

Planning for a Monument: Dr John King and Charterhouse Chapel

by

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The chapel at the Charterhouse in Clerkenwell was built in the early fifteenth century as the chapter-house of the Carthusian priory. After the Dissolution, the priory church was demolished to make way for the mansion built on the site by Sir Edward North, in 1545, and the chapter-house probably was used as the chapel for the house. It certainly survived intact until the Charterhouse was bought by Thomas Sutton in 1611, for conversion into an almshouse and school. Enlarged and adapted, it has since served as the almshouse's chapel, the school having moved away in 1872, and all of the monuments now in the building are from the period since the foundation of Sutton's charity. They do not include one commemorating Dr John King, Master of the Hospital, contrary to his hopes and intentions.

The charity was established according to the arrangements made by Sutton. Described as the wealthiest commoner in England, he had risen to prominence as secretary to Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick, and as Master of the Ordnance in the Northern Parts from 1568 until 1594. Advantageous property dealings, leases of the Durham coalfields and his activities as a moneylender had greatly increased his wealth. Most of his fortune was allocated to create a charitable foundation, initially planned for Little Hallingbury in Essex, but, following a change of mind, he acquired the Charterhouse for the purpose. Sutton's preparations included obtaining an Act of Parliament and enlisting the support of the king, to safeguard his endowment from rapacious claimants who might challenge the terms of his will. The challenge duly came after his death, but was defeated by the governors appointed by Sutton, who were among the most senior men in church and state, with the Archbishop of Canterbury acting as chairman. In 1613 the foundation, known as King James's Hospital in Charterhouse, was safely established (Fig. 1).¹

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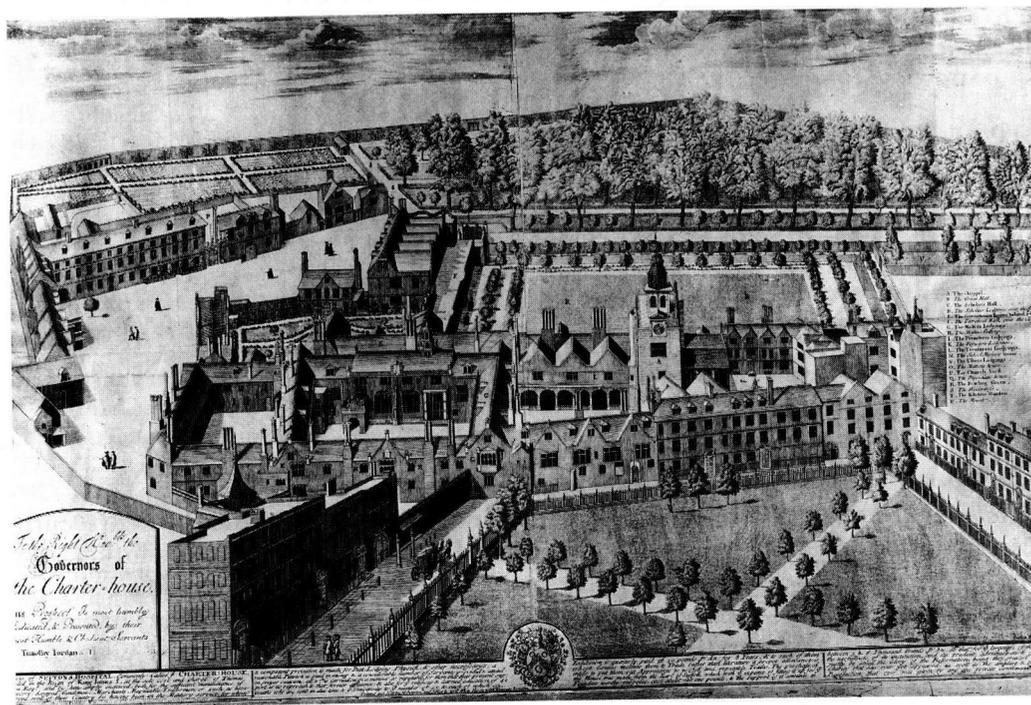


Fig. 1

Sutton Nicholls's View of the Charterhouse, c.1718-26

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The charity was by far the biggest beneficiary of Sutton's wealth, receiving an endowment which produced an annual income on such a scale that the unusually large numbers of eighty almsmen and forty scholars could be maintained. It became a paragon for the achievements of Protestant England in the sphere of charitable giving. Indeed, Sutton's bequest was the largest investment in a private charity in London between the Reformation and the founding of Guy's Hospital, which opened in 1726. Yet the charity was beset with financial problems in the early years, suffered considerable losses during the Civil War and was in difficulties again in the late seventeenth century. Its problems stemmed partly from the fact that almost all of the rental income came from rural properties. The prevailing low level of prices for both arable produce and livestock during the late seventeenth century led to many tenants defaulting on their rents. A further reason undoubtedly was corruption among the senior administrative and financial officers. Those appointed in the late seventeenth century to the posts of Registrar, Receiver and Auditor held them for twenty-five, forty-two and forty-six years respectively, allowing undisturbed collusion and corruption by the Receiver and Auditor that continued until the latter's death in 1717.

John King was born c.1660 and entered Charterhouse School as a Foundation Scholar, or gown-boy. He matriculated in 1678 at Christ Church, Oxford, taking a BA in 1682, an MA three years later, and a BD and DD in 1704. He returned to the Charterhouse in 1696 as Preacher and Deputy Master to Thomas Burnet, following the death of John Patrick, and on Burnet's death in 1715 was appointed Master.² Throughout the seventeenth century the king had played a major role in the Master's appointment, although legally the choice lay with the governors, and the post was much coveted. It was, therefore, noteworthy that King succeeded Burnet, becoming the first pupil from the school to have gone on to be Preacher and Master. He was very proud of his achievement, although he was perhaps aware that his immediate predecessors, Patrick as Preacher and Burnet, Martin Clifford and William Erskine as Masters, had been distinguished scholars and office-holders in their own right.

Patrick was an eminent protestant controversialist and author whose publications included a metrical version of a selection of psalms 'for the use of the Charter-House', drawn upon by Henry Purcell for nine psalm settings, and *The Psalms of David in Meter*, a complete psalter which included some versions not included in his earlier selection.³ He was a prebend of Peterborough cathedral, precentor of Chichester and brother of Simon Patrick, appointed bishop of Chichester in 1689 and translated to Ely in 1691. Clifford was the author of *A Treatise of Humane Reason* (1675). He was also a prominent literary critic of John Dryden, and the last of his *Notes upon Dryden's Poems in Four Letters* was dated at the Charterhouse, 1 July 1672. With Thomas Sprat, Buckingham's chaplain, and Samuel Butler, Clifford was said to have assisted the duke with writing *The Rehearsal, a Comedy*, which caricatured Dryden as the pretentious poet Mr Bayes and was one of the provocations that led to his devastating satire of Buckingham in *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681). Anthony Wood wrote of Clifford that he 'might have been eminent had not the [civil] wars hindred his progress'.⁴ Erskine was a son of the Earl of Mar, one of the five Cupbearers to Charles II appointed in 1660, and a Fellow of the Royal Society. John Evelyn described him as 'a Wise & learned Gent' who would have been better employed as 'a Privy Councelor & Minister of state than laied aside'. Burnet was Chaplain in Ordinary and Clerk of the Closet to William III, and the author of several works on theology and cosmology, most notably *Telluris Theoria Sacra*, or *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681) and *Archaeologiae Philosophicae: sive Doctrina antiqua de Rerum Originibus* (1692).⁵

By comparison, King emerges as an able administrator rather than a scholar, courtier or theologian. His position in the establishment over the previous twenty years gave him a close knowledge of the charity and those problems which required attention, and he applied this to good effect. His was certainly a new broom. Soon after his appointment, the Manciple was dismissed and the Receiver followed shortly afterwards, owing the hospital more than £6,000, the equivalent of more than one year's revenue, only a small part of which was recovered.⁶ King himself made four circuits of the hospital's properties and drew up the outstanding annual accounts. At Lady Day 1715 the hospital owed its suppliers more than £1,160, but his efforts

led to the recovery of £4,500 of rent arrears, which allowed him to clear all outstanding bills and debts, 'a thing not known in the memory of man'.⁷ He was a conscientious Master, missing only eight of the sixty governors' meetings held during his Mastership, and his careful oversight of the administration saw the charity's rental income increase from a little over £5,500 in the early 1720s, to £6,200 by the late 1730s.

The early years of King's Mastership also saw improvements to the buildings and ambitious plans for the rebuilding of the chapel. It had been enlarged by Francis Carter in 1613-4 by the addition of the north aisle, equal in length to the existing building, but somewhat narrower (Fig. 2). Between the aisles Carter built a splendid Tuscan colonnade of three arches, decorated with strapwork (Fig. 3). By the early eighteenth century the building required some renovation, as King was aware when he prepared the first drafts of his will, directing how his achievements should be commemorated after his death.

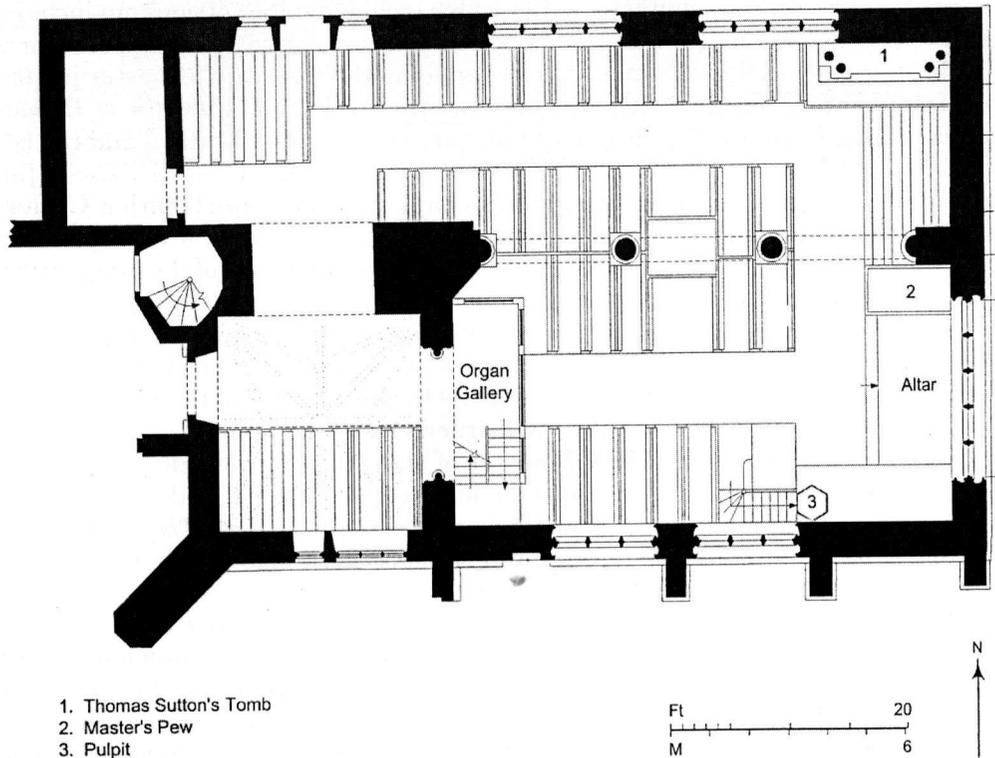


Fig. 2
 Charterhouse Chapel c. 1800
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Fig. 3
Charterhouse Chapel in 1915
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He asked to be interred in the vault beneath Sutton's monument, as Burnet had been, and that his funeral be neither 'vain nor Niggardley, but mixt with decency and Charity to the several Poor Members of the Hospital', leaving £200 for the purpose. But he also desired a more lasting memorial and directed that 'a decent Marble stone monument' should be erected, allowing £500 for the expense, a figure which he had in mind as early as 1716.⁸

When King became Master there were just three monuments in the chapel: those of Thomas Sutton, John Law, one of Sutton's executors, and Francis Beaumont, Master of the Charterhouse, who died in 1624. King was concerned about their condition and soon after his appointment he arranged for the repair, gilding and painting of Sutton's tomb (Fig. 4).⁹ In a draft codicil to his will he directed that £1,000 should be invested and the interest used every twenty years for 'repairing, beautifying and adorning and new lettering with gold letters' firstly the founder's monument, secondly his own, and then the others in the chapel.¹⁰



Fig. 4

Thomas Sutton's tomb, by Nicholas Johnson (or Jansen), Edmund Kinsman and Nicholas Stone, 1614

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Fig. 5

Portrait of Dr John King, artist unknown

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Although King gave no indication of what form his monument should take, or of any preference for a particular sculptor, he did specify that the inscription should state, in English, that he was the first Preacher and Master who had been 'bred of Mr Sutton's Foundation'. It is also possible, given the sum which he allocated, that he intended that the monument should carry his effigy. A sculptor would have had ample source material; one half-length and two full-length portraits of King hung in his study, and he kept a full-length portrait at his bedside. The surviving full-length one is life size, at 7ft 8ins high by 4ft 10ins wide (Fig. 5). He stands in his Doctor of Divinity gown, a copy of the bible is open at his elbow and he holds a piece of paper inscribed 'Dr John King Archdeacon of Colchester and Master of the Charterhouse London'. In case the viewer failed to spot this, the inscription is repeated in the foreground. Neither contemporaries looking at

the portrait nor posterity could be in any doubt about the identity of the subject or his principal achievements. Apart from ensuring that his image was preserved, he was something of a connoisseur, bequeathing thirteen paintings from his collection to Oxford University, to be hung in one of the galleries over the Schools, and providing for the existing paintings in the Schools to be cleaned and framed.¹¹

King was very concerned about the position of his monument and creating the appropriate setting. There was no east window in the north aisle until the removal of the adjoining building in the early nineteenth century made it possible to insert one. Both Beaumont's tomb, on the east wall over the scholars' seats, and that of the founder, on the adjoining section of the north wall, were, therefore, in relatively dark locations. While considering the east wall of the north aisle as a possible place for his monument, he seemed to prefer the space above the Master's large box pew on the north side of the sanctuary (Fig. 6). This was one of the most prominent positions in the chapel and could be seen by everyone entering along the principal aisle. Whichever spot was chosen, he wished to ensure that the monument would be visible, by directing that it should be mounted at least seven feet above the scholars' seats or the Master's pew.

His plans also involved extensive work in the chapel, with the floor raised by two feet, and re-laid with marble, the walls of the south aisle by ten feet and the windows in that aisle 'proportionably'. This would, of course, require the re-roofing of that aisle. The east window was to be decorated with wooden pillars on each side, carrying 'arched work' over it, decorated with gold and ultramarine colours.

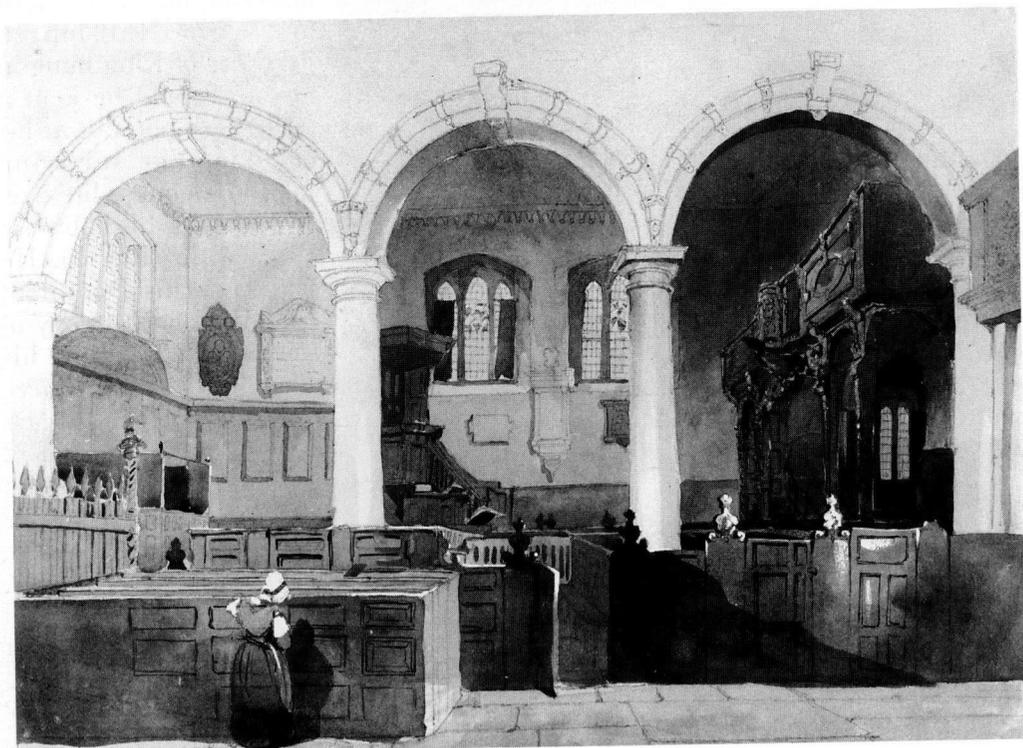


Fig. 6

Charterhouse Chapel c.1840 by John Wykeham Archer

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The work would have both transformed the appearance of the chapel and emphasised the primacy of the south aisle. It is clear that he regarded these improvements as being linked to the creation of his monument, making them a condition for the payment of his contribution of £500 to the cost.¹²

In 1726, just four years after he had prepared these requirements, King was involved in the renovation of the chapel, overseeing the project with the Bishop of London. The ceiling over the north aisle was boarded, to match that over the south aisle, and two of the tall windows on the south side were made to conform to those opposite by filling in their lower sections, and the easternmost window on that wall was filled in (Fig. 7).¹³ The windows were re-glazed with clear glass. It is likely



Fig. 7
Chapel Tower and
Charterhouse
Chapel, south
side, in 1915
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that the upper part of the south wall was rebuilt at this time, in brick, and the roof over the south aisle, which probably dated from the early sixteenth century, was replaced. Internal alterations included re-paving the floor with stone slabs laid in a diamond pattern and repairing the pavement of the sanctuary. The panel above the altar with the Ten Commandments and the east window were restored, with the direction that they should be 'beautified with proper ornaments', and the frames of the panels carrying the Ten Commandments, Creed and Lord's Prayer were gilded. The organ was renovated, and a decorative cartouche was added to the organ gallery.¹⁴

The nature of the work carried out was characteristic of the period, especially in the treatment of the ceilings and windows, to create greater uniformity.¹⁵ King's influence can be recognised, for example in the specifications for colouring and beautifying the interior, but the changes fell considerably short of his intentions. Whether he attempted to persuade the governors to be more ambitious is not clear, but the alterations to the chapel cost more than twice the £500 he intended to bequeath for his grander scheme.¹⁶ It seems that he had seriously underestimated the cost of his proposed changes, or anticipated that the charity would make a substantial addition to his own contribution. In any event, as the repairs did not exactly meet his provisions, the bequest was void and when he prepared a new will, in 1733, alterations to the chapel were not mentioned.

King's predilection for memorials is also evident in the erection of three substantial wall monuments and laying of four black marble floor slabs during his time as Preacher and Master. The monuments commemorate Henry Levett, the charity's Physician, who died in 1725, and two Schoolmasters, Thomas Walker and Andrew Tooke, who died in 1728 and 1731 respectively (Fig. 8). They do not have effigies, but all of them carry inscriptions in Latin. The floor slabs commemorate John Patrick, Walker and Levett, and James Sidgrave, Manciple, who died in 1707 and whose slab is at the west end of the chapel. When drawing up their wills, only Sidgrave and Tooke asked to be buried at the Charterhouse, Sidgrave requesting a slab with a 'decent short Inscription' approved by the Master.¹⁷ There is no monument to Burnet.

Other provisions in King's will indicate his wish to be remembered and his name continued. He provided for the creation of two rent charges of £500 each, bequeathed to his great nephews John and Charles Dashwood, sons of Sir Francis Dashwood of West Wycombe, who had married, in Charterhouse chapel, Mary, daughter of King's brother Major King. These bequests were conditional on the brothers taking the name King within three months and retaining it, which they complied with. He also made provision for eleven more exhibitioners from Charterhouse at Oxford, increasing the number to forty, partly for 'uniformity', so that the combined number of exhibitioners and gown-boys would equal the number of pensioners. Other bequests to the Charterhouse were £100 for a new organ in the chapel and £700 towards the rebuilding of one of the service buildings within the precinct, the new building to have a stone plaque stating by whom it had been erected and when.¹⁸



Fig. 8
Monument to Andrew
Tooke, d. 1731
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The increase in the number of exhibitors was dependent on the failure of the Dashwoods and three other members of the family, who were to inherit in default, to produce issue, and they did not fail. The bequests for the rebuilding and the new organ were conditional on the erection of his monument in the chapel within four years of his death, and it was not erected. But after his death in 1737 he was buried in the founder's vault and the governors accepted two full-length portraits of him from his executors (although neither of them now hangs in the

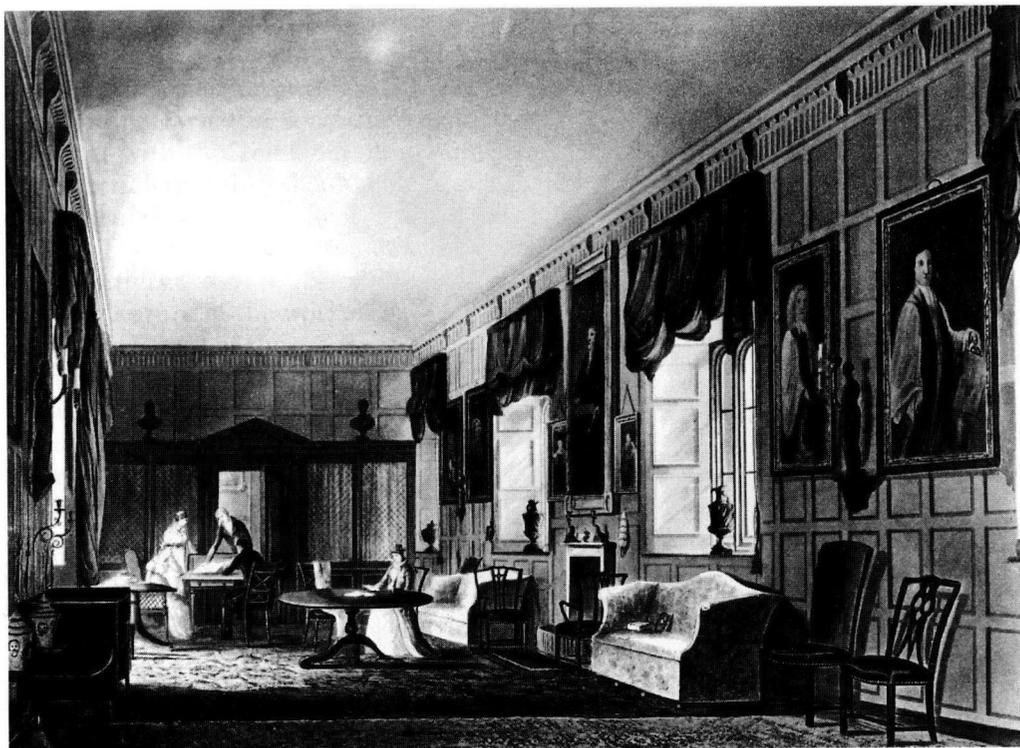


Fig. 9

The Master's Lodge at the Charterhouse, 1816,
with Dr John King's portrait in the centre of the right-hand wall

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Charterhouse or Charterhouse School) (Fig. 9). His successor, Nicholas Mann, and the other officers were asked by the governors to consider if the monument could be erected in either of the specified places.¹⁹ Their conclusion must have been negative, even though space could scarcely have been a problem. Nor was there any obvious liturgical objection to a wall-mounted monument in the sanctuary. Law's monument was taken down during the work in 1726, but was then placed on the south wall of the sanctuary, despite the availability of alternative spaces. And so King's careful, but over-elaborate, plans to benefit the Charterhouse from his estate, and to be remembered, did not mature, and he is not included in the list of the charity's benefactors.

There is no suggestion of hostility towards King by the governors. They were sympathetic when, in the early 1730s, he twice asked for leave to travel abroad for his health. The pride, verging on vanity, which emerges from his testamentary arrangements and his apparent fondness for his own portraits may not give a true impression of his character. He was known always to carry with him a copy of

Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, with its admonitions against vanity and exhortations to cultivate humility.²⁰

If it was not his personality that deterred the governors, and they could have no objection to him on the grounds of competence, then what else prevented the implementation of his plans? His specified sum of £500 certainly would have been more than adequate to provide a fine wall monument. Perhaps his intentions were just too ambitious, too hedged around with conditions, and too specific, especially with regard to the position of his monument. Above all, the governors may not have wished to encourage the further cluttering of the interior of the chapel. Significantly, only one monument was installed between King's death and the end of the century, commemorating the charity's organist and distinguished musician John Christopher Pepusch and erected by the efforts of the Academy of Ancient Music in 1767, fifteen years after Pepusch's death.²¹ No ledger slabs have been added.

King's plans for substantial alterations to the chapel may have been too elaborate and expensive, and beyond the competence of the Master of a private charity, constrained by the oversight of its governors. More surprising is his failure to erect his own monument during his lifetime. This mistake was not repeated by Nicholas Mann, who erected his memorial tablet before his death in 1753, not in the chapel, but over the door from Chapel Cloister into the ante-chapel. But King's efforts were not completely in vain. The arrangement and appearance of the chapel established while he was Preacher and Master were largely unchanged until the 1820s, and the wall monuments and ledger slabs placed there during his period remain, even though his own monument was not erected.

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