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ANOTHER DRAWING OF THE OBELISK AT RIPON

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Some time between June and December 1702 the oldest surviving monumental obelisk in these islands was erected in the Market Place of Ripon. It was built to Hawksmoor's 'draught or scheme', but not to the 'first design', which he sent on 15 April 1702 (see above, p. 1), and it had evidently been altered by 1719 or 1720, when it was recorded in a drawing by Samuel Buck.¹

Both these two images, which straddle its time of construction, lack three features which are recorded in correspondence between the principal patron, John Aislabie, MP and Mayor of Ripon in 1702–3, and the clerk of works, Cornelius Barker; these are sundials, a balcony and stone lions. The first two were mentioned in a letter from Barker to Aislabie on 22 November 1702. The letter makes it clear that the obelisk was almost complete at that date. 'Iron worke' with 'gilding' and 'copper worke', both presumably composing the vane at the summit, shown in all illustrations, were already 'fixt'; the scaffold was to be struck on the following Wednesday; and 'Watt', presumably Walter Weymick, the paviour, would get 'all paved' by December 10. But, among the unfinished items, Barker wrote that he was 'pursuing' the dials, of which his letter reveals that he had still to 'make the figures wth their lines and distances', and he reported that he had expected to fix up the balcony on the previous Tuesday, but it was 'not yet com,d'.² He made no mention of lions, but 'A Note of the Measurement of the Obeliske don att Ripon', submitted by the masonry contractors William Etty and William Cowley on 9 January 1703, includes 'The Lions' among work 'don'.³

Although these three features were not included in either the 1702 or the 1719/20 illustrations, the correspondence reveals that their existence is undeniable. Barker's letter does not make it clear of what material he was to 'make' the dials; the figures, lines and distances could have been either attached or cut. A balcony which could have been delivered together, fixed in a day, and was still capable of being fixed after the scaffold had been struck, was presumably not a stone one. But the measurements submitted on 9 January were all of stonework, and among these were the lions.

Fortunately their appearance can be envisaged from a previously unnoticed illustration, a drawing at Holkham Hall, Norfolk (Fig. 1). The drawing, mounted in the Innys Collection of topographical drawings, has no caption, and is in the volume on Berkshire; and it may have escaped attention for that reason. However, 'The height from ye low Step 27 yards' is written on the left side of the *recto*,⁴ and that (81 feet) conforms to the 82 feet given in Thomas Gent's *History of Ripon*, published in 1733,⁵ while the elevation given in the drawing conforms to Buck's sketch except for the three features mentioned above.

The drawing shows that the balcony surmounted the cornice of the lower of the obelisk's two plinths. On each side it had four slender twisted posts, with knop-shaped finials which projected above the hand rail, and the corner posts were braced by S-shaped scrolls. The intermediate bars were even more slender and apparently plain. It had three rails, one at the base, and two at the top, separated by scrolling or tendril-like ornament. The drawing confirms the

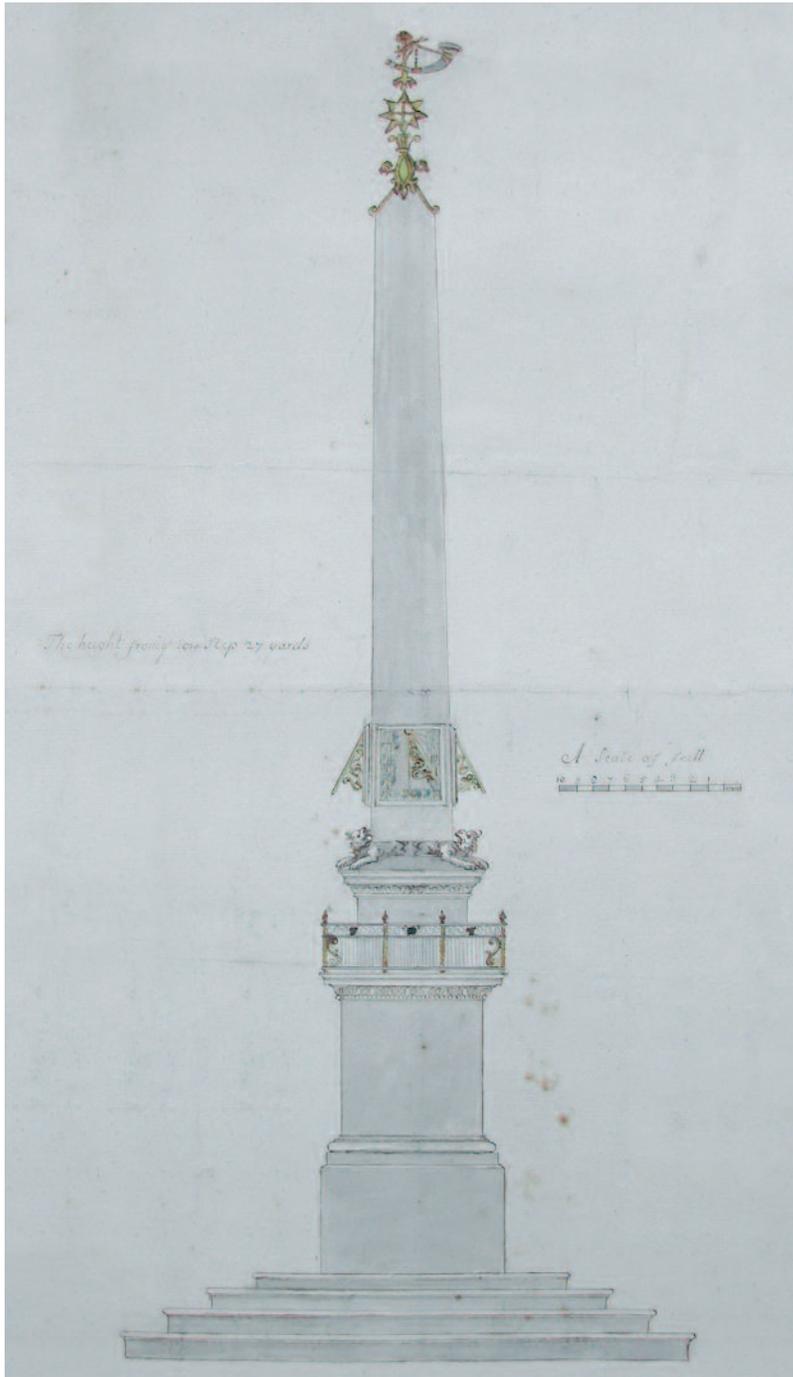


Fig. 1. Elevation of the obelisk at Ripon, 1702.
Holkham Hall, The Inmys Collection, vol. 68, no. 34.

implication of Barker's letter that the balcony was not made of stone, and suggests that it was made of iron. The yellow wash applied to the four posts and the corner braces indicate that these were copper or gilded.

The lions could not have been of any material other than stone, as the 'Note of Measurements' states, since they are shown crouching above the corners of the upper plinth, with the shaft of the obelisk supported on their backs. Their position confirms previous speculation that the obelisk was in some particulars inspired by the illustration of the obelisk in the Piazza San Pietro, illustrated in Domenico Fontana, *Della Transportatione dell'Obelisco Vaticano*, 1589, a book which Hawksmoor possessed.⁶

Three sun dials are shown on the faces of the shaft (and there was presumably a fourth), about two feet above the lions, the position in which Hawksmoor's first draught shows inscriptions to have been proposed. The gnomons are washed in yellow, and thus they too must have been copper or gilded.

The status of the drawing is difficult to determine. If it was a proposal, evidently realised, it would have been made after Hawksmoor's first, unused, draught, sent on 15 April 1702, but before 18 June, when William Etty and William Cowling signed articles of agreement to build it.⁷ Its hand and draughtsmanship do not appear to be Hawksmoor's. It is possible that it is a copy of Hawksmoor's second proposal, but at that scale it would have been of no use as a working drawing. What it may have been, however, is a record, presumably made for the purpose of engraving; in the event a cruder, woodcut, record was made in 1733 by Thomas Parker for Thomas Gent's *History of Ripon* (see above, p. 1). A motivation for publicising the Ripon obelisk either by the ambitious patron, the *venerabiles viri* of the town, or an entrepreneurial bookseller certainly existed, for a monumental obelisk in a public space remained, outside Rome, a rarity for several years to come.

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I am grateful to Viscount Coke and the Trustees of the Holkham Estate for permission to publish the drawing illustrated in fig. 1, and to Dr Suzanne Reynolds, Manuscript Curator at Holkham Hall, for advice on the Innys Collection.

NOTES

- 1 Richard Hewlings, 'Ripon's *Forum Populi*', *Architectural History*, 24 (1981), p. 44 and pl. 27a.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 46; Leeds, West Yorkshire Archive Service, Vyner MSS, 5742 (245/3).
- 4 Holkham Hall, 'A General System of Cosmography or Elements of Astronomy and Geography, illustrated by Maps, Plan and Views Collected from the most Eminent Authors, Ancient and Modern by John Innys', vol. 68 (Berkshire), no. 34. I am indebted to Dr Timothy Connor, who recognised the Ripon drawing as such when examining views of Berkshire. It lies between an engraving of the monument of Edward IV in St George's Chapel and an engraving of the ceiling of 'his Majesty's Withdrawing Room in the Royal Palace of Windsor'. John Innys (1695–1778), 'stationer', was a leading bookseller and publisher with premises in St Paul's Churchyard, London. His collection, estimated to hold over 15,000 maps, topographical prints, drawings and plans, was acquired by the first Earl of Leicester in about 1755: D.P. Mortlock, *Holkham Library: A History and Description* (Cambridge: Roxburghe Club, 2006), pp. 69, 77 (pl. 36).
- 5 Hewlings, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 47, and pl. 28d.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 44.