

# Beverley Minster: some perspectives

by

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*In Volume 44 of these Transactions (2000), Paul Barnwell provided an account of recent investigation of the roofs of Beverley Minster, and, in particular, of the physical evidence for the scale of the early eighteenth-century restoration above the vaults.<sup>1</sup> As that paper went to press, it became apparent that various pieces of pictorial evidence (some little known) pose further questions, especially in relation to the development of the central tower. The illustrations are here for the first time gathered together, and their evidence discussed in a short commentary.*

Although Beverley Minster has never been a cathedral, it was considered to be a church of sufficient importance to be included in the first illustrated survey of English cathedrals, Daniel King's *The Cathedrall and Conventuall Churches of England and Wales orthographically described*. That work, which consisted of illustrations from Dugdale's *Monasticon*, was first produced in 1656, with a second, expanded, edition following in 1672.<sup>2</sup> There are two illustrations of the Minster at Beverley, both drawn and engraved by King himself: one (Fig. 1) is of the west façade, while the other (Fig. 2) is a perspective view of the entire building from the south west. In both, the proportions are distorted, as is common in King's work: the elevation, in particular, conveys none of the emphasis on the vertical plane so palpable in the Perpendicular west façade (c. 1400), while in the perspective the east end is over-extended.

The second engraving is the only known illustration of the central tower as it existed before the eighteenth-century restoration, but interpretation is not without difficulty. The first problem relates to the shape of the structure: although the west face appears to be flat, as if the tower were square, the upper part of the south side contains an angle, suggesting that the structure might have been octagonal. Such a suspicion is enhanced by the fact that King's two illustrations of the octagon at Ely, drawn from a similar viewpoint, display similar characteristics – a flat face in shadow on the east-west axis, and (more distinct) angles on the north-south axis<sup>3</sup> – but that is not conclusive, and there is no physical evidence to suggest an

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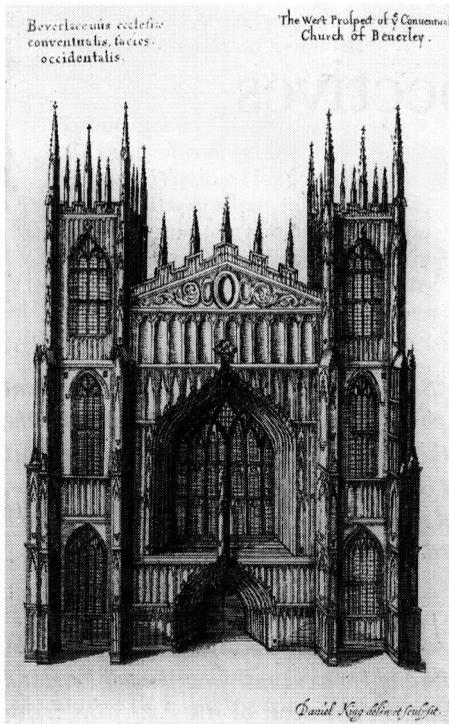
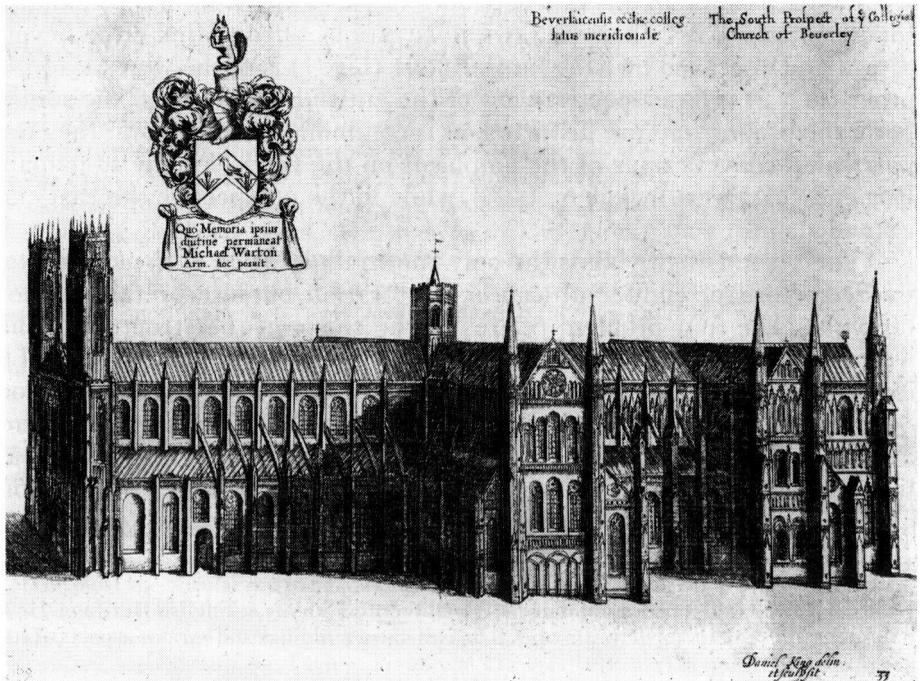


Fig. 1  
Beverley Minster: West Front. Drawn and engraved  
by Daniel King. Published 1656  
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Fig. 2 (Below)  
Beverley Minster: South Prospect. Drawn and  
engraved by Daniel King. Published 1656.  
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octagonal form at Beverley, the surviving thirteenth-century stone base of the tower being square.<sup>4</sup>

The base of the tower has quatrefoils on its sides, but they are only visible above the vault, indicating that the vaulting was not part of the original design: the clear implication is that the original scheme was for an open lantern, casting light down into the crossing. It is possible that it was a structure of that kind which King depicted, and, in 1721, the Trustees of the fund for the restoration of the Minster ordered the dismantling of the 'lantern'.<sup>5</sup> Although the meagre physical evidence is consistent with such an interpretation, it does not represent the only, or even the most likely, possibility, particularly since the vault which now spans the crossing is constructed of stone, as in the rest of the thirteenth-century work, rather than of timber, like the only other eighteenth-century vault (in the north-west transept). Since the crossing vault is not load-bearing, the use of stone in the eighteenth century would be surprising, though it may have been thought that a stone vault would add greater strength and stability to the base of the eighteenth-century tower than a timber one. It is also not possible to be certain that 'lantern' was used in the documents to signify a structure casting light down into the crossing, since it can also refer to a light central tower, which is how Hawksmoor himself referred to the present tower, even though he designed it to be vaulted across well below window level.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore possible that 'lantern' was used simply to distinguish the structure at the crossing from the west towers, which the restoration Accounts describe as 'steeple'.<sup>7</sup> Given the material of the vault, and the fact that instability led to the abandonment of a proposed thirteenth-century lantern at the eastern crossing,<sup>8</sup> previously I suggested tentatively that the original scheme for the main tower could have been modified during construction, with the upper part being abandoned, or with it being completed in timber, either during the initial construction or later in the middle ages. In favour of such a view is the apparently diminutive scale of the tower in King's engraving, which is repeated in his depictions of the timber Ely octagon but not in any of his depictions of masonry towers (including the octagonal one at the Norwich Blackfriars [St Andrew's]),<sup>9</sup> but the overall distortions of scale suggest the need for as much caution in drawing conclusions from the illustration concerning the material of the structure as in relation to its shape, and the detail included is insufficient to determine its date.

Already in the second half of the seventeenth century the Minster must have been beginning to show significant signs of decay and, by the early years of the subsequent century, the imminent collapse of the north-west transept was the occasion for a major restoration of the building. The services of Nicholas Hawksmoor were engaged to oversee the repairs, the construction of a new tower and a major re-fitting of the interior, all of which were carried out by the York-based firm of William Thornton. Although some funds had been raised earlier, in 1716 a fresh appeal was launched with a printed bill. It included a plan of the Minster (with overall dimensions), an elevation of the west façade, and a scroll text consisting of a brief history of the Minster and an appeal for funds: it was dated 'Whitehall, 27th Feb. 1716', signed 'Survey'd by N. Hawksmoor', and engraved by Gucht (Fig. 3).

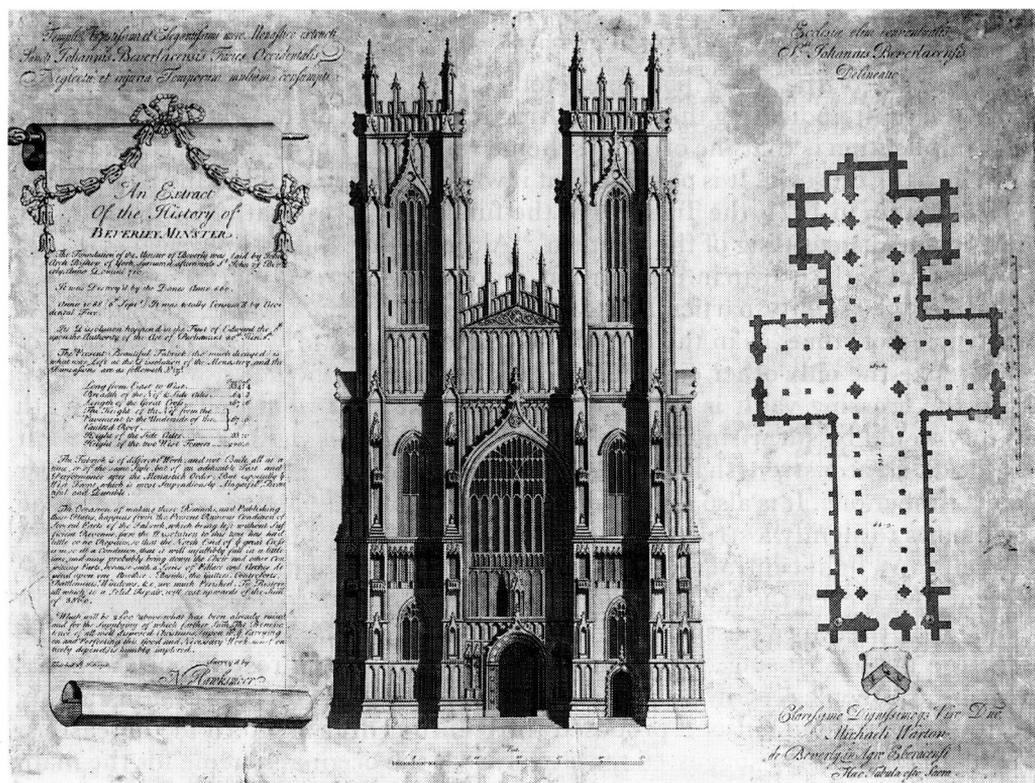


Fig. 3

Beverley Minster: 1716 Appeal. Surveyed by Nicholas Hawksmoor. Reproduced by permission of Beverley Art Gallery, East Riding Museums Service, East Riding of Yorkshire Council  
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Although the text contained within the scroll (see Appendix) refers to the production of 'plates' (plural), there is nothing to suggest that the appeal document ever contained further illustrations, the plural probably referring to the three elements (text, elevation and plan) brought together and printed on a single large sheet.<sup>10</sup>

In 1717, another Hawksmoor survey was produced, a perspective of the north elevation which was engraved by Kip (Fig. 4). Assuming that the dates are Old Style, the interval between the two documents may only be a matter of a few weeks rather than at least eleven months, but it does not appear that the 1717 illustration formed part of the 'plates' for the 1716 appeal. Apart from a dedication, contained in a scroll, to Archbishop William Dawes, there is a short text in Latin with an English translation, which states:

#### The North Front

Of the most Celebrated Minster of S' John of Beverley, at present in many Parts much decay'd and in danger of immediate Ruin, for want of Sufficient Revenue to Repair it.



Fig. 4

Beverley Minster: North Elevation, 1717. Surveyed by Nicholas Hawksmoor. Reproduced by permission of Beverley Art Gallery, East Riding Museums Service, East Riding of Yorkshire Council  
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It is presumably to this engraving that the Accounts for 1718 refer when they mention payment of £10 10s. for printing three or four hundred 'of the Minster Perspectives', and of a further 7s. 9½d., 'For a box with the Minster Perspectives bringing from London'.

The illustration is dominated by the north transept, the condition of which prompted the restoration, but which is here shown in pristine condition. It is upon the transept that the focal point for the primitive perspective centres (see, for example, the leading joints and flying buttresses which are shown in parallel rather than in true perspective, and the exaggerated height of the east transept). In addition, the flying buttresses have been removed from around the main transept in order to render it more prominent. It was perhaps a similar logic which resulted in the omission of the central tower for, although it is not shown, it must have stood until 1721 when the Trustees ordered its careful removal (above) and the Accounts begin, almost immediately thereafter, to contain references to work at the 'doom' (crossing), including, in August, mention of 'closing roofs to the doom': had the tower been depicted, the top of the transept would have been difficult to distinguish.<sup>11</sup> An alternative is that the drawing was intended to illustrate how the

Minster would look after restoration, and that neither the replacement tower which was ultimately built by Hawksmoor and crowned with a cupola (below), nor Hawksmoor's embellishment of the north (main) entrance (shown on Fig. 7) were at that time envisaged. Such an explanation would be consistent with the parlous state of the Minster finances in the 1710s, but would perhaps have demanded a different text. However that may be, the earlier tower was taken down to what Hawksmoor later described as 'ye height of ye gutter'<sup>12</sup> – that is, approximately the level of the wall heads of choir, nave and west transepts.

Whatever the precise date of the scheme for the new tower, such a structure had been constructed by the mid-1730s, and finished with an ogival dome. Although the cupola was removed in the 1820s, along with most of Hawksmoor's interior fittings, it is known from a number of engravings, two of which are reproduced here. The first (Fig. 5)<sup>13</sup> does not bear a date but is almost certainly an engraving of the 'North East Prospect' which Gough lists as having been drawn by Edward

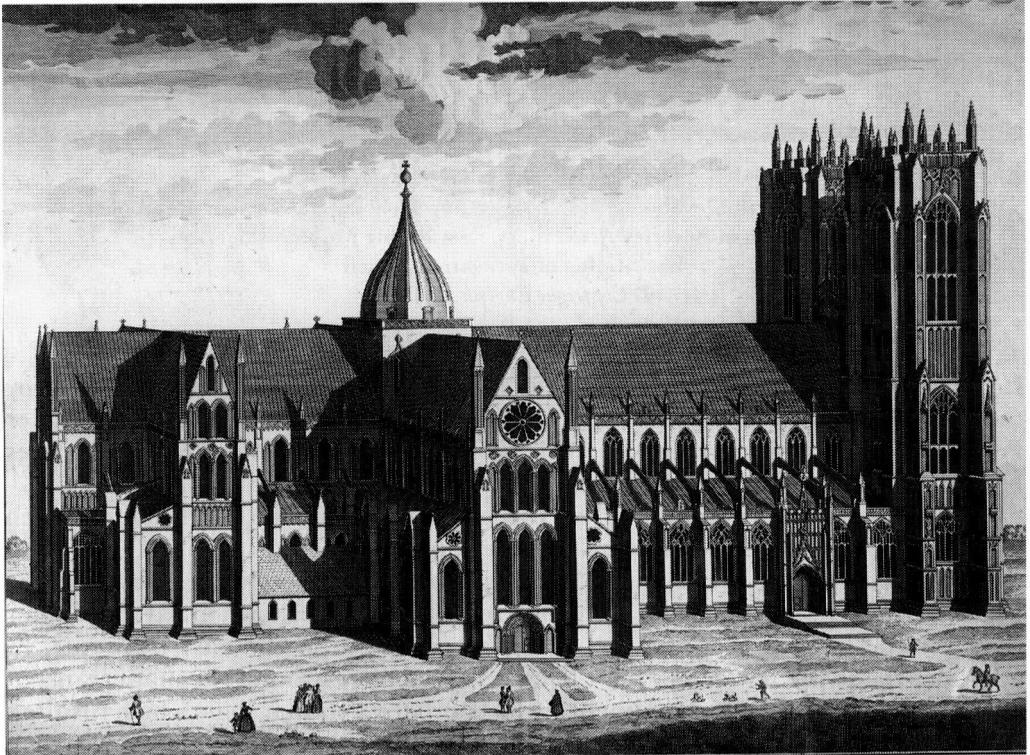


Fig. 5

Beverley Minster: North East Prospect. Probably drawn by Edward Geldart *c.* 1730. Reproduced by permission of Beverley Art Gallery, East Riding Museums Service, East Riding of Yorkshire Council

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Fig. 6

Beverley Minster: South West View. Published 1817. Reproduced by permission of Beverley Art Gallery, East Riding Museums Service, East Riding of Yorkshire Council

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Geldart in the 1730s;<sup>14</sup> the second engraving (Fig. 6)<sup>15</sup> is later, and was published in 1817. The reason for reproducing two illustrations depicting the building in the later eighteenth century is partly to show different styles and approaches to the subject, but also to demonstrate how little reliance can be placed on even these later engravings in terms of architectural history. The most immediate factor, for the present purpose, is that the shape of the dome is inconsistent: the drawing from the lower viewpoint shows a plinth which does not feature on the other, and the detailing of the ribs and openings varies significantly. This is characteristic of the illustrations as a whole: for example, not only do the proportions of the west towers differ, but so does the decorative detailing.

No matter what its precise form, the dome was not deemed aesthetically pleasing, at least by the early nineteenth century, and was taken down as part of the 'restoration' conducted in the 1820s. It is possible that the tower as built always disappointed, for in a letter to the Dean of Westminster, Hawksmoor noted that, 'we Raised it as high as our money would reach',<sup>16</sup> perhaps suggesting the frustration of a grander scheme. In view of this, one further illustration – a drawing some



Fig. 7

Beverley Minster: Perspective, 1740s

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twenty inches by twenty-eight – assumes particular significance, for it seems to show an impression of a scheme or fantasy for the central tower (Fig. 7).

The picture, which does not appear to have been published before, presents great difficulties of interpretation. It was formerly owned by Edward Croft-Murray, from whom it passed to the British Museum, where it was accessioned in 1971,<sup>17</sup> and is ‘attributed’ to the York architect, John Carr. According to the late Brian Wragg, Carr was paid sixteen guineas in 1758 to produce a design for the crossing, here perhaps drawn by his pupil, William Lindley. The source for the payment to Carr is unclear<sup>18</sup> but the drawing is, in any case, very unlikely to be connected with it for three principal reasons. First, the costume of the figures in the foreground indicates a date in the 1740s or very early 1750s, as the wide hoops of the ladies’ dresses were a short-lived fashion and had disappeared long before 1758.<sup>19</sup> Second, although initially impressive, the drawing is very crudely executed, most obviously in relation to the proportions of the west towers and to the flying buttresses of the octagonal structure, which terminate against the windows rather than the stonework: it is very unlikely that such skilled and architecturally literate draughtsmen as Carr and Lindley would have perpetrated such illogicality, even in a sketch. Finally, the scheme illustrated is not similar to anything else designed by Carr, whether executed or not.

If Carr is discounted as author, problems remain for, although the costume indicates a date in the 1740s rather than earlier, and despite the fact that the north porch is embellished with the urns, railings and statues Hawksmoor introduced,<sup>20</sup> the square part of the tower is not an accurate depiction of Hawksmoor's executed design. In particular, the drawing does not show the windows present in the tower as built, but does include three-stage buttresses, which do not exist (Fig. 8). It is perhaps unlikely that anyone in the 1740s would have produced a serious proposal for further work to the Minster which would have entailed demolishing or

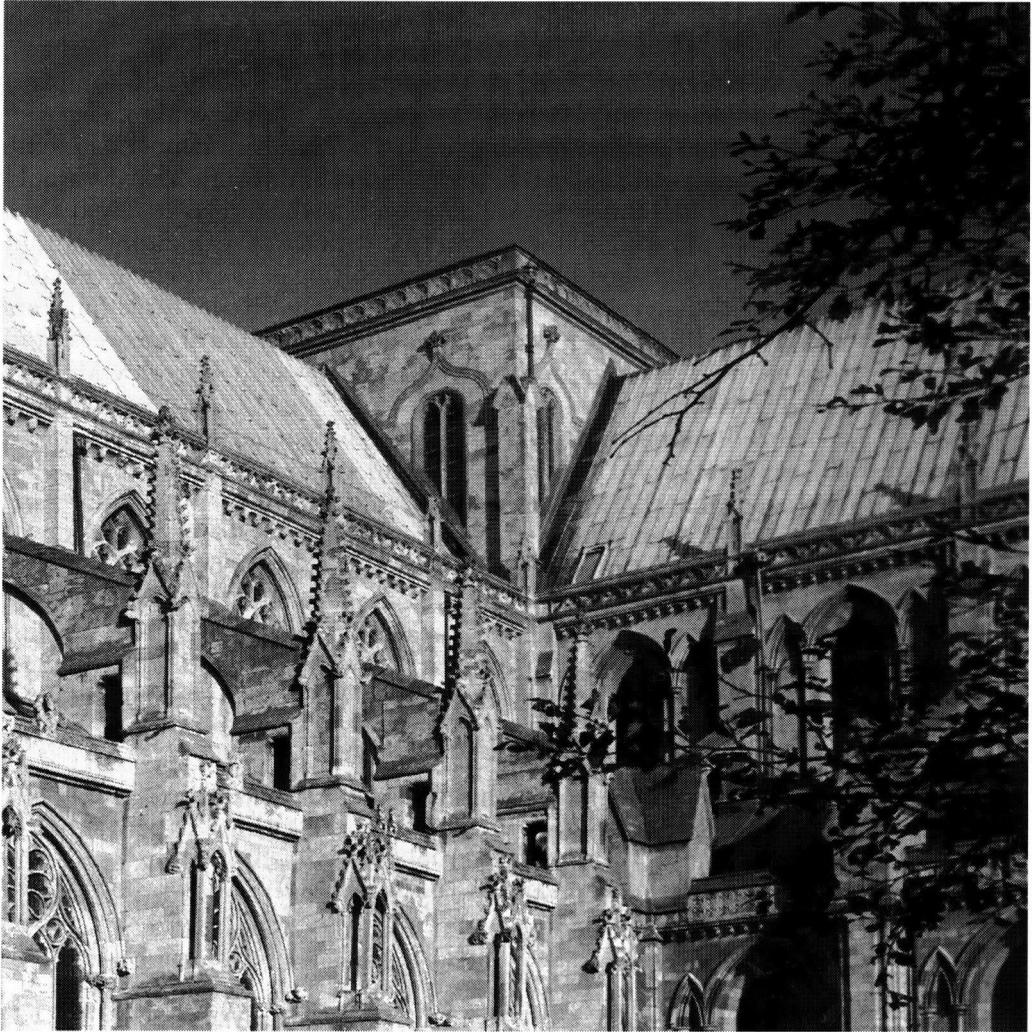


Fig. 8  
Beverley Minster: Detail of Tower from South West  
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substantially altering the tower, which was then less than two decades old.<sup>21</sup> One possibility is that the drawing is no more than a fantasy, perhaps executed by someone local, showing how the Minster could have looked. That would allow for the drawing to have been produced by someone with little architectural knowledge, and perhaps permit of an explanation for the eccentricity of the flying buttresses; but the alteration of the details of the tower would be more difficult to explain, as it is unlikely that the person who drew the buttresses would have thought to show a stronger tower perhaps necessary to carry the weight of the superstructure. An alternative is that a local amateur artist drew the Minster from life but added to it a copy of an abandoned Hawksmoor sketch design of which the original (like all his other Beverley drawings) is now lost. An interpretation of this kind could, perhaps, account for the poor proportions of the west front (in particular) and the oversized and badly detailed superstructure at the crossing, which would have been copied, wrongly scaled, from another drawing or sketch. That Hawksmoor had some plan in mind has already been suggested, and it is not impossible that he would have designed something like the structure depicted, in which case he might have set it upon a plainer and more solid tower than that which was ultimately built. In the present state of knowledge, however, any interpretation of the drawing remains highly speculative. Like the engravings of Daniel King, produced over three-quarters of a century earlier, the illustration poses more questions than it answers, and parts of the story of the development of the crossing tower at Beverley Minster remain tantalisingly obscure.

## APPENDIX

The text within the scroll of the 1716 appeal is as follows:

## An Extract of the History of Beverley Minster.

The Foundation of the Minster of Beverley was laid by John Arch Bishop of York, Surnam'd afterwards S' John of Beverly, Anno Domini 710.

It was Destroy'd by the Danes Anno 860.

Anno 1088 (6<sup>th</sup> Sept<sup>r</sup>) It was totally Consum'd by Accidental Fire.

Its Dissolution happen'd in the First of Edward the 6<sup>th</sup> upon the Authority of the Act of Parliament 26<sup>th</sup> Hen. 8<sup>th</sup>.

The Present Beautiful Fabrick (tho' much decayed) is what was Left at the Dissolution of the Monastery and the Dimensions are as followeth, Viz<sup>v</sup>

	Feet Eng <sup>l</sup>
Long from East to West .....	334 : 4
Breadth of the Nef & Side Ailes .....	64 : 3
Length of the Great Cross .....	167 : 6
The Height of the Nef from the .....	} 67 : 0
Pavement to the Underside of the .....	
Vaulted Roof .....	

Height of the Side Ailes ..... 33 : 0

Height of the two West Towers ..... 200 : 0

The Fabrick is of different Work, and not Built all at a time, or of the same Style, but of an admirable Tast and Performance after the Monastick order; But especially y<sup>e</sup> West Front, which is most Stupendiously Magnific<sup>m</sup> Beautiful and Durable.

The Occasion of making these Remarks, and Publishing these Plates, happens from the Present Ruinous Condition of the Several Parts of the Fabrick, which being left without sufficient Revenue, from the Dissolution to this time has had little or no Repairs, so that the North End of y<sup>e</sup> great Cross is in so ill a Condition, that it will infallibly fall in a little time, and may probably bring down the Choir and other Conjoining Parts, because such a Series of Pillars and Arches depend upon one Another. Besides, the Gutters, Centreforts, Battlements, Windows, &c, are much Perished. To Restore all which to a Solid Repair, will cost upwards of the Sum of 3500£s.

Which will be 2500£s above what has been already raised, and for the Supplying of which further Sum, The Benevolence of all well disposed Christians (upon w<sup>ch</sup> y<sup>e</sup> Carrying on and perfecting of this Good and Necessary Work must entirely depend) is humbly implored.

Whitehall 27<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1716

Survey'd by

N. Hawksmoor

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have been kind enough to provide information, advice and assistance during the course of my work on the illustrations presented here. I am particularly grateful to the editor of the *Transactions* for suggesting inclusion of a second paper on the subject of Beverley Minster, particularly as it is longer than originally envisaged, and to Bob Skingle for photographing all the illustrations apart from Figs. 1 and 7, and for taking Fig. 8. Those who have provided advice include Allan Adams, Tony Berry, Colum Giles, Professor Kerry Downes, Professor David Palliser, Josie Sheppard, Ian Stewart and Dr Giles Worsley, but they should not be assumed to share the views expressed herein, and are certainly not responsible for any errors. I am grateful to the Trustees of the British Museum for permission to reproduce Figs. 1 and 7, to Beverley Art Gallery, East Riding Museums Service, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, for similar permission in relation to Figs. 2 - 6 (and to Christine Rostron for facilitating access to the illustrations), and to English Heritage for allowing the use of those same Figures and of Fig. 8.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Barnwell, P. S., "The Church of Beverly is fully repaired." The roofs of Beverley Minster', *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society*, 44 (2000), 9-24.
2. The second edition was reprinted as Colvin, H., ed., *Daniel King: The Cathedrall and Conventuall Churches of England and Wales* (Farnborough, 1969); it is from Colvin's short introduction to that volume that information concerning King is derived.
3. The drawing of the north face of Peterborough Cathedral, showing the former timber octagon, also shares those characteristics, though the viewpoint is slightly different.

4. Barnwell, "The Church of Beverley is fully repaired". The roofs of Beverley Minster', 22; the following discussion amplifies and partly modifies the interpretations suggested there.
5. East Riding of Yorkshire Archives Office, BC/IV/14/1 (the unpaginated Account Book for the early eighteenth-century restoration), order of the Trustees, dated 9 May 1721. All subsequent references to the orders of the Trustees and to the Accounts are to that volume.
6. Letter from Hawksmoor to the Dean of Westminster, 19 January 1735 (1736 New Style), Westminster Abbey Muniments 34573, quoted in Downes, K., *Hawksmoor* (London, 1979), 260 Letter 261.
7. Accounts for 1721, *passim*.
8. Barnwell, "The Church of Beverley is fully repaired": The roofs of Beverley Minster', 11-15.
9. The Peterborough octagon, which shares the same distorted shape (above, n. 3), is less diminutive, but both the proportions and shape of the masonry octagonal tower at Norwich Blackfriars are more accurate: the difference may relate to building materials, or may be due to the fact that the octagons at Beverley, Ely and Peterborough were all in one sense or another 'lanterns', sitting on top of square towers, while that at Norwich Blackfriars was a fully octagonal tower.
10. I am grateful to Professor Kerry Downes for advice concerning this point and for other thoughts on the two Hawksmoor illustrations.
11. The following reasoning represents a modification of my initial reaction to the omission of the tower, noted at the end of my paper in last year's volume of the *Transactions*.
12. Letter as in n. 6
13. The inscription reads: 'The North East Prospect of Beverly Minster, in York Shire. Sold by H. Overton and J. Hoole without Newgate, London, and George Feraby, Bookseller in Hull, Yorkshire'.
14. Gough, R., *British Topography, or, an historical account of what has been done for illustrating the topographical antiquities of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 vols (London, 1780), vol. 2, 448; Geldart also drew the well-known illustration of the 'machine; for levering the north wall of the north-west transept back into place (engraved by P. Fourdrinier and published in 1739), and a section (*ibid.*). The catalogue entry for the copy of the engraving reproduced here which is held in the British Library (KTC 44.26.D) also attributes the drawing to Geldart.
15. The inscription reads: 'S. W. View of St John's or the Minster Church, Beverley, Yorkshire. To John Cross Esqr. F.S.A. &c of Hull. This Plate is inscribed, from motives of gratitude and regard, by Wm Taylor. London. Published 1 March 1817 by J. Britton, Tavistock Place'. It was etched by John Roffe and engraved by R. Havell and Son.
16. Letter as in n. 6.
17. The British Museum reference number is Atlas 1.c.77; the accession number is 1971-10-11-9.
18. Wragg, B., 'The Life and Works of John Carr of York: Palladian architect' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sheffield, 1975). It is unfortunate that the note of payment to Carr is unreferenced, and it has not proved possible to track down its source; there is no mention of the payment in York Georgian Society, *The Works in Architecture of John Carr* (York, 1973). I am grateful to Dr Giles Worsley, who is editing Wragg's thesis for publication, for advice on this point and others.
19. I am grateful to Josie Sheppard of the Castle Museum, York (City of York Council), for assistance on this matter.
20. Like the dome and most interior fittings, they were later removed, but not before they had attracted severe criticism from Arthur Young, *A Six Months Tour through the North of England*, 2nd edn, 4 vols (London, 1771), vol. 1, 148n., who described the entrance as appropriate to a 'cakehouse', and the urns which adorned it as ones 'which would do tolerably well for the decoration of a shrubbery'; his remarks on the interior fittings are less complimentary.
21. It was complete by 1732 at the latest, for it was then mentioned by Loveday, J., *Diary of a Tour in 1732 through parts of England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1890), 199-200.