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RETHINKING DRAWING AND OFFICE PRACTICES IN EARLY EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND: A STUDY OF WILLIAM DICKINSON'S POCKETBOOK

ELIZABETH DEANS

This article explores the drawing skills that William Dickinson (c.1671–1725) cultivated during his time working under Sir Christopher Wren through an examination of the pocketbook he used as clerk and surveyor in the first years of the eighteenth century. I apply both a material and formal analysis to investigate the essential purpose and significance of drawing in a pocketbook. And, in doing so, I offer insight into early eighteenth-century professional drawing practices, and the first scholarly article on Dickinson's career.

In 1711, Christopher Wren's son, in a letter to the Duchess of Marlborough, wrote of his father's gratitude for the invaluable assistance provided to him in the latter years of his career, by a draughtsman and surveyor named William Dickinson. He wrote that Dickinson was 'a person that has served [his] father with great fidelity, diligence, and skill'.¹ Yet the specific nature of Dickinson's architectural career remains unclear and has been generally obscured by his master's reputation. When historians have considered Dickinson, it has generally been in the context of his work under Wren at Westminster Abbey.

Dickinson's work was described by contemporaries as being 'ingenious' and 'magnificent',² and it has recently been stated that

his architectural draughtsmanship heralded modern drawing practices in England.³ Yet no scholarly article has ever been published on Dickinson's career or even his drawings.⁴ He was, like Nicholas Hawksmoor, a product of Wren's office training. But, unlike Hawksmoor who similarly trained as a clerk and went on to have his career beyond Wren's office, Dickinson has not been credited with any buildings.⁵ His skills appear to have lain in administration rather than in the design of buildings, and his career and legacy chiefly remain on paper, but his pocketbook and drawings, deepen our understanding of his unique contribution to architectural drawing.

For this article, Dickinson's pocketbook in the collection of the Bodleian Library serves as the primary focus of his career and legacy.⁶ As a cumulative source, one that Dickinson used for about five years, the pocketbook offers an opportunity to examine his role and skills developing over time. And it enriches the meaning of the drawings and the relationship between them. The drawings in the pocketbook reveal not only the tasks assigned to Dickinson by Wren, but also his approach and methodology. Ultimately, my analysis of the pocketbook demonstrates that he was uniquely tuned into the materiality of drawing through his observation of drawings themselves and especially through his extensive surveys of buildings.

INTRODUCING WILLIAM DICKINSON

In July 1691, at the age of twenty, William Dickinson (c.1671–1725) entered Wren's office as a clerk. He obtained this job because he was most likely the son of William Dickinson (d. 1702) who worked from 21 July 1660 to 1702 as the Chief Clerk of the King's Works and as Comptroller's Clerk Ingrosser (or often called penman) at Windsor Castle from 1686–1702.⁷ Though no documentary evidence survives confirming their relationship, it is highly likely that this Dickinson was William's father, especially as it was common at this time in the building trades for jobs to be passed within families, most often from father to son. If work was done well and the son proved capable in business or showed great skill at a young age, an application could be put forth for a reversionary grant, which was most often received with 'favourable consideration'.⁸ Though William Dickinson senior's role was chiefly administrative, William Dickinson junior seems to have possessed and demonstrated other, more creative, skills at a young age.⁹

In 1697, Dickinson succeeded Hawksmoor as clerk, witnessing payments and accounts for the City churches of London,¹⁰ having taken office the previous year at Greenwich as Clerk of the Works, probably working alongside his father.¹¹ Also that year, in 1696, Dickinson began assisting John Oliver, Wren's deputy surveyor, at St Paul's Cathedral by taking measurements of the building and supplying those numbers to masons, carpenters, and other workmen.¹² As part of his job as measurer, he produced measured sketches for the dome and was recorded as a draughtsman in the Cathedral office from c.1696–1701, for which he was paid ten shillings per day of work. Over the next few years, from 1699–1702, he worked with Nicholas Hawksmoor, then assisting Wren in making working drawings for the Cathedral, including the cornice of the dome and the western towers.¹³

It was not until Wren's appointment as Surveyor of the Fabric at Westminster Abbey on 11 March

1698, though, that he recruited Dickinson to complete an extensive survey of the building.¹⁴ By 1700, Dickinson started taking measurements of buildings and sites and performing clerical jobs for Wren and the then Deputy Surveyor of the Fabric, James Broughton (1697–1711).¹⁵ It was around this time that he moved house to Westminster to be closer to the surveyor's room at Westminster Abbey and the Office of Works at Scotland Yard. From 1700 he resided at No. 6 Smith Street in the parish of St Margaret Westminster, just off Deans Yard by the Abbey.¹⁶ For ten years, his role at Westminster was to survey the medieval fabric of the Abbey. From 1700–8 we find him measuring the building and witnessing payments made to the workmen,¹⁷ and in 1711, when he succeeded Broughton as Deputy Surveyor, he made design proposals for the repairs and restoration of the church.¹⁸ By this point, the demands of his high-ranking position at the Abbey and as clerk of works for Whitehall, St James and Westminster in the Royal Works prompted him to resign from his post as surveyor to the Commission for Building Fifty New Churches (held from 1711–13 August 1713) to focus on his work at Westminster.

DICKINSON'S POCKETBOOK

Dickinson's pocketbook is a rare surviving architectural object from the turn of the eighteenth century (Fig. 1).¹⁹ It is not only remarkable in its survival but it is still intact and in good condition. He probably bought the pocketbook from a London stationer's shop or, more likely, obtained it from the office's stationer.²⁰ Even for a pocketbook, which by its very nature is compact, it is quite small, measuring just 9½ cm tall by 14½ cm long made to suit the pocket.²¹ It was bound oblong (on the short side), so it is longer than it is tall. It has some elegant features for a pocketbook from the period. It was bound in fashionable acid-etched calf with two fine blind fillets (parallel lines) on the front



Fig. 1. William Dickinson's pocketbook, c.1699–1706.
(MS Gough Misc. Antiq. 17 © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford)

and back of the book and vermillion pigment (now slightly faded) was originally sprinkled on its edges for decoration.

Before discussing the content and purpose of the pocketbook, it is important to establish the use of pocketbooks more generally and how they differ from our understanding of a sketchbook. When we generally consider the act of drawing in a small blank book we are likely to think of a sketchbook, where one makes freehand drawings from observations that somehow inform the design process. Drawing outdoors is especially linked to the sketchbook. And, in sketchbooks, as we know them, ideas, problems, memories, and jottings may be set down on paper as part of a creative process. In this period, however, keeping a small blank book for recording observations or outdoor leisurely sketching was not yet an established practice. In England, in particular,

the practice of making observations of buildings in a small portable book was rare and unusual.²² The word 'sketch', which derives from the Dutch word *schets* or the Italian word *schizza*, only entered into common English parlance in the late seventeenth century.²³ And the practice of using a dedicated book for architectural 'sketches' did not become widespread until the early nineteenth century.

Those examples that predate the late eighteenth century should be understood according to the specific purpose they served. And although there is an art historical tradition to refer to objects such as Dickinson's as 'sketchbooks', as this term was not used in this period and it does not connote the specific purpose the book served. In the period, small blank books like Dickinson's would have been referred to as pocketbooks. A pocketbook may have been printed or bound up blank, as Dickinson's

was. In architectural practice, surveyors used blank pocketbooks to set down their accounts, and there were contemporary texts specifically instructing surveyors how to write in their pocketbooks.²⁴ Still, Dickinson used his pocketbook in a distinct way. His drawings were not drawn at leisure, but were the product of careful study and measured preparation – a product of his official job – and part of the process for making office drawings. Dickinson would have fundamentally understood his pocketbook as a tool for recording surveys but also a means by which he could revisit and refine drawings. Furthermore, it presented an opportunity for him to exercise his skills in draughtsmanship; the act of drawing in a pocketbook, as we will see, was very much shaped by the dimension and form of the book.

For an architect working as a surveyor like Dickinson, using a small pocketbook would have had physical and material limitations. Drawing any part of a building and setting it down on small sequential pages seems contrary to the instinctive way we want to render architectural space, and Dickinson was dealing with large scale works. Of course, drawing on a larger, flat surface of paper makes the task of plotting out architecture much easier, but within the confines of a portable book the draughtsman translates large-scale structures onto small pieces of paper. We can see early on in his use of the pocketbook how Dickinson handled this issue of scale and size of the page in his measured drawing of the 'Cornice of the first Order at St Pauls outside' for the Cathedral dome (Fig. 2). He drew a detail of the cornice on the recto and the capital and column base fitting neatly across the page on the verso, each contained on a single page. Here we also detect Dickinson's inexperienced hand attempting to render a volute, helix, and abacus flower of the Corinthian capital, handling the pencil with little confidence at this point.

But it is this physical and visual challenge – the form and small scale of his pocketbook – that was fundamentally part of the material process that



Fig. 2. Dickinson's measured drawing for the 'Cornice of the first order at St Pauls outside' of the dome, black ink over pencil, c.1701-2. (*MS Gough Misc. Antiq.* 17, f. 100r-101v © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford)

shaped Dickinson's method for thinking about and making architectural drawings. From the use of his pocketbook, we are reminded how the form and function of the book were so materially familiar to the early modern reader. Book users intuitively started at the front of the book. They worked from top to bottom, left to right, oriented images vertically to align with text, and the scale of texts and images were proportionate to the dimensions of the page. These conventions of the book were so engrained that it can be argued that the exercise of drawing (even on a blank sheet of paper) was both physically and materially linked to reading and writing.²⁵ As we will see, Dickinson engaged the form and scale of his pocketbook in surprising ways, and how he consciously used these facets of the book to draw architectural elements shows a unique way of thinking about the relationship between a sheet of paper and buildings.

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As we can expect from a surveyor's pocketbook, most pages contain plans and elevations notated with measurements and calculations, for example, of the Great Court at St James's Palace, which Dickinson surveyed for the extension of Queen Anne's apartments upon her accession to the throne in 1702 (Fig. 3).²⁶ And while this approach to taking measurements of spaces and buildings is generally expected to look this way, there are extraordinary ways in which Dickinson used his pocketbook that reveal the distinction of drawing existing buildings in a small blank book.

Although only the formative part of Dickinson's career is represented by this pocketbook, it shows concrete examples of his daily work and the drawing style that developed from it. We may safely assume that he had other pocketbooks that he used in offices and on sites that are not represented in this one (e.g. at Greenwich, and domestic works).²⁷

When Dickinson began using his pocketbook at St Paul's he started drawing from one side of the book. But shortly after this, when he began taking measurements at Westminster Abbey, he flipped the pocketbook upside-down and backward separating his drawings for St Paul's from his work at Westminster.²⁸ The drawings he made for St Paul's were in support of Hawksmoor's, but the survey drawings made for Westminster, as we will see, have an entirely different character to the simple line drawings of St Paul's and St James's Palace.

It is for this reason and the fact that his career took off there, that I focus on his drawings at Westminster Abbey rather than the other works

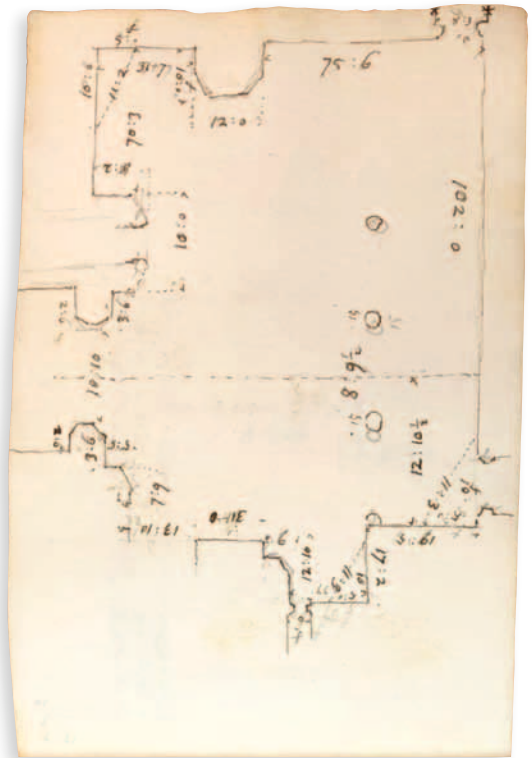


Fig. 3. Dickinson's survey of the Great Court of St James's Palace, c.1701–2. (*MS Gough Misc. Antiq.* 17, f. 88r © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford)

surveyed in his pocketbook. But, since this article is equally about introducing the previously obscure figure of Dickinson, we should briefly turn to his lesser-known works. One of these projects includes his work for Sir John Vanbrugh, for whom he surveyed the playhouse at Haymarket (f. 78v) after Vanbrugh had purchased the old theatre in c.1703.²⁹ Vanbrugh probably hired and paid Dickinson to measure the building as he was a reliable and professional surveyor working under Wren at the time.³⁰ Another project is Dickinson's survey of Somerset House from c.1706 (ff. 4v–5r), which may have been related to a problem with the site's water drainage.³¹ And finally, pencil sketches for St Bride's Fleet Street (ff. 94v–96r) and St Magnus the Martyr (f. 96v) done between 1701–3 show Dickinson drawing and measuring the City churches for work to be done on the steeples.³²

Dickinson's drawings pertaining to the jobs assigned to him overlapped in the pocketbook, indicating the synchronic nature of his work. This suggests that he moved, from site to office as part of his duties for Wren, and also how the pocketbook as an object with many pages facilitated his ability to be mobile, to move from one building to another. The portable function of his pocketbook also allows us to imagine Dickinson using his pocketbook across London, from these sites to the Office of the Works at Scotland Yard, the drawing room at St Paul's Cathedral, the surveyor's office at Westminster, and the various entertainments that followed official meetings in taverns, coffee houses, and dinners alongside fellow officers. From the evidence in the pocketbook, we can infer that Dickinson also worked on drawings in his pocketbook at home and that he stored and worked on office drawings there as well. We know this because, eight years after Dickinson's death, the Dean of Westminster requested drawings for Westminster Abbey that had been in his possession at his home on Smith Street. Dickinson's widow sold them all, including of the 'West Tower' designs (now lost), to the Dean for fifteen guineas on

17 May 1732.³³ Dickinson left his estate – including most of his drawings – to his widow except for £150, which he left to his son William.³⁴ Whether or not he actively worked on drawings at home is difficult to prove (though we know that other architects in this period did do so), and it could have been just a place to keep drawings for projects as he moved from office to office, site to site during working days.³⁵

The function of Dickinson's pocketbook first and foremost was a physical place for keeping material together. The earliest drawings in the pocketbook from St Paul's c.1700, reinforce this claim, based on the way he handled the drawings. Pasted on the last page of the pocketbook are studies for the cornices of the dome of St Paul's (Fig. 4).³⁶ Across the page are three measured delineations of the entablature of the dome that were first drawn in graphite before being carefully traced over with a fine pen.³⁷ On the upper right-hand corner of this drawing (on f. 102) is a smaller scrap of paper showing a measured detail of the 'Cornice over the Round Windows in the Towers'. This smaller paper was pasted on its left side to the larger sheet, creating a hinge so that it could be flipped over to reveal a preliminary pencil sketch on its verso. Notably, there are two discernible hands in both drawings: Hawksmoor's hand can be seen in the lines and measurements of the entablature and cornice, and Dickinson's hand in their labelling.³⁸ If we think of Dickinson assisting Hawksmoor in taking measurements and making drawings in the office, we can imagine him being responsible for the management of drawings.

After Hawksmoor produced these details, Dickinson labelled both drawings, even making a small rectangular cut-out through the larger one so that the label of the detailed drawing reading 'Inside Cornice and outside Cornice of the Dome' could be seen on the outside of the larger drawing. He then folded the larger drawing twice to fit neatly into his pocketbook for safekeeping. From his careful treatment of these perfunctory drawings

we can understand that, from the onset, Dickinson approached drawing from an administrative point of view, working as a clerk and ordering, keeping, and labelling office drawings to store for future use. Although this may seem insignificant, it is not: the pocketbook materialises the process through which Dickinson's experience as an office clerk fundamentally informed how he went on to make drawings.

SURVEYING THE ABBEY

Between 1698 and 1699 Wren recruited Dickinson to assist with the surveying of Westminster Abbey.³⁹ From 1700 to 1706, Dickinson spent significant time inspecting the state of Westminster Abbey

and reporting his findings to Wren. These surveys were fundamental in preparation for what Wren considered the 'fair Steps in the Reparation of that ancient and ruinous Structure' that he undertook as Surveyor of the Fabric before he wrote his official Report on the Abbey for Dean Atterbury in 1713.⁴⁰ Wren must have placed great trust in Dickinson at this point, since the work of a measurer of the 'ancient and ruinous Structure', was critical in his support of Wren and Broughton, and in providing accurate measurements to make precise estimates for work and materials.⁴¹ Dickinson gave these measurements to workmen, including masons, ropemakers, carpenters, glaziers, smiths, and plumbers (all of whom worked under Fabric Orders on site) so that they could estimate labour and costs and quantities of materials and also to artisans, who had

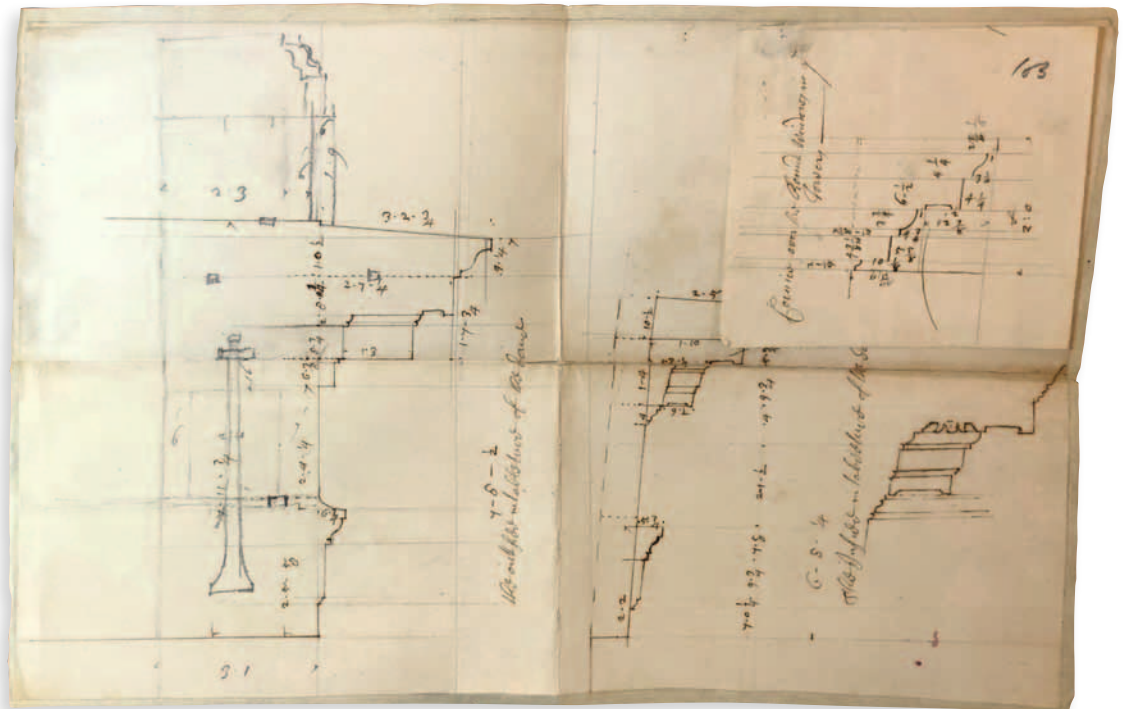


Fig. 4. Hawksmoor's drawings for the entablature of the dome of St Paul's Cathedral, c.1699–1702, dark brown ink over pencil. (*MS Gough Misc. Antiq.* 17, f. 102.

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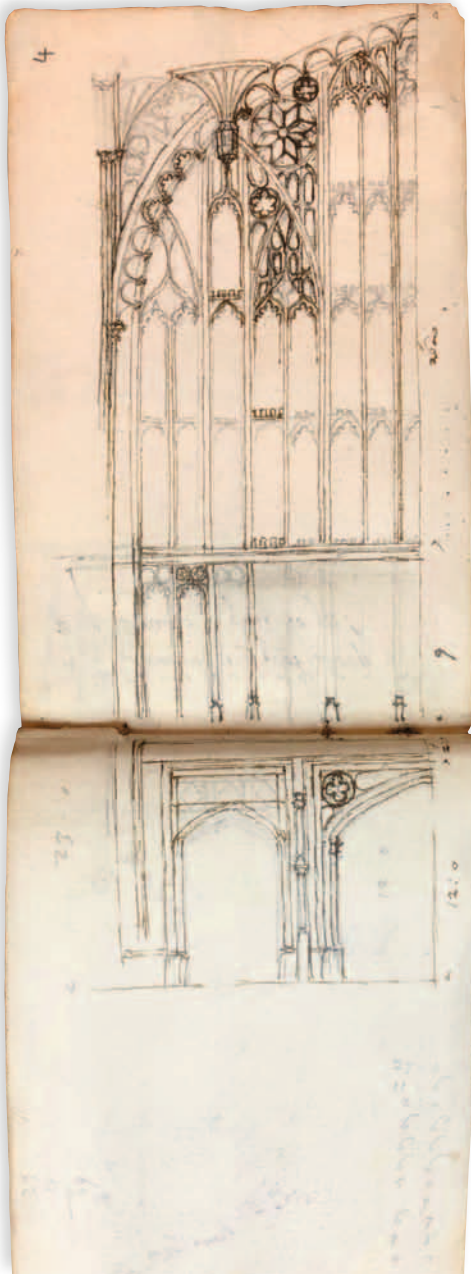


Fig. 5. Survey of the Henry VII Chapel interior looking east. (*MS Gough Misc. Antiq.* 17, ff. 3v-4r. © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford)

work at the Abbey. What resulted from Dickinson's surveyorship in the first decade of the eighteenth century was used to inform the Dean and Chapter and to 'set down what is necessary for compleating the Repairs'.⁴² The drawings in Dickinson's pocketbook that follow come from this period.

For about nine months (from Michaelmas 1700 to midsummer 1701) Dickinson began surveying Henry VII's Chapel (the Lady Chapel), starting inside during the colder season and working his way to the exterior of the early sixteenth-century fabric in the spring and summer months.⁴³ One of the first spaces he measured in his pocketbook was the east end of the Chapel interior (Fig. 5). In an orthogonal 'upright' of the Chapel, Dickinson drew the stained-glass window, window tracery, the pointed arches on the lower level, and a portion of the pendant fan vault ceiling. As he carefully made this drawing with a pencil in hand, we might imagine Dickinson in the nave of the Chapel with a plumb line, rope, and protractor equipped to measure the heights of space. To plot the full height of the walls on the small pages of his pocketbook, he ran his pencil across the gutter of the book, stretching the lines from one page over to the facing page. At the bottom of the drawing (on f. 3v) he recorded the height of each level, adding it up to reach a total height of 74 feet, 2 inches. After taking measurements, he returned to his pencil study with a fine-nibbed pen. With black ink, he ran the pen over his grey lines, defining the delicate tracery, cusping, and quatrefoils, expressing the finest details of the high-Gothic ornament. In one sense, the exercise of tracing his pencil marks in pen was to ensure nothing rubbed out; in another, it shows Dickinson's pleasure in making a drawing.

In 1702 Dickinson returned to the inside of the Chapel to take measurements of one of the bays of the side aisles designated for the tomb monument for William and Mary. The project was ordered, and Grinling Gibbons was chosen to design and sculpt the monument.⁴⁴ It was then Dickinson's task to provide Gibbons with accurate measurements of the

intended space. To do so, he first made a cursory pencil sketch with annotations for the height, width, and depth of elevation and plan to correspond below it. At some point, the two men must have conferred over the design and measurements of the bay, for a drawing of Gibbons's design was made by Dickinson and inserted into the pocketbook (Fig. 6). This demonstrates that Dickinson must have seen some version of the design for the monument, perhaps the extant, highly finished design drawing (Fig. 7) or an earlier version of it.⁴⁵ His study of the monument was probably taken so that Dickinson could make a plan of the design. He did this by interleaving the drawing between the sketchy pencil drawing and a blank page. He first would have cut the paper scrap down to fit neatly into his pocketbook; then he affixed the paper with red sealing wax (often called wafer in the period), overlaying the monument in front of the elevation, as it were, as if he were fitting it into the space of the aisle itself, between wall and plan. Then, with pencil, he drew a fine line down the centre of the monument across the blank page to draw a corresponding plan at the same scale as the monument.⁴⁶ Dickinson's exercise in copying, cutting, and pasting Gibbons's design into his pocketbook is evidence of his working out how the monument would occupy a physical space between the floor and wall of the Chapel, since the paper was physically inserted between the pages in the book (Fig. 8). In doing so, he diligently observed Gibbons's technique and assimilated aspects of it which we can see plainly in his version of the monument. Gibbons's approach to drawing imitates his skill in carving wood and marble. He combined separate applications of brown and black inks with subtle and bold washes effecting an intense contrast of light and shadow, form, and mass. Dickinson's imitation of these techniques is clearly discernible despite the small scale and incomplete nature of his study. Not only this but these steps in layering materials—both paper and pigments—make for vivid drawings that enhance structural elements that define

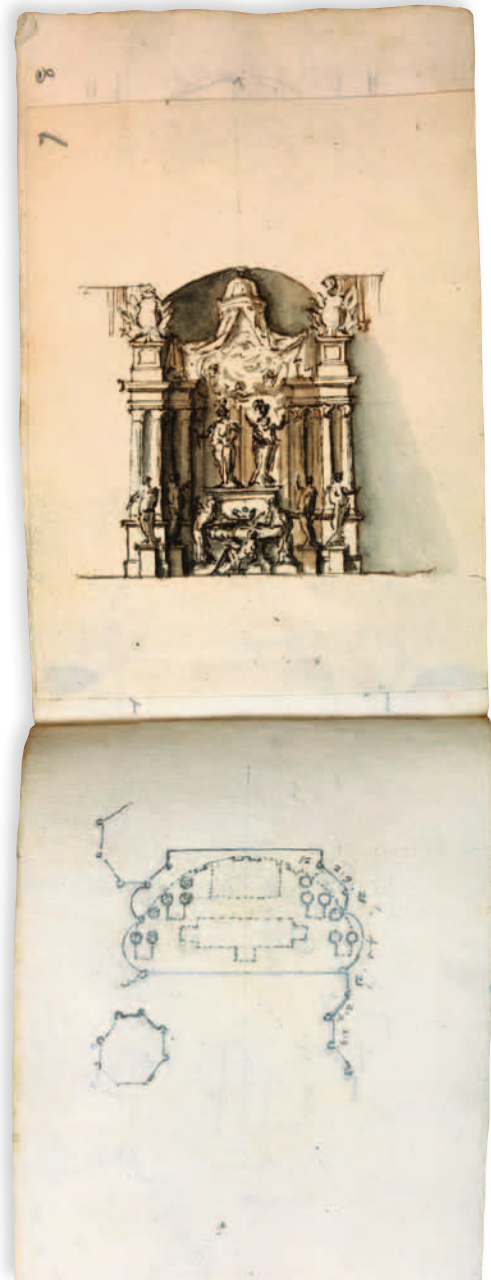


Fig. 6. Dickinson's copy of Gibbons' Design for a Monument (recto) with corresponding plan (verso), black and brown ink and wash over pencil, c.1702. (*MS Gough Misc. Antiq. 17, ff. 6v-7r.* © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford)



Fig. 7. Grinling Gibbons's Design for a Monument for King William III & Queen Mary II for the Henry VII Chapel (unexecuted), c.1702, brown ink and wash on paper. (© *The Trustees of the British Museum*)

his later drawings and in particular, as we will see, in the highly accomplished draughts he made for Westminster Abbey. For this reason, this miniature copy of Gibbons's drawing marks an overlooked office practice, one that must have occurred regularly; for it documents a precise moment of collaboration

when Dickinson, working as a surveyor, adopted techniques from a prominent artisan.

Dickinson also completed a detailed survey of the exterior of the Abbey church. Two tasks he carried out were inspecting the series of structures on the north side of the site and taking down measurements

of the diameters of the pillars and intercolumniation in the nave of the church. Both jobs were critical in Wren's understanding of the sources causing structural issues in the historic fabric and were crucial information in his study and solution for the crossing tower and spire.⁴⁷ Before undertaking his extensive survey, Dickinson drew the entire plan of the Abbey across two pages of his pocketbook (Fig. 9). Instead of drawing it from scratch, he copied Wenceslaus Hollar's 1654 print of the ground plan of the Abbey (a set of prints that had been used in the office),⁴⁸ scaling it down to fit into his pocketbook (Fig. 10). After surveying the site, Dickinson returned to the office to set down his numbers and observations in his pocketbook. He applied coloured washes and used different hatching techniques to signify different parts of the site: the red wash indicates areas 'so



Fig. 8. Dickinson's copy of Gibbons's Design for a Monument pasted between elevation and plan of Henry VII Chapel side aisle. (*MS Gough Misc. Antiq.* 17, ff. 6v–8r. © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford)

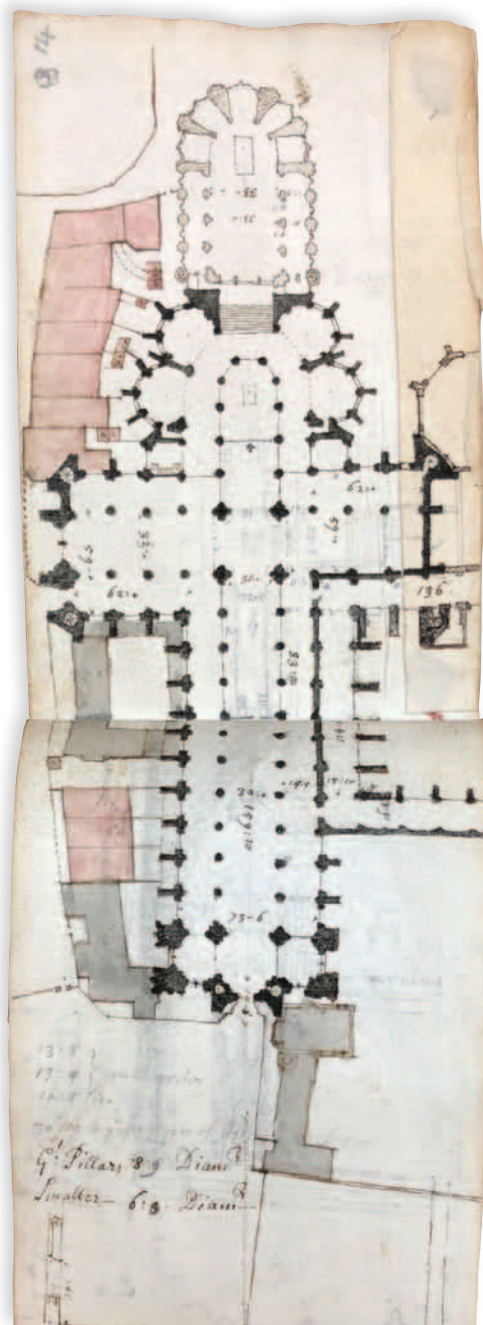


Fig. 9. Survey of the Abbey fabric, pen and dark ink over pencil with washes in grey and pale red. (*MS Gough Misc. Antiq.* 17, f. 13v–14r. © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford)

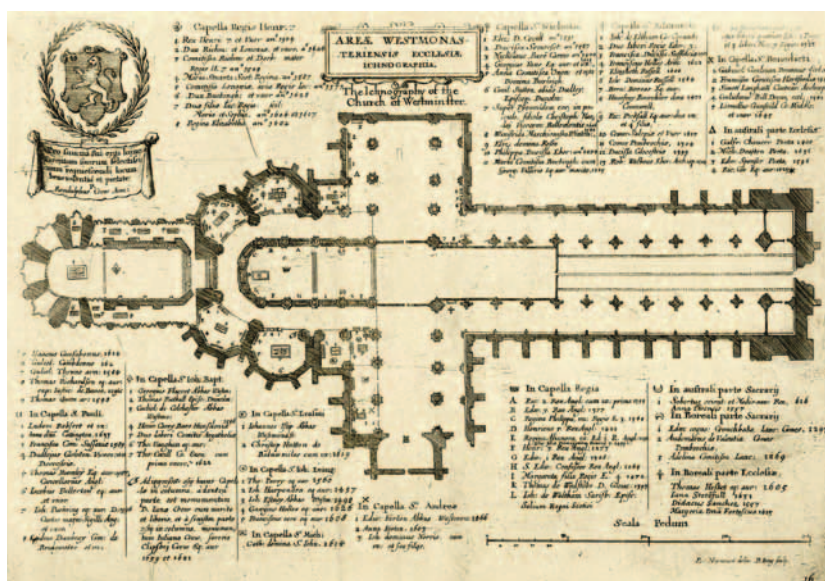


Fig. 10. Wenceslaus Hollar's drawing of the ground plan of Westminster Abbey, noting the location of the monuments and tombs in the chapels to the left; the plan surrounded by corresponding keys; illustration to a later edition of William Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum*, (1655), Vol. 1. (© The Trustees of the British Museum)



Fig. 11. Pietro Fabris, *View of Westminster Abbey from the north with Hawksmoor's proposed steeple*, c.1735-40, oil on canvas. (© Dean and Chapter of Westminster)

incumbered with private Tenements, which obscure and smoke the Fabrick, not without danger of firing it.⁴⁹ These buildings had been built along the north side of the Abbey, which Wren wrote about in his report, stating that:

‘the Houses on the North-side are so close, that there is not Room left for the raising of Scaffolds and Ladders, nor for Passage for bringing Materials: besides, the Tenants taking every Inch to the very Walls of the Church to be in their Leases, this Ground already too narrow, is divided as the Backsides to Houses, with Washhouses, Chimnies, Privies, Cellars, the Vaults of which if indiscreetly dug against the Foot of a Butress, may inevitably ruin the Vaults of the Chapels (and indeed I perceive much Mischief is already done, by the Opening of the Vaults of the octagonal Chapel on that Side) and unless effectual Means be taken to prevent all Nusances of this Sort, the Works cannot proceed, and if finished, may soon be destroyed.’⁵⁰

The threat, identified by Wren, that this series of houses posed to the Abbey is reflected in Dickinson's red wash. It calls attention to the position of the structures along the north front, which can be seen in Pietro Fabris's 'View of Westminster' (Fig.11),⁵¹ showing the runoff from washrooms, privies, and drains that ran directly into the buttresses of the Abbey.⁵² The areas washed in grey in Dickinson's plan (Fig. 12) show the sacristy linking the north transept and the nave, and the fourteenth-century structures including the Jerusalem Chamber at the west front and part of the old Abbots' lodgings off Tothill Street; they were 'not very graceful', according to Wren's report, and are indicated by the application of grey wash.⁵³ Similarly, the walls of Henry VII's Chapel are hatched with fine black lines indicating the sixteenth-century fabric and the walls of the nave, transept, choir, altar, and presbytery have a saturated poché of black ink marking the thirteenth-century structure. When he ran out of paper to draw the extension of the south transept and chapter house, Dickinson pasted a scrap of paper with red wax to

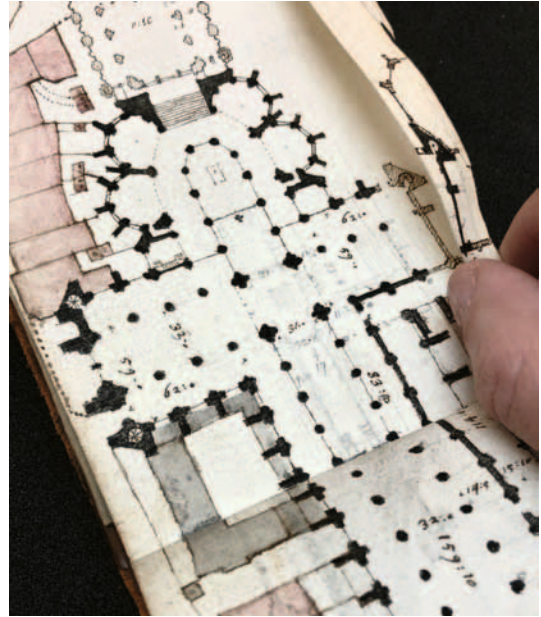


Fig. 12. Survey of the Abbey fabric (detail).

(*MS Gough Misc. Antiq. 17, f. 14r.*

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expand the page. Though only a fragment of that attached paper remains, the fold and the partial plan that extends on it are evidence of the larger plan that has since been torn and lost. We must imagine that on this extension Dickinson drew the fourteenth-century chapter house, refectory, large cloister, and the smaller cloister, all of which he surveyed in the first decade of the eighteenth century.⁵⁴ As a primary document of the condition of the Abbey affected by surrounding buildings and the dimensions of the historic building, the survey was essential for the production of further drawings in the office, and was consulted over time.⁵⁵

Dickinson was also tasked with examining and measuring the flying buttresses of Henry VII's Chapel, whose deterioration was a matter of concern. We know that the 'topp' of the Chapel was partially restored sometime between 1669–1671 under masons William Moxam and Thomas Channel.⁵⁶



Fig. 13. Measured survey of 'A Springer of ye G[reat] West Windows'. (*MS Gough Misc. Antiq.* 17, ff.12v-13r. © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford)

But the flying buttresses made of the same 'tender caen-stone' of the Chapel were 'so eaten up by [the] Weather' that they posed a concern to Wren.⁵⁷ Dickinson evaluated one of the flying buttresses on ff. 12v-13r (Fig. 13). When it came time to draw the buttress, he used the same space in his pocketbook to illustrate one buttress as he did the entire plan of the Abbey church. After taking down measurements he drew in pencil a plan of a window (on the west face), a section of the mullions, details of the Gothic panelling, and an elevation of one of the buttresses with open foiled tracery inside. He returned to the pages with a brush, laying a thin layer of grey wash over the arch buttress. Then, with a fine pen and black ink, he carefully traced over the measurements and labels and outlined the faint pencil lines enhancing the undulating geometries of Gothic moulding, crockets, and tracery. The evidence of the prick marks at the centre of each quatrefoil shows that Dickinson used a compass and pen to draw the annular lines around. This approach would have taken a significant length of time and demonstrates his diligence in making details correct, rather than simply tracing over his graphite lines freehand. Dickinson applied the same rigour to his measured study of the buttress, resulting in a striking drawing.

What is also made clear by this drawing is Dickinson's discerning eye and his proficiency in translating the substance of the building onto a flat page in his pocketbook. His technique for controlling his pen and making fine lines in this particular drawing plainly expresses the delicacy of the Gothic ornament of the Chapel, which, as Hawksmoor later described to the Dean of Westminster, was 'so tender that one cannot tell how to brush down the Cobwebbs'.⁵⁸ We must infer his technique as one linked to his familiarity with the building, its ornament and form, from his experience surveying the fabric.⁵⁹ It also underlines his developing knowledge of architecture, for his earlier drawing of the Chapel interior does not show as strong a grasp of the Gothic forms and,

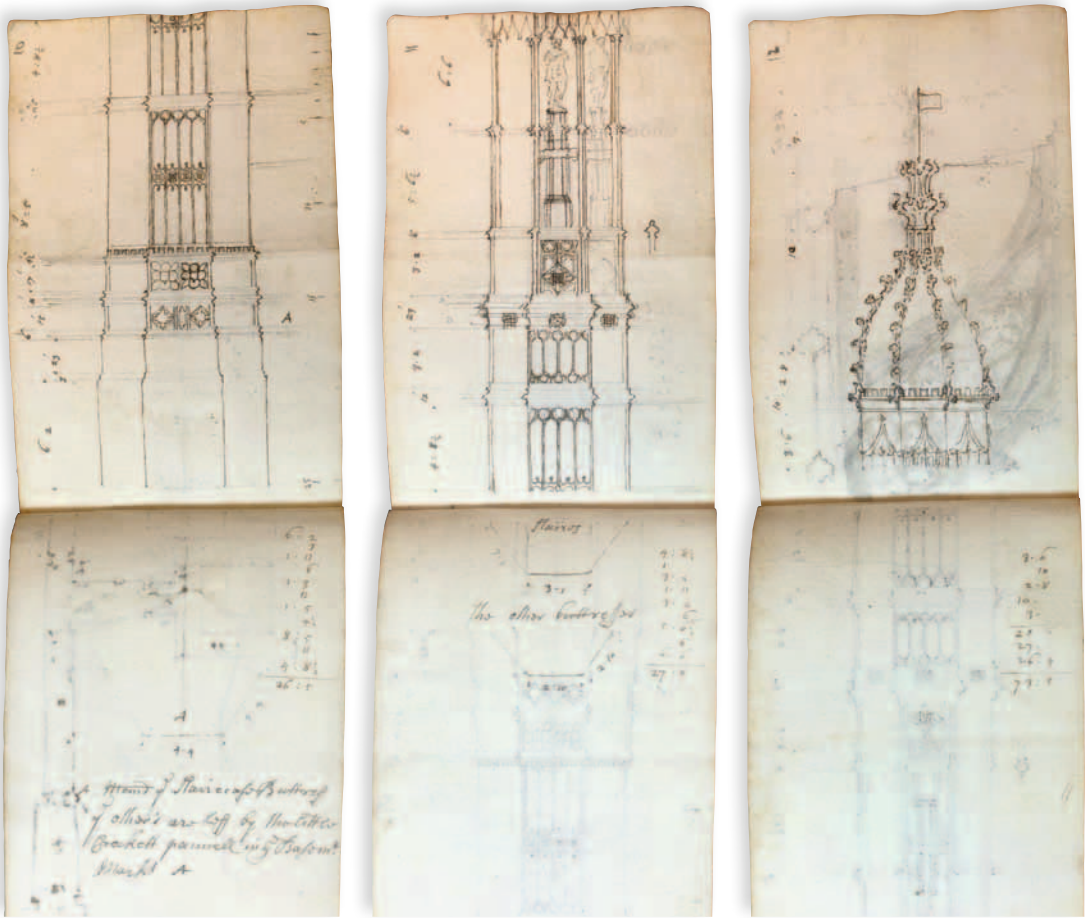
even before that, to refer back to his drawing of the Corinthian order, his ability to articulate elements of a Corinthian capital show the hand of someone unversant with classical form. But time looking at the Gothic structure and its defining features, like the crockets, furnished him with a masterful vocabulary of the Gothic manner, which, for example, he and Wren integrated into their design for the pinnacles of the north front since they exemplified 'good Use, as well as agreeable Ornament'.⁶⁰

But when it came time to measure and draw the Chapel's polygonal turrets (Fig. 14), Dickinson

took a very different approach. Rather than drawing across two pages of the book as he did with the plan and the buttress, he stretched the lines of the elevation on the recto of three consecutive pages. On ff. 10–13 he made an orthogonal line drawing of the three facing sides of the polygonal turrets (Figs. 15–17). As with the plan of the Abbey, drawn from Hollar's print, he did not make this drawing on site. The controlled parallel pencil lines under his lines in pen indicate that he must have made this drawing at a table. This means that he roughed out a cursory drawing on wastepaper while taking



Fig. 14. South exterior elevation of the Henry VII Chapel showing polygonal turrets.
(Photo: Author)



Figs. 15–17. Consecutive measured drawings of the Henry VII Chapel domed turrets, c.1700–2, dark brown ink over pencil. (*MS Gough Misc. Antiq.* 17, ff. 10r–12r.
© Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford)

measurements on site before plotting down the refined elevation we see in his pocketbook. He also worked out the heights of the turrets before making his drawing, dividing the turret in half, drawing the lower half on the first page, the upper portion on the second page, and the crocketed dome surmounting the turret on the third page. Finally, he intentionally positioned the elevations to rise from the gutter of the book, which acted as the ground line of the turret. By orienting the elevation and plan on the gutter in this way, when he held or moved the book

(as he customarily would have done) the volume of the turret became more apparent (Fig. 18). By rendering the height of the turret in this meticulous way, from the ground up, across a sequence of pages, and communicating with its plan, he could maintain the legibility of the measurements for later reference, and also convey the form of the building through that of the book, something that speaks of the novel graphic practices we find in Wren's office during this period.⁶¹

CONCLUSION

About five years after surveying Westminster Abbey, in February 1711, Dickinson succeeded Broughton as Deputy Surveyor of the Fabric and as Surveyor to the Dean and Chapter of Westminster. In this dual appointment, he was responsible for the remaining repair works, including the north transept and the crossing tower, which was never built.⁶² It was also during the final decade of his career that his skill as a draughtsman was fully expressed. I turn finally to an office drawing of the exterior of Henry VII's Chapel of around 1720 (Fig. 19). Though not the most

sophisticated or complete of Dickinson's drawings, it is a drawing of an existing building he knew intimately, and one that epitomises what he learned by working as a clerk and surveyor at the Abbey in those first years of the eighteenth century.

The drawing shows two of the polygonal turrets that Dickinson had measured and drawn in his pocketbook about fifteen years earlier.⁶³ As he drew the whole of it, he would have referred to earlier drawings and measurements, including the one he set down in his pocketbook. He would have read the measurements on each page, transferring the correct dimensions, increasing the scale onto the larger sheet of paper. In the process of transferring the turrets to the larger drawing, he would have flipped the pages of his pocketbook as a means of seeing the complete drawing. Just as his study of Gibbons's monument design was inserted between wall and plan, the page represented space, and, in this case, described the height of the Chapel's turrets. After charting the scale and measurements of the drawing in pencil, he used his parallel ruler to lay the Chapel's underlying structure before applying layers of wash.

When we focus on a section of this drawing (Fig. 20), we can recover Dickinson's process for making it. After drafting the skeleton of the drawing in pencil, he returned to the paper to touch it with brush and ink, transforming the flat lines into a solid mass. First, with a wide brush in hand, he laid down several fine washes, defining the glazing between the stone tracery. Then, he used a smaller brush dipped in carbon black wash to contour the left edges of the tracery, casting a dark shadow underneath, giving depth to the stone tracery as though it is coming off the paper. With a lighter wash, he dabbed his brush along the right side of each crocket and around the faces and drapery of the sculptures using their shadows to give them form. And finally, once the surface of the paper was dry, he went back over the drawing with a fine nibbed pen dipped lightly in ink. With his pen he carefully outlined the dense grid of panelling, cusps, and crockets of the ogee domes.

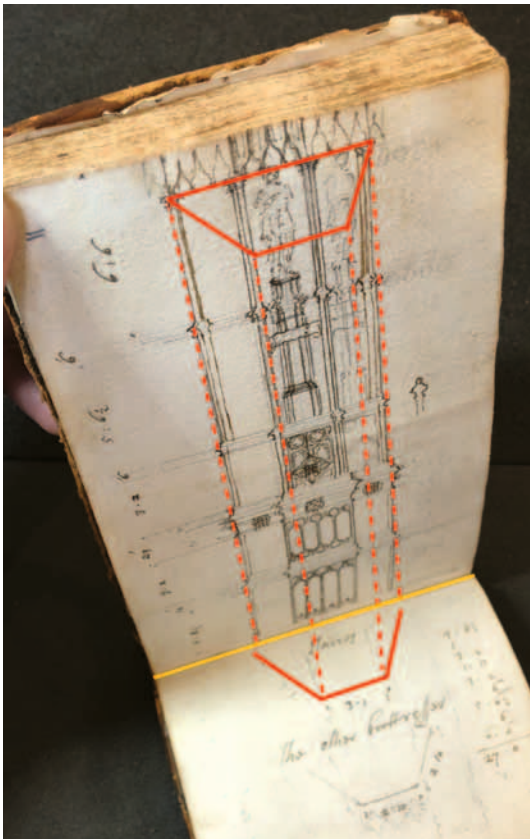


Fig. 18. Corresponding plan and elevation of the middle section of Henry VII Chapel turrets, c.1700–2, dark brown ink over pencil. (*MS Gough Misc. Antiq.* 17, ff. 10v–11r. © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford)

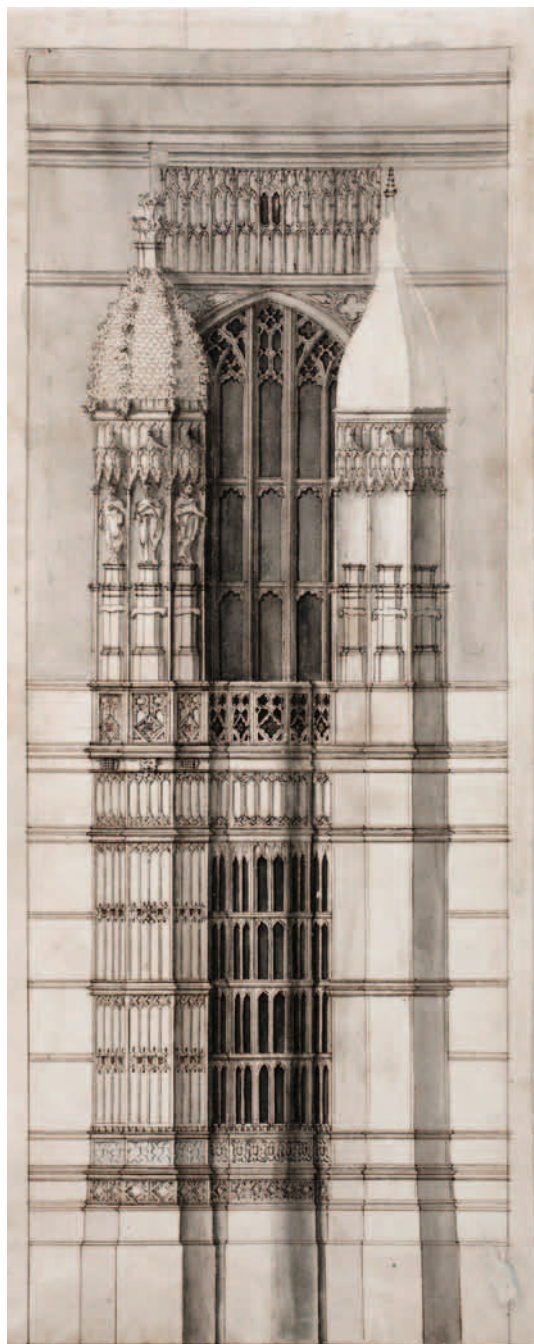


Fig. 20. Detail of Dickinson's drawing of the crocketed cone of the polygonal turrets of the Henry VII chapel, black and brown ink and grey wash over pencil, no date. (*WAM(P)* 913A. © *Dean and Chapter of Westminster*)

Fig. 19. Dickinson's (unfinished) office drawing of the exterior elevation of bay and buttresses of the Henry VII chapel, black and brown ink and grey wash over pencil, no date. (*WAM(P)* 913A. © *Dean and Chapter of Westminster*)

But when it came to the wild beast crockets and the sculptures, he only lightly suggested shape with partial contours rather than flattening the figures with complete lines. These traces of Dickinson's hand bring us back to his pocketbook drawings for Westminster Abbey. This later drawing evokes his measured survey of one of the flying buttresses, vitalised by wash, pen, and compass. It also speaks to the intensely inky wash and delicate strokes of line of his drawing of Gibbons's royal monument.

Most of all, Dickinson was able to articulate on paper how his contemporaries viewed and understood the Chapel. John Evelyn likened the exterior to '*Lace and other Cut-work, and Crinkle Crankle*',⁶⁴ and Wren regarded it as 'a nice embroidered Work'.⁶⁵ Both observations on the surface and ancient texture of the Abbey are manifest in Dickinson's drawing. What he described in brush and pen describes Wren's report of the 'tender Caen-stone'. But his mastery of drawing is not only apparent in his skill and techniques in material. His ability to convey the character of architecture on paper evolved from his experience of the rigorous processes of documenting the extensive site, inclusive of its five-hundred-year-old walls, modern tenements, sculpture, ornament, and structure. Its scale commanded his exacting approach to translating the whole of it into the confines of his small pocketbook, and then back into office drawings, that would be deployed in the repair work that Wren set out.

The pocketbook serves as a map that charts this complex operation and, more broadly, traces the formation of Dickinson's career from a humble clerk at St Paul's to master draughtsman at Westminster Abbey. Dickinson's pocketbook and the drawings in it, shed light on a figure who remained in Wren's shadow for so many years, but most of all, it reveals in detail the practices which surveyors used for recording, interpreting, and understanding major buildings in the early eighteenth century.

ENDNOTES

- 1 British Library (hereafter BL), Add. MS 61357, ff. 11–12. See H.M. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1600–1840* (New Haven and London, 2008), pp. 311–2.
- 2 John Dart, *History of St Peter's Westminster*, (1723), 2 vols, p. 58.
- 3 See Gordon Higgott's thorough description of Dickinson's draughtsmanship, which includes his tendency to date his office drawings (especially after 1706), a clear methodical approach to keeping office drawings. See Higgott, 'Wren and his draughtsmen at St Paul's' (hereafter Higgott, St Paul's Catalogue online) <https://www.stpauls.co.uk/history-collections/the-collections/architectural-archive/wren-office-drawings/wren-and-his-draughtsmen>
- 4 Dickinson's career is outlined in Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary*, pp. 311–2. Dickinson's work as a draughtsman has most closely been examined in Higgott, 'St Paul's Catalogue online' and in the archive of the Westminster Abbey Muniments and Library. Some research (mostly summarised by Colvin) was undertaken by Timothy Benton for his graduate dissertation 'The Architecture of William Dickinson Junior' (London: Courtauld Institute, 1969). His work on the repairs later in his career are outlined in Timothy Benton, 'Wren, Dickinson, and the Westminster Abbey Repairs', in 'A Gothick Symposium' held by the Georgian Group at the Victoria and Albert Museum on 21 May 1983.
- 5 He does have some domestic designs on paper: see Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 312.
- 6 Catalogued in Falconer Madan, *Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1897), Vol. IV, p. 165.
- 7 H.M. Colvin, ed. *The History of the King's Works* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1976) Vol. V, 1660–1782 (hereafter HKW), pp. 31–2, 345–6, 471; Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 311.
- 8 HKW, p. 27.
- 9 *Ibid*, p. 31.
- 10 Anthony Geraghty, *The Architectural Drawings of Sir Christopher Wren* (Lund Humphries: Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2007), p. 13.

- 11 Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 311.
- 12 Arthur T. Bolton and H. Duncan Hendry (eds.), *Wren Society*, Vol. XV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938: hereafter *WS*), p. 69. Payments were made 'To Wm Dickinson. For Assisting Mr Oliver 98 days Measuring Masons, Carpenter, Plaisteres, Joiners & Carver's Work &c, Mm. 1696 to Mm 1700 & not before brought to Account at 10s per diem.
- 13 See Bodleian, MS Gough Misc Antiq. 17, ff. 99–103. For an essay on the office drawings for the dome, see: Anthony Gerbino and Stephen Johnston, *Compass and Rule: Architecture as Mathematical Practice in England, 1500–1750* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 97–110.
- 14 *WS*, XV, pp. 9–11.
- 15 The payment of £20 for 'assisting in taking measurements, making up and making the bills of this several Artificers employed at Saint Peters Westminster from Michas 1700 into Midsummer 1702'. MS Westminster Abbey Muniments (hereafter WAM) 34501, f. 84. He was paid annually at mid-summer until 1706 when he took a salary from Westminster 'for measuring and making up the Bills of the Fabrick for Ditto' (which is for three quarters of a year Due Christmas 1706), for which he was paid £15. In comparison, Sr Christopher Wren as the 'Knt Surveyor' was paid £75 and Broughton as Under-Surveyor was paid £37: WAM 34511, f. 5v.
- 16 From a letter to Dean Atterbury, 'Dickinson at No. 6 in Smith Street Westminster': see WAM 62000A and WAM 51551, f. 15. He lived here with his wife Elizabeth, renting their home from a Sir Robert Smith until at least August of 1719 and until his death in January 1724/5.
- 17 He signed payments for Bricklayers, Smiths, Carpenters, Plumbers, Masons, Labourers, Ropemakers, Glaziers, Charcoal: WAM 34511, f. 26v.
- 18 Dickinson appointed 'undersurveyor' to the Dean and Chapter of Westminster. His stipend for [a half year] £25: WAM 34511, f. 68v.
- 19 Bodleian, MS Gough Misc. Antiq. 17. The provenance of Dickinson's pocketbook is vague. We know that it came to the Bodleian Library in May 1809 after the death of leading antiquarian Richard Gough (21 Oct 1735–20 Feb 1809): see Madan, *Summary Catalogue*, p. 165, 'Included in a miscellaneous collection of copies of inscriptions (on sculptured stones, monuments, seals, bells &c.), epitaphs and the like, with papers relating to them, partly printed, many illustrated by drawings.' It was catalogued with a group of 'manuscripts, printed books, and pamphlets, prints and drawings, maps, copperplates relating to British Topography', and some printed and some illustrated, which were supposed to be kept in his 'Antiquaries Closet': see Bernard Nurse, *London: Prints & Drawings before 1800* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2017), p. 7. It came to the Bodleian by one of two sales, from 5 April 1810 or 19 July 1810 where the contents of the *Museum Goughianum* were sold off, the catalogues for which have been lost. It was catalogued by Falconer Madan as 'An Architect's notebook of plans and architectural details of buildings apparently in London (Westminster abbey, &c): much of the volume is blank': Madan, *Summary Catalogue*, p. 165. Some time in the early twentieth century the pocketbook was identified as 'Wm. Dickinson's', which was hand-written into the Weston Library's catalogue in a twentieth-century hand. Most likely the pocketbook was identified as William Dickinson's during the research for the Wren Society's publications in the early twentieth century. Several years after Dickinson's death on 20 May 1732 his son submitted the drawings kept in his home to the Dean of Westminster. His pocketbook may have been among the drawings now kept at Westminster Abbey.
- 20 I explore this more deeply later in the article, but this is known from the earlier drawings from the dome of St Paul's Cathedral (ff. 103), which were done c.1699–1701.
- 21 It measures just under the standard *trigesimo-secondo*, or 32mo, size (3½ x 5½ inches).
- 22 Cf. to Inigo Jones's 'Roman Sketchbook' at Chatsworth is one example which derives from Italian practice: see Edward Chaney, *Inigo Jones's Roman Sketchbook* (Roxburghe Club, 2006).
- 23 The term 'sketch' as both a verb and an object most likely derived from the Dutch word *schets*. By the mid-17th century, the Dutch term *schets* and German word *Skizze* were often used. Nicholas Hawksmoor, for example, used the term *scizza* from the Italian word *schizzo* or the verb *schizzare*, to make a sketch.

- 24 E.g. 'How to set down Dimensions in your Pocket Books' in Venterus Manderey, *Mellicifum Mensionis; or, the Marrow of Measuring* (London: Printed for Thomas Hawkins, 1685), p. 225.
- 25 Sir Roger Pratt wrote on this subject in his notebooks. In one instance he wrote: 'In preparing an architectural sketch the best way of drawing is from the top downwards to preserve the cleanness of the drawing'. Though he does not explicitly connect architectural drawing to the act of reading or writing, the way the body performs in relationship to the materials or writing and drawing dictates the process of both: see R.T. Gunther, *Architecture of Sir Roger Pratt*, (Oxford, 1928), p. 8.
- 26 Bodleian, MS Gough Misc. Antiq. 17, ff. 87v–88r. See National Archives, Work 6/12, ff. 172v–73r and WS, VII, pp. 210–2 for Wren's estimate for the remodelling of Queen Anne's apartments from 3 July 1702, the drawings for which are catalogued in Geraghty, *Architectural Drawings of Sir Christopher Wren*, pp. 162–6.
- 27 From this table we can also see that Dickinson's earliest drawings of St Paul's from the late 1690s are at the back of the book, indicating that the pocketbook was catalogued in reverse.
- 28 The use of the book in this way is called 'Tête-a-tête', or head-to-head. Working from opposite ends of the book explains why the centre of the pocketbook (ff. 15–78) are left blank.
- 29 His involvement must have been measuring the space from the annotation Dickinson wrote in: 'Play House in the Haymarket 50^{ft} high to the Ceiling', f. 78v.
- 30 For the drawing and annotation for the 'Play House at Haymarket', see f. 78v. For more on Vanbrugh's theatre design, see chapter 'Towards a new theatre' in Kerry Downes, *Vanbrugh*, pp. 253–71. See also Richard Leacroft's chapter 5 'The Fan-shaped Auditorium' in *The Development of the English Playhouse* (Methuen Publishing, 1988), pp. 99–104 and Graham F. Barlow, 'Vanbrugh's Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket, 1703–9', *Early Music* 17, no. 4 (1989), pp. 515–21.
- 31 Bodleian, MS Gough Misc. Antiq. 17, ff. 4v–5r, written in pencil under dark brown ink: 'A ye Draine (drawing?) is 9 foot Deep/ B ye Drawn is full 10 fot'. His work at Somerset House was part of his work as Wren's Assistant at the Office of Works under the reign of Queen Anne. In 1707 the palace 'reverted to the Crown after the Queen Dowager's death. But from time to time the State Apartments [at Somerset House] were still made use of ... William Dickinson was then paid a further £5 "for contracting the said plot into less scale and fixing it neatly into a frame with copying the Book of the Inhabitants for her Majesty's use"; see *HKW*, pp. 258–9. In 1706 the palace was designated by Queen Anne for the reception of foreign embassies.
- 32 See Anthony Geraghty, 'Nicholas Hawksmoor and the Wren City church steeples', *The Georgian Group Journal*, 10 (2000), pp. 1–14.
- 33 *WS*, XI, pp. 9–11.
- 34 The building accounts note his absence for 'being confined at home by sickness'. See the Will of St Margaret's Westminster dated 9 June 1724 proved 3 March 1724/5, Westminster Archives, No. 1895. Also cited in Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 311.
- 35 We do know that he was confined to his home for some time in 1724, during which period he may still have been producing drawings from home: WAM(P)911+A (the drawing for the crowning tower and spire with attached plan) was dated June 8th 1724, just one day before the building accounts note his absence for 'being confined at home by sickness'. See the Will of St Margaret's Westminster dated 9 June 1724, proved 3 March 1724/5, City of Westminster Archives, No. 1895; Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 311.
- 36 Higgott, St Paul's Catalogue online.
- 37 Cf. WRE5/3/6 and 5/3/8: Higgott, St Paul's Catalogue online.
- 38 *Ibid.* We can identify Hawksmoor's hand by his characteristic truncated 5s with dots and dashes dividing measurements, and no division bar dividing fractions.
- 39 For which he was paid £20 for one year's work, salaried only from 1706 onward: see WAM 34501, f. 84.
- 40 *WS*, XI, pp. 15–20
- 41 Christopher Wren, *Parentalia* (London, 1750), pp. 295–302; also cited in *WS*, XI, pp. 15–20.
- 42 *Parentalia*, p. 299.

- 43 For drawings relating to the repair work at Westminster Abbey, see Bodleian, MS Gough Westminster 1.
- 44 Gibbons originally conceived a marble memorial for Queen Mary for Henry VII's Chapel (the drawing for which is at All Soul's, Oxford) before the work was put to an end by the King: see D. Green, *Grinling Gibbons: his Work as Carver and Statuary 1648–1721* (London, 1964), pp. 74, 164. See also L. Stainton and C. White, *Drawings in England from Hilliard to Hogarth* (British Museum exhibition catalogue, 1987), pp. 195–6.
- 45 An earlier design of c.1694–5 for the tomb monument for Queen Mary II from is at All Souls College, Oxford: Geraghty, *Architectural Drawings of Sir Christopher Wren*, p. 279 (AS I.5). But this design was significantly changed by Gibbons upon the death of King William III.
- 46 We see this convention throughout Wren's office drawings, one that was well established and seen in prints since the 16th century (and even earlier), but perhaps the most relevant to Dickinson's design is Wren's design for the altarpiece in the Chapel Royal at Whitehall Palace (c.1676): see Geraghty, *Architectural Drawings of Sir Christopher Wren*, p. 170, (AS II.66).
- 47 See Gordon Higgott, 'Sir Christopher Wren's failed project for a crossing tower and spire at Westminster Abbey, 1713–25', *Burlington Magazine* (January 2019). See also *WS*, XI, p. 19.
- 48 Thomas Hinton, who replaced Dickinson after his death, used Hollar's prints of the north front for Hawksmoor's crossing tower designs: see WAM(P) Hawksmoor 4.
- 49 *Parentalia*, p. 302.
- 50 *Ibid*, p. 299.
- 51 They can also be seen in an etching by William Lodge from the 1680s: Bodleian, MS Gough Maps 23, f. 46v.
- 52 Benton, 'Wren, Dickinson, and the Westminster Abbey Repairs'.
- 53 In a drawing of the crossing tower (Bodleian, MS Gough Maps 23, f. 24), the grey washed areas are also labelled 'The Rever:d Dr: South's', which the clergyman must have occupied at the time.
- 54 Bodleian, MS Gough Misc. Antiq. 17, ff. 8v–9r, 15v–16r.
- 55 Cf. James Broughton's large survey drawing (drawn 'at a scale of Fifty Foot): WAM(P)915. See also the proposed repair work: see Bodleian, MS Gough Maps 23, ff. 22a.–23b.
- 56 See WAM24833–5 for the payment and works from this period which also included 'the Walls and Buttresses on the East side of the Abby', 'the pavements in the Church' and 'the west window' for which £729 9s was spent on repairs.
- 57 *WS*, XI, p. 18.
- 58 In his letter to the Dean of Westminster (WAM 24878) transcribed in Kerry Downes, *Hawksmoor* (London: A. Zwemmer, 1959), pp. 255–8.
- 59 See Dickinson's unexecuted design for St Michael's Cornhill in *WS*, X, pl. 9. His surveying at Westminster probably also inspired the pinnacles at St Mary Aldermary: Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 312.
- 60 'inriched with the Flower the Botanists call *Calceolus*, which is a proper Form to help Workmen to ascend the Outside to amend any Defects, without raising large Scaffolds upon every slight Occasion; I have done the same, being of so good Use, as well as agreeable Ornament': *Parentalia*, p. 302.
- 61 For more on innovation in drawing in Wren's office, see Gerbino & Johnston, *Compass and Rule*, pp. 105–10.
- 62 Higgott, 'Sir Christopher Wren's failed project'.
- 63 Attached at some point to a drawing showing the section of the central tower and spire with Hawksmoor's annotations; WAM(P)913.
- 64 *An Account of Architect and Architecture* (1664, reprinted London 1706), p. 10.
- 65 *WS*, XI, p. 18.