interior, like the bay windows, these were created as key British Renaissance elements of the house rather than the exterior expression of the interior. Asymmetry dominates Pugin's work while Sheard's is much more symmetrical in appearance, which can be seen for instance in the ordered grouping of the windows and the regularized brickwork. It is somewhat problematic, however, to compare Trafalgar Castle to Pugin's house, since we do not know if Sheard ever saw that home, or had even read any of Pugin's work, although the ideas of the Gothic Revival had clearly reached him in one way or another.

At the time it was built it was said that Trafalgar castle was "Destined [...] to be the leading architectural ornament in the country, and so far as private residences are concerned, the leading one in Canada."<sup>33</sup> The home was a sensational topic in the press who delighted in indulging readers with the grandiosity and sheer lavishness of the construction, providing updates every few months.<sup>34</sup> It was compared with upscale New York City hotels and was even called "perfection" by writers.<sup>35</sup> With such publicity and prestige surrounding it, it is curious that it was never really documented architecturally other than briefly in the articles featured in the local papers and in a few small blurbs in broad surveys of Southern Ontario. Once again, as an unremarkable town, in today's public eye at least, Whitby becomes glossed over or even ignored as it is lumped into broad historical and architectural categories such as "Southern Ontario" rather than receiving specific attention.

As we have seen through the examination of the interior and the exterior, it appears that in the true Canadian style, this home is a blend of many different styles suited to personal taste rather than to strict tradition. Its relative obscurity seems to spring from several different factors, including its location, its enigmatic architect, and perhaps also its inhabitation by a private school for the last one hundred and thirty-four years rather than its transformation into a readily accessible public site. What is clear is that Joseph Sheard succeeded in creating a home that accurately reflected the personality of its owner, which may not have been possible in a different time and place. Trafalgar Castle is truly a fascinating and magnificent building, despite the lack of written attention that it has historically received.

## NOTES

1. I would like to thank the SSAC for awarding me the Martin-Eli-Weil Prize and for providing me with this amazing opportunity. I would also like to thank Malcolm Thurlby for endless support and advice regarding this project. Further thanks go to Pierre du Prey and Katherine Romba of Queen's University for inspiring a love of architecture, to the Town of Whitby Archives, and to Rhonda Daley and Robert Carnevale of Trafalgar Castle for showing me around.
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5. *Id.* : 94-95.
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8. *Id.* : 97.
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23. McArthur and Szamosi : 61.
24. Adamson and McRae : 178.
25. McArthur and Szamosi : 9.
26. *Id.* : 64-66.
27. Ruskin, In McArthur and Szamosi : 108.
28. Downing, Andrew Jackson, 1981, *Victorian Cottage Residences*, New York, Dover Publications Inc.; and Downing, Andrew Jackson, 1968, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, *op. cit.*
29. Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* : 261-262.
30. *Id.* : xiii.
31. *Id.* : 266-267.
32. Atterbury, Paul (ed.), 1995, *A.W.N. Pugin: Master of Gothic Revival*, New Haven, Yale University Press.
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34. « The Sheriff's New Residence », *op. cit.*
35. « The New Residence of N.G. Reynolds... », *op. cit.*