



# THE GEORGIAN GROUP

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# 'HIGH AND BOLD STRUCTURES': A GEORGIAN STEEPLE SAMPLER

Terry Friedman

How beautiful does our land now look,  
from the spires and steeples<sup>1</sup>

**A**ccustomed to the opulent ornament and imagery of Roman Catholic church interiors on the Continent,<sup>2</sup> a European visitor to London in 1728 dismissed its churches because they contained 'neither painting nor gilding, and [are] barer than chapels . . . When you have seen one, you have seen a hundred'. But he did note that their steeples, 'built of good stone and in an agreeable variety of designs', were 'more worth seeing than the churches themselves'.<sup>3</sup> That distinctive architectural accent — accurately defined in 1736 as 'a Building erected at the West-end of a Church for the Conveniency of hanging Bells therein, and for Ornament also; when 'tis finished with a Pyramis, 'tis called a *Spire*, and when without, as with Battlements, &c. 'tis called a Tower'<sup>4</sup> — was invariably the loftiest and often the most distinguished external feature of the building; and since the church was the focal-point of the town or village, its steeple was also a salient landmark.

Celia Fiennes, on her Northern Journey of 1697, observed that the medieval parish church of St Wulfram at Grantham in low-lying Lincolnshire 'has a very high Steeple [281ft, so] 'tis a long tyme when you see a great part [of it] ere you come to see the Church or town'.<sup>5</sup> Later, the anonymous author of *Viator, A Poem: or, A Journey from London to Scarborough By the Way of York*, 1782, wrote that 'Grantham's soaring spire salutes the skies', having already glided through Stamford's 'steepled town'.<sup>6</sup> The 'glittering domes and massy towers' of Broomholm Priory, Norfolk

With ken full blithe the mariner espies  
Far from the dizzy mast he looks in vain,  
And longs to view his native shore again.<sup>7</sup>

*The New Bath Guide*, 1799, proudly claimed that the city 'is remarked for good Churches and organs, and like York and Oxford for a handsome shew of steeples', having  
Buildings superb and lofty spires, surprise  
The gazer's senses, and enchant the eyes.<sup>8</sup>

The 'glitt'ring spires' eulogised by Pope in *Windsor-Forest*, 1713,<sup>9</sup> soon developed into a rich picturesque poetical literature:

A hundred temples for devotion rise,  
A hundred steeples glitter in the skies.<sup>10</sup>

O'er all conspicuous with its beauteous spires,  
*London*, th' Emporium of the busy world.<sup>11</sup>

The 'tow'ring *Spires*, superior and Sublime!' of St Paul's Cathedral were a 'noble *Quarry* mounted up in Air!', while the visitor, ascending the dome,

The gilded *Gallery* his Labour ends  
Which fix'd round the highest spiral base,  
Whence *Pigmy-like*, he now may freely gaze,  
The noblest *Scene*, beneath the Sky that meets,  
Of cluster'd *Buildings*, *Lanes* and crowded *Streets*;  
A world of *Squares* and *Courts* the Prospect tires,  
*Palaces*, *Churches* and their glist'ring *Spires*.<sup>12</sup>

Churches with stunted steeples were noted with consternation. St Mary's, Truro was described in 1759 as 'a good Gothish edifice [wanting] a handsome tower, the pitiful little thing which contains a single bell looking rather like a pigeon-hut',<sup>13</sup> and the lack of a steeple altogether was a serious deficiency:

A beggarly people! A church and no steeple!<sup>14</sup>

Daniel Defoe praised York Minster except for the lowness of the crossing tower, which wanted 'a fine spire'<sup>15</sup> and Batty Langley considered Inigo Jones's Tuscan-porticoed St Paul's, Covent Garden of 1631-3 'not to be parallelled by any . . . in or about London', though he believed that 'if a steeple of proper dimensions was raised above the [east] pediment, 'twould be a very great improvement to the whole'.<sup>16</sup> Bishop Nicholson's Visitation of the Diocese of Carlisle in 1704 reported that the parish church of Kirkandrews, recently put 'into a commendable Posture', nevertheless 'looks low; haveing neither Steeple, Belfry nor Bells'.<sup>17</sup>

Even the failure to complete a building project successfully was cause for concern. Daniel Hodkin, a Chesterfield architect, wrote to the parish churchwardens in the 1790s pleading with almost evangelical intensity, but without success, that 'the tower will remain in an unfinished state if the four pinnacles are not put on, and you will always wish they had been done when you see the effect so much different . . . I cannot take leave without a repetition of begging of you to raise your spirits and say with one voice we will have them done and look so respectful as any of our neighbours'.<sup>18</sup>

The steeple was more than a simple symbolic beacon: it possessed the practical function of housing the bells to call parishioners to worship.

And now the Chappel's silver Bell you hear,  
That summon you to all the Pride of Pray'r<sup>19</sup>

If it was too low, as in the case of Gayton, Northamptonshire, there were complaints from 'the Inhabitants of the West part of the Town [who] could not hear the sound of the bells over the trees and houses when they were rung or tolled to Call them to Divine Service'.<sup>20</sup> If it was too confined to admit a ring of bells, as was the tower of St Cuthbert's, Carlisle, then the parishioners were 'called together to their devotions by the weak tinklings of the old bells'.<sup>21</sup> Various attempts were made to rectify the problem. The minister and his flock at Pulloxhill, Bedfordshire, petitioned the archbishop in 1713 to grant a faculty for rebuilding the steeple, which had collapsed 60 years earlier: they proposed financing the venture by selling four cracked and useless bells and with the money raised have one or two new ones made, but in the end only succeeded in erecting a hanging frame for them at the west end of the church.<sup>22</sup> A 'Couple of Bells . . . ill hung in . . . a Crazy wooden Frame'<sup>23</sup> was not an uncommon sight up and down the country. And there was the sad case at Lewes in Sussex, reported in 1724, where the steeple was rebuilt as far as the first stage 'but not being finisht for want of a sufficient collection; the Timber is in a few Years so much Decayed, by being exposed to the Weather' that the bells had to be taken down.<sup>24</sup>

The visual exaltation achieved by height also made steeples, particularly those of medieval date, vulnerable to the vagaries of nature and of human strife and neglect. As late as 1791 the Hon. John Byng, 5th Viscount Torrington complained that 'numbers [of steeples] had gone to ruin, and yearly suffer to fall down: how happens this? Have we no bishops, or do they not visit their diocese?', having already noted that the 'fine old Steeple' at Thurgarton, Nottinghamshire, 'must soon fall, for it is full of Cracks'.<sup>25</sup> In 1704 Nicholson reported that Greystoke tower 'is crack'd, on the North-West Corner, from Top to bottome; and looks threatened'.<sup>26</sup> The architect, John Lumley reported in 1718 on the 'Decays Cracks & other failures and Defaults in the Tower' at Green Norton, Northamptonshire, and warned of 'the Great Danger [of it] falling . . . in Case that there should be any great or tempestuous Wind . . . and thereby of doing damage to the Church . . . if not also the Loss of many lives should [it] fall whilst the Inhabitants are in the . . . Church'.<sup>27</sup> At Walton-on-the-Wold, Leicestershire, the

decayed steeple was ‘in such Danger of falling, that the Parishioners cannot assemble therein for the Public Worship of Almighty God, without manifest Hazard of their Lives’.<sup>28</sup>

Decrepitude, faulty foundations, fire, high-winds, storms and even the occasional earthquake were the most frequent causes of collapse. On November 27, 1713, the ‘most violent Storm known in the memory of any one now living . . . a SWly Wind, attended with small Rain (and some say an Earthquake)’ toppled the vases crowning St Michael, Crooked Lane, in London.<sup>29</sup> Such accounts abound throughout the century, too numerous to detail here, though a few of the more interesting and spectacular tumbles are worth recounting.

A particularly dramatic and, therefore, widely reported incident occurred at 6.30pm on Easter Monday (April 17) 1786 when the much admired, 125ft high Romanesque west tower of Hereford Cathedral fell. *The Gentleman’s Magazine* had noted a gradual ‘settling of the walls and arches from their perpendicular’ over the previous two or three years, and about nine days before the disaster a ‘gradual dropping of mortar and small stones’.<sup>30</sup> Lord Torrington, passing by in August 1787, described the ‘great ruins [laying] in sacredotal shame’ and repeated a graphic eye-witness account: ‘the inside roof began to give way in the morning, and continued to

*West View from the South Aisle*

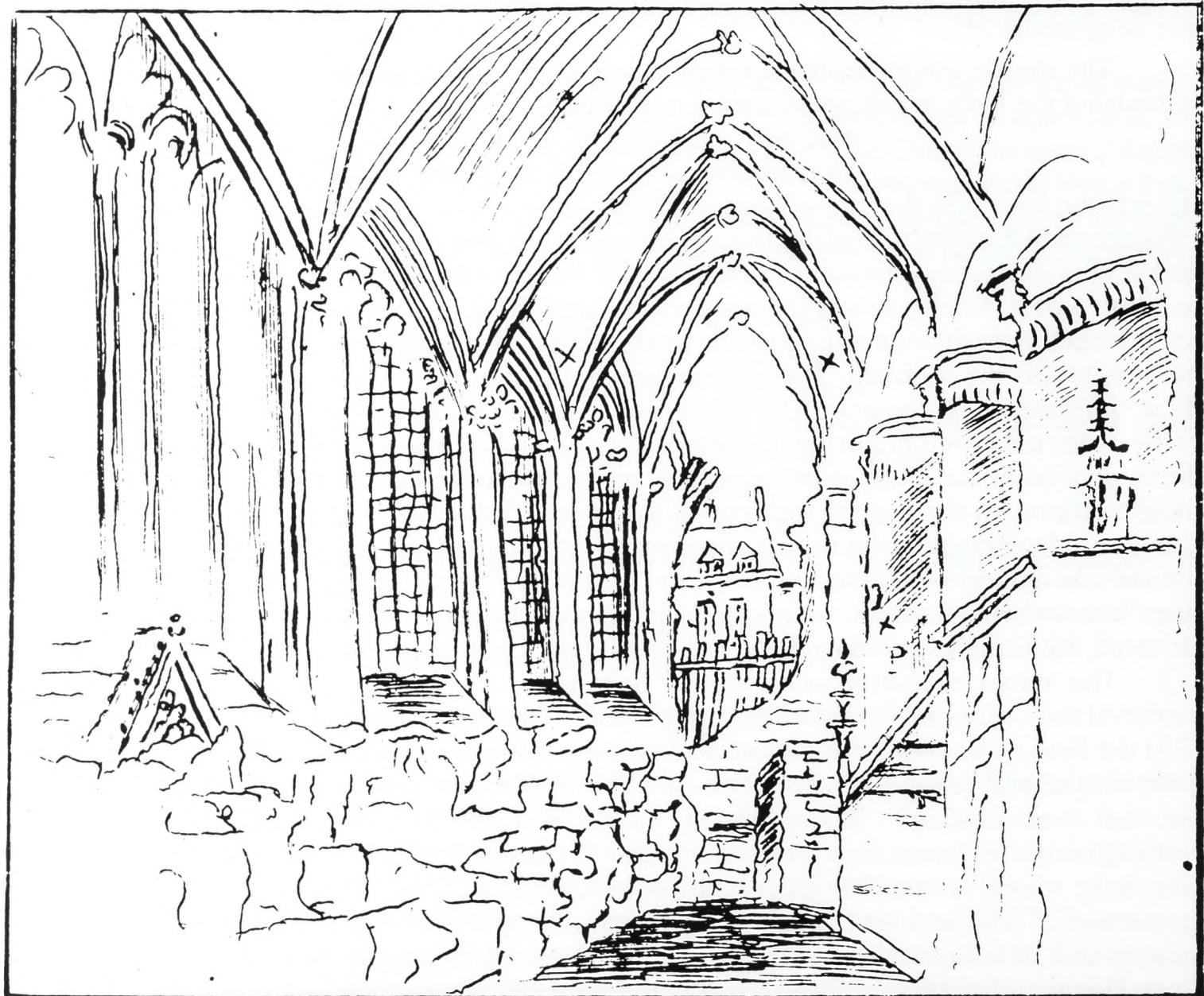


Fig. 1. Hereford Cathedral ‘at the time the tower fell’, in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, June 1787, p.459. Anonymous engraver (Leeds City Library).

fall so rapidly, that people were placed around the close, to hinder any from entering. As the crumbling, and dissolution increased, this noble tower began in some hours to totter; and after many shakings, at last sunk upon itself a heap of ruins, with half the body of the church . . . what a glorious *clash* it made!<sup>31</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine* published two sketches of the desolation (Fig. 1) and condemned 'the more than barbarous indolence of the chapter, who have left that fine ancient building in such a state',<sup>32</sup> thereby opening the door to an extensive and problematic restoration programme undertaken in 1786-7 by James Wyatt.<sup>33</sup>

On a more modest scale, at Frolesworth, Leicestershire in 1759, the medieval church 'by Length of time [was] brought into a ruinous Condition' with the towers 'cracked from Top to Bottom [and the] Buttresses So Mouldered and Decayed that it is in Great part tumbled down', so that the parishioners 'cannot Assemble . . . to perform Divine Service Without Manifest Danger to their Lives'. The tower was rebuilt in 1762 at a cost of £1,183 10s.<sup>34</sup> Nor was it only ancient fabrics which fell onto hard times: the lofty and elegant steeple built by Henry Sephton as part of the new church of St Thomas, Liverpool (1750), collapsed after only seven years; rebuilt, the spire was then struck by lightning in 1783.<sup>35</sup>

Malevolent storms, the sudden and unexpected blasting of steeples by lightning, were terrifying events and, therefore, held an intensely romantic fascination:

The mutt'ring thunder strikes alarm

The vivid flashes ghastly glare

Swaffham church, Cambridgeshire, was 'struck with lightning, and the congregation much frightened'; 'A most awful storm of thunder and lightning struck the inhabitants in Thornbury . . . with terror. A ball of fire . . . broke down one of the pinnacles, and covered the pavement with mortar and shattered stones'.<sup>36</sup> At Holy Trinity, Kingston-upon-Hull, 'the Steeple is thought too crazy to support so vast a weight, as the Pinacles lay upon it . . . which keeps some people from Church (when an high wind blows) . . . it is certain, that their devotions will be often confus'd and interrupted, when their minds are thus possessed. Had the wind been in a contrary quarter . . . and the Church crowded with a multitude of people . . . it would have been a very lamentable and shocking sight, to have view'd not only part of the Church in ruins, but hundreds crush'd and buried under them.'<sup>37</sup>

Defoe recounts that the spire of Chichester Cathedral 'received such a shock . . . that it was next to miraculous, that the whole steeple did not fall down; which in short, if it had, would have demolish'd the whole church. It was a fire-ball . . . the lightning broke upon the steeple, and such was the irresistible force of it, that it drove several great stones out of the steeple, and carry'd them clear off . . . and they were found at a prodigious distance . . . as if they had been shot out of a cannon, or blown out of a mine . . . The breach it made in the spire . . . was so large, that as the workmen said to me, a coach and six horses might have driven through it'.<sup>38</sup> (The crossing tower finally collapsed in 1861).<sup>39</sup> In 1741 the wood and lead spire of St Margaret's, Kings Lynn was blown down in a violent storm, falling into the whole length of the church, forcing the corpses out of their graves and making a 'universal havoc'.<sup>40</sup> In 1755 a storm at Husbands Bosworth, Leicestershire, 'attended with such terrible thunder and lightning, as had not its equal in the memory of man [caused] a large chasm' in the spire; 'globes of fire were seen in the air, flashes of lightning in a terrible manner ran along the streets, and a great smoke and sulphureous smell issued from the aperture of the spire [and] several hundred weight of stone fell about'. This account, by the great antiquarian John Nichols, was accompanied by an engraving showing the incident, a rare pictorial record for the time (Fig. 2).<sup>41</sup> At Wimeswould, Leicestershire, on July 2, 1783 between 2 and 3pm, lightning struck the weathercock, 'passed with great violence down the spire' into the church, shattering the tower door, and shot out of the chancel window.<sup>42</sup> A fierce storm in 1786 struck Batley church tower in Yorkshire, the 'inconceivable power of the electric fluid . . . seldom . . . more conspicuous', and fragments of

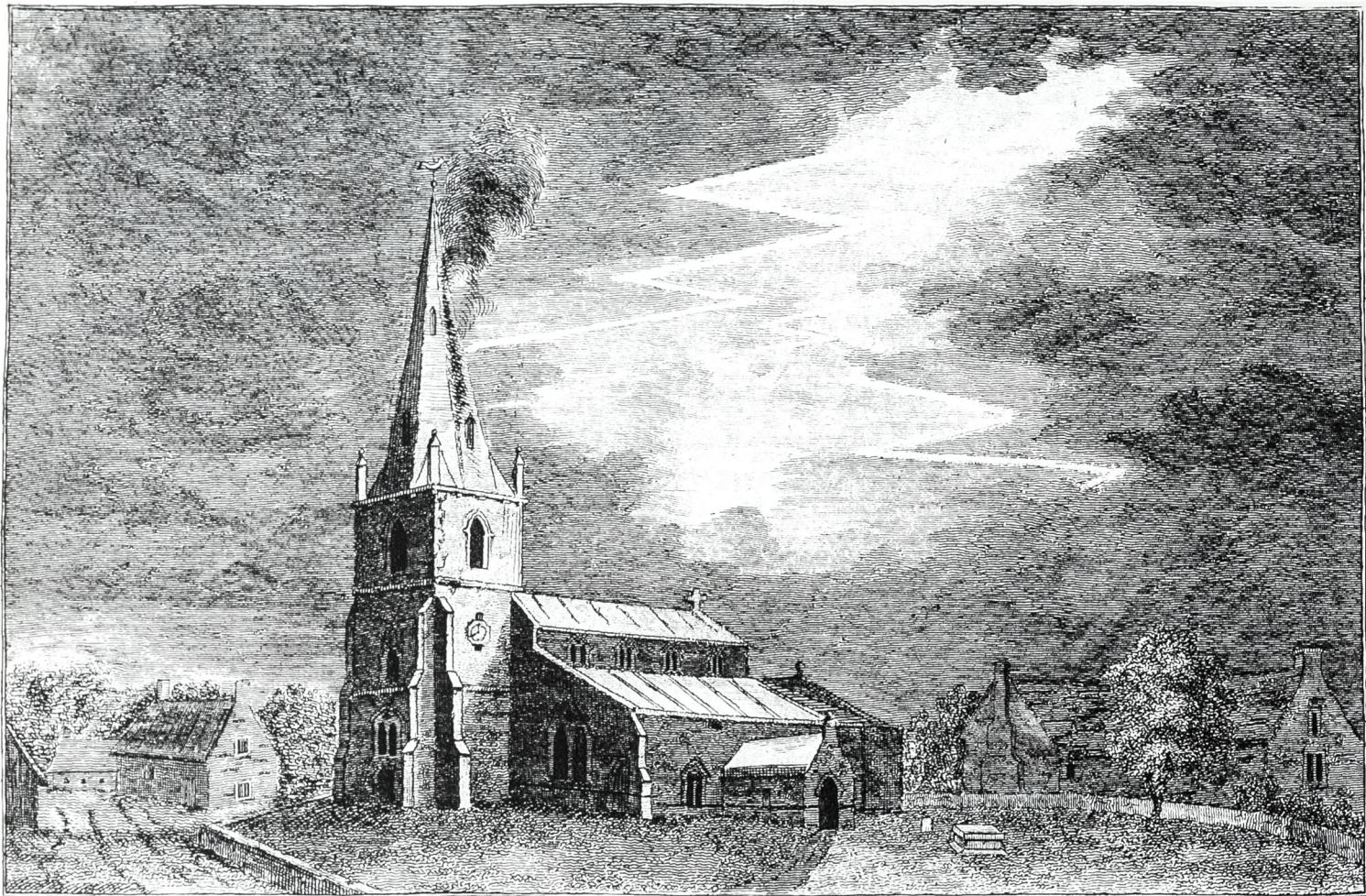


Fig. 2. All Saints, Husband Bosworth, in J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, 1798, Vol.II, Pt.2, Pl.LXXXI, engraved by J. Basire (Leeds City Library).

pinnacle were ‘driven away in different directions so suddenly and so wonderfully’.<sup>43</sup> During a ‘most alarming thunder-storm’ at St Keverne, Cornwall, on Sunday, March 18, 1770, ‘lightning shivered the steeple, and threw it upon the body of the church’, striking the congregation attending divine service with ‘astonishment: Many had their cloaths singed by the fierceness of the lightning, and some their watches melted’.<sup>44</sup> *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, which frequently reported church fires, was able to happily recount that in 1790 the inflamed steeple at Horsham, Sussex was ‘extinguished by the rain’; as if by the hand of God.<sup>45</sup>

The rebuilding of damaged or dilapidated steeples, and the creation of new ones, were the subject of much discussion by vestrymen, their architects and builders. Early in the century two general views became current, postulated by Sir Christopher Wren and Sir John Vanbrugh in 1712, following the collapse of the medieval church of St Alphege at Greenwich in 1710 and the subsequent formation of the Commission for Building Fifty New Churches in London and Westminster (the so-called Queen Anne Churches). The practical-minded Wren recommended ‘handsome Spires, or Lanterns, rising in good Proportion above the neighbouring Houses [but] without a great Expence [since] great Towers, and lofty Steeples, are sometimes more than half the Charge of the Church’; whereas ‘for the Ornament of the Towne, and to shew at a distance what regard there is in it to Religious Worship’, the visionary Vanbrugh advocated ‘High and Bold Structures, and so form’d as not to be subject to Ruin by fire, but of such Solidity and Strength, that nothing but Time, and scarce that, shou’d destroy them’.<sup>46</sup>

There was criticism of some Wren steeples — for example, Batty Langley thought St Andrew Holborn (completed 1703) ‘very disagreeable’ — and also of Wren-inspired compositions such as Gibbs’s St Clement Danes (1719-20), with its ‘small black rustics [in a] low

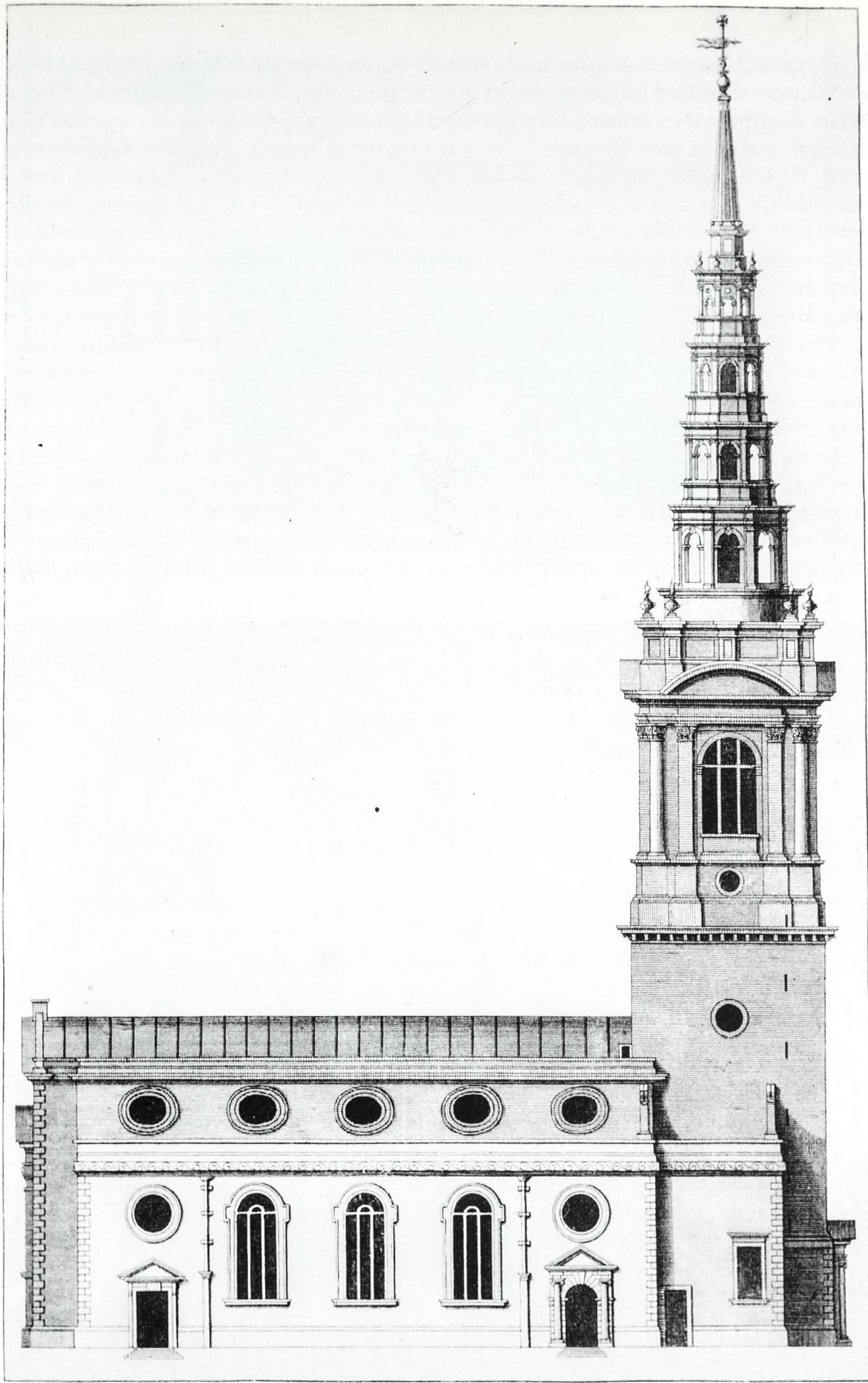
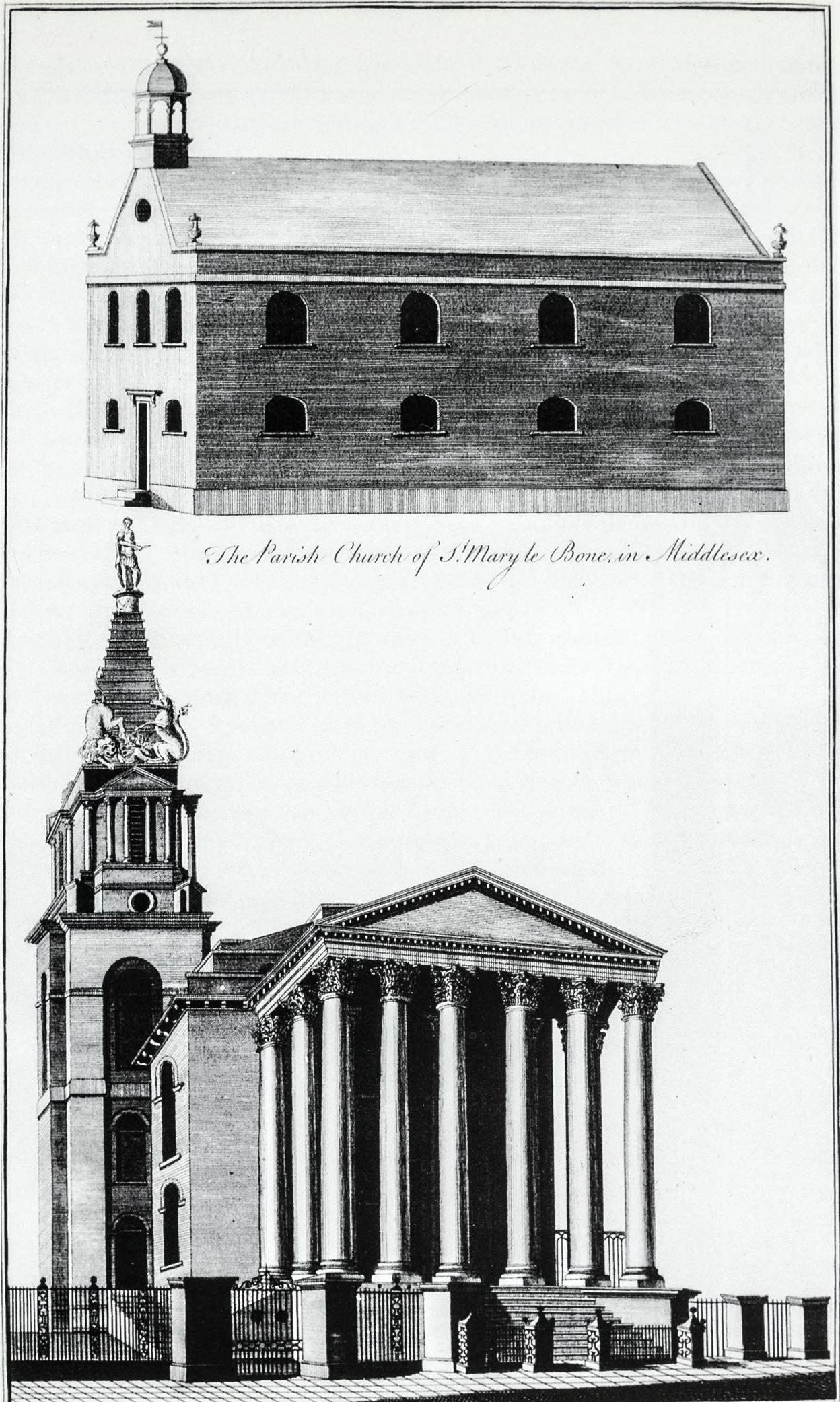


Fig. 3. Christopher Wren, St Bride's, London, 1671-1703, engraved by W.H. Toms (Leeds University Photographic Service).

mince-pye taste’,<sup>47</sup> or the St Martin-in-the-Fields-derived steeple at Mereworth (1744-6), which Horace Walpole ridiculed for being ‘so tall that the poor church curtseys under it’.<sup>48</sup> But despite this, Wren steeple types persisted through the 18th century, perhaps because it was Wren who almost single-handed had ‘invented’ the post-medieval steeple form for English Protestant churches. Furthermore, compared to domestic and civic buildings, engraved patterns for steeples (and for that matter for churches) are rare in Britain. The exceptions, like the series published in Gibbs’s *A Book of Architecture*, 1728, are firmly rooted in the Wren tradition. Indeed, the most comprehensive group of illustrations of steeples in print appear in the views of City Churches in Stephen Wren’s *Parentalia: or, Memoirs of the Family of Wren . . . But Chiefly of Sir Christopher Wren*, 1750.<sup>49</sup> The steeples of St Bride’s (Fig. 3) and St Mary-le-Bow were particularly praised: for Defoe both ‘hold up their heads with grandeur and magnificence’.<sup>50</sup> Bow (completed 1680) was ‘accounted by judicious Artists an admirable Piece of Architecture, not to be parallel’d by the Steeples of any Parochial Church in Europe’,<sup>51</sup> ‘one of the best in the Kingdom’,<sup>52</sup> ‘a masterpiece of its kind’;<sup>53</sup> even a French tourist in 1728 considered it ‘in good taste’.<sup>54</sup> Bride’s steeple (1701-3) has ‘a spire of extremely delicate workmanship, raised upon a solid yet light tower’.<sup>55</sup> Langley’s 1734 description of it as ‘very genteel, airy, and well-proportioned [with an] easy and gradual diminution’<sup>56</sup> was reiterated in the celebrated passage by Hogarth in *The Analysis of Beauty*, 1753, to demonstrate how the steeple ‘diminishes sweetly by elegant degrees’.<sup>57</sup> Henry Flitcroft’s St Giles-in-the-Fields (1731-4), derived from Plate 1 in *A*



Fig. 4. Henry Flitcroft, St Giles-in-the-Fields, London, 1731-4, engraved by Anthony Walker after James Donowell (Leeds University Photographic Service).



*The Parish Church of S<sup>t</sup>. Mary le Bone, in Middlesex.*

Fig. 5. Nicholas Hawksmoor, St George's Bloomsbury, London, 1716-31. Anonymous engraver (Leeds University Photographic Service).

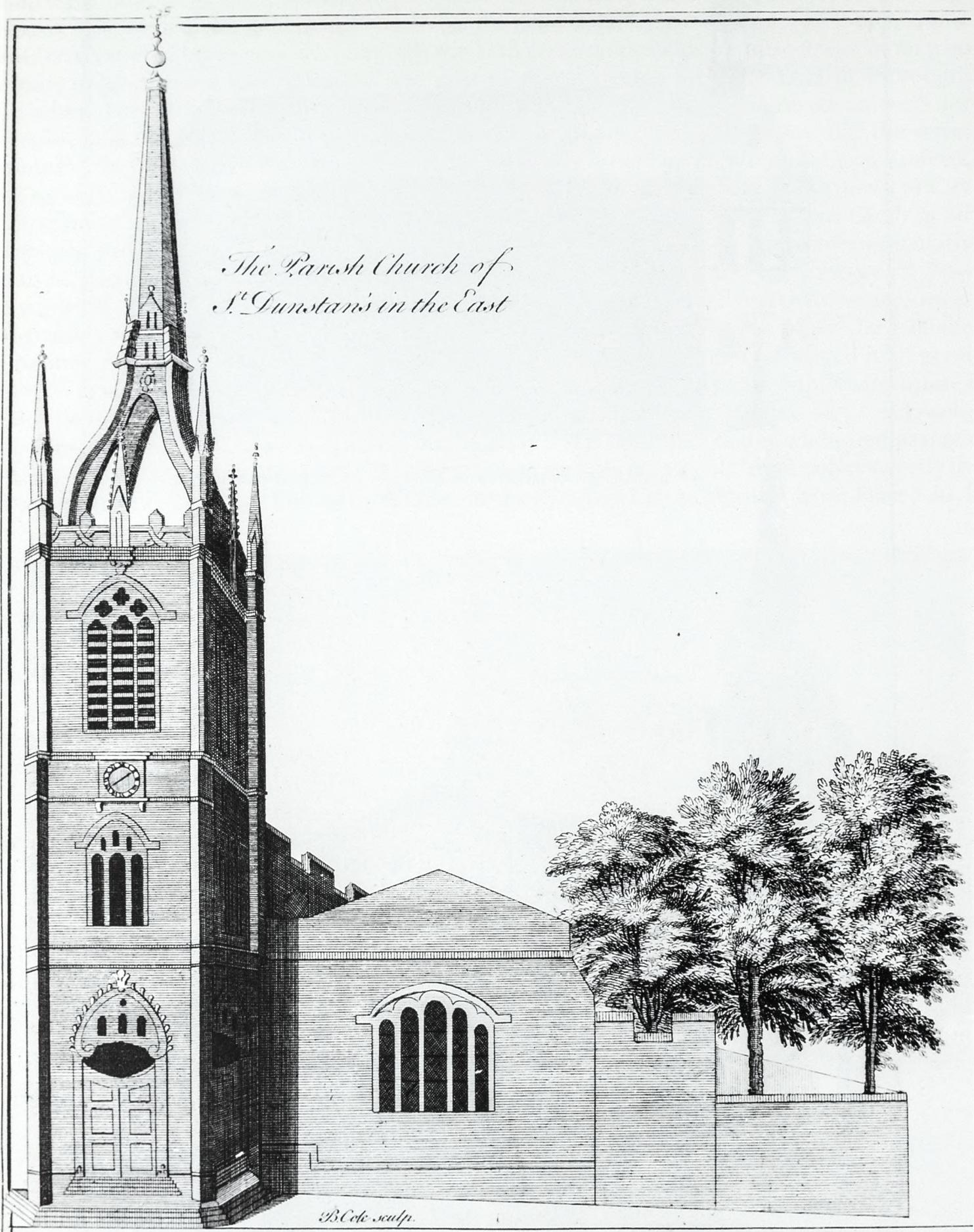


Fig. 6. Christopher Wren, St Dunstan-in-the-East, London, 1697-9, engraved by B. Cole, in S. Wren, *Parentalia*, 1750 (Leeds University Photographic Service).

*Book of Architecture*, struck *The London and Westminster Guide*, 1768, ‘with a genteel, light and airy Shew which vouches strongly for the Genius of the Architect. It looks extremely well, whether considered in Competition with the Body of the Church, or contemplated as a separate Edifice in a remote Prospect’<sup>58</sup> (Fig. 4).

On the other hand, the remarkable structures of Nicholas Hawksmoor, the other great steeple designer of the early 18th century, so praised today for those virtues prescribed by Vanbrugh, were generally regarded at the times as too idiosyncratic to be imitated. St George-in-the-East’s ‘might be taken for a lengthened chimney’,<sup>59</sup> St Anne’s Limehouse was denounced for its ‘extreme Heaviness’, St George’s, Bloomsbury (Fig. 5) as an ‘extraneous [and] ponderous Absurdity’.<sup>60</sup> They were censured, as we shall see, as ‘mere Gothique heaps of stone’, the word used in this case as a form of derision, meaning barbaric. The issue of stylistic appropriateness — Gothic versus Classical — was never a straightforward one.

Throughout the 18th century medieval Gothic cathedrals and churches were greatly respected, and their steeples the subject of special esteem. Favourites included the 288ft-high Boston Stump: ‘admiring with all my eyes, and a strained neck, [its] beauty, grandeur, and loftiness . . . a building of most wonderful workmanship’.<sup>61</sup> Above all there was Salisbury spire: ‘the handsomest in England’<sup>62</sup> and the subject of a celebrated, detailed study by Francis Price published in 1753.<sup>63</sup> The heavenwardness of Gothic forms expressed a proper religious reverence and awe in a way Classical vocabulary could not do nearly so well, and approaches to reinterpreting the models of medieval steeples for modern Protestant usage had been established in the 17th century by the authority of no less a master than Wren. St Dunstan-in-the-East (1697-9), described as being ‘in the modern Gothick Taste’, was commended for its creation of dramatic tensions particularly associated in the 18th century mind with that style: ‘The Mind of almost every Spectator on beholding a Base, which appears to them so insecure, is filled with Apprehension of its being thrown down by the first violent Gust of Wind; and yet in all human Probability it is to stand there for Centuries, in immovable Uprightness’<sup>64</sup> (Fig. 6). St Mary Aldermanry (1702-4) and the steeple begun by Wren (1715-17) and completed by Hawksmoor (1718-22) for St Michael, Cornhill, were regarded by Langley as ‘beautiful’, though as a rule he felt ‘*Filligrana work* . . . not worthy of imitation’.<sup>65</sup> Later in the century, as the vocabulary of Gothic progressed towards an archaeological refinement, even a provincial architect-builder like the Warwickshireman, John Cheshire was capable of adding convincing spires to medieval churches, as we see at St Mary-de-Castro, Leicester (1783) and nearby Hinckley (1788), and at Aston, Birmingham (1776-7).<sup>66</sup> There seems to have been little speculation among architects and writers before the 19th century with regard to selecting the ‘correct’ period of Gothic; rather, controversy raged on the promiscuous mingling of Gothic and Classical.

Purists found difficulty, for example, in approving Hawksmoor’s west towers of Westminster Abbey (1734-45): the American critic, James Ralph, writing in 1734, thought them ‘a sort of patch-work . . . ever offensive both to judgement and taste’,<sup>67</sup> while a later edition of Defoe, ‘a sort of Medley, neither Gothick, nor anything else’, adding that ‘as so many beautiful structures of [a true Gothic] kind are to be seen, it is amazing, that any Architect should be above imitating them’.<sup>68</sup> James Gibbs offered the explanation that ‘Steeple are indeed of a Gothick Extraction’ to which Classical rules of design could be imposed ‘when the Plans of the several Degrees and Orders of which they are compos’d gradually diminish, and pass from one Form to another without confusion, and when every Part has the appearance of a proper Bearing’.<sup>69</sup> (Of course, this notion could be applied to the design of both Gothic and Classical steeples).

This was further developed by Langley in his article in the *The Grub-street Journal* in 1734, in response to Ralph’s premise published in the same year in *A Critical Review of the Publick Buildings Statue and Ornaments in, and about London and Westminster* that Hawksmoor’s London steeples were

'mere Gothique heaps of stone, without form or order; and meet with contempt from the best and the worst tastes alike'.<sup>70</sup> Langley put forward the interesting suggestion that they represent 'a mean between the Greek and Gothique architecture . . . first invented and practiced by . . . Hawksmoor' in which strength and magnificence are combined with lightness and gentility.<sup>71</sup> However, this issue seems never to have been resolved in the 18th century: 'By attempting to imitate the antique style of architecture in our churches, we have fallen into a compound one, which is neither Grecian nor Gothic, but rather a piece of patchwork, made up of the remnants of three different nations. Italy furnished the ground plan, Greece the portico, and France the spire. The coalition of these heterogenous parts, cannot with propriety be called Grecian architecture.'<sup>72</sup>

Moreover, throughout the country Gothicists attacked the use of the Classical style for churches. When, in 1725-6, Gibbs repaired the western towers of Lincoln Cathedral by adding groups of octangular lanterns ('small cupelettes') instead of replacing the original medieval spires, the townspeople rioted!<sup>73</sup> James Essex condemned the rebuilding (1750) of the transept turrets of Norwich Cathedral with Tuscan pilasters as being in 'no way agreeable to the rest of the building, a fault', he suggested, 'always to be avoided in repairing old Buildings'.<sup>74</sup> Torrington reported in 1792 on the tower built by John Yenn at Woodstock, Oxfordshire (1785) that the church ought not to have 'suffer'd a conceited Grecian building [but] an elegant Gothic one', and on an earlier visit, soon after its completion, had already concluded that 'Vanbrugh's shade still presides in the neighbourhood'.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, at least as many steeples attached to medieval churches were rebuilt in the Classical as in the Gothic style during the century, and as early as 1710 Lord Shaftesbury, noting the 'Many spires arising in our great city [London], with such haste and sudden growth', warned that this 'may be the occasion that our immediate relish shall be hereafter censured, as retaining much of what artists call the Gothick kind'.<sup>76</sup>

The building of steeples in the 18th century is often well documented because any alteration to an existing fabric, or the erection of a new one, required ecclesiastical authority in the form of a faculty issued by the bishop on the evidence of a detailed brief submitted by the Vestry or, in the case of private enterprises such as estate chapels, by the landowner. These and subsequent proceedings were usually recorded in vestry minute books or estate accounts, sometimes naming architects and builders and occasionally retaining working drawings. Here are a few provincial samples.

An inspection in 1706 by vestrymen and 'several able workmen' of the medieval west tower of Burton Overy, Leicestershire, whose spire was 'cleft from ye Top to ye bottom [and] so Ruinous and Decayed that [the parishioners] are daily in fear, that [it] may fall down, and thereby damnify their . . . Church', revealed that it could not be repaired 'but ought to be rebuilt [according to] a verry proper' design submitted by a local architect named Henry Dormer.<sup>77</sup> However, nothing was done and in 1776-77, when the steeple was again 'in danger of falling down', it was repaired by John Woodruff and William Leach.<sup>78</sup> This may have included strapping the corners and upper windows, though we read in 1706 that the steeple 'for many years hath been clamp't with Iron'.<sup>79</sup>

A particularly complete contract survives for rebuilding St Botolph at Sibson, Leicestershire, to a design supplied by Francis Smith of Warwick in 1725-26. Thomas Moor, the builder, agreed 'to digg the foundations and to lay the same with the old stone . . . All the Doores and window Cases Coines, Rustish, Cornishes and all other ornaments . . . to be of new stone from Wharton Quarry: All the ashler of the . . . out and inside of the Tower to be done with the old stone so far as it will goe . . . The stone for the inside . . . to be only joynted and not Cleansed . . . and when the old stone is used up the inside . . . to be laid with brick'; furthermore, he agreed 'to put a strong floor with four beams where the Bells hung . . . to Lead the . . . Roof . . . to glaze the . . . Windows . . . with good Stourbridge glass Except the bell windows and they to be weather

boarded with good Oak timber . . . All the walls of the inside to be plastered with good lime and hair'. Moor was to retain 'all manner of materialls belonging to the old Church and Tower' and the new work was to be 'done in a Substantial handsom and workmanlike manner' for £700, 'except ye Coins Rusticks and ye Ashlar work'.<sup>80</sup>

Around 1760 the masons Joshua Breare, Thomas Spencer, John Hargreaves and William Hustwick contracted to build Addingham steeple, Yorkshire; their contract specified the work in detail, including building a 'Yard high of Battlements . . . Drawn in with the Chizel and Broahed with A Ledge under the same'.<sup>81</sup>

At Market Weighton, in the same county, in 1775, the parishioners proposed transforming the structure from a spire to a tower steeple by the simple expediencies of removing the 'old and decayed wood spire', raising the tower from three to four stories and finishing the battlements with short Gothic pinnacles.<sup>82</sup>

Construction costs varied greatly. Take three examples from Berkshire churches. Repairs to Uffington steeple in 1704 cost £23 10s, financed by a 10½d tax on the parishioners.<sup>83</sup> Estimates to repair Shottesbrooke steeple in 1758 ranged from £900, submitted by a London stone-mason, and £600 from one working out of Bath, to £300 from the Oxford man, John Townesend which, as might be expected, was the one accepted.<sup>84</sup> Robert Taylor's pretty Gothick spire (1773) at Wallingford cost £751 17s 6d.<sup>85</sup> In 1774 Joseph Pickford received two payments, £243 14s 11d and £47 17s 10d, for building the spectacular Perpendicular-style tower and spire at Solihull, Warwickshire.<sup>86</sup> In 1789 the damaged medieval tower and spire at Shearsby, Leicestershire, was taken down and rebuilt, in a sort of Soanian Classicism, for £300 at the expence of the local landowner.<sup>87</sup> Occasionally moneys were not forthcoming, as in the case of



Fig. 7. Thomas Cadman, 'the Italian Flyer', anonymous engraver, c1727 (Westminster City Library: St Martin-in-the-Fields, Box 2, No.18d) (Leeds University Photographic Service).

Wroxton, Oxfordshire, for on May 2, 1747 the patron, Lord North, wrote to the architect, Sanderson Miller: 'I am very glad you think our tower can be built cheaper than was imagined: I have laid aside all thoughts of a spire for I find it will come to too much.'<sup>88</sup>

Little wonder then that the steeple was the centre of celebrations on those occasions when work on the church was completed or when it was consecrated. In 1717 John and William Townesend, the master-masons at St Mary-le-Strand (1714-24), were reprimanded by the Commissioners because 'the work-men were guilty of great disorder . . . upon finishing the Tower'.<sup>89</sup> Ten years later, at the consecration of Gibbs's other London church, St Martin-in-the-Fields, Thomas Cadman, known as 'the Italian Flyer', clutching lighted torches in both hands, slid on his belly head-first down a rope stretched from atop the 170ft high steeple into the Royal Mews (Fig. 7). He performed the stunt again at Bromham, Wiltshire, in 1735, but an attempt at St Mary's, Shrewsbury in 1740, on this occasion blowing a trumpet and firing a pistol, proved fatal! In 1732, an itinerant French acrobat named Gillinoe flew down a rope stretched from the top of the 178ft high Gothic tower of All Saints, Derby.<sup>90</sup>

'What is a church?', asked the poet George Crabbe: 'Tis a tall building, with a tower and bells.'<sup>91</sup> But in the 18th century steeples aspired to being more than merely tall structures: they were 'parochial fortresses'<sup>92</sup> and a powerful symbol of Protestant presence. In 1748 the Vestry of Brimpton, Berkshire petitioned for the removal of the timber belfry and the construction of a new brick tower as 'highly beneficial & Ornamental, and in no way Detrimental, to the Church or Parish',<sup>93</sup> while in 1791 Torrington lamented as 'truly wretch'd' the medieval church at Sempringham, Lincolnshire, shorn of chancel and transept in 1788, though he rejoiced that the steeple 'is yet beautiful'.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, the steeple was inseparable from the Anglican vision of the prosperous Christian community. In 1789, Erasmus Darwin wrote, in his poem *Visit of Hope to Sydney Cove, near Botany-Bay*:

There shall broad streets their stately walls extend,  
The circus widen, and the crescent bend;  
There, rayed from cities o'er the cultured land,  
Shall bright canal and solid roads expand

Embellished villas crown the landscape scene,  
Farms wave with gold, and orchards blush between:-  
There shall tall spires and domed-capped towers ascend<sup>95</sup>

## NOTES

1. C. Bruyn Andrews, ed., *The Torrington Diaries*, II, 1934-8, p.342, entry dated June 27, 1791.
2. For such an observation see S. Markham, *John Loveday of Caversham 1711-1789: The Life and Tours of an Eighteenth-Century Onlooker*, 1984, p.281, travelling in Belgium during 1736-7.
3. Victoria and Albert Museum Library: MS. 86NN2, translation from the French.
4. B. Langley, *Ancient Masonry*, 1736, under dictionary of terms.
5. C. Morris, ed., *The Journeys of Celia Fiennes*, 1947, p.70.
6. Pages 17 and 15.
7. Anon., 'Verses written amidst the Ruins of Broomholm Priory, Norfolk. By a Lady', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, June 1784, p.455.
8. Pages 124 and 145.
9. H. David, ed., *Pope: Poetical Works*, 1966, p.48, line 377.
10. Anon., 'A Description of LONDON', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, September 1739, p.491.
11. 'Fairy Fort; or, the Pleasures of an Aire' in R. Barton, *Farrago: or, Miscellanies in Verses and Prose*, 1739, p.22.
12. Anon., *St Paul's Cathedral, A Poem*, 1750, pp.13 and 33.
13. A. Brice, *Gazetteer*, 1759.

14. Attributed to Jonathan Swift in J. Prior, *Life of Malone*, 1860, p.381.
15. *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, 1724-6, II, p.229 (Everyman's Library, 1962).
16. *The Grub-street Journal*, No.249, October 3, 1734, p.1.
17. R.S. Ferguson, ed., *Miscellany Accounts of the Diocese of Carlile, with the Terriers Delivered in to me at my Primary Visitation. By William Nicolson, Late Bishop of Carlile*, in *Cumberland & Westmorland Antiquarian & Archaeological Society*, 1877, p.142.
18. Quoted in C.J. Cox, *Churches of Derbyshire*, 1875, I, p.95.
19. *A Miscellany on Taste. By Mr Pope, &c.*, 1732, p.18.
20. From a 1725 petition quoted in B.F.L. Clarke, *The Building of the Eighteenth Century Church*, 1963, p.125.
21. D.R. Perriam, *Eighteenth Century Carlisle*, 1973, no.32, quoting a 1794 description.
22. Bedfordshire Record Office: ABF 3/175.
23. Ferguson, p.58, describing Hutton-in-the-Forest, Cumbria in 1703.
24. Clarke, p.20.
25. Torrington, II, p.342 (June 27, 1791), IV, p.139 (June 8, 1789).
26. Ferguson, p.131.
27. Clarke, p.133.
28. Leicestershire Record Office: 2 D 31/295, dated April 9, 1736.
29. E. Hatton, *A New View of London*, 1708, p.424.
30. April 1786, p.350.
31. Torrington, I, p.314, August 10, 1787.
32. July 1787, p.578.
33. T. Cocke and C.R. Dodwell, 'Rediscovery of the Romanesque' in *1066: English Romanesque Art 1066-1200*, 1984, p.364, cat.no.508.
34. Brief dated 1759, quoted in Clarke, p.277.
35. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, March 1757, p.139; J.A. Picton, *Memorials of Liverpool Historical and Topographical*, 1873, II, pp.322-3.
36. J.H., 'A Thunder-Storm', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, August 1774, p.380, July 1779, p.374 and July 1782, p.352.
37. Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York University: FAC 1718/1; in repairing the pinnacles the Vestry hoped to 'prevent so great a calamity'.
38. Defoe, I, p.134.
39. G. Cobb, *English Cathedrals: The Forgotten Centuries*, 1980, p.14, pl.9.
40. *The Family Memoirs of the Rev. William Stukeley, M.D.*, 1887, III, p.29.
41. J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, II, Part 2, 1798, pp.467-8, pl.LXXXI.
42. Nichols, III, Part 1, 1800, p.504.
43. A contemporary account quoted in R.V. Taylor, *The Ecclesiae Leodienses; or Historical and Architectural Sketches of the Churches of Leeds and Neighbourhood*, 1875, p.157.
44. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, March 1770, p.138.
45. December 1790, p.1144.
46. 'The Letter of Sir Chr. Wren Upon the Building of National Churches' in *Wren Society*, 1932, IX, p.16, item 4; 'Mr Van-Brugg's Proposals about Building ye new Churches' in K. Downes, *Vanbrugh*, 1977, p.257, item 5.
47. *The Grub-street Journal*, September 5, 1734, No.245, p.1 and October 31, 1734, No.253, p.1.
48. P. Toynbee, ed., *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, 1903, III, pp.119-20.
49. Section IX, pp.309-21.
50. Defoe, I, p.332.
51. Hatton, II, p.369.
52. C. Campbell, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, 1717, p.1, pl.26.
53. *The Grub-street Journal*, August 8, 1734, No.241, p.1.
54. Victoria and Albert Museum Library: MS. 86NN2.
55. R. and J. Dodsley, *London and Its Environs Described*, 1761, II, p.6.
56. *The Grub-street Journal*, September 5, 1734, No.245, p.1.
57. Page 47.
58. Pages 41-2.
59. Dodsley, III, p.240.
60. *The London and Westminster Guide*, 1768, pp.35,40-1.
61. Torrington, II, p.224, July 3, 1790.
62. Defoe, I, p.189.
63. *A series of particular and useful observations . . . upon . . . the Cathedral Church of Salisbury*.

64. *The London and Westminster Guide*, 1768, p.39.
65. *The Grub-street Journal*, July 18, 1734, No.238, p.1; March 6, 1735, No. 271, p.1, writing of Westminster Abbey. *The London and Westminster Guide*, 1768, pp.46-7, cites Cornhill steeple as 'very magnificent and the greatest Curiosity of its Kind to be seen in this City'.
66. H. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*, 1984, p.213.
67. *A Critical Review of the Publick Buildings, Statues and Ornaments In, and about London and Westminster*, p.63.
68. *Defoe*, 1761, II, p.137.
69. *A Book of Architecture*, 1728, p.viii, pl.xxi, referring to St Mary-le-Strand.
70. Page 6.
71. Langley cited Limehouse's steeple as possessing a 'most solemn reverend [and] most gay and airy' aspect (July 11, 1734, No.237, p.1).
72. James Murphy, *Plans Elevations Sections and Views of the Church of Batalha . . . in Portugal*, 1795, p.16.
73. T. Friedman, *James Gibbs*, 1984, pp.198-200.
74. T. Cocke, 'James Essex, 1722-1784: Archaeological Integrity' in R. Brown, ed., *The Architectural Outsiders*, 1985, p.109.
75. *Torrington*, III, p.169 (July 13, 1792), I, p.323 (August 13, 1787). Vanbrugh was architect of nearby Blenheim Palace. Torrington disliked 'Grecian fancies' on churches (III, p.30).
76. E.F. Carritt, *A Calendar of British Taste From 1600 to 1800*, 1948, p.156, quoting from *Letters on Design*, 1711.
77. Christ Church, Oxford: Wake Letters, Vol.3, f.252, dated October 26, 1706; Lincolnshire Archives Office: Fac 9/59, dated October 29, and November 13, 1706.
78. Leicestershire Record Office: 1 D41/18/21, f.77v; 1 D41/41/131, faculty dated April 18, 1777.
79. *Wake Letters* (see note 77).
80. Leicestershire Record Office: DE 373/3, dated August 18, 1725.
81. West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds: Parish Records 34, item 19.
82. Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York University: D/C. FAC. 1775/2a,2b. A pair of crude 'before and after' drawings is included in the faculty.
83. *Clarke*, p.91.
84. *Colvin*, p.832.
85. Berkshire Record Office: D/P139/6/3.
86. E.C. Shepherd, *The Tower and Bells of Solihull Church*, 1950, p.20.
87. *Nichols*, IV, Part 1, 1807, p.234, pl.XXIV.
88. L. Dickins and M. Stanton, *An Eighteenth Century Correspondence*, 1910, p.130.
89. Lambeth Palace Library: Commission for Building Fifty New Churches Papers, MS 2690, p.358.
90. Friedman, p.73; *Country Life*, February 22, 1990, p.120; M. Mallender, *The Great Church*, 1977, p.24.
91. *The Church*, I, ii.
92. An early-19th-century reference quoted in *Taylor*, p.156.
93. *Clarke*, p.141.
94. *Torrington*, II, p.336.
95. Lines 11-14, 17-19 in R. Lonsdale, ed., *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse*, 1985, p.761.