

**Stones of empire: allusions to ancient Rome in the physical fabric of the
Victorian and Edwardian world.**

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ABSTRACT

My paper explores how the theme of ancient Rome in Victorian and Edwardian culture was expressed physically in the public art, architecture and town-planning of contemporary Britain and its empire. Divided into two parts, my paper analyses this Roman modelling in both the British Isles and the British imperial project. As ancient Rome and Victorian London represented the *caput mundi* of their respective eras - the chief metropolises of two vast empires, as well as the most populous and influential cities of the time -, comparisons between both were clearly viable. Certainly, many commentators, such as Lord Bryce and Lord Cromer, sought active parallels between the Roman and British empires for a number of reasons. However, I perceive a disconnect between their theorising and the practicalities of actually building a great society and empire. I argue that the physical fabric of the Victorian and Edwardian world bore limited relation to the vision of ancient Rome that was extolled and propagated as an applicable theoretical model in other aspects of contemporary society. Based on a survey of the evidence, I contend that a number of features identify and exemplify this cultural trend, such as how the monumentalism of ancient Rome never found a place in official London. Yet, while officialdom largely avoided such a debt to antiquity, private enterprise and many provincial British cities - both newly enriched from Victorian prosperity - did engage and express a civic debt to Roman forms and mores. Only abroad in the British Empire were wholesale allusions to ancient Rome produced fully, yet even these were rare and restricted. Thus, in my paper, I seek to portray how the cultural cachet attendant upon ancient Rome in speculative intellectual terms transferred in only a limited material manner to the art, architecture and town-planning of the Victorian and Edwardian eras.