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‘HERE ART SHALL REIGN’: A GEORGIAN ENLIGHTENMENT EXTRAVAGANZA

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This article was submitted by Terry Friedman not long before his death in 2013. It is published now in memory of one of the leading scholars of 18th-century British architecture, and a valued contributor to this Journal.

In 1767 an obscure poet named William Woty published a long panegyric entitled ‘Church Langton’ devoted to

‘yon proud eminence
That yields a prospect of the richest lands,
There shall the grand Collegiate Church arise,
A welcome, free-will offering to the skies.

Such as effects the soul, and which I see
With joy, celestial Westminster! In thee.’

He also praised a

‘spacious Hospital
Where pity will diffuse its mildest beam.
There shall the aged meet with due relief,
And wipe, with joy wipe off the tear of grief

The grand Museum there shall strike the eye,
And furnish students thence with large supply;
Teach them the virtues of the plants to know,
How best to cultivate, where best they grow.

What Nature yields throughout her wide domain,
The wood, the rock, the hill, the vale, the plain,
Whate’er her springs and fossil mines produce,
There shall they learn, and learning teach their use.
There shall a spacious Temple rear its head,
And o’er the walls immortal Painting spread
Her sacred canvas.

The School shall train each rude unletter’d youth,
His morals guide, and point the way to truth
While Music, soaring to th’ ethereal plain,
Descends, and with her brings a noble strain.
Here Art shall reign.¹

This ensemble was to comprise cloisters, quadrangles, piazzas and squares, writing, music and drawing schools, premises containing a library, a dining hall, a printing house, an observatory and a mausoleum as well as residences linked by formal avenues, all carefully organized within an excessively megalomaniac, unimaginably colossal townscape – in essence a microcosm of a mid-Georgian Enlightenment universe – which, however, failed to advance beyond the drawing-board. A detailed account of this extraordinary episode, arguably one of the most sphinx-ian documents relating to eighteenth-century English artistic culture, is preserved in the Record Office of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, and is the subject of the present article.²

GENERAL DIRECTIONS

Its background is this. In 1767 Rev. William Hanbury (1725–78) (Fig. 1), Rector of Church Langton in Leicestershire, just north of Market Harborough, launched ‘a very large and extensive charity’ with the aim of creating the ostentatious and expensive complex just described.³ *A Sermon Preached at the*



Fig. 1: Edward Penny, Portrait of William Hanbury, detail, oil on canvas (from J. Prophet, *Church Langton and William Hanbury*, 1982, frontispiece).

First Public Meeting Of The Trustees of the Charities on ‘The Duty of Decorating Religious Houses’ stressed that one of its goals was ‘to pass by neatness and decency, which ought to be in every consecrated place, those rich ornaments, and beauties in churches and religious assemblies, as well as the magnificence of the building itself, which add nothing to God, yet add much devotion to us’.⁴ Hanbury also insisted on making it ‘incumbent on our Successors to build everything as grand and magnificent as the Founder could wish’.⁵ A later, broader perspective (1798) saw the project as an incentive ‘for relieving distress, encouraging merit, promoting virtue, exciting industry, and propagating religion’ – the linchpins of Enlightenment philanthropy – entitling Hanbury to ‘the thanks,

esteem, and patronage of his contemporaries’:⁶ a verdict which, as will soon become clear, proved premature.

The scheme was described in considerable detail in ‘The Proceedings of the Society at Church Langton Founded by The Revd. William Hanbury March 14. 1767’.⁷ Among its many exceptional features was the decision to build throughout in stone ‘except the inside of the Walls which may be Brick’ (f. 12), with a provision ‘To purchase the Stone Quarries of Ketton [in Rutland] and Weldon [in Northamptonshire] should they be . . . sold, or Land in the said Parishes, or in any other Parish, in which there is a probability of getting suitable Stone’ (f. 17, item 3). Characteristically thoroughgoing, the Founder devoted a substantial and invaluable section to ‘Samples of good Building Stone from several of the most noted Quarries’ together with their costs.⁸ He favoured Ketton as ‘superior in many respects to Portland [in Dorset] especially for projections: – it sells now [in 1773] at one shilling p Cubic Foot, and probably will be found the very best and most convenient stone for our public buildings’ (f. 21, item 2.2), but also Weldon, which ‘will do for the Walls as well as . . . any sort if laid in the same manner as it was taken from the bed: – it is of the same color with Ketton . . . and may be mixed with it in case Ketton Quarries by that time should be nearly drained; – it now sells at Seven pence p Cubic Foot’ (3.3). Hanbury also recommended petitioning Parliament ‘to be empowered to form a Navigable [sic] Canal from Stamford to Harborough, thence to the Oxford Cut, for the advantage of the whole Country, as well as bringing up Materials’ to Langton (f. 12, item 5).

There were other motivations. £16,005 of surplus funds were to be

‘annually employed in Building and Founding a College at Oxford for the training up of Youth for Holy Orders . . . The Situation of it to be (suppose) on Heddington Hill, a little below or beyond the Tree called Jo: Pullins Tree. – It shall consist of 2 or 3 Quadrangles, with suitable Offices &c. There shall be

also built a very superb Collegiate Gothic Chapel, for Divine Service, having ornamental Steeples &c. – in the Cathedral Stile; Also Gardens &c. – shall be laid out in the best taste . . . The Hall, for the Members to eat together in at Meals, shall be large, and shall be most magnificently fitted up, and the whole shall be a perfect model of Grandeur, Elegance and Beauty’.

Furthermore, £12,005 per annum was to be ‘disposed of in beautifying, ornamenting and improving; or rather, building a suitable Church for the University of Oxford: – which being finished, the said sum shall be [used] annually in beautifying and improving the different Welsh Cathedrals, then the Irish, and afterwards such of the English as shall most need such Charitable Assistance’ (ff. 28–29).

Hanbury’s architectural repertory was sourced not only from Oxford colleges – he had matriculated at Magdalen and graduated from St Edmund Hall between 1745 and 1748 – but from rigorous bouts of ‘Observations’ during nationwide touring. In 1771 he visited Peterborough, Croyland, Boston and ‘Examined every thing that was curious in Lincolnshire and the Adjacent parts, but did not go to Lincoln’ (f. 5), followed by Lichfield, and ‘whatever was curious in and about Staffordshire’ (f. 6). In 1772 to London and Kent, including Rochester, Canterbury, Battle and Tunbridge, then Southwell in Nottinghamshire, Newark, Lincoln and on to Hull and Beverley, where he was ‘most highly delighted with that most elegant Collegiate Church, which . . . was inferior in nothing except size, to any Cathedral in England’ as well as York, pausing there for a month to attend divine services (f. 7). Then back to London and the south-west: Arundel, Chichester, Netley Abbey, Portland, Weymouth, Blandford Forum, Stonehenge and Salisbury (ff. 7–8). Finally, in 1776, through Somerset: Glastonbury, Wells, Bath and Bristol and returning home via Gloucester, Tewkesbury, Evesham, Stratford and so on (f. 30). It was during these sojourns that various possible stones were explored.

The ‘Proceedings’ of 1773 allude to ‘Directions

. . . sufficient to inform the ingenious Architect, how the Founder could wish to have his Church built, direct his Judgment, inspire him with suitable Ideas for his great and Immortal Employment, induce him to exert his whole power to unite Piety and Grandeur, and in every respect to complete it in the most august and finished taste’ (f. 9) and also ‘To invite the most able and expert Artists to exhibit models for the Church and Public Buildings pay them well for their trouble and appoint a Committee of approved Judges to assist the Trustees in determining upon the best’ (f. 12, item 2). The ‘Surveyor of the Church and Buildings’ is identified with ‘the Artists Business, and the Diligence of Mr: Price of Salisbury affords a laudable pattern for him to copy after’ (f. 27), that is, Francis Price (c.1704–53), surveyor to the Dean and Chapter of Salisbury from c.1737 and author of *A Series Of particular and useful Observations . . . upon that Admirable Structure, The Cathedral-Church of Salisbury* (1753, 2nd edition 1774) (Fig. 2).⁹ In the light of Hanbury’s excursion to Salisbury in 1772, it is apposite that this pioneer publication – ‘the first serious attempt to describe and analyse the structure of a major Gothic building’¹⁰ – emphasised the historical context and geographical interrelationship between the present ‘elegant and magnificent structure’ and the previous cathedral at Old Sarum, built inside an ‘ancient fortress . . . formed upon the extrem end . . . of a hill, which commands an extensive prospect’.¹¹ These features correspond to Hanbury’s vision for the church at Langton, in which ‘the greatest Air of majesty may be given to the whole, that it may afford a most surprising Prospect’, and that his church ‘be so constructed . . . it may in magnificence and grandeur, exceed all others; and become not only the Principal ornament of the Country, but an Honour to the Island, and a suitable Minster for that extensive Charity of which it is the head’ (f. 8). Or, in Woty’s words a ‘grand Collegiate Church/ Gothic the style, and tending to excite/ Free-thinkers to a sense of what is right.’¹²



Fig. 2: P. Fourdrinier, ‘Part of the Plan, And a Perspective View...Taken from the North East’, Pl. I, 1747, engraving, in F. Price, *A Series Of particular and useful Observations* [on] *The Cathedral-Church of Salisbury* (London, 1753)

The intended but un-named architect may well have been Henry Keene (1726–76), Surveyor to the Fabric at Westminster Abbey and designer of a series of remarkably accomplished Gothic-style buildings at Hartlebury, Worcestershire (c.1750), Hartwell, Buckinghamshire (1753–55) and University College, Oxford (1766–68).¹³ Woty’s panegyric explicitly mentions ‘celestial Westminster’. Yet there seems every reason to believe that Hanbury himself was the guiding architect. Since no visual evidence appears to have survived, what might this architectural conglomerate have looked like?

THE COLLEGIATE CHURCH

The centrepiece was to be a colossal, sculpture-laden, Latin Cross ‘Collegiate Church’ or ‘Minster’ dedicated, like Westminster Abbey, to St Peter. If built it would have measured 660 feet long ‘exclusive of the Porch’ (compared to the Abbey’s 511 feet including Henry VII’s Chapel), the nave 60 feet wide by 153 feet high, the two aisles each 30 feet wide, the choir 300 feet long, the ‘Great Transept’ 300 feet long with side aisles totalling 120 feet wide, a 453 feet high ‘Lantern Tower . . . exactly in the Center of the whole Fabric’ (ff. 8, 14, 18). The ‘General Directions concerning

Building’ offered useful technical advice: ‘The Ingenious Architect is to have a strict regard to the Foundation, pillars and adjacent Parts . . . that by building them large enough, and causing them by proper Arches &c: to unite in one Common Strength for its support, it may be properly raised to the desired height, without danger of any of them giving way a circumstance which has too often happened in Buildings of this nature’, citing York, Peterborough and Ely. In this eventuality a caveat was added: ‘the Building is not to be left unfinished . . . but the whole shall be taken Down . . . and a better and more substantial under part constituted which shall be able to support a Tower of such desired Elevation’. (f. 10, a). Furthermore, towers were to be added to the east and west, each 336 feet high crowned by steeples rising 399 feet complimented by north and south ones each totalling 609 feet (ff. 8, 14, 18). We learn that

‘The upper Transept is designed to strengthen the Building and throw light into the Choir: – All large Cathedrals afford instance how usefull and ornamental such kind of Transept is to the upper parts of them. That of York extends little or nothing beyond the breadth of the Church, and if it is left to the ingenious Architect to contrive this to be somewhat similar to . . . York, or project on both sides like . . . Lincoln and others; tho’ it is desired no . . . doors may lead into it immediately from the Church-yard; All . . . Doors . . . being strictly prohibited . . . except those at the West End, and . . . at the North and South Ends of the Great Transept’ (f. 18). Yet, ‘every Entrance shall be the most Noble and uniform, and every termination of view . . . enriched with all Elegance, grace, and such profusion of Decorations, as the keenest Genius, and most luxurious Imagination can suggest’ (f. 9).

The interior was to be veneered in various stones, which are itemized, including ‘The Floors shall be Marble, the pillar Marble, and the finest Marble, Porphyry, and Jasper . . . for the Choir and High Altar’ (f. 8). ‘Samples of good Building Stone from several of the most noted Quarries’, discussed earlier, particularly single out ‘a most excellent White Free Stone’ dug near Castle Howard, Yorkshire,

which ‘seems admirably well adapted for such parts of the Walls . . . as are not Marble’ (f. 21, 4.4). More luxurious is the list of ‘Samples of Precious Stone’ with prices, including ‘White Italian Marble called Statuary Marble, this sells in the Block 22/ per Cubic foot’ (f. 22, 2.2) and ‘Italian blue veined Marble’ sold by ‘Marble Merchants at Mill Bank Westminster’ (f. 1.1). This western reach of the Thames incorporated several stone wharfs which in turn attracted leading monumental sculptors to set up yards nearby.¹⁴

RELIGIOUS SCULPTURE

The most dramatic feature of this colossus was the provision for figurative monuments, in their overpowering plenitude reminiscent of Westminster Abbey, as well as over a hundred single saintly statues, a phenomenon then unique in England since they would have all dated from the same time and not suffered from the inevitable haphazard natural growth found in ancient buildings. In 1773 none of the great medieval cathedrals featured a comparable single-minded programme saturating the entire fabric, yet inexplicably this remarkable episode has been forgotten by modern chroniclers of Georgian sculpture.

The commemorations, all of unspecified appearance, were organized hierarchically, under the umbrella ‘The Entrance in to the Tombs’ (f. 10, T). Firstly, ‘Monuments of Trustees and Professors’:

‘the first Ten Trustees shall be distinguished by suitable Monuments erected to their Memory:- Each . . . of 1500 Pounds value. – Such after Trustees, as have with good fidelity presided over the Charity Twenty years, shall at a convenient time after their Dicesse, have each a 1000 lb Monument erected to his Memory at the Society’s Expence: – Every Trustee that has been in Office 30 years . . . of 1250 pounds value; and every one that Survives 40 years after his Election, shall be distinguished by a Marble Monument valued at 1500 Pounds. – They shall be properly arranged along the Walls on both sides; when these are full, they shall be

arranged in like manner round the body of the Church, also the great Transept, and when these are full, no more . . . shall be erected in the Church, but a Grand Mausoleum shall be built in some convenient place for the sepulture of the Trustees and Professors for ever’.

Then ‘The Space called the Sanctum Sanctorum, shall be ornamented with the Visitors Rectors of Church Langton: – Every Visitor on his Dicease shall have a Monument of 1,500 Pounds value . . . erected along the Three sides f.f.f. the fourth side g, or back of the High Altar being for the Founder, his wife, and Three Children’ (f. 10, b, also f. 8), the last site designated as beneath the altar ‘in a dry, light, airy Room’ (f. 10, g). Unfortunately there is a lack of evidence identifying sculptor or sculptors, or a policy of encouraging uniformity of design. The cost of the work would have been excessively extravagant.¹⁵ To dramatize this space the ‘East Window . . . is to possess the grandest painted Window that can be devised’ (f. 9, Q), its dazzling Technicolour flooding the space, no doubt inspired by abundant medieval glass seen during the tours as well as achievements by leading modern English glass-painters Joshua and William Price and William Peckitt.¹⁶

Even more striking, the Church interior was to be ‘replete with Statues of every denomination that have a good Tendency, but more specially Religious History pieces . . . Single Statues of Saints and good men of all ages may here find a [blank] and these may be disposed in Groopes so as to have a very good effect’ (f. 28), each featuring ‘short inscriptions on the Dies of the Pedistals shewing their names &c:’ (f. 9). They would serve as a three-dimensional equivalent to the traditionally printed catechism. The ‘Proceedings’ itemize a total of 142 religious dedications ranging from the famous to the obscure living from Early Christian to pre-Reformation times, with a cluster of ‘Side Ayles’ devoted exclusively to 29 ‘Statues of Female British Saints’. Their overall classification follows no obvious sequential pattern – alphabetical, iconographic or according to individual Feast Days. A total of £13,000 was to be allocated for

‘52 Marble Statues of Saints at 250 lb each’ for the interior, with an equivalent number and sum for the exterior (f. 19).

The present writer is unaware of precedents in either Georgian High or Low Anglicanism to account for Hanbury’s preference for single, free-standing statues within the public domain of a parish church, where saintly images were condemned as idolatrous and carried explicitly negative associations with Roman Catholicism¹⁷. Nevertheless, since Langton was intended to be a private ‘Society’ promoting religious education through an ambitious visual demonstration of ecclesiastical history, such edification might have been considered acceptable both as legitimate religious endeavour and as a respectable antiquarian pursuit.¹⁸ In this he may have been inspired by *Britannia Sancta: Or, The Lives of The most Celebrated British, English, Scottish, and Irish Saints: Who have flourished in these Islands*, published in 1745 by Richard Challoner, the Catholic Vicar Apostolic of the London district, the Preface to which stressed that ‘The Almighty. . . the Worker of Wonders, is . . . wonderful in all his works, but more especially in his Saints . . . They are . . . his Master-piece . . . the brightest Ornament of his Church . . . they are helps and encouragements to Faith and Piety, and excite the soul to glorify God.’¹⁹

DIVINE SERVICES

Much discussion was devoted to the ‘Orders concerning Divine Service’ which throw light on Anglican practices in the later eighteenth century. Eleven o’clock Morning Service commenced with an organ Voluntary; the ‘Sentences, Exhortation, Confession, Absolution [were to be] Chanted’ followed by another Voluntary preceding the first Lesson, then a Te Deum, the second Lesson, Jubilate, Litany with the ‘remaining part of this Service constantly sung or Chanted’. The second

Service entailed ministers and vergers passing through the transept, re-entering at the choir carrying ‘Silver Virges’, or maces, to the high altar accompanied by ‘a solemn Sanctus . . . played on the Organ, and sung by the whole Choir’ and ending with a sermon. Hanbury was adamant that

‘no part ... shall ever be curtailed or abridged on any pretence whatsoever: – this is more particularly enjoined and made a Standard Law, as the Founder in his visits to the different Cathedrals ... has found the Service, in many of them, most shamefully hurried over and curtailed. One Dean professed his dislike to Chanting and tells the Vicars Coral and Singing Men they may afford as little of it as they please. Another Dean abridges the Service under a pretence of being afraid of taking cold at Church. The next shortens the Anthems. Another knocks off part of the Voluntaries &c ... Such kind of indifference or dislike, so glaring in those who are termed the Head of the Church, will ever in some degree influence many of the other least conscientious Members ... If any Member belonging to this Foundation should ever show dislike to such kind of Worship, or avow its impropriety, it is desired, that he may be immediately expelled: – And if the Visitor, like some Deans of this age, should show indifference or dislike, the respective Members ... are desired to revolt, obey him in nothing, destroy his authority, and continue in such Disobedience, untill it shall please God, to remove such Visitor out of this World’.

Hanbury also dealt rigorously with the ‘Disposition of the Members’ including the ‘Trustees’, ‘Canons’, ‘Professors’, ‘Fellows’, ‘Librarians’, ‘Keeper of the Museum, Painter or Keeper of the Temple of Religion and Virtue’, ‘Sculptor, Drawing Master, Writing Master . . . Women belonging to the Hospital’, while ‘The Boys belonging to the Foundation [and] to the Town, Children, Servants &c . . . shall have portable forms’ and the ‘Singing Men . . . shall constantly endeavor to chant and sing the Psalms and Anthems with Devotion of Heart as well as Melody of Voice, in order to cause the better effect on others’ (ff. 15–16). It is also worth noting that these ‘Orders’ reveal not only Hanbury’s outspoken anti-Dissenter stance but also the

importance he attached to musical performances in church; on 26–27 September 1759, for instance, he staged Handel’s *Messiah*, *Overture to Esther*, *Jubilate*, *Sacred Oratorio*, the ‘grand’ *Te Deum* and *Coronation Anthem* accompanied by a ‘whole band’ in the local parish church.²⁰

In addition, the Collegiate Church interior ‘shall be most splendidly illuminated for Divine Service in Afternoons, during . . . November, December, January, and longer if necessary’ (f. 14, g) and £250 was allocated for wax candles (f. 13, g). The fabric would undergo a strict regime of maintenance and well-being: ‘always kept in good repair, and all necessary precautions used to prevent bad effects from Lightning &c.’ (f. 14, 2), with the Vergers to

‘keep [it] neat and clean, have the care of the Vestments . . . and get them washed at proper intervals, that no dirty or slovenly appearance may be ever found amongst them . . . provide matts and scrapers . . . properly placed by the doors . . . and see that nobody chews Tobacco in it, they shall have keys for the Locks of the different Seats and be ever ready to open them for the Congregation; but shall never receive money . . . shew the Church to Strangers &c. and to prevent imposition the prices shall be fixed at . . . For seeing the Choir and Eastern part [charging 3d per person] For going to the Top of the . . . Lantern Tower [2d, etc, with the total] deemed additional Salaries and divided . . . in equal shares’ (f. 17).

The churchyard was ‘to be always kept neat and level by constant mowing &c. – In this no Horses or Cattle of any kind shall be ever permitted to enter, nor Grave Stones put up in any part of it’ (f.11, Q). The Church was to be preceded on its 660 feet-long south side by a ‘Grand Quadrangle . . . in breadth [720 to 780 feet] similar to the length of the Church’, enclosed by ‘Iron Rails’ approached through a ‘Grand Dome or Cupola’ and ‘Grand Iron Gate’, beyond which the ‘Town . . . continued in this breadth to the Brow of the Hill . . . to afford a proper and more striking view of the Church immediately upon rising the Hill’ (f. 10, D–F, H), a reminder of the Salisbury-Sarum terrain. ‘Piazas’ would surround the Quad (f. 11, m, n).

THE PUBLIC BUILDINGS

What of the rest of Hanbury's ambitious 'New Town'? Described under 'The Platforme of the Public Buildings', it was to consist of a broad, straight avenue paved with 'Small, but well squared stones [costing] 9s /- p Ton' (f. 21, 2) with an 'Obelisk in the Center' (f. 10, B), 'Two Pompous Inns' (a.a), a 'Porters Lodge' (C), 'Professors Lodgings' (n), 'Lodgings, or Apartments for different Officers' (5), a 'Square composed of Houses, appropriated for taking in Boarders' (10). Tangentially were a cloister range (f. 10, i) and a 'Square [where] the Boys are permitted to play and no where else', accessed by 'Four Gates [which] are constantly to be shut at the approach of Twilight, or after Evening Prayers . . . and never opened before Sun rising' (11-12) and, indeed, 'all others belonging to the College, to prevent Communication between that and the Town in the Night' (f. 11).

There was also an assortment of 'Public Schools' devoted to 'Writing' and 'Music' (f. 11, O, 3, 4) as well as 'a Drawing Master to Exercise his Art' (1) and 'the Statuary' (2); a 'Hall or Dining Room [where] the Trustees, Professors &c: . . . dine together on Public Days at the Charity's Expense' (Y), the 'College Kitchen' (X), a 'Printing House' (8), perhaps reflecting a practice instituted in 1757 by Horace Walpole at Strawberry Hill.²¹ A 'Library forming an Equilateral square of 200 yards on each side' featuring a 'Grand Dome or Cupola over the entrance' (K, L), had its origin in 1760 when Hanbury published his 'Plan for a Public Library at Church Langton', 'with a view not only to the entertainment and improvement of the country, but to assist the charity, and enlarge the foundation of the general plan'.²² 'The Museum' also featured a 'Grand Corresponding Dome' (f. 11, V, W). As well the scheme also accommodated a 'Temple of Religion and Virtue, forming an Equilateral Square of 200 yards on each side' (R), a 'Hospital or Convent for 60 Poor Women, and such others as may choose the like kind of Devout Life, [who] will wear the Habit

and submit to the Rules of the House' (G, g, g. g. g), a 'County Hospital or Infirmary' (b), an 'Observatory' (Z), 'with a suitable House for the Professor' (f. 32, 3), and a 'Grand Mausoleum' (f. 11, 8), 'necessary when the places appointed for the Monuments in the Church are full' (f. 14, f).

All these elements were to be connected by avenues. Cross Street, 78 feet broad and situated between the Hospital and the Museum, flanked by 'a Sett off of 9 feet on each side, for walking . . . stumped, or railed, or fenced from the middle part, which is for Horses and Carriages, and . . . elegantly paved with Flat Purbec Stones, or Stones of a similar nature so that the Terras or Walk round the whole, may be continued in these Parts without interruption'. 'Broad Street' leading southward from the Church, would be 750 feet wide, 'that is the breadth of the whole length of the Church and Steeples' and intersect at right angles with 'Elliptic Street' measuring 900 feet wide by 1,200 feet long, and thence 'leading to the London Road', marked by 'Two . . . Castle like Towers' having 'an appearance as if designed for defence . . . embattled, and well mounted with Heavy Canon, to be played off on days of Rejoicing' (f. 33).

Finally, the proposed new town featured two other extraordinary elements. Hanbury claimed that the origin of one was the result of his

'natural genius and inclination for planting and gardening. . . As the amusement of gardening is innocent, and the profits arising from it are intended for the glory of God, and the good of mankind, I think I cannot be centured for pursuing this bent . . . which possessed me so forcibly and so early in life . . . but the true sweets . . . I never tasted till I entered the University, when the philosophical and practical part went hand in hand . . . so that where practice is joined to the study of philosophy, there and there only the true culture of things may be depended on'.

In 1751 he 'procured a great variety of seeds, &c. from distant countries, particularly North America . . . to raise that very great collection which has

composed the different parts of our extensive nurseries’, from which emerged his *Essay on planting, and a scheme for making it conducive to the glory of God and the advantage of society* (1758).²³ By 1773 provision was made for creating a ‘Physic Garden’ at Langton (f. 11, 7).

At the same time the town’s nucleus, ‘similar in Grandeur and Magnificence to . . . the Church’, was to consist of ‘Four Grand Domes . . . erected over the four Grand Entrances into the four Quadrangles; they shall be of suitable height, neither shall any expence be spared to render them complete’, each dome to cost £12,000;

‘Cupolas shall grace the smaller passages, pinacles, Turrets, Pyramids, Mouldings, Skylights, Globes, Crosses &c: the different parts, and Elevated Towers or raised Buildings at the Corners. of each Square shall dignify the whole. Piazzas shall surround the Quadrangles, and Ornamental Statues be properly arranged along the several Buildings; Whereas those respecting the Church are the Effigies of Saints, Angels, and good Men, these shall be the great Luminarys of the Literary World, the Statues of such Men as have, with sound heart, been most remarkable for their abilities and learning’ (f. 9).

Later in the ‘Proceedings’ there is mention of a

‘most superbly magnificent . . . Statue square [with] the outside . . . so constructed and adorned as to give sufficient indication of the contents within. – it shall form an equilateral square . . . on the West side of the Library . . . The inside . . . replete with Statues of every denomination that have a good Tendency, but more specially Religious History pieces . . . Single Statues of Saints and good men of all ages may here find a [blank] and these may be disposed in Groopes so as to have a very good effect . . . Antiques also may be admitted, and they should accompany one another in a distinct Room by themselves’ (ff. 27–28).

The last conjures a domestic ambience which by the 1770s was firmly established in England.²⁴

Only on one occasion was the source of a statue specifically identified: ‘the Fleaing [Fлаяing] of St: Bartholomew at Milan [is] designed for this place’ (f. 28) (Fig. 3). The circumstances of this choice – a



Fig. 3: Marco D’Agrate, ‘St. Bartholomew Flayed’, 16th century, in the Duomo, Milan, Italy (from F.M. Valeri, *Milano*, part II, Bergamo, 1906, p. 62)

unique reference to a particular work of historical European sculpture which Hanbury may never have actually seen, since there is no record of him travelling abroad – while enigmatic, might be explained by its celebration in travel accounts.²⁵ Nor is Milan Cathedral (founded 1386) without direct relevance since it not only measures 500 feet long by 350 feet high (of comparable magnitude to Hanbury’s Church) and contains well over 3,000 external and internal statues, but by the eighteenth century had been at the centre of a centuries-long European debate regarding the relative merits of choosing either Gothic or Classical for ecclesiastical

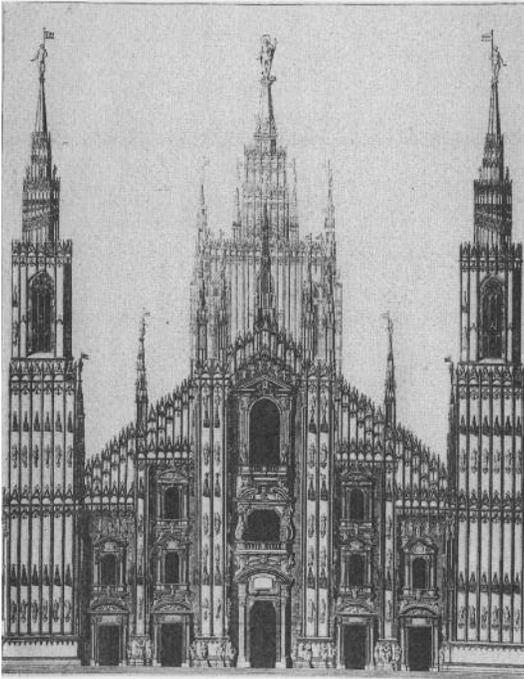


Fig. 4: C. Buzzi, design for the west façade of the Duomo, Milan, Italy, c.1645, engraving in J. Blaeu, *Civitatium et admirandum Italia* (Holland, 1724), detail

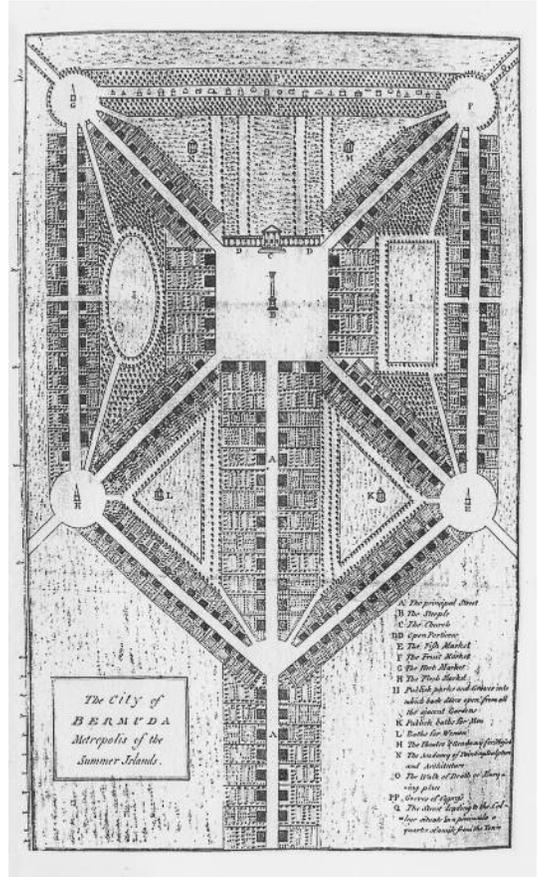


Fig. 5: George Berkeley, ‘The City of Bermuda Metropolis of the Summer Islands’, c.1720s, engraving, in *Works*, 1784

buildings, with some of the schemes for completing the west front incorporating vigorous sculpture programmes published as engravings, which can hardly have escaped Hanbury’s attention (Fig. 4).²⁶

The idea of a British cleric envisioning a formally planned urban utopia was not without precedent either. The philosopher and Anglican Bishop of Cloyne, George Berkeley (1685–1753) drew up a proposal in the late 1720’s for his university ‘City of Bermuda Metropolis of the Summer Islands’ (Fig. 5). This consisted of a ‘principal Street’ (marked A) lined on both sides with residences individually set in private gardens, leading to a central square with a free-standing steeple placed in the middle (B) and a

church flanked by open porticoes along the western side (C, D). Stretching diagonally from each corner were further streets leading to Fish, Fruit, Herb and Flesh Markets (E–H), each placed in a *rond-point*, with intervening open spaces devoted to ‘Public Parks and Groves’ (I) containing ‘Public baths for Men [and] Women’ (K, L), a ‘Theatre & Academia for Musick’ (M), ‘Academy of Painting Sculpture and Architecture’ (N), ‘Walk of Death or Burying place’ (O), ‘Groves of Cypress’ (P) and off to the south-east a ‘Street leading to the College situate in a pininsula a quarter of a mile from the Town’ (Q). This, however, was never realized.²⁷

FINANCE AND FAILURE

The utterly fantastic nature of Hanbury's Gormanghastic scheme and the impossibility of its realization must by now be self-evident to the reader; that the expediency of preserving the 'Platforme . . . in a suitable Box . . . untill that happy period arrives when it shall be wanted' (f. 12, 3) would in fact never come to pass. To a large extent this would be due to its complicated and unpractical financial structure. A significant part of the 1767–73 'Proceedings' is a commentary on calculating the costs of building work, paying salaries and fund-raising, as well as an unrealistic time-table. The Church alone was reckoned to take between 16 and 20 years to complete, exacerbated by adding £25,600 'to make up such deficiency [of] 64 Stone Masons for 16 years at 12s and 6d. per week each' and £19,200 for 64 'Laborers at 15 pence p Day'. The building estimates were dazzling, including £24,000 for the roof 'Suppose at the rate of 1000 lb for 10 yards', £12,000 for the altarpiece, £84,245 for 'Each Pillar marbled . . . 30 yards high at 10s p foot is 1620 lb: 2: 0 and 52 at that rate', £1,000 for communion plate and the same for chandeliers, bring the total cost to an astronomical £400, 273 (ff. 19–20).

Hanbury, however, admitted that the 'Particulars are estimated at a most extravagant Rate, more than they can possibly cost, and afford reason to hope that the general sum will fall vastly short' of two celebrated ecclesiastical enterprises. One was the 'Grand Church of the Escorial' near Madrid (by Juan De Herrera, 1568–84), which including 'all the decorations, Ornaments, Chapels, Images, Organs, Stalls, Paintings &c.', was reckoned to cost about £186, 645 (f. 20). It was the subject of George Thompson's *A Description of the Royal Palace, and Monastery of St. Laurence, Called The Escorial; And of the Chapel Royal of the Pantheon*, published in London in 1760 (Fig. 6).²⁸ Its cathedral-like church was at the heart of a vast network of apartments and courtyards, as was to be the case at Church Langton.

Hanbury's other example was Wren's St Paul's

Cathedral, London (1675–1710), which cost £736,752, 'more . . . than these estimates for ours'. He warned his Trustees that 'no Church should be taken for a precedent that is built at a National Expense' and 'it is feared that Tradesmen, Artificers &c. too often make them very high presents, in return for which, they receive their full price for the several articles let the real value be what it will: – these and the like practices, will ever retard the finishing of Public Buildings, which may be said to belong to everybody, and yet to nobody'. Moreover, he noted 'These observations are added to prevent any thing discouraging to the Trustees, who perhaps may be tempted to believe, the building of so pompous and magnificent a Church is beyond any estimate, and a thing that could never be accomplished' (f. 20). The choice of St Paul's is relevant because in 1755 the architect John Gwynn and engraver Samuel Wale, in an attempt at 'promoting the advancement of grandeur and elegance' in public buildings and instilling the interior with a sense of greatness if only 'the Religion of the Country allow'd *Altars* with *Statues*', issued an impressive engraved manifesto dedicated to the Prince of Wales showing the choir window embellished with a *Last Supper* of painted glass and the transept bays framing elaborate sculptural memorials to the fallen heroes of the recent Seven Years War.²⁹

The annual 'Income for the Building' was gauged at £12,000 'clear money . . . after the charges attending the Models, Designers, Committees, Stewards, Collectors, Bailiffs, Clercks, Officers &c. are deducted, in order to carry every thing on with better despatch', but revised to £13,000 as a result of savings made by redundancies of 'Officers', then upwards to £20,000 or £30,000 or 'any greater sum, which may be found equal to the largeness of the Undertaking' (ff. 8, 11–12, 1). Repairs and improvements 'for ever' were to be cared for by 'the Rent of the whole Town and the Square . . . of Houses to take in Boarders', also 'to let the Houses . . . of the Convent' (Hospital) and 'to lay a Mulct or

Payment upon every Youth belonging to this Foundation, of Two Guineas a year’ together with about 19 guineas annually, ‘which is so reasonable a sum for such good education’ (f. 12, 4).

The ‘Proceedings’ also itemized ‘The Disposition of the Revenue’ between laying the Church’s foundation-stone and ‘Finishing . . . all . . . the different Buildings’ together with ‘well fitting them up, untill the Library is sufficiently stored with Books, the Temple of Religion and Virtue with Paintings, the Museum with Curiosities &c.’. This would be allocated in sums of £1,000 each to ‘Schools’ and ‘Organs for ever’, £100 to ‘Beef for ever’, £250 to the Printing Office, £485 to the Hospital, £200 to the Physic Garden, £1,000 to the County Hospital, £2,000 each for Library books and pictures for the Temple, £1,285 for Museum curiosities, and so forth (ff. 12–13).

Annual professorial salaries for Grammar, Music, Botany, Mathematics, Antiquity and Poetry were £150 each, rising to £200 from ‘the Perfection of every individual part of the Charity to the End of the World’. In addition the Writing Master would receive

£50, the Organist £100, the Keeper of the Museum and the Painter or Keeper of the Temple £150–£200 each, the Head and Sub-Librarian £200 and £100 respectively, with £2,000 allocated towards library books and £100 allocated for ‘New Books’. Six ‘Priest Vicars’ would be paid a total of £600, ten ‘Lay Vicars, or Singing Men’ £500, eight ‘Porters’ and four ‘Sacrists’ a total of £80 respectively, eight ‘Singing Men’ £400, sixteen ‘Quiristers’ £160. Altogether the sum came to £9,015. As part of Hanbury’s egalitarian social structure, ‘Young Maids on their Marriage’ could expect £100, while ‘Women are . . . increased one shilling a week . . . Two shillings and six pence a week, being . . . found too small allowance for their comfortable subsistence’ and those ‘worth more than Fifty shillings a year are . . . granted admission into [the] Hospital’ (ff. 12–14).

On 3 October 1777 the eternally optimistic 52-year-old William Hanbury, in the certainty that his noble enterprise would continue ‘to the End of the World’, brushed aside rumours of his inability to succeed in this ‘very commendable scheme’,³⁰ and ‘began laying out the ground for his Church and



Fig. 6: T. Miller after J. Leroux, ‘Perspective View of the Escorial’ in G. Thompson, *A Description of the Royal Palace . . . Called The Escorial*, 1760, frontispiece, engraving



Fig. 7: Mausoleum at Church Langton, Leicestershire, 1778, architect unknown, demolished, engraving, in Nichols, *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* II, Part. 2 (1798), Pl. CXII, Fig. 19.

Public Buildings’; the former was accomplished two weeks later, and between 28 October and 29 November he completed all five Squares as well as the ‘Town and other Buildings’ (f. 30). Construction was about to begin in the Spring but on 1 March 1778 the Founder died. His remains were interred in a modest but handsome octangular Gothic-style mausoleum (Fig. 7), which itself survived only into the 1860’s.³¹

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NOTES

- 1 *Church Langton: a poem* (British Library, 162.1.20), reprinted on 13 March 1773 (Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland subsequently cited as ROLLR), DE 2415, f. 22.; J. Throsby, *The Supplementary Volume of Select Views in Leicestershire* (Leicester, 1792), Vol. II, pp. 353–54; J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* (Leicester, 1798), Vol. II, pt. 2, p. 691. Despite references in several contemporary and later publications, this story has attracted almost no serious attention among modern historians of Georgian architecture, town planning and sculpture.
- 2 See also W. Burton, *The Description of Leicestershire* (1777, 2nd ed.); J. Hill, *The History of the Parish of Langton* (Leicester, 1867), pp. 118–47; B. F. L. Clarke, *The Building of the Eighteenth-Century Church* (London, 1963), p. 67; J. Prophet, *Church Langton and William Hanbury* (Wyomondham, 1982); T. Friedman, *The Eighteenth-Century Church in Britain* (New Haven and London, 2011), pp. 8, 17–18, 69, 92, 250–51, 253.
- 3 ‘Hanbury . . . gave up the sum of 1500 *l.* together with a share of his plantations, in trust, for the foundation of a very large and extensive charity’: *Gentleman’s Magazine*, March 1767, p. 142. For Hanbury see *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), Vol. 25, pp. 8–9.
- 4 Delivered by the Rev. Mr Atton (London, 1767), p. 19 (Eighteenth-Century Collections Online).
- 5 ROLLR, DE 2415, f. 11 (1773).
- 6 Nichols, *op. cit.*, p. 685.
- 7 ROLLR, DE 2415, f. 9. It was originally accompanied by a keyed ‘Iconography or Platform now exhibited’ (but now untraced).
- 8 *Ibid.*, ff. 12, 17.
- 9 E. Harris and N. Savage, *British Architectural Books and Writers 1556–1785* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 375–6.
- 10 H. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600–1840* (New Haven and London, 2008), p. 829.
- 11 Price, *op. cit.*, pp. i, iii, 1, 19.
- 12 Nichols, *op. cit.*, p. 691.
- 13 Colvin, *op. cit.*, pp. 602–6, 1216; T. Friedman, ‘Henry Keene and St Mary, Hartwell’, in M. Hall, ed., *Gothic Architecture and its Meanings, 1550–1830* (Reading, 2002), pp. 134–56, and *The Eighteenth-Century Church in Britain* (New Haven and

- London, 2011), pp. 217, 221, 253–55, Docs. 96–97, 272, Pls. 167–70, 213.
- 14 R. Hyde, *The A to Z of Georgian London* (Lympne Castle, 1981), 19Aa, notably Henry Cheere.
- 15 L-F. Roubiliac charged £1,086.3.10 for one of his most expensive multi-figural Westminster Abbey monuments, commemorating John 2nd Duke of Argyll and Greenwich, in 1745–49; D. Bindman and M. Baker, *Roubiliac and the Eighteenth-Century Monument Sculpture As Theatre* (New Haven and London, 1995), pp. 286–94. Hanbury would probably have known the carefully orchestrated series of tombs in the semi-private Montagu family chancel at Warkton church, some 15 miles south-east of Langton, carved by Roubiliac, who also designed the architectural setting (pp. 298–304, 308–11, Pls. 53, IV, VI).
- 16 See Friedman, *op. cit.* (2011), Chapter Eight.
- 17 For example, Pope Clement XI and Carlo Fontana’s 1703–18 scheme in St Giovanni in Laterano to fill Borromini’s twelve nave niches of 1646–50 with over-life-size statues of the Apostles; (R. Enggass, *Early Eighteenth-Century Sculpture in Rome* (Pennsylvania State University, 1976). See M. Aston, *England’s Iconoclasts* Vol. 1 (Oxford, 1988), pp. 21, 25, 33, 115, 139–40.
- 18 Hanbury was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries: J. Evans, *A History of The Society of Antiquaries* (Oxford, 1956), p. 443.
- 19 Clare Haynes generously alerted me to this source; her insightful observations (letter to the author 27 December 2010 and subsequent conversations) are greatly appreciated.
- 20 Nichols, *op. cit.*, pp. 686–7.
- 21 A. Chalcraft and J. Viscardi, *Strawberry Hill: Horace Walpole’s Gothic Castle* (London, 2007), p. 68; M. Snodin, ed., *Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill* (New Haven and London, 2009), pp. 242–43, cat. no. 199.
- 22 Nichols, *op. cit.*, p. 687.
- 23 *Ibid.*, pp. 685–6. On 17 April 1776 at Bristol Hanbury met ‘Mr. Farrah a Capital Florist [and] found his Collection to consist of 236 sorts of Auriculas: – 600 sorts of Tulips: – Polyanter Narcissus, all the sorts: Carnation 200 kinds: – all of which were preserved in the best and most elegant state’, in September receiving a present from him of ‘some Tulips, Hyacinths, Auriculas &c.’ (f. 30).
- 24 The most celebrated example of this is Robert Adam’s Sculpture Gallery at Newby Hall, Yorkshire, 1767–74: R. Guilding, *Marble Mania: Sculpture Galleries in England 1640–1840* (London, The Soane Gallery, 2001) and ‘The Sculpture Gallery at Newby Hall’ in *Drawing from the Past: William Weddell and the Transformation of Newby Hall* (Leeds Museums and Galleries, 2004), pp. 72–91.
- 25 For example, T. Martyn, *The Gentleman’s Guide in his tour through Italy* (London, 1787), pp. 73–4. In 1787, on a visit to the Duomo, the sculptor John Flaxman noted ‘Gothic Niches in which figures stand & have most beautiful effect, in the East walk. . .the figure of St: Bartholemew’, which he criticized for its ‘stiff. . .attitude’: E. Marchand, ‘Flaxman: The British Library Journal’, *Walpole Society*, Vol. 72, (2010), p. 71.
- 26 R. Wittkower, *Gothic Versus Classic: Architectural Projects in Seventeenth Century Italy* (London, 1974), Chapters I – III, figs. 60–3, 73–4; C. de Seta, *Luigi Vanvitelli* (Napoli, 1998), pp. 252–53.
- 27 E. Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour: Anglo-Italian Cultural Relations since the Renaissance* (London and Portland, 1998), pp. 340–42, Fig. 56.
- 28 See also Anon., ‘Some Account of the Celebrated Building, called the ESCURIAL in SPAIN; from a Work just Translated’, *Gentleman’s Magazine* (October 1761), pp. 447–52.
- 29 Friedman, *op. cit.* 2011, pp. 109–12, 356, Pl. 83.
- 30 Nichols, *op. cit.*, p.685, n. 6.
- 31 Prophet, *op. cit.*, p. 101. The sophisticated quality of the Hanbury family’s architectural taste is epitomised in the surviving Neoclassical Rectory Friedman, *op. cit.* 2011, p. 69, Pl. 54.