George Gilbert Scott (1811-1878) was instrumental in establishing the reputation of architects as professionals whose knowledge and skill awarded them authority over any work on historic buildings, and over preservation in general. Celebrated as a consummate professional, he led a large London office with clerks, draftsmen, architects and pupils who praised his kindness, talent, and skill. Both in his office and as Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy (1868-1878), he trained the best British architects of the next generation. He was appointed surveyor to Ely Cathedral and Westminster Abbey, and designed and restored numerous churches and, in the 1860s, an increasing number of secular buildings, including the Albert Memorial in London and several buildings at Oxford and Cambridge Universities. His 1848 lecture *A Plea for the Faithful Restoration of our Ancient Churches* was published in 1850, and his *Remarks on Secular and Domestic Architecture*, advocating the use of Gothic forms in such buildings, in 1857. By the time he wrote the paper below, one of the earliest instances of the word “conservation” used in reference to the care of historic buildings, he had already received the RIBA’s Gold Medal (1859). His power within the Institute led the paper to be turned into the RIBA’s first preservation guidelines on the “Conservation of Ancient Monuments and Remains” (1865). The guidelines followed his main idea that preservation should be experimental, that is guided by trial and error in the field, on a case-by-case basis, and that ultimately the architect should use his best judgment in following the spirit of the guidelines. Scott upheld the centrality and importance of professional architects in leading preservation projects amidst a rising tide of public criticism against the profession’s mishandling of restorations, which included the powerful critical voices of John Ruskin, William Morris, and J.W. Loftie’s “Thorough Restoration” (1877) a scathing personal attack to which Scott replied with “Thorough Anti-Restoration.” The ongoing debates have been apocryphally called “Scrape and Anti-Scrape,” but in fact both sides were arguing for anti-restoration. The substance of the debates had more to do with the power of architects in restorations of public buildings. On his heels, Scott shifted blame to uneducated clients and contractors, but he recognized that more needed to be done to raise the standards of care within the profession. He argued for the need to establish more oversight in restorations, but he resisted Morris’s idea that ultimate control should be handed over to non-expert advocacy groups, proposing instead the creation of a “Vigilance Committee” within the RIBA to oversee the work of its members. His idea of professional self-regulation (rather than government or citizen control) was also influential in other countries. For instance, the American Institute of Architects founded the “Committee on Conservation of Public Architecture” in 1890. Scott’s defense of self-regulation was based on the idea that preservation defined a specialized area of knowledge and skills, that required training and field experience. He seeded a debate, which is still alive today, about whether preservation is a discipline or simply a theoretical concern in many other disciplines (e.g. architecture, planning, jurisprudence, etc). Scott was President of the RIBA in 1873–6. His first gesture was to offer the Gold Medal to John Ruskin, who used the opportunity to publicly humiliate Scott by refusing it on account of the damage architects had done to historic buildings.

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