England

Charles A. Place and Harold Kirker, who have both written seminal works on Charles Bulfinch, find a great deal of importance in Bulfinch’s time in England, which was perhaps as long as seven months. Kirker and Place point to particular buildings of the Adam brothers, and Christopher Wren, most notably Saint Stephen’s Church in Walbrook is mentioned at length by both. Other scholarly articles follow suit, placing the origins of Bulfinch’s inspiration in London. Buford Pickens wrote a convincing article claiming that James Wyatt’s Pantheon was influence to Bulfinch’s design for the Massachusetts State House. Indeed, other famous buildings in England can be pointed to in detail: the façade of Saint Peter’s Cathedral, the two towers of Robert Adam’s Mistley Church, and a curved section of the Adam brother’s Portland Place can also be mentioned as comparisons to Bulfinch’s work in Boston.

While these influences are notable it is difficult to find significant grounds for comparison which would obscure the influence of French and Italian architecture. Bulfinch’s description of London is very brief in his personal letters, only relating the first impact of the city upon his arrival.

“... [we] arrived about eleven at night in this city. This is, in my opinion, the best time to enter London, you are astonished with the splendor from the immense number of lamps, & there is a sufficient degree of obscurity to make a sublime scene.” - Charles Bulfinch (Life and Letters)

In fact, there is no evidence in his letters that he strayed outside of London in his time in England. Bulfinch’s letters to his mother enumerate each city in France he visited and their most notable features, and he stayed in Paris twice in the span just a few months. He wrote of buildings in France which were good examples of the Corinthian order, demonstrating a particular interest in the Greek and Roman revival, and its origins in classical architecture, giving more weight to his time in Italy.