

Nicholas Hawksmoor and the drawings for St Alfege Church, Greenwich

by

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St Alfege, the parish church of Greenwich, was entirely rebuilt between 1713 and 1732 following the partial collapse of the medieval structure in 1710. It was the first of the new churches to be built and consecrated (1718) by the Commission for the Fifty New Churches and the first of a series designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor.¹ It was badly damaged by incendiaries in March 1941 and restored under the direction of Albert Richardson, re-opening in 1953. Research recently carried out as part of a Heritage Lottery Fund bid has increased our understanding of the development of the design for St Alfege.² A previously unknown presentation drawing of the church, in Hawksmoor's hand, has come to light and we discuss this drawing in the context of other discussions of Hawksmoor's work for the Commission.

AN OUTLINE OF THE PROCESS OF DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

In 1711 an Act was passed imposing a duty on coals for, among other purposes, 'Building... fifty new churches of Stone and other proper Materials, with Towers or Steeples to each of them...'. Nicholas Hawksmoor and William Dickinson were appointed Surveyors to the Commission which was charged with implementing the Act, their salaries starting in Michaelmas 1711.³ Other architects and surveyors submitted design proposals for the new churches – most notably James Gibbs - and on 9 July 1712 both Hawksmoor and John James submitted designs for St Alfege. James's proposal was rejected by the Commissioners, leaving the field clear for Hawksmoor.⁴ On 16 July the Commission discussed their generic brief and on 23 July asked Hawksmoor to submit a revised design 'conformable' to the brief. On 6 August he duly presented two alternative schemes of which the Commission chose the smaller.⁵ Work was underway on the foundations by the autumn and by August 1713 the masons had reached the top of the outside walls, good progress indeed.⁶ Work then slowed down and it was not until 1718 that the church was consecrated, the delay causing annoyance to Greenwich Hospital which had accommodated the congregation during the building work.⁷ This six-years project (not including the tower) can be compared with the fifteen years and more that were taken to build Christ Church Spitalfields, St Anne Limehouse and St George-in-the-East (Figs 1 and 2).

The medieval church was entirely demolished before reconstruction began. No remnants of its foundations can be seen in the crypt of the new building, though some

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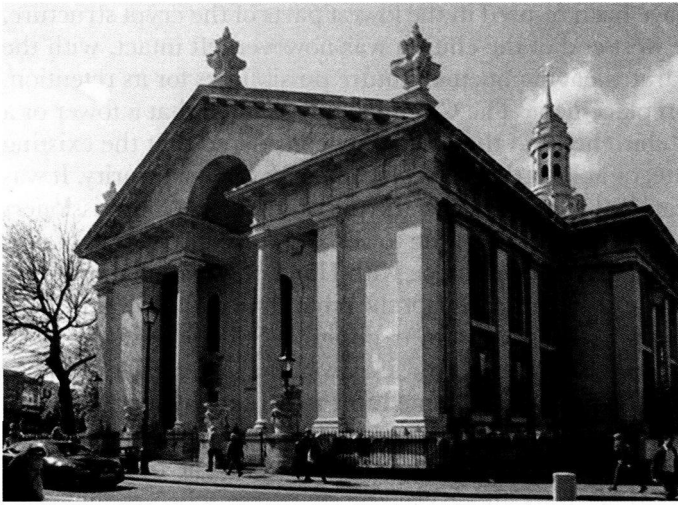


Fig. 1
St Alfege Church, east end.
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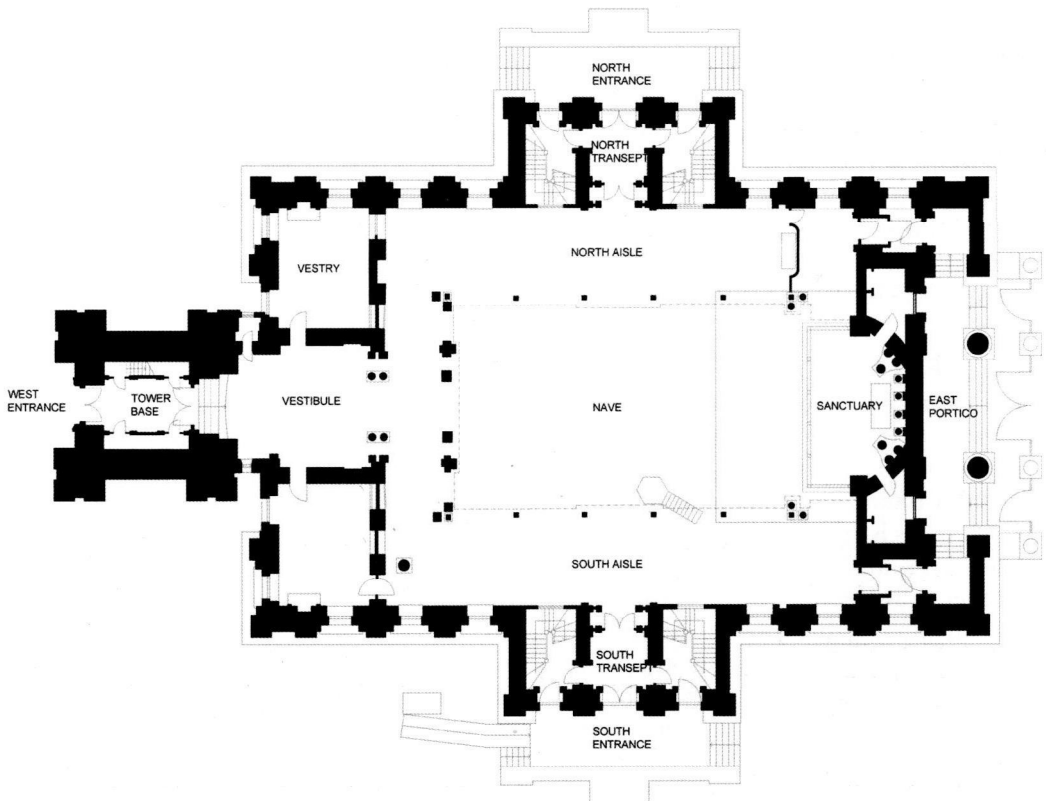


Fig. 2
St Alfege Church, plan.
Richard Griffiths Architects

individual stone blocks may have been re-used in the lowest parts of the crypt structure. The tower which stood at the west end of the church was however left intact, with the new building structurally separate, leaving open all future possibilities for its retention, demolition, refurbishment or replacement. The Commission assumed that a tower or a spire was essential to the new churches, but they evidently considered that the existing tower of St Alfege was adequate, or at least that its replacement was not a priority. It was not until 1730 and after a great deal of debate with the parish that the Commissioners agreed to fund the encasing of the lower parts of the tower and the construction of new upper stages, employing John James as the architect, with Hawksmoor's collaboration.⁸ As we shall see, Hawksmoor himself had canvassed for the rebuilding of the tower in 1714, to no avail, but he did use the upper stages of his tower design at St George-in-the-East.

The structural separation of church and tower are an important aspect of the St Alfege scheme. At Christ Church Spitalfields, St Anne Limehouse and St George-in-the-East Hawksmoor made many changes to the designs of the spire and towers – dramatically so at Christ Church – but their structural bases were in place from the beginning. At St Alfege the separation meant that Hawksmoor was free to devise schemes that were independent of the tower, in the idiom of a freestanding Doric temple, just as he had recently done at the Clarendon Building in Oxford.⁹

Hawksmoor had the task of reconciling two other stipulations set by the Commissioners, namely that each church should be orientated east-west, and that it should have a portico. The old tower stood, immovable for now, at the west end where a portico would normally have been placed, leaving Hawksmoor with the task of designing an eastern portico set dramatically in the curving High Street, but of limited usefulness, since only narrow entrances were possible to the extreme right and left of the chancel. The resulting conflict between the symbolic power of the east portico and its practical insignificance has often been remarked on. Robin Evans put it succinctly: 'a front is stuck on the back, as it were'.¹⁰

A REAPPRAISAL OF THE DESIGN PROCESS

No drawings survive from the early stages of design. There are two sheets of drawings in Sir John Soane's Museum, showing east and west elevations in their final form. The smaller scale drawing (Fig. 3) has dimensions of columns and of window openings, probably intended for the masons to work out quantities.¹¹ There are also two engravings by Johannes Kip showing respectively the plan and north elevation, and the east elevation, dated 1714, and based on drawings by Hawksmoor.¹² In the course of recent research another drawing (Fig. 4) has come to light, from a late stage in the design process, and we will discuss this shortly. Altogether this is a meagre haul of images, particularly compared with the extent of design development drawings for Christ Church Spitalfields, it fortunately can be supplemented by drawings of models submitted to the Commission.¹³ In fact we believe that these drawings – two-dimensional representations of wooden models – provide crucial information about the development of Hawksmoor's design.

Models were important to the Commissioners.¹⁴ Their offices were fitted out with shelves to accommodate them and a very splendid setting it must have been for their meetings. In addition to helping the Commissioners to clearly understand a proposal,

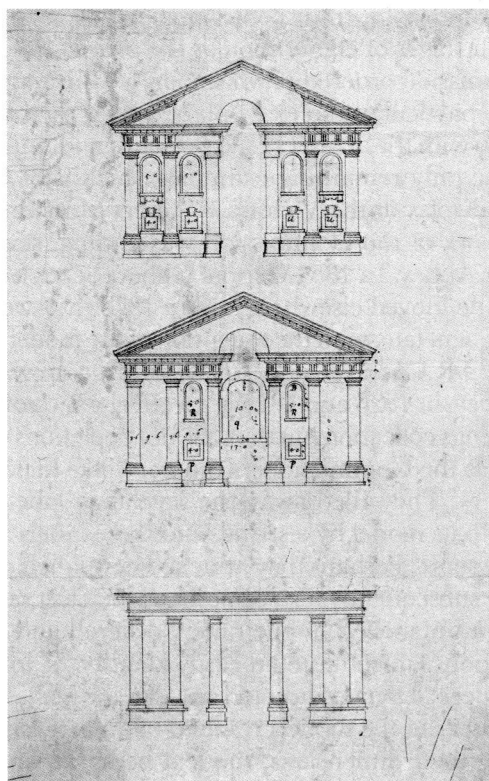


Fig. 3
Nicholas Hawksmoor,
St Alfege Church, three
study elevations, 1712.
Sir John Soane's Museum
London
Photograph: Ardon Bar Hama

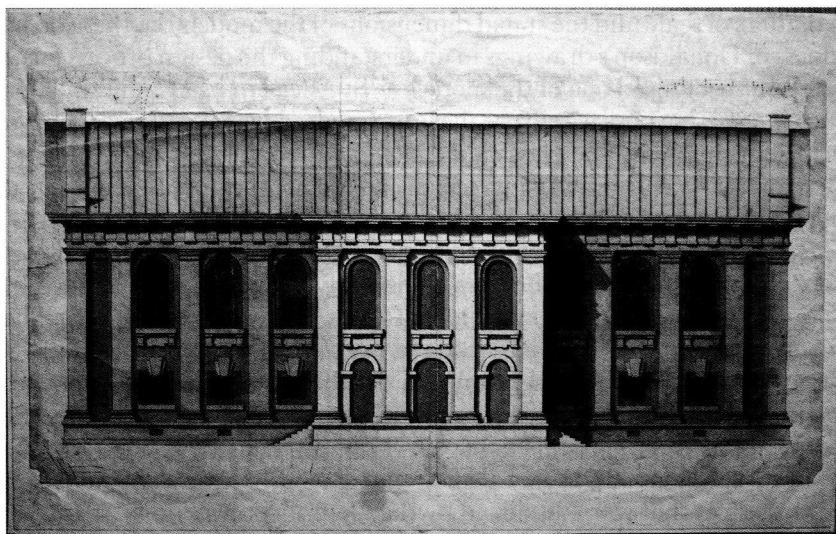


Fig. 4
Nicholas Hawksmoor, St Alfege Church, north elevation, c.1713.
Royal Greenwich Heritage Trust

the models provided a reference for trade contractors in preparing their estimates. The models also went through stages of elaboration as the project unfolded. So for example in August 1712 the Commission ordered Hawksmoor 'to finish model for Greenwich in all its parts, so as to have particular and exact plans drawn therefrom to be annexed to the agreement to be made with the artificers'.¹⁵ The detail and finish of such a completed model can be seen in the only remaining example, which is of Gibbs's scheme for St Mary-le-Strand now on display at the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A).

In 1733 when the work of the Commission was ending, seventeen of the models were sent to Westminster Abbey. In 1854 George Gilbert Scott, Surveyor to the Abbey, recommended that they be moved elsewhere and in 1876 they were in the Kensington Museum, but their subsequent fate, with the exception of the model of St Mary-le-Strand, is unknown. Fortunately C.R. Cockerell and T.L. Donaldson drew the models while they were in Westminster Abbey, in 1826 and 1843 respectively. Two of Cockerell's drawings survive in the V&A drawings collection but they are not depictions of models of St Alfege. In disposing of the models the Commissioners did not make life easy for Donaldson or for subsequent researchers. They filed away the seventeen labels, each of which had evidently been attached to its model by a string, and these labels are now neatly bound into the Commission's papers.¹⁶ Perhaps they attached new labels when the models were sent away, and they were subsequently lost, or perhaps they just sent the models as a job lot. Either way, they were unlabelled by the time Cockerell and Donaldson saw them and so, with three exceptions which he could easily identify (St John's Smith Square, St Mary-le-Strand and St Alfege), Donaldson could only guess which church was represented in a given model. His studies of the models resulted in an article in which he discussed their significance, noting their dimensions, the text being accompanied by schematic plan drawings. They also bore fruit as a set of plans on large sheets which were intended as lecture aids.¹⁷ There are discrepancies between the published article and the lecture sheets on matters of scale and the stated dimensions of the models but these do not vitiate the usefulness of Donaldson's drawings in understanding the design process for St Alfege.

Donaldson recognised one of the models as St Alfege in its as-built state, but he did not draw it, since his purpose was to use the unrecognised schemes as pedagogic material, classifying them simply by the classical Order to which they belong. Students did not need a drawing of St Alfege to see its use of the Doric: they could just visit it. This is frustrating for us but it makes sense. We therefore have Donaldson's reference to a model of St Alfege (and the two other identified projects), as it was built, but no drawing; and drawings of other schemes which he does not identify but which are classified by Order. It is therefore up to us to judge which, if any of them, represent models of St Alfege. The obvious contenders are those models depicted in the sheets labelled 'R-Doric 5' (Fig. 5) and 'Roman Doric 4' (Fig. 6). The numbering of the sheets is not chronological and it is almost certain that R-Doric 5 is an earlier, less developed and less detailed version of Roman Doric 4.

It is very likely that the model depicted in Roman Doric 4 is the larger of two Hawksmoor designs that were discussed by the Commissioners on 6 August 1712. The Minutes state that they 'Fixed upon the smallest of Hawksmoor's designs' and resolved that it should be 'proceeded upon with all convenient speed'.¹⁸ We can assume that this

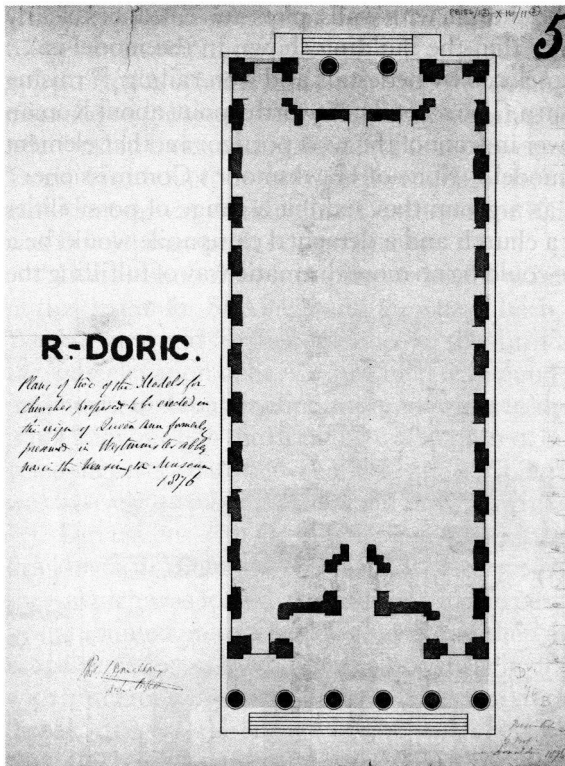


Fig. 5

T. L. Donaldson, drawing of Commissioners' models,
R-Doric 5.

RIBA Collections

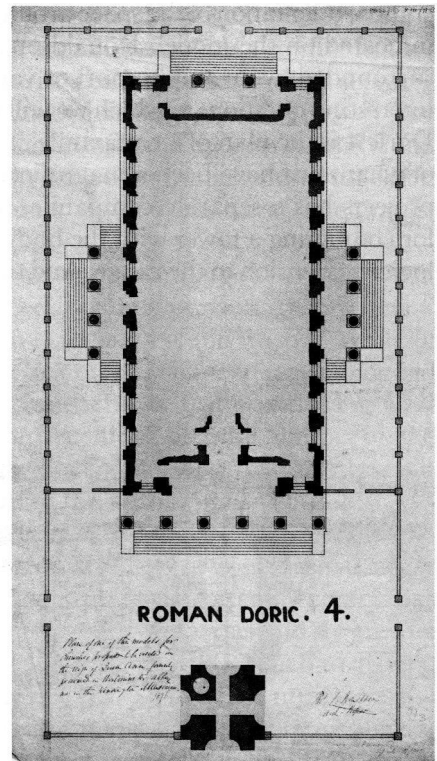


Fig. 6

T.L. Donaldson, drawing of Commissioners' models,
Roman Doric 4.

RIBA Collections

was the model that Donaldson recognised as being of St Alfege, although important modifications were yet to come. Roman Doric 4 and the as-built scheme are similar in width, as are the bay modules and their modelling, confirming that the built scheme is indeed a cut-down version of the larger option that was rejected on 6 August 1712. There are porticos at both the west and east ends of Roman Doric 4, but only at the east end of the as-built scheme, as we would expect from the Commission Minutes which state that there should be 'only one portico, at the east end'.¹⁹ In both cases there are entrances on the north and south sides. In Roman Doric 4 these are sheltered by colonnades: in the as-built scheme they house the stairs to the galleries and are enclosed by pilastered walls, an important modification that we will discuss in a moment. Therefore Roman Doric 4 differs from the earlier R-Doric 5 in its degree of detail, and it embodies the dual axis arrangement that was finally built; the body of the church is more amply proportioned, and the added north and south porticos allow for a secondary north-south axis. We should conclude that R-Doric 5 is a model of one of the earlier proposals made by Hawksmoor before the decisive meeting on 6 August 1712.

There are two other remarkable aspects of Roman Doric 4. The first is the

compartmentation of the space around the church, with walls, piers and entrances clearly indicated on the model. Donaldson states that the building shown in the model is '... surrounded by an ample court or yard enclosed by pedestals and iron railing',²⁰ raising interesting questions to which we will return. The second noteworthy point about Roman Doric 4 is the plan of a campanile or tower in front of the west portico: another element of what must have been a magnificent model.²¹ None of Hawksmoor's Commissioners' projects has a separate campanile, but as a group they exhibit a range of possibilities for combining a tower with the body of a church and a detached campanile would be a logical extension to the range. And there could be no more dramatic way of fulfilling the

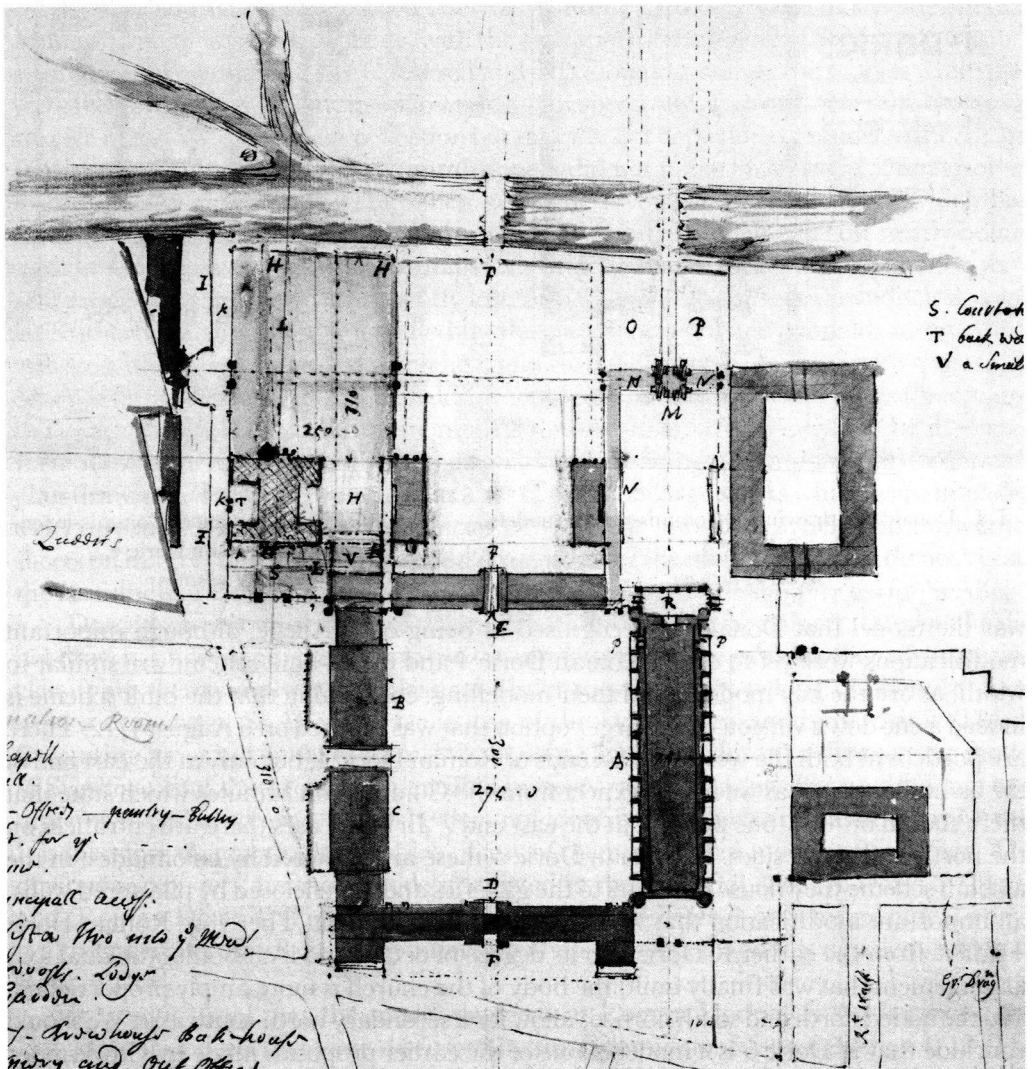


Fig. 7

Nicholas Hawksmoor, proposal for King's College Cambridge, 1712-13.

The British Library Board, King's Topographical Collection, K Top 8.58b

Commissioner's requirement that each church should have a tower or spire. Freestanding towers and campaniles abound in Hawksmoor's later work: for example a similar feature appears in his scheme for King's College Cambridge, in which the campanile is set some distance to the west of the Chapel, to which a colonnade has been added (Fig. 7).²² The relationship is essentially similar to that between the campanile and the portico in Roman Doric 4, although in the Greenwich case the two structures are much closer together. Hawksmoor was working on the scheme for King's in 1712-13, at the same time that he was developing the St Alfege designs.

Donaldson's drawings provide useful material for understanding the development of the design for St Alfege and they have been mined by many previous researchers.²³ We can now add further evidence in the form of an original pen and wash drawing of the long elevation of St Alfege which was found in a box of miscellaneous uncatalogued postcards, newspaper clippings and prints in the Greenwich Heritage Centre (Fig. 4). It is not known when the drawing was acquired, but the pencilled accession number on the verso suggests a date between 1949 and 1961 during which time the local history librarian was actively acquiring prints and drawings relevant to the history of Greenwich.²⁴

Discussions with Dr John Bold and Professor Kerry Downes have confirmed that the drawing is in Hawksmoor's hand. It is 180 x 357 mm, apparently cut down from a larger sheet which was folded at some time in the past and is worn at the lower corners. It has been mounted on to a backing sheet and then mounted again on to a second sheet. The north elevation of the building is exquisitely drawn at a scale of 1:120 (1 inch to 10 feet) with numerous layers of wash depicting gradations of shadow. The three central bays, the 'break' that was the subject of discussion between Hawksmoor and the Commissioners, and which we discuss in more detail below, is shown without shading. This may just be a recognition of the fact that it is nearest to the picture plane, but it may be a deliberate emphasis of the point that was under discussion. At the top of the drawing there is a dotted outline of part of the plan of the church, taken just above the long axis, the dots evidently pricked through from another drawing. The pricking-out shows the internal walls and openings of the vestries in their as-built positions and therefore must be from a late stage plan drawing. The outer edges of the elevation are projected down exactly from this plan, giving its overall extent but nothing of its external form, all of which has been added for this specific drawing.

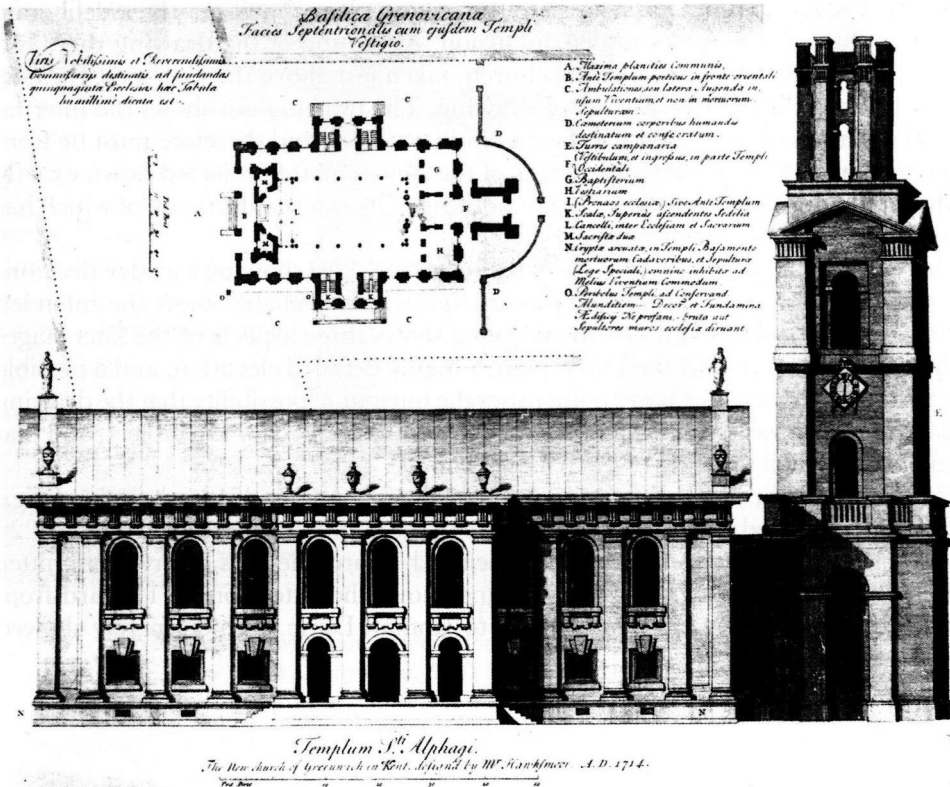
There is also a light pencil drawing at the top of the sheet showing a grid of divisions which do not match the grid of the pilasters, but which probably show the intended positions of roof trusses. Therefore the drawing shows three aspects of the later stages of design: a fragment of a detailed floor plan, a highly detailed elevation, and a possible layout of the roof trusses. The latter point raises the intriguing possibility that the drawing passed to John James and Robert Jeffs, the carpenters appointed for the project, and that they added the pencil drawing of the trusses.

There is no doubt that the drawing dates from after August 1712, when the design was becoming finalised. It may be the response to the Commissioners' instruction of 26 November 1712 that 'Hawksmoor to lay Greenwich church designs before Committee on Monday'.²⁵ As we have noted, the drawing shows the extension set forward from the centre of the long elevation, in contrast to Roman Doric 4 which merely showed



Fig. 8
St Alfege Church, south-west
corner.
Richard Griffiths Architects

Fig. 9
St Alfege Church, north
elevation, engraving by Johannes
Kip, 1714.
*The Bodleian Library, University of
Oxford, Gough Maps 13. Fol. 62v (B)*



colonnades sheltering the two lateral entrances, and so it must date from the period when this important modification was being discussed or had been agreed. We will return to this point, but first we need to complete the discussion of the images that are available to us.

Two drawings show a parallel stage in the development of the design. They are in Sir John Soane's Museum and although Kerry Downes includes reference to them in his 1959 list they have not previously been illustrated.²⁶ They are both outline drawings, with no shading, and may have been intended for reference by the masonry and brickwork trade contractors. One of them shows the east façade on its own; the other (Fig. 3) shows the east and west façades and also an abstracted scheme of their intercolumniation, the three images one above the other. This is a most delicious drawing, showing the classical theme and its two variations to suit the contingencies of the east and west ends of the building. Both façades are built exactly as they are depicted on this drawing, but the treatment of the west façade is the more interesting. Hawksmoor shows a pediment broken at the first bay, and a much simplified treatment in the inner three bays, with no elaboration to the bases and capitals of their two pilasters. This provided surfaces on to which a new link to the tower could eventually be made, and this is exactly what happened (Fig. 8). Hawksmoor had been prevented from executing his grand scheme for reconfiguring the tower, but he made careful and modest provision for what he hoped would be a second best solution – a redesigned tower cladding the original medieval core.²⁷

Finally we must turn to the 1714 Kip print (Fig. 9). As we have seen, Hawksmoor made provision for a future tower, and we assume that he commissioned the print as part of a campaign for it to be built to his design. By 1714 the Commissioners, the people of Greenwich and influential visitors would have seen progress on site for themselves and would have noted the strange conjunction of the Doric temple and the medieval stump. The print, a publicity shot incorporating Hawksmoor's proposed design for the tower, would have shown them how the whole ensemble might be brought together more coherently.²⁸ He failed in his aim and many years elapsed before the tower was eventually built, the outcome of the collaboration with John James.

The north elevation shown in the Kip engraving is also nearly identical to that shown on the newly-discovered drawing, and it is likely that the latter was the reference used by the engraver. They both represent the final stage in the development of the design, for the north elevation at least. However a difference can be seen in the depiction of the east façade, made as a separate print, and both the Soane drawing and the as-built scheme: in the former more windows are shown than were actually built. This confirms that the drawing in Sir John Soane's Museum, which shows blank ashlar where windows are shown on the Kip engraving, is later than the drawing used by Kip for the engraving.

HAWKSMOOR'S LATE CHANGES TO THE DESIGN

The newly-discovered drawing, and the Kip engraving which followed it, show the important alteration to the north façade in which the projecting 'breaks' containing staircases, were added, and thus it satisfactorily completes a skeletal sequence of design information. But more discussion of the reasons for and significance of the alteration is in order. In earlier stages of the design the stairs to the galleries would have intruded into the main rectangle of the nave and the modification to the design avoided this, putting

the stairs in their own extensions. This is Downes's interpretation of references to the 'arcades or breaks' which were added to the body of the church, and we believe it is correct.²⁹ It is clear that a price had not been agreed between the trade contractors and the Commission, but it is also clear that Hawksmoor had instructed that the extensions be built. The Commissioners called for a report on the estimated cost, and for a report by Hawksmoor on the increased area and seating capacity that the extensions would produce. On 11 March 1713 they confirmed that the construction of the extensions should go ahead.³⁰ The newly-discovered drawing may have been produced during this somewhat anxious process in order to satisfy the Commission of the appearance of the extensions and to complement what could be seen in the revised model. It is very likely that it was also given or lent to Johannes Kip, together with an additional drawing of the proposed tower, to enable him to set up the engraving.

Why did Hawksmoor change the north and south elevations, replacing the colonnades by the 'breaks' containing the stairs? John Summerson proposed that the breaks were suggested to Hawksmoor by a passage in Vitruvius which describes the Basilica at Fano.³¹ Late design changes were not uncommon in Hawksmoor's work for the Commission, and indeed the modifications to St Alfege were modest compared with the radical and costly transformations of the design of Christ Church Spitalfields which he made over many years. In this instance we suggest that the reasons for the change were not stylistic, as Summerson and others have proposed, but practical. We should recall that Hawksmoor was prevented from going ahead with the larger scheme submitted on 6 August 1712, and it seems most likely that the filling in of the colonnades was a rearguard action to provide more space. It would have been very difficult to surreptitiously enlarge the overall ground plan - for one thing, Thomas Archer, one of the Commissioners, was looking over Hawksmoor's shoulder when the foundations were set out³² - but enclosing the space formed by the colonnade would be the next best tactic. Giving the galleries their own attached stairs towers also had the great advantage of leaving the ample volume of the nave unobstructed, just as in later projects at St Anne Limehouse and St George-in-the-East. At Christ Church Spitalfields the gallery stairs are tucked in next to the main entrance, as they were at St Martin-in-the-Fields, and as became typical in eighteenth century churches.

Hawksmoor's dogged determination to increase the size of the church, and to add the extensions, had two other practical aspects. The first was the question of escape in case of fire. The layout of stairs, just as at the three Stepney churches, made it possible to create enclosures which allowed people in the galleries to escape down the stairs and then straight out to the open air, without having to go down into the nave and cause crowding and panic. In fact we have practical evidence of the efficacy of Hawksmoor's strategy. The nave of St Anne Limehouse was burnt out in April 1850 but at least one of its attached stair volumes was unaffected, as were the sacristy and vestry.³³ St George-in-the-East was bombed in May 1941 and its stair towers also remained intact.³⁴ And at St Alfege, where the nave was burnt out by incendiaries on 19/20 March 1941, the staircase extensions were entirely unaffected and their splendid joinery can be seen today, just as it was installed nearly three hundred years ago. Thankfully all three fires happened when the buildings were empty, but it seems likely that in each case a crowded congregation

could have been evacuated without loss of life.³⁵

The second practical consideration would be the accommodation of large numbers of people in the building, each of whom needed to be seated in a defined location. It is difficult accurately to define the design capacity of the building, and the numbers actually attending. In 1716 Hawksmoor submitted two alternative pew layouts to the Commissioners, allowing for 646 or 520 people.³⁶ In 1718 the Vestry submitted a list of proposed pew holders to the Bishop of Rochester.³⁷ Sadly, the plan that accompanied the list of pew holders is lost, but the list describes their location in enough detail to draw some conclusions. The total of named individuals is 878, but this does not allow for multiple family members occupying the larger pews, servants and footmen associated with households, 'scholars of Mr Weston', the 'green and greycote' children, the poor of Queen Elizabeth College, charity girls, churchwardens, and strangers, and makes no allowance for the poor and others who were unable to rent a pew space. It is therefore possible that there were in excess of 1000 people in the church on occasions.³⁸

These figures confirm Hawksmoor's prescience in forcing the Commission to provide multiple stairs to aid evacuation, and making the nave a simple rectangle unencumbered by stairs. However questions of status and decorum may also have played a part. Although we do not know the exact layout of the allocated pews, the proposal to the Bishop of Rochester makes it clear that many of the gallery pews were occupied by high-status households. The expression of status was not a simple matter of downstairs/upstairs and in fact the first row of the gallery would provide the best seats - just like the grand circle in a theatre - with the closest aural contact with the preacher in the elevated pulpit. Different social groups in the congregation were allocated blocks of space, but closely adjacent. Taking one's place in the church, and leaving it after the service, would have involved brushing past groups of social inferiors or superiors, with many possibilities for embarrassment and conflict. We should also remember Greenwich's polarised social character with aristocrats and rich families drawn to the Palace in previous decades, and a large working and dependent population.³⁹ All the more reason then to provide multiple means of access to the nave, allowing for a careful procedure of who entered through which door. The preamble to the pew list expresses the point very clearly:

And Whereas the New Church now being duly Consecrated and open'd for the use of the Parishioners, it is highly fitting and reasonable that, upon their immediate resort to it for the Daily Celebrations of Divine Service the said Parishioners should be informed in what Seats they ought severally to Sit and should accordingly repair to such Seats, when they attend Divine Service, for the avoiding of Disorder and Confusion which must otherwise necessarily arise in so numerous an Assembly, compos'd of Persons of so different and unequal a condition and character.⁴⁰

Our suggestion is therefore that Hawksmoor's re-thinking of the plan of St Alfege, with its attached stair volumes, was a way of reducing the risk to life if a fire took place while the building was occupied, and a clever way of avoiding the 'Disorder and Confusion' that might otherwise have taken hold among a crowded congregation.

chancel, were simply not part of early eighteenth-century Anglican practice, and we may call them 'counter-factuals' or what-ifs: what would a church be like if it provided for a fourth century pattern of worship rather than an eighteenth-century one? The provision made for immersion of converts falls into a different category: the Commissioners did include this in their design guidance but it was never implemented.⁴³ It is difficult to understand the motivation behind the drawing: did Hawksmoor really intend to design a church that fitted an imagined fourth-century pattern of worship, or was the scheme primarily a counter-factual to stimulate discussion among the Commissioners, in the expectation that it would affect, but not determine, future designs?

Whichever was the case, the fact is that, contrary to du Prey's suggestion, the 'Basilica' scheme had almost no effect on the design of St Alfege or subsequent Commissioners' churches. Some aspects, for example putting the burial ground at a distance from the church itself, were already common assumptions among those involved in the Commission and were primarily to do with hygiene and the avoidance of damage to church structures by building too close to their foundations, and not theology.⁴⁴ They were therefore probably part of Hawksmoor's background thinking about the scheme, whatever their supposed historical origins. The more intriguingly counter-factual aspects of the Basilica scheme, such as the separate access for women to the galleries, the provision for immersion of converts, the placing of accommodation for the minister, sexton, reader and vestry within the enclosed precinct, and the extended chancel, are simply absent from the St Alfege scheme, and indeed from subsequent Commission projects.

Nevertheless one aspect of the Basilica drawing does invite further discussion. Hawksmoor sets the church within a precinct, and he also does so in Roman Doric 4, which we believe was his favoured scheme for St Alfege in August 1712. The Basilica scheme is a little like a London Square, in fact like Smith Square in the centre of which Thomas Archer placed St John's church, surrounded by houses. But unlike the normal London pattern the centre of the Square in Hawksmoor's drawing is walled-in, with openings on four sides. Three of them lead into the precinct, and the fourth directly into the baptistery. The faithful would go from the secular world into the precinct and then into the church; converts would make a more dramatic journey from the secular world directly into the care and protection of the church.

Donaldson's drawing of Roman Doric 4 shows the church and its separate campanile entirely surrounded by a wall or railing, forming a large precinct and on the face of it this marks a similarity with the Basilica scheme. But the drawing also shows railings at each side of the west portico, creating a subsidiary space around the church building. The resulting circulation and access system is strange, to say the least. Worshippers can enter the courtyard in front of the portico from three directions; they can then enter the church from the portico or slip into the subsidiary spaces and make their way into the north or south extensions. Or they can enter from the east through the narrow doors on either side of the chancel. The strangeness is compounded by the very narrow spaces on north and south, which we assume is an artefact of the model baseboard: we need to see the separated spaces as a topology not a literal ground plan. But we have a nagging feeling that Hawksmoor is getting tied up in a problem that he would rather avoid.

The Kip engraving, made a little over a year after Roman Doric 4, shows Hawksmoor

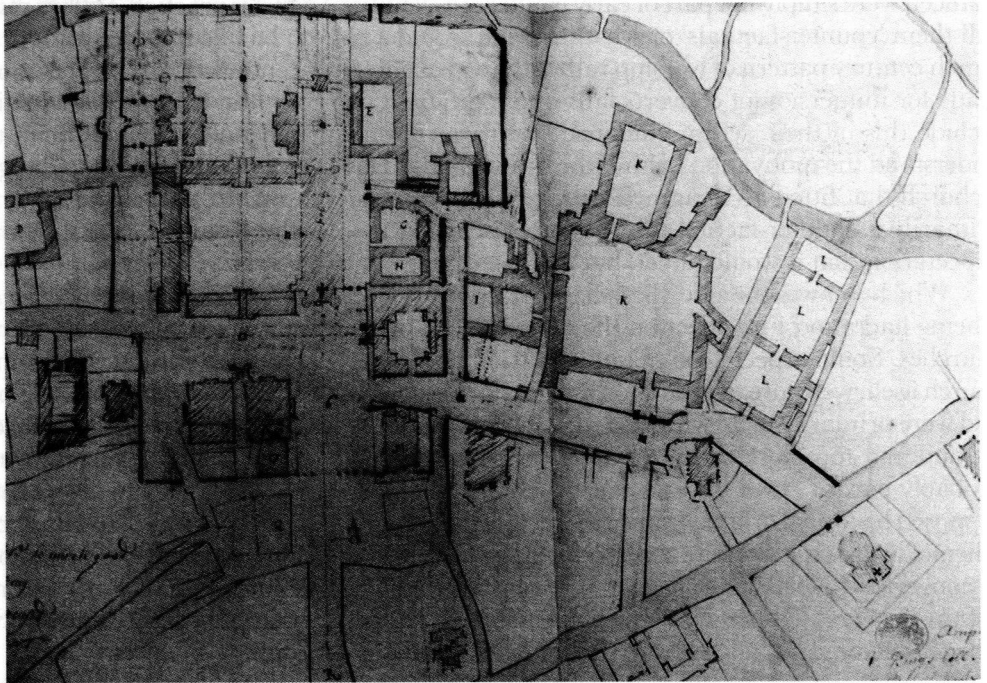


Fig. 11

Nicholas Hawksmoor, plan for Cambridge, 1712.

The British Library Board, King's Topographical Collection, K Top. 8.44

Fig. 12

Gordon Cullen, conjectural view of Hawksmoor plan for Cambridge.

With kind permission of the David Roberts Archive

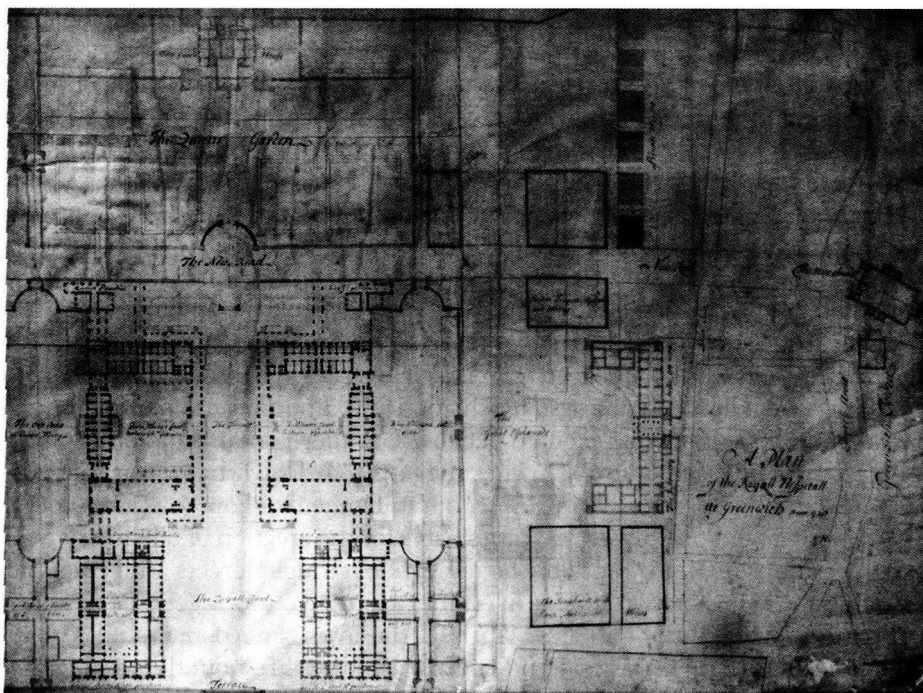


Fig. 13
Nicholas Hawksmoor, plan for Greenwich, 1728.
RIBA Collections

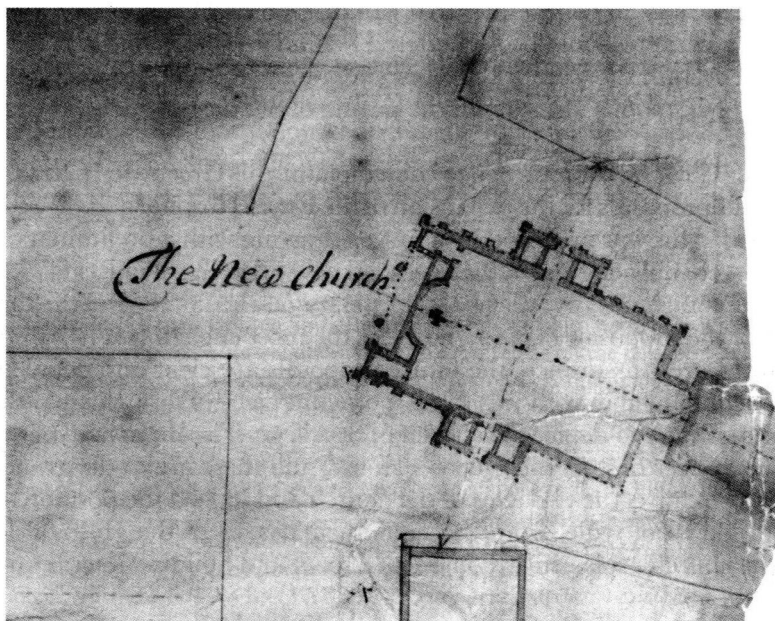


Fig. 14
Nicholas Hawksmoor, plan for Greenwich, 1728, detail.
RIBA Collections

having cast off the shackles of the walls and railings. The church now sits in an open piazza and the railings are set close to the masonry, performing the important practical function of stopping dogs and drinkers using it as a urinal.⁴⁵ The piazza arrangement, bounded by the existing buildings in Church Street is not immediately clear on reproductions of the print, but obvious on closer inspection, and we have emphasised the building line to make the point clearer. In short, we can see no connection between the precinctual arrangement of the Basilica scheme and the setting of St Alfege as Hawksmoor intended it to be built and as it was built.

In 1712-13, at the time that Hawksmoor was working on the design for St Alfege, he also proposed a scheme for the rebuilding of Cambridge, or rather for the modification of its medieval structure into a series of routes and squares within which new university and public buildings would be placed (Fig. 11).⁴⁶ He writes on the drawing that 'It would be very impertinent in me to desire so much good and, I humbly ask pardon for making such a plan and hope it may be excused because Cavalier Fontana and others has done the same in cases of Like Nature'. Downes suggests that Hawksmoor was referring not to Carlo Fontana, Gibbs's master in Rome, but to Domenico Fontana (1543-1607) who had been architect to Pope Sixtus V,⁴⁷ responsible for the erection of obelisks at St Peters and other locations in Rome, and for the network of straight streets aligned on new or existing monuments. Obelisks appear in quantity in the Cambridge scheme as do axes of view cutting through the medieval fabric of the town, and piazzas linked by these grand avenues. Civic, ecclesiastical and commercial uses are bound into a continuous urban scenography. In 1955 David Roberts published an essay on the Cambridge scheme, illustrated by a number of conjectural drawings from viewpoints in the new squares and avenues. The drawings are by Gordon Cullen (Fig. 12) and they are delightful expressions of the idea of 'serial vision' that Cullen was keen to foster.⁴⁸ They illustrate in perspective the spatial continuities that can be seen on Hawksmoor's plan drawing. The idea that a church should be sequestered behind a wall, as in the Basilica scheme, is entirely absent from the Cambridge plan and, on the evidence of the Kip engraving, absent from Hawksmoor's ideas about the setting of St Alfege which were crystallising at the same time.

Years later Hawksmoor returned to contemplating his Greenwich piazza. In 1728 he made ambitious proposals for the expansion of the Royal Hospital and the re-aligning of the Dover road. This was preceded by a survey drawing with a preliminary layout and the proposals were duly engraved, the new road now titled the 'Via Regia'.⁴⁹ All three of these representations show St Alfege and its piazza on the far edge of the drawing, but his drawing of the proposal (Figs 13 and 14) is the most engaging. The Hospital layout is inked in with great assurance, the future proposals are clear and detailed, with the walls outlined and filled in with wash. It is a bravura piece of draughtsmanship and the technique is also used to depict the church of St Alfege. The main axes of the Hospital are dotted in, as are those of the Queen's House, and these are at the grand scale, but Hawksmoor also draws the two axes of the church and indeed the position of the altar. The stepping down of scale, from the monumental axes of the Hospital to the very interior of the church is pleasing: monuments, town and building interior are seen as a continuous fabric.

Neil Rhind and Julian Watson have recently published an extraordinary set of street views of Greenwich dating from 1710.⁵⁰ It is possible to combine the depiction of Church Street with a measured drawing of the east end of St Alfege (Fig. 15). The resulting collage, made by Sophie McIlwaine, shows the striking contrast of the grandeur of the new church and its vernacular setting. One of the aims of the Commission was to assert the dominance of the Church of England in areas where Dissent was seen as a growing threat, and where there were no other institutions of social control.⁵¹ These were ideological and political concerns, but placing a new church in all its pomp, within the matrix of ordinary urban life was surely a more appropriate symbolic gesture than placing it, embattled, behind a perimeter wall.



Fig. 15

View of Church Street Greenwich, c.1710, with east elevation of St Alfege Church.
With kind permission of Neil Rhind, Julian Watson and Sophie McIlwaine

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NOTES

- 1 In the event only twelve new churches were built, of which six were designed by Hawksmoor: St Alfege, St Anne Limehouse, Christ Church Spitalfields, St George-in-the-East, St George Bloomsbury and St Mary Woolnoth. Hawksmoor collaborated with John James on the design of St Luke Old Street and St John Horsleydown. An introduction to the work of the Commission can be found in M. H. Port, ed. *The Commissions for Building Fifty New Churches: The Minute Books, 1711-27, A Calendar* (London, 1986) xl, which is available at *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol23/xl> (accessed 19 March 2017). As stated, St Alfege was in fact a replacement for an existing church, not a new one, and Port explains the circumstances of its inclusion in the Commission's projects.
- 2 The research was carried out for Richard Griffiths Architects as part of a Heritage Lottery Fund bid by St Alfege church for access improvements and public interpretation.
- 3 H.M. Colvin, 'Introduction', in E.G.W. Bill, *The Queen Anne Churches: A catalogue of the papers in Lambeth*

- Palace Library of the Commission for Building Fifty New Churches in London and Westminster 1711-1759* (London, 1979) xi. References to papers and Minutes of the Commission, which are held in Lambeth Palace Library, are hereafter prefixed LPL.
- 4 LPL MS 2690. John James (c.1673-1746) was admitted to the freedom of the Carpenters' Company in 1697 and was joint clerk of the works with Hawksmoor at Greenwich Hospital from 1705 to 1718. On Wren's death he succeeded him as Surveyor to the Fabric at St Pauls. Although he was not initially appointed a surveyor to the Commission for Building Fifty New Churches he successfully bid (in conjunction with Robert Jeffs) for the carpentry trade contracts for four of the churches, including St Alfege. In 1716 he was appointed as a Surveyor to the Commission and designed St George Hanover Square. When Hawksmoor died in 1736 James succeeded him as Surveyor to the Fabric of Westminster Abbey, completing the west towers in accordance with his designs. See H.M. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1660-1840* (London, 4th ed., 2008)
 - 5 LPL MS 2690.
 - 6 LPL MS 2750.
 - 7 The Royal Hospital for Seamen wrote to the Commissioners on 19 May 1716 'desiring the rapid completion of the church', pointing out that since the collapse of the church in 1710 the townspeople had been using the Hospital's chapel. LPL MS 2715, 126-7.
 - 8 See LPL 2728, f46, a report by 'John James and John Andrews (for Hawksmoor)' proposing that the old tower be cased with stone. It is plausible that Hawksmoor and James collaborated on the design of the tower: perhaps Hawksmoor for the lower stages and James for the upper.
 - 9 In *Hawksmoor* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1969, reprinted 2005) 111, Kerry Downes noted the similarities between the design of St Alfege and of the Clarendon Building, completed in 1713. Both are variations on a Doric temple form with the Clarendon Building a heavy industrial version, as befitted a printing-house and book store, and the Doric order is implied rather than explicit.
 - 10 R. Evans, 'Architecture in the distant mirror: Hawksmoor's imposing churches: an interpretation' in Alexander von Hoffman, ed., *Form, Modernism and History: Essays in Honour of Eduard F. Sekler* (Cambridge Mass., 1996) 8. Evans claims that Hawksmoor was fixated on correct east-west orientations for his churches, but it is clear that the Commission insisted on this strategy.
 - 11 London, Sir John Soane's Museum: Nicholas Hawksmoor Design for St Alfege, East elevation, SM 43/9/8; Nicholas Hawksmoor Three study elevations for St Alfege, SM Volume 9/65.
 - 12 Oxford, Bodleian Library Special Collections, Gough Maps 13, fols 62v(B)b and 63r-v(A-B).
 - 13 For the development of the design of Christ Church Spitalfields see F.H.W. Sheppard, ed., *Survey of London: Volume 27, Spitalfields and Mile End New Town*, (London, 1957) 148-69.
 - 14 For the story of the Commissioners' models see H.M.Colvin, 'Introduction', to E.G.W. Bill, *The Queen Anne Churches*; P. Jeffery, 'The Commissioners Models for the Fifty New Churches: Problems of Attribution and Identity', *Georgian Group Journal*, 5 (1995); E. Bottoms, 'The Royal Architectural Museum in the light of new documentary evidence', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 19 (May 2007).
 - 15 LPL MS 2693.
 - 16 LPL MS 2724 f2-4 and f10-26.
 - 17 T.L. Donaldson, 'Some account of the models of churches preserved in Henry V's chantry, Westminster Abbey', *The Architect, Engineer, and Surveyor* (1843), 350-51. Donaldson's lecture aids are in seven sheets: RIBA Drawings Collection, 'Diagrams made from the models of the Queen Anne Commissioners Churches 1876', PB 156/1 1-7.
 - 18 LPL MS 2690.
 - 19 LPL MS 2690.
 - 20 Donaldson, 'Some account of the models', 351.
 - 21 According to Donaldson the model of the church was 3ft 4in. long, and the campanile 7in. square and 19in. high. Donaldson, 'Some account of the models', 351.
 - 22 British Library King's Topographical Collection, K.Top 8 58 b. The campanile is illustrated in a conjectural drawing in Downes, *Hawksmoor* (London 1979, 1st ed. 1959), fig 14.
 - 23 For recent examples see T. Friedman, *The Eighteenth-Century Church in Britain* (New Haven and London, 2011) 395, which takes Roman Doric 4 as being the basis of the actual scheme and claims for it the first appearance of the antique Roman temple form in an English church with porticoes: 'The

significance of the sudden, prophetic appearance of this impressive motif cannot be overestimated'. G. M. Ramirez, *Evoking Antiquity: Nicholas Hawksmoor's Drawings and His Design Process for the London Churches*, PhD University of Cambridge (2010), 40-46, discusses the Donaldson drawings in greater detail and notes the importance of the 'breaks'.

- 24 We are grateful for the advice of Julian Watson, former Greenwich local studies librarian, on this point.
- 25 LPL MS 2690.
- 26 Downes, *Hawksmoor* (London, 1979), 276.
- 27 By contrast Ramirez, *Evoking Antiquity*, 42, sees the design of the west elevation as a 'feeble attempt .. to relate the two masses', of the church and the tower. In his bibliography Ramirez also discounts the importance of the drawings in Sir John Soane's Museum, which 'present the final design for St Alfege's and therefore offer little insight into the design process' for the building. But surely the end point of the design process is germane to the understanding of the process overall.
- 28 For comments on the use of engravings for fund-raising and publicity for building projects see Antony Griffiths, *The Print Before Photography: An introduction to European printmaking 1550-1820* (London, 2016), 318-19.
- 29 Downes, *Hawksmoor* (1979), 167.
- 30 LPL MS 2690.
- 31 J. Summerson *Architecture in Britain 1530 to 1830* (Harmondsworth, 1970), 301-03. The point is repeated in G. Worsley, 'Wren, Vanbrugh, Hawksmoor and Archer: The search for an English Baroque', in H. Millon, ed., *Circa 1700: Architecture in Europe and the Americas* (Washington, 2005), 106.
- 32 'Hawksmoor to measure foundations of Greenwich church, Archer supervising'. Commission Minutes 12 November 1712, LPL MS 2690.
- 33 *Illustrated London News*, 16 (April 6 1850), 233. I am grateful to Mehmet Berker of Inskip and Jenkins for information on the effects of the fire at St Anne Limehouse.
- 34 'St. George's-in-the-East: an obituary by John Summerson', *Architectural Review*, 90 (November 1941) 129 and 135-40.
- 35 Vanbrugh mentions fire safety, but from the external rather than internal point of view and as an argument in favour of 'insulate' sites, which will 'make the Access to them easy and is a great Security from Fire'. See K. Downes, *Vanbrugh* (London, 1977), Appendix E 257.
- 36 LPL MS 2715 f126-7. The Commission's view was that the church would 'conveniently contain 800 persons, decently to perform divine services'. LPL 2690 f49.
- 37 Greenwich Heritage Centre, St Alfege files, Box 6.
- 38 In 1816 it was stated that the church accommodated 'upwards of 1500 persons', but that it was 'far too small for the increased population of the parish, which amounted, by the census of 1811, to near 17,000 souls'. J. Kimbell, *An Account of the Legacies, Rents and Fees etc. appertaining to the Church and Poor of the Parish of St Alfege* (Greenwich, 1816). A second church, designed by George Basevi, was duly built in 1823, and demolished in 1936 after seventeen years of closure.
- 39 See B. Platts, *A History of Greenwich* (Newton Abbott, 1973), 196, and C. Aslet *The Story of Greenwich* (London, 1999), 187. The petition from Greenwich parishioners which initiated the process of rebuilding St Alfege, and indeed the Commission as a whole, stressed the extent of poverty in Greenwich, partly arising from the deaths of many seamen in the disastrous wrecking of Sir Cloudesley Shovell's fleet in 1707: see *Journal of the House of Commons*, 16 (1711), 580.
- 40 Greenwich Heritage Centre, St Alfege files, Box 6.
- 41 The significance of the Basilica scheme was noted by H.M. Colvin, 'Introduction', in E.G. W. Bill, *The Queen Anne Churches*, and in K. Downes, *Hawksmoor* (1969).
- 42 P. de la Ruffinière du Prey, *Hawksmoor's London Churches: Architecture and Theology* (Chicago and London, 2000), 77. See also C. Moody, 'The Basilica after the Primitive Christians: Liturgy, Architecture and Anglican Identity in the Building of the Fifty New Churches', *Journal of Anglican Studies*, 14 (2016). Friedman, in *The Eighteenth Century Church in Britain*, 359, also describes the Bethnal Green project as a 'trial run' for the design of St Alfege.
- 43 'That, the Fonts be so large as to be capable to have Baptism administered in them by dipping, when desir'd', LPL 2693, subcommittee meeting 11 July 1712 and Commissioners meeting 16 July 1712.

See also du Prey, *Hawksmoor's London Churches*, Appendix 4 143.

- 44 The Commission received proposals for the brief and design principles for the new churches from Vanbrugh, Wren and others. Wren's letter on the subject is reprinted as Appendix 2 of du Prey, *Hawksmoor's London Churches*. The Commission never fulfilled its intention to issue a standard brief but the Building Committee (11 July 1712, LPL 2693) and the Commissioners themselves (16 July, LPL 2690) did list key points for design and layout. The question of the location of graves is not mentioned in these documents, but is referred to in Wren's letter and also in Vanbrugh's Proposals, reprinted in Downes, *Vanbrugh*, Appendix E 257.
- 45 The captions in the engraving are in Latin and the relevant item can be translated as 'The exterior circuit [peribolus] of the Temple, for conserving the cleanliness, appearance and foundations of the building, to prevent the profane, animals or buriers from destroying the walls of the church'. On the control of dogs in churches see J. Craig, 'Psalms, groans and dogwhippers: the soundscape of worship in the English parish church, 1547-1642', in W. Coster and A. Spicer, eds., *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2005).
- 46 British Library, King's Topographical Collection K.Top 8.44.
- 47 Downes, *Hawksmoor* (1979), 118.
- 48 D. Roberts and G. Cullen, *The Town of Cambridge as it ought to be Reformed* (Cambridge, privately printed, 1955). See also S. Lang, 'Cambridge and Oxford Reformed: Hawksmoor as Town Planner', *Architectural Review*, 103 (April 1948), 157-40, and R. White, *Nicholas Hawksmoor and the Replanning of Oxford* (London RIBA and Oxford Ashmolean Museum, 1997).
- 49 RIBA/V&A Drawings Collection, 'A Plan of the Royall Hospitall at Greenwich Anno 1728', SA 70/6, and 'The Lands adjoined to Greenwich Hospitall 1728 by N.H.', SA/70/5.
- 50 N. Rhind and J. Watson, *Greenwich Revealed* (London, 2013).
- 51 Port, *The Commissions for Building Fifty New Churches: The Minute Books*, ix, expresses some scepticism about High Church claims of the importance of Dissent, quoting survey data from 1718 that only about 5.7% of the estimated population of London and Middlesex could be identified as Presbyterians, Independents, Particular Baptists, General Baptists or Quakers.