

# THE DIGITAL NINETEENTH CENTURY

Series Editor: Andrew Stauffer

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## VICTORIA'S LOST PAVILION

From Nineteenth-Century  
Aesthetics to Digital Humanities

**Paul Fyfe, Antony Harrison,  
David B. Hill, Sharon L. Joffe  
and Sharon M. Setzer**



# The Digital Nineteenth Century

Series Editor  
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# Victoria's Lost Pavilion

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to Digital Humanities

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# Introduction: Experiments from Nineteenth-Century Aesthetics to Digital Humanities

*Paul Fyfe*

*A small pavilion, or summer-house, in the grounds behind Buckingham Palace, was selected by Her Majesty as the locality in which this interesting Experiment was to be tried.*

(Grüner and Jameson 6)

**Abstract** This Introduction quickly surveys the history of Queen Victoria’s garden pavilion as well as the contemporary project at North Carolina State University to renovate it in digital space. It provides an overview for each of the book’s chapters, arguing for the significance of the pavilion across several historical and contemporary frameworks. Finally, it suggests how the project gets its very rationale from Victorian contexts, including nineteenth-century notions of virtuality and the legacy of historical architecture which the *Victoria’s Lost Pavilion* project remediates.

**Keywords** Digital humanities · Victorian · Garden pavilion · Architecture · Remediation · Virtuality

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P. Fyfe (✉)

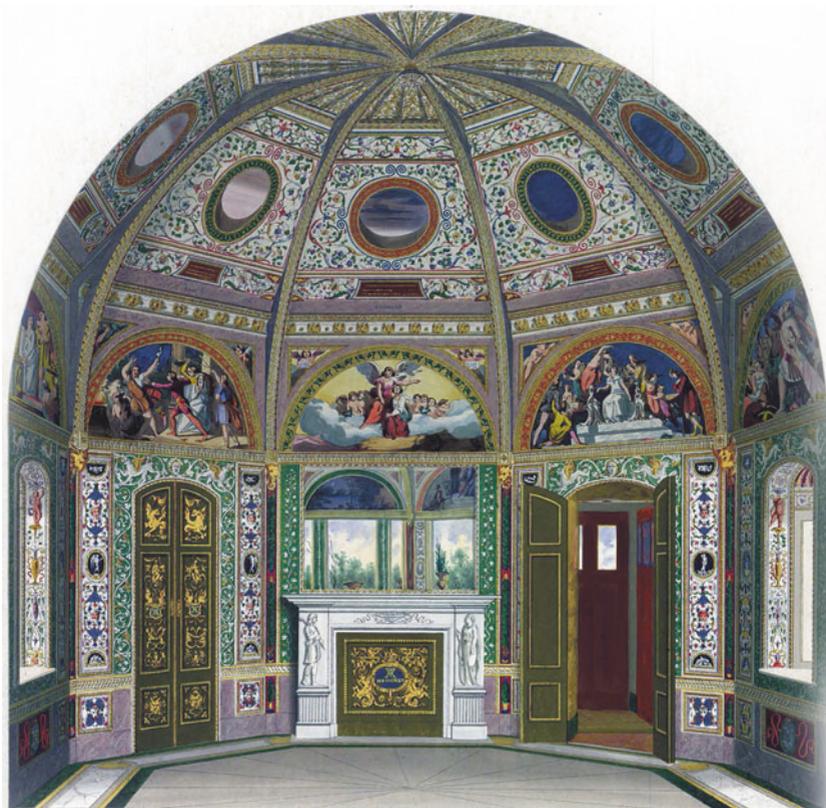
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An “interesting Experiment,” capital “E.” In 1842, a small pavilion was built for Queen Victoria in Buckingham Palace gardens. It was an arabesque “folly” intended for little else than a summer retreat, offering an elevated view of the lake and grounds beyond. But within a year, that pavilion was rededicated to another, grander purpose: to serve as a test site for experiments with fresco painting, newly revived in Germany and being considered in England as a possible medium for large paintings inside the Houses of Parliament. After its destruction by fire in 1834, the Palace of Westminster was rebuilt in its present neo-Gothic style and questions of its interior decoration soon came to embroil royalty, politicians, artists, and critics. As Anna Jameson explained in her introduction to a lavish folio describing the garden pavilion and its artworks, “the revival, of Fresco Painting in this country has become, in connexion with a great national monument, a topic of general interest, an affair of national importance, and no longer merely a matter of private or artistic speculation.” That conversation to interest a nation, those decisions over the aesthetic hallmarks of its seats of power, hinged on the trials of “the experiment made on a small scale, yet under circumstances which might lend it more than common interest” (Grüner and Jameson 5). By Victoria and Albert’s decree, this interesting experiment took place in the quirky little pavilion in the backyard of Buckingham Palace, soon decorated with frescos, encaustics, designs, and furnishings of approximately three dozen artists and craftsmen, and featuring some of the best-known names of mid-nineteenth century British art (Fig. 1.1).

Demolished in 1928 after falling into disrepair, that pavilion is now lost to time. Its frescoes were destroyed or dispersed, current whereabouts unknown. The *Victoria’s Lost Pavilion* project has endeavored to return it to a semblance of virtual life, using digital tools to augment ongoing research into this fascinating piece of cultural history. This book grows out of such efforts to visualize the pavilion’s art and architecture in digital space, using architectural software to model the pavilion based on historical sources. The digital model, available online at <http://go.ncsu.edu/pavilion>, is itself part of the project’s broader experiments with how we might share, encounter, and analyze cultural history through various mediums available in our own time, whether as an interactive website or a collection of chapters in prose. In so doing, the project reanimates the pavilion’s very status as an “experiment” in new contexts, including the interdisciplinary alliances and technical applications of the digital humanities. *Victoria’s Lost Pavilion: From Nineteenth-Century Aesthetics to*



**Fig. 1.1** Color lithograph showing the Octagon Room (from Grüner, *Decorations* 15)

*Digital Humanities* offers a window into the historical phenomenon of the pavilion as well as contemporary experiments in remediating it. Each of these historical frames has revealed much about the other, as the digital sustains and extends our conversations with the nineteenth century. Thus, this volume is both a handbook to the project and a set of scholarly analyses of what Victoria's pavilion was, what it meant, and what happens when we model the past digitally. It aims to help return attention to this remarkable building and to argue for the very continuity of the pavilion's