

**James Thornhill and Decorative History
Painting in England after 1688**

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Text**

Richard Johns

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**University of York
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ABSTRACT

James Thornhill (1675-1734) is best known for his grand-scale decorative paintings – in the Royal Naval Hospital at Greenwich, at St Paul’s Cathedral and in more than twenty-five other public buildings and country houses across England. He was unique among native painters in his ability to win commissions over his foreign rivals in the difficult art of decorative history painting and, in a career that spanned four decades, produced some of the most spectacular and important decorative schemes of the eighteenth century. However, Thornhill’s work has hitherto remained on the margins of British art history. This thesis combines original document-based research with a fresh pictorial analysis of Thornhill’s work in an examination of the complex relationships between the artist’s patrons, his paintings and the subjects he represented.

Thornhill’s working life began in the year of William and Mary’s coronation in 1689, and his subsequent career was shaped, to a significant degree, by the social and political consequences of the Glorious Revolution. Across four chapters, this thesis explores the different ways in which the artist used the various lenses of allegory, mythology and religious history to historicise significant events in the nation’s recent past in ways that were meaningful to its cultural and political elite, and to the wider viewing public of early eighteenth-century England. At the same time, the thesis examines how Thornhill successfully distinguished his own work from that of his more cosmopolitan European counterparts, fashioning a distinctive artistic identity while capturing the imagination of an audience whose appetite for grand-scale decorative history painting was greater and more diverse than at any time before or since.

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'Nor is it in the Power of Words to raise too great an Idea of the Work'
Richard Steele on Thornhill's painting at Greenwich

'Its enough to breake ones neck to looke on them'
Celia Fiennes on painted ceilings

INTRODUCTION

‘Our celebrated Country-man’

In 1707, the architect John James and the engraver John Sturt jointly published the first English edition of Andrea Pozzo’s *Rules and Examples of Perspective proper for painters and architects*. With more than 100 new engravings by Sturt and a list of subscribers that included several Dukes and Earls, as well as numerous painters, craftsmen and booksellers, this new translation of Pozzo’s treatise was an ambitious production.¹ In the book’s dedication to Queen Anne, Sturt paid tribute to Britain’s monarch by praising the great architectural projects that had become associated with her reign. He singled out for special attention St Paul’s Cathedral in London, the Royal Naval Hospital at Greenwich (the building of which had commenced several years before Anne’s accession) and Blenheim Palace, the vast Oxfordshire pile granted to the Duke of Marlborough following his first and most celebrated victory against the French in 1704. ‘The late magnificence of these buildings’, Sturt suggested,

seem to presage, that a Time is coming, when, through the Blessing of Peace, and the Happy Influence of Your Majesty’s Government [...] Your Majesty’s Subjects shall exert themselves as much to their Country’s Honour, in the Arts of Design, and Civil Architecture; as they have already done in the Art Military, and Personal Valour.²

Eight years later, in 1715, Colen Campbell completed the first volume of *Vitruvius Britannicus*, an equally impressive publication celebrating Britain’s classical architecture since the time of Inigo Jones. Among the more recent architectural projects included in this volume was the Royal Naval Hospital, still under

¹ Pozzo’s *Rules and Examples of Perspective* first appeared in Latin and Italian in 1693 as *Prospettiva de’ pittori e architetti*. For a discussion of Sturt’s other activities as an engraver and print entrepreneur, see Mark Hallett, ‘The Medley Print in Early Eighteenth-Century London’, *Art History*, vol. 20, no. 2 (June 1997), pp. 214-37.

² Andrea Pozzo, *Rules and Examples of Perspective proper for painters and architects, etc.*, translated by John James with engravings by John Sturt, London, 1707, preface.

construction at Greenwich. After describing Christopher Wren's designs for the hospital, Campbell added:

I can't neglect mentioning that excellent Cieling in the great Hall, by Mr. *Thornhill*, to his eternal Honour, and his Country: Here Foreigners may view with Amaze, our Countrymen with Pleasure, and all with Admiration, the Beauty, the Force, the Majesty of a *British* Pencil! Rich in Invention, correct in Design, noble in Disposition, in Execution admirable.³

In June of the same year, the *Weekly Packet* reported that the commission to decorate the inner dome of St Paul's Cathedral had been handed to the same artist, James Thornhill, and praised the 'exquisite Skill of this our celebrated Country-man, whose Memory must live as long as Hampton-Court [where the painter had also worked during the previous three years] or Greenwich-Hospital are in Being'.⁴ One year into his work at St Paul's, Thornhill also began decorating the hall ceiling of Blenheim Palace – the third monument that Sturt, a few years earlier, had identified as heralding a national renaissance in the Arts. The opinions of John Sturt and Colen Campbell, and the artistic events that separate them, introduce the three principal concerns of this thesis: the close relationship between architecture and its painted decoration; the importance of both in the negotiation of a national cultural identity during the early decades of the eighteenth century; and, most importantly, the prominent role played by James Thornhill in that process.

The enthusiasm, even surprise, with which Campbell commended Thornhill's '*British* Pencil' is revealing. In a field otherwise dominated by foreign-born and foreign-trained painters, Thornhill's nationality was a defining feature of his artistic identity. During his career, he established and nurtured a reputation as the only native painter capable of competing alongside the most prominent overseas artists for the most prestigious commissions. That career began in 1689, when Thornhill was bound as an apprentice to the Painter-Stainers' Company, an entrance not usually associated with the kind of artistic success that he later achieved. His earliest steps into the field of decorative history painting depended on a few individual patrons who, whether out

³ Colen Campbell, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, vol. 1, London, 1715, p. 6.

⁴ *Weekly Packet*, no. 155, 18-25 June 1715.

of choice or necessity, were prepared to employ the services of a relatively inexperienced English painter over the more glamorous and expensive names from Italy and France. Notable among these early patrons was Thomas Foley who, in 1705, commissioned Thornhill (then in his thirtieth year) to decorate the staircase and hall of Stoke Edith in Herefordshire.⁵ This was followed, two years later, by a staircase and saloon for the first Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth, Derbyshire – a commission that marked the beginning of a twenty-year period in which the painter was in constant demand and typically worked on three or more schemes in different parts of the country at any one time. In the course of his career, Thornhill was employed by some of the most powerful figures in the country. In addition to the Dukes of Marlborough and Devonshire, his aristocratic patrons included the Dukes of Chandos and Leeds, at Canons and Kiveton House respectively, and the Earls of Nottingham, Oxford and Plymouth, at Eastwell Park, Wimpole Hall and Hewell Grange. Of equal importance was the artist's work for an increasingly wealthy and assertive gentry at several of the smaller country houses built during the first decades of the eighteenth century. He also decorated several other public and private buildings across London, as well as the chapels at All Souls' College and Queen's College, Oxford, and a handful of smaller parish churches.⁶

Decorative history painting on such a scale was a lucrative business: each staircase, saloon or chapel typically earned Thornhill in excess of £1,000, enabling him to acquire a considerable fortune in a relatively short time.⁷ This level of

⁵ At Stoke Edith Thornhill worked alongside the house painter Isaac Bayly. A letter from Bayly to Foley in 1705 reveals the co-operation between the two painters and indicates that Thornhill was already a painter of some seniority. For example, on the matter of which colours he should use for the wainscot, Bayly remarked: 'I think it will be best to advise with Mr Thornhill in that point for I may not only putt you to more charge but doe damage to Mr Thornhills worke for to paint very beautifull coullers will take the eye of from his painting which is principall.' The letter, now in the Foley archive at the Herefordshire Record Office, is quoted in full by Edward Croft-Murray in *Decorative Painting in England*, vol. 1, p. 216.

⁶ Many of these smaller schemes have now disappeared. A list of those destroyed (mostly during the nineteenth century) would include the painted ceilings and staircases at Hewell Grange in Warwickshire, Addiscombe House in Surrey, Eastwell Park in Kent, Headley Park in Hampshire, Stoke Edith in Herefordshire, Eastbury Park in Dorset and Wotton House in Buckinghamshire. Among the most notable survivals are Hanbury Hall in Worcestershire, and Charborough Park and Sherborne House in Dorset. See Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England 1537-1837*, vol. 1, pp. 165-74.

⁷ Details of Thornhill's payment survive in relatively few cases. At Wotton House, where he worked between 1713 and 1716, one visitor noted that he was 'engaged at a salary 1000£ per annum and his board'. A single fee for work done was a more usual method of payment. For example, he was paid £985 for the hall ceiling at Blenheim (1717), £1350 for painting the chapel at Wimpole (1724) and £1,500 for a staircase and hall at Luxborough House (c. 1723). See Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England 1537-1837*, vol. 1, pp. 165-74. Ronald Paulson has estimated that Thornhill earned

professional success soon led to a degree of recognition never before achieved by a British artist. In 1718, he was appointed History Painter to George I and, in 1720, he became the first native painter to receive a knighthood. His social elevation was confirmed when he acquired and rebuilt Thornhill Park near Stalbridge, an old family seat that had been sold by the artist's cousin some years before, and which became the basis for the artist's subsequent election to parliament in 1722. Finally, in 1723, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society. These official acknowledgements of Thornhill's artistic achievements are inscribed and combined with the sartorial signs of gentlemanly distinction in John Faber's 1732 mezzotint (fig. 1), after a portrait of the artist by Joseph Highmore. It represents Thornhill at the end of his career, aged 56, and confirms his status as the most prominent native painter of his generation.

Thornhill and Modern Scholarship

The accident of Thornhill's birth, as the son of the eighth son of an ancient Dorsetshire family, no doubt facilitated his later social standing.⁸ But it was the significance of his work as a painter, amply acknowledged by his contemporaries, that enabled his dramatic rise to celebrity and fortune. The extent and novelty of Thornhill's individual success are well known. Less familiar are the artistic reasons that lay behind the string of accolades the painter received in his fifties. Despite the artist's evident importance during his own lifetime, the art historian Ellis Waterhouse had cause to remark in 1953 that Thornhill remained 'the least studied in detail of the eminent names in British painting', and half a century later he continues to be a relatively neglected figure in the history of British art.⁹ One explanation for this lies with the modern discipline of art history, which has generally regarded the kind of site-specific decorative painting for which Thornhill was best known as less worthy of serious consideration than other, more portable forms of pictorial art, which for a

around £30,000 during the 1710s alone (see his *Hogarth, vol. 1, the 'Modern Moral Subject' 1697-1732*, New Brunswick and London, 1991, esp. pp. 96-100).

⁸ See John Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, London, 1774, esp. vol. 2, p. 451. The earlier part of the Thornhill [*sic*] lineage (from the thirteenth century) was confirmed by the Heralds' Visitation of the County of Dorset in 1623, published by the *Harleian Society*, vol. 20, London, 1885, pp. 91-92.

⁹ Ellis Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain 1530-1790*, Harmondsworth, 1969 (third edition), p. 133.

variety of reasons – not least their repeated exposure in sale rooms and exhibition halls – are far better understood today than they were half a century ago.

The modern historiography of Thornhill's work begins after the Second World War with the research of William Osmun, whose thesis on the artist draws together an impressive range of documentary material relating to the chronology and immediate circumstances of Thornhill's various commissions.¹⁰ Though never published in its own right, Osmun's study provided the basis for the relevant chapter of Edward Croft-Murray's two-volume *Decorative Painting in England 1537-1837*, the first part of which, *Early Tudor to Sir James Thornhill*, appeared in 1960. As its title suggests, Croft-Murray's study reaches far beyond the work of a single artist, although it is strongest when dealing with the half-century or so that followed the Restoration. It provides a useful catalogue raisonné of Thornhill's decorative painting, cross-referenced with the work of his contemporaries, many of whom are virtually unknown outside of its pages. Researched and written while its author was Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, it also demonstrates a formidable knowledge of several hundred extant drawings by the artist. For Croft-Murray, Thornhill represented something of a flawed genius. He was a painter whose 'particular harmony and sweetness of palette' set him above his contemporaries, but whose 'softness of outline' could often descend into an unattractive 'woolliness'; an artist whose potential was tempered as much by the 'ignorance of his public' as by his own 'facile talent'.¹¹ *Decorative Painting in England* may today seem rather restrictive in its aims, which are connoisseurial and biographical in nature, and it is not without errors of fact. Yet it remains the first point of reference for any serious study of decorative history painting in early modern England.

Osmun's pioneering research also informed a number of more general surveys that situate Thornhill within a broader history of British art. The first of these was Ellis Waterhouse's *Painting in Britain 1530 to 1790*, first published in 1953, which places Thornhill's career within the 'Age of Kneller' – a construction that emphasises the peculiarly British affair with portraiture during the first part of the eighteenth century, and as such, obscures the importance of decorative history painting in this period. Waterhouse begins a brief discussion of decorative painting with the ominous

¹⁰ William R. Osmun, 'A Study of the Works of Sir James Thornhill', PhD thesis, University of London, 1950.

¹¹ Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England 1537-1837*, vol. 1, p. 78.

suggestion that 'all the great movements in European painting during the seventeenth century passed Britain by'. He thus places Thornhill at the end of an already diluted continental tradition, describing him as an artist whose 'natural bent towards closely observed genre' and 'native instinct towards realism' set him apart from his foreign contemporaries.¹² Margaret Whitney and Oliver Millar, whose *English Art 1625-1714* appeared in 1955, devote a longer chapter to decorative painting, in which they offer a more detailed assessment of Thornhill's achievements. His work, they suggest, oscillates between an 'academic, classicizing baroque' and something 'more rococo and painterly'.¹³ Like Waterhouse before them, Whitney and Millar divorce Thornhill's work from the circumstances in which it was originally seen and understood. Concerned above all with the 'great movements' and chief personalities of British art, they assess Thornhill's achievements according to rather vague (and wholly modern) notions of style and quality. For these authors, the history of baroque decorative painting in England culminated with Thornhill's painting, but it was, they also imply, a rather disappointing climax.

In 1976, Judith Hook proposed a more sophisticated analysis of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century visual culture in *The Baroque Age in England*. It is an ambitious study (encompassing the fields of painting, sculpture, architecture, literature and music), which the author describes as 'an attempt to relate one particular art style to the age and society which sustained it'.¹⁴ In the process, Hook goes some way in placing Thornhill, among many other makers, within the political and religious context of the time. However, like its predecessors, *The Baroque Age in England* often struggles to accommodate its wide and varied subject matter within the conceptual framework of 'the baroque' – a term that is used to refer simultaneously to a style, a period and a 'sensitivity', but which can at best be defined only loosely.¹⁵ As Hook's study demonstrates, the notion of the baroque is not wholly redundant when discussing the ostentatious, theatrical, court-facing visual culture of the seventeenth century. However, such broad classifications and the 'spirit of a culture' that they imply allow only a limited view of individual works of art. To borrow what the art historian Matthew Craske wrote about another, equally

¹² Ellis Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain 1530-1790*, esp. pp. 125 and 131-33.

¹³ Margaret Whitney and Oliver Millar, *English Art, 1625-1714*, Oxford, 1957, esp. pp. 310-16.

¹⁴ Judith Hook, *The Baroque Age in England*, London, 1976, p. 7.

¹⁵ See, for example, Judith Hook, *The Baroque Age in England*, pp. 9-14.

anachronistic label of style, the rococo: 'To describe an art work as [baroque] is to say very little that one means and very much that one does not.'¹⁶

Thornhill finally escaped the historiographical confines of 'the baroque' in 1987, in the Tate Gallery's influential exhibition and catalogue *Manners & Morals: Hogarth and British painting 1700-1760*. The show included a number of portable works by Thornhill, Louis Laguerre and Sebastiano Ricci, mostly oil sketches for site-specific schemes, which were displayed alongside portraits, conversations, modern moral subjects and landscapes by other eighteenth-century artists. The exhibition cast Thornhill at the beginning of a new tradition in British art – one concerned primarily with the 'polite' and increasingly commercial visual culture of the first half of the eighteenth century. It is an important assessment of Thornhill's work, but one that still places the artist and his work at the margins of British art history.

Symptomatic of Thornhill's marginalisation is the fact that the most thorough discussion of his art since Croft-Murray's *Decorative Painting in England* has appeared not in a study of the artist himself, nor of decorative history painting, but in the volumes of Ronald Paulson's work on William Hogarth. Paulson offers a detailed discussion of those decorative schemes he regards as most important to Hogarth's artistic development – invariably as a prelude to some aspect of the younger artist's life or work.¹⁷ In doing so, he frequently extends the earlier researches of Osmun and Croft-Murray. However, with his attention focused elsewhere, Paulson inevitably reinforces what has become the most enduring and, on its own, most distorting characterisation of Thornhill – as the 'father-in-law', an indirect relation not only of Hogarth, but also of British art more generally.

One of the most significant studies of eighteenth-century British painting to appear in the past twenty years is David Solkin's *Painting for Money*. Here, Thornhill makes a brief appearance not as a decorative painter, but as the author of the small group portrait *Andrew Quicke in Conversation with the 1st Earl of Godolphin, Joseph Addison, Sir Richard Steele and the Artist* (c. 1711-12; fig. 2). Portraiture represented a small but significant aspect of Thornhill's career, and in *Painting for Money* the artist is given a role, alongside Kneller, in the formulation of a 'polite' form of

¹⁶ Judith Hook, *The Baroque Age in England*, p. 10; Matthew Craske, *Art in Europe 1700-1830*, Oxford, 1997, p. 8.

¹⁷ See Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth, vol. 1, the 'Modern Moral Subject' 1697-1732* and *Hogarth, vol. 2, High Art and Low 1732-1750*, both New Brunswick and London, 1991.

representation that was subsequently extended and refined by a group of painters led by Hogarth. As Solkin points out, Thornhill's inclusion of himself in the *Quicke* portrait (second from the right), alongside Addison and Steele, is significant and finds the artist 'engaged in the collective rituals of public life' and immersed in the 'polite ideals' of an eighteenth-century urban elite.¹⁸ However, *Painting for Money* presents a narrative of eighteenth-century British art in which there is little or no place for Thornhill's more prolific decorative work. Such grand visual statements as the painted hall at Greenwich (which was under way when the *Quicke* portrait was made), or the painted dome of St Paul's Cathedral, relate less clearly to the emerging 'bourgeois public sphere' that forms a central theme of Solkin's book. Here, too, Thornhill's painting remains in the margins.

In the past half-century, then, Thornhill's artistic identity has alternately been aligned with two very different art-historical epochs, while remaining a partial stranger to both. On the one hand, he occupies the closing stages of a continental tradition that had been imported in 'watered form' during the 1660s, and which was already running out of steam by the end of the century.¹⁹ This perspective is best summarised in the words of Edward Croft-Murray:

Thornhill closes an epoch. The style of scenographic wall-decoration which he practised had been founded in England before he was born; its formulas were completely established by the time he started painting; and throughout his career he continued to work according to them.²⁰

On the other hand, we find Thornhill defined as the progenitor of an eighteenth-century tradition – one dominated, at least in its earlier phase, by Godfrey Kneller and the portrait, and which culminated half a century later with the foundation of the Royal Academy. Within this schema, Thornhill is typically presented as 'a model that any ambitious British painter could follow' and, more specifically, a 'spur' to the later success of William Hogarth.²¹

¹⁸ David H. Solkin, *Painting for Money: the visual arts and the public sphere in eighteenth-century England*, New Haven and London, 1992, esp. pp. 40-47.

¹⁹ Ellis Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain 1530-1790*, p. 125.

²⁰ Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England 1537-1837*, vol. 1, p. 78.

²¹ Elizabeth Einberg, *Manners & Morals: Hogarth and British Painting 1700-1760*, exh. cat., Tate Gallery, London, 1987, pp. 13-14.

In the past two decades, a handful of shorter essays have focused on individual projects by Thornhill. Notable among these are Brian Allen's 1985 essay on Thornhill's work for Edward Harley, 2nd Earl of Oxford, at Wimpole, where the artist worked closely with the architect James Gibbs, and alongside the painters Michael Dahl and John Wooton. More recently, Carol Gibson-Woods's investigation of the political background to Thornhill's work at St Paul's Cathedral (1993) and Arline Meyer's 1996 exhibition and catalogue on his various copies of Raphael's tapestry cartoons have taken a fresh look at the circumstances surrounding particular aspects of the artist's work, as have a number of shorter articles by Jeremy Barker, much of whose extensive research on Thornhill's life and career awaits publication. The study of decorative history painting has also benefited from the recent doctoral research of Andrea MacKean, whose thesis, an investigation of grand-scale decorative painting and its role in the social formation of its viewers across two centuries, includes a detailed and informative investigation of Thornhill's work at Greenwich.²²

My own research has coincided with a renewal of interest in Thornhill's surviving work. In the past five years, several of the painter's major schemes have been cleaned and restored, including his work at Chatsworth in Derbyshire and at Hanbury Hall in Worcestershire. The painted hall of the Royal Naval Hospital at Greenwich has benefited from the refurbishment of the nearby National Maritime Museum, and by the designation of the hospital and surrounding area as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Thornhill's work in the dome of St Paul's Cathedral is the subject of a major cleaning and conservation programme, and the artist's full-size copies of Raphael's cartoons are soon to emerge into the public eye after decades in the basement of the Royal Academy.²³ The latest scheme to take advantage of a wider public enthusiasm for heritage projects is that at Sherborne House, one of only a handful of Thornhill's smaller staircase paintings to survive. It recently became a runner-up in the BBC's *Restoration* programme, in which viewers were invited to vote for the dilapidated building they would most like to see 'saved'.

²² Andrea MacKean, 'The Shaping of Identity in Public Places: an examination of subjective identification in British decorated interiors, 1630-1800', PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 1999, esp. pp. 178-258.

²³ The conservation specialists involved in these recent and ongoing projects to restore Thornhill's work have produced a considerable body of mostly technical (and largely unpublished) research, providing a valuable source of additional information for the art historian.

In the wake of all these forms of restoration, my intention is not so much to restore Thornhill's reputation as British art's 'celebrated Country-man', but to understand why contemporaries held his work in such high esteem. Focusing on four very different examples of the artist's work, this thesis seeks to explain how and why the subjects and methods of decorative history painting adopted by Thornhill were meaningful for the artist's original audiences. To answer these questions, Thornhill's decorative schemes need to be considered within the social and political climate of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and as an integral part of the architectural spaces in which they were seen – not on the edge, but at the centre of a society in flux. Such a project also requires some account of the specific properties and limitations of a form of painting that has traditionally been afforded a lesser status in the history of art than other, more conventional kinds of painting.²⁴

'Those wilder sorts of Painting'

The use of decorative history painting in some of the nation's most important public buildings suggests that it was a form of art that eighteenth-century patrons and viewers regarded far more seriously than is often recognised. However, the tendency to overlook decorative history painting as mere decoration also has its roots in the eighteenth century. In the opening paragraphs of *A Notion of the historical draught or tablature of the Judgment of Hercules*, first published in English in 1713, Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, approached a definition of 'historical *Tablature*', his preferred name for history painting, by indicating those types of visual art that he did not regard as worthy of the name:

By the word *Tablature* (for which we have yet no name in *English*, besides the general one of *Picture*) we denote, according to the original word *Tabula*, a Work not only distinct from a mere *Portraiture*, but from all those wilder sorts

²⁴ Three studies of decorative history painting, though not relating to schemes in Britain, have provided useful examples for my own study in their approach to the specific pictorial demands of painted ceilings in particular. They are Malcolm Campbell's *Pietro da Cortona at the Pitti Palace: a study of the planetary rooms and related projects* (Princeton, NJ, 1976), John Beldon Scott's *Images of Nepotism: the painted ceilings of Palazzo Barberini* (Princeton, 1991), and Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall's study of Giambattista Tiepolo, *Tiepolo and the pictorial intelligence* (New Haven and London, 1994). The emphasis of these authors on the process of looking, something that is too often sidelined in the history of art, informs an important strand of this thesis.

of Painting which are in a manner absolute, and independent; such as the Paintings *in Fresco* upon the Walls, the Cielings, the Stair-cases, the Cupolo's, and other remarkable Places either of Churches or Palaces.²⁵

Though few decorative schemes in England were painted in true fresco – oil on a carefully primed plaster being much better suited to the damp climate – the term continued to be used, as Shaftesbury uses it here, to describe all figurative decoration applied directly to the wall or ceiling of a building.²⁶

There are many important differences between conventional easel painting and decorative painting. The scale of many decorative schemes, for one, meant that their application demanded equipment and techniques more often associated with the building trade than with the fine arts. Decorative painting, moreover, was typically designed to be seen from below, often by a mobile spectator passing from one part of a building to another. And it is this, more than the size or irregular support, that seems to have most offended Shaftesbury. For 'it is not merely the Shape or Dimension of a Cloth, or Board, which denominates the *Piece*, or *Tablature*', he continued:

But 'tis then that in Painting we may give to any particular Work the name of *Tablature*, when the Work is in reality "a Single Piece, comprehended in one View, and form'd according to *one single* Intelligence, Meaning, or Design; which constitutes a *real* Whole, by a mutual and necessary Relation of its Parts, the same as of the Members in a natural Body."²⁷

The visual plurality of decorative history painting – its openness to more than one view and its interaction with the surrounding visual environment – is one of its most distinctive features.

²⁵ Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, 'A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules', in *Characteristicks of men, manners, opinions, times*, 1714 (second edition), vol. 3, pp. 347-48. Shaftesbury's *Notion* was first published anonymously in French in 1712 and translated into English in 1713.

²⁶ One significant exception was Verrio's work at Windsor, which was painted in fresco secco, where the pigment was applied directly to the dry but unprimed plaster. The state to which the paintings had deteriorated by the nineteenth century was a major factor in the decision to pull them down during the 1820s.

²⁷ Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, 'A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules', p. 348.

Recent histories of British art and art theory that privilege the importance of Shaftesbury's *Notion* implicitly draw attention to the conspicuous absence of history painting during the opening decades of the eighteenth century.²⁸ Certainly, there was little demand for easel paintings of historical subjects, and few artists, if any, attempted to meet the exacting standards of 'tablature' set out by Shaftesbury. However, there is good reason to include, within an extended definition of history painting, the kinds of decoration purposely excluded by the third Earl. Such a definition would take in, for example, Louis Laguerre's depiction of the *Judgment of Hercules* on the staircase at Fetcham Park in Surrey (fig. 3), a painting that seems to demonstrate a detailed awareness of the *Notion* and other established definitions of history painting in the attitudes of its various figures, even if its situation, halfway up a flight of stairs, introduces a very un-Shaftesburian element of play to the 'arduous and rocky' climb advocated by the figure of Virtue.²⁹ An extended definition of history painting would also take account of much of Thornhill's work, including the eight scenes of religious history he produced in the dome, or cupola, of St Paul's Cathedral, which in their rejection of all things 'emblematical or enigmatick' are also broadly in agreement with Shaftesbury's ideas on the correct treatment of 'moral' subjects.³⁰

In the minds of many patrons and viewers, moreover, the differences between history painting and decorative history painting were less absolute than is allowed either by Shaftesbury or by the modern histories that take his ideas as read. Thornhill was routinely described as a history painter, and his appointment as History Painter to the King in 1718, though a largely symbolic office, at least acknowledged the arrival of an English painter deemed worthy of the title.³¹ It is one suggestion of this thesis that painting of the 'wilder sort' made a vital contribution to the intellectual as well as the visual culture of early eighteenth-century Britain.

One text worthy of special note here is John Elsum's *The Art of Painting After the Italian Manner With Practical Observations on the Principal Colours. And*

²⁸ The best discussion of Shaftesbury's *Notion* can be found in John Barrell's influential *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt*, New Haven and London, 1986, esp. pp. 1-33.

²⁹ Shaftesbury, 'A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules', p. 365. Fetcham Park belonged to the MP and South Sea Company director, Arthur Moore.

³⁰ Shaftesbury, 'A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules', pp. 381-82. The 'simplicity' of Thornhill's painting at St Paul's will be discussed in chapter two.

³¹ The position of History Painter in Ordinary had been vacant since the death of its previous incumbent, Antonio Verrio, in 1707.

Directions how to know a Good Picture, first published in 1703. Elsum's treatise combined a simple theory of painting and discrete advice on judging a 'Good Picture' for the would-be connoisseur with practical advice for working painters, including a lengthy discussion of 'dry painting' (using colour mixed with size rather than oil), which the author described as 'a sort of Painting fit only for works of great expedition, as *Scenes, Prospects, Triumphal Arches &c*'.³² Several sections are addressed specifically to decorative painters. Chapter 23, for example, advises 'how the painter ought to take due account of the place or form of the room', with the recommendation that 'in all Arched Roofs that he begin the Capital Figures of History in the middle part of the vault, and plant them against the Principal entrance of the Place'.³³ In many respects, Elsum's *The Art of Painting*, or an earlier treatise such as Alexander Browne's *Ars Pictoria* (1675), which combined rudimentary commentaries on the likes of Raphael and 'Leonard Vincent' with practical instructions for mixing colours, is more typical of the literature that was available to English painters during the early 1700s than the exclusive musings of Shaftesbury.³⁴

Another important publication, one aimed primarily at decorative painters, was the aforementioned translation of Pozzo's *Rules and Examples of Perspective*, which promised its readers 'a most easie and expeditious Method to Delineate in Perspective All Designs relating to Architecture'. Sturt's engravings (see, for example, figs 4-6) and James's translation provided a step-by-step demonstration from the first principles of drawing in perspective to the representation of complex architectural configurations. There is a later section on painting perspective scenery for the stage, followed by fifteen plates that deal specifically with the pictorial demands of ceiling painting, or '*Horizontal Perspective*'.³⁵

The specific practical and artistic qualities of grand-scale decorative painting, addressed by the likes of Elsum and Pozzo, highlight one of the most significant

³² John Elsum, *The Art of Painting After the Italian Manner With Practical Observations on the Principal Colours. And Directions how to know a Good Picture*, London, 1703, p. 35.

³³ John Elsum, *The Art of Painting After the Italian Manner*, pp. 80-81.

³⁴ Leonard Vincent was the Anglicised name for Leonardo da Vinci used by Alexander Browne in his *Ars Pictoria: or an Academy Treating of Drawing, Painting, Limning, Etching*, London 1675. Henry and Margaret Ogden's bibliography of seventeenth-century literature on painting, compiled for the *Art Bulletin* in 1947 (vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 196-201) remains a useful resource on the subject. See also Luigi Salerno, 'Seventeenth-Century English Literature on Painting', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 14, no. 3/4 (1951), pp. 234-58. However, the range and readership of the early-modern English literature on painting awaits further study.

³⁵ See Andrea Pozzo, *Rules and Examples of Perspective*, esp. figs 72-92.

differences between decorative history painting and 'tablature', or history painting proper: the close relationship between the decoration and both the painted architecture that usually framed the figurative content of a scheme and the actual architecture that provided its support. Any study of a form of art that functioned as both decoration and history painting has as much to learn from the history of architecture as from the history of painting. In the past, however, the study of decorative history painting in Britain has fallen between these traditionally separate art-historical disciplines. It has been easily overlooked by historians of painting and rarely afforded more than a passing mention in architectural histories, which typically end when the last stone of a building is put in place. The resulting historiographic anomaly has contributed to an almost involuntary blindness towards decorative painting and to the dualised status that makes it such a rewarding area to explore in more detail.

1689

One event of particular importance for any cultural history of early-modern England, and one that cuts through the middle of the period usually embraced by the 'English baroque', was the Glorious Revolution of 1688, in which the Catholic king, James II, was dethroned by a Dutch invader acting in collusion with an alliance of English noblemen determined to preserve what they regarded as their ancient feudal prerogatives.³⁶ For a generation, Britain's ruling elite was preoccupied by the interpretation and consequences of a revolution that circumvented the hereditary passage of the monarchy and which sparked a quarter of a century of near-continuous war against France. The legitimacy, or not, of the principles that had brought William and Mary to the throne divided England's landed magnates and the established Church, while the initial success of the coup handed the initiative to those Whig or whiggish noblemen who had benefited most from the removal of James II (and who stood to lose the most if he were to return). The 1690s and early 1700s also witnessed the reinvigoration of the City of London as an independent political force, and a

³⁶ The historiography of the Glorious Revolution and the political turbulence of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is immense. Among those works I have found most useful are Tim Harris' *Politics Under the Later Stuarts: Party Conflict in a Divided Society 1660-1715*, Harlow, 1993; J.P. Kenyon's *Revolution Principles: The Politics of Party 1689-1720*, Cambridge, 1977; and Craig Rose's *England in the 1690s: Revolution, Religion and War*, Oxford, 1999. The long-term consequences of the Glorious Revolution in the formation of a modern national identity are discussed by Linda Colley in her *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, New Haven and London, 1992.

dramatic rise in the wealth and influence of a mercantile urban elite, buoyed by the political opportunities offered by the Revolution settlement and enriched by the money-making opportunities of war.

The repositioning of England's political elite after 1688 prompted an equally significant, and no less conservative, cultural realignment that sought to reconcile the established apparatus of power with the extraordinary political upheavals of the Revolution – to accommodate unprecedented change while maintaining the illusion of continuity. The cultural consequences of the Revolution were felt in all areas of production, but were perhaps most visible in the fields of architecture and decorative painting: in the spaces of worship, of civic government and of military and feudal display that had previously lent their institutional authority to the monarchical ambitions of the Restoration court. The ideological and often physical reconstruction of such spaces after 1688 – from cathedral to parish church, and from country palace to town house – provided the location for much of Thornhill's work.

Thornhill was not the only artist employed in the cultural assimilation of the events and consequences of 1688. The strategic decision of William and Mary to remove the English court *en masse* from Windsor – the cultural heart of the Restoration court – to the Tudor palace at Hampton Court gave the elderly Italian painter Antonio Verrio the opportunity to redirect the skills he had honed at the former palace of Charles II to the service of the new regime, with remarkable results on the King's Staircase.³⁷ At Chatsworth, Louis Laguerre worked equally hard to reconcile a mode of painting previously associated with the Restoration monarchy with the very different political demands of the Duke of Devonshire. Elsewhere, the visiting Venetian painter Antonio Pellegrini made a significant contribution to the decoration of elite interiors – most notably at Kimbolton Castle in Huntingdonshire and Castle Howard in Yorkshire – as did Sebastiano Ricci in the chapel of Chelsea Hospital and at Burlington House, both in London.³⁸

³⁷ See Edgar Wind's iconographical analysis of Verrio's work for William III in 'Julian the Apostate at Hampton Court', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 3 (1939-40), pp. 127-37. While I find some of Wind's conclusions less than convincing, this essay still provides one of the most engaging discussions of decorative history painting in England.

³⁸ See Edward Croft-Murray, Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England 1537-1837*, vol. 2, esp. pp. 13-24. For a useful discussion of Pellegrini's work for the 3rd Earl of Carlisle at Castle Howard, see Charles Saumarez Smith, *The Building of Castle Howard*, London, 1997 (second edition), esp. pp. 95-107.

However, no other artist's career was more closely associated with the redecoration of the halls of power after 1688 than that of James Thornhill. His career began in 1689, the year of William and Mary's coronation, and his subsequent good fortune as a painter was both a consequence of, and a factor in, the long-term success of the Glorious Revolution and the Protestant succession that it inaugurated. This thesis therefore begins with the premise that Thornhill's work needs to be understood alongside the changing patterns of patronage, and the new demands that were made of visual art, in the wake of William's arrival in England on 5 November 1688.

Documents

This study draws on a wide range of documentary evidence. Among the most significant is a sketchbook by Thornhill, now in the collection of the British Museum, which he began in 1699, using it regularly (although in no particular order) throughout his career. A great deal can be gleaned from its pages about how the artist approached the complex art of decorative history painting, from his initial impressions of a prospective site to detailed designs for specific schemes. The sketchbook also includes several drawings after the work of other painters, as well as a series of topographical scenes, ideas for mythological and historical easel paintings and notes referring to other unexecuted or lost decorative projects. More than just a sketchbook, this important volume also served as a scrapbook for the artist, a sample book for potential patrons and a kind of *liber veritatis*, recording a number of his completed projects – all of which makes it a highly valuable resource for any investigation of Thornhill's work. In addition to the sketchbook, several hundred equally suggestive drawings by the artist survive in collections on both sides of the Atlantic.

George Vertue's notebooks, compiled between 1712 and 1756 for a planned history of English art, provide another rich, if rather chaotic, source of information. Their author's candid observations locate Thornhill at the centre of the vibrant and competitive art world of early eighteenth-century London.³⁹ Vertue's notes on the capital's early artists' clubs and academies, in which Thornhill played such a

³⁹ Vertue's notebooks were published in their original state by the *Walpole Society*, vols 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 29, Oxford, 1930-47. Vertue's notebooks also provided the basis for Horace Walpole's discussion of the artist in his *Anecdotes of Painting*, 4 vols, Strawberry Hill, 1762-71, vol. 4, pp. 20-23.

prominent role, have been painstakingly compiled and elucidated by Ilaria Bignamini for the *Walpole Society*. These form a particularly interesting strand of the notebooks, mapping the intricate social and professional networks within which an ambitious professional artist such as Thornhill could operate and achieve recognition.⁴⁰

Thornhill made two journeys abroad, to the Low Countries in 1711 and to France six years later, and on each occasion compiled a detailed travel journal, both of which are now in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum. These capture the artist in an ebullient, inquisitive mood – as likely to record a bawdy drinking song or the local price of wine as recount the many paintings, tapestries, sculptures and buildings that he and his fellow travellers encountered abroad. A facsimile of the earlier journal was published in 1975, with a useful introduction and commentary by Katharine Fremantle.

Two printed catalogues, produced for the posthumous sale of Thornhill's art collection in February 1735, provide a valuable insight into the range and quantity of images he acquired.⁴¹ The first catalogue, published by the *Burlington Magazine* in 1943, lists more than 300 paintings, including a considerable number of Thornhill's own oil sketches, models and finished paintings, which were sold alongside numerous works by his contemporaries (including around twenty by Laguerre). Thornhill's collection of old masters included Poussin's *Tancred and Erminia* (which he had acquired in Paris in 1717, now in the collection of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham) and Rubens's *The Graces Unveiling Nature*, as well as several paintings by, or optimistically attributed to, the likes of Annibale Carracci, Caravaggio and Guido Reni, and a 'Young *Hercules* in Marble, by Bernini'. The first sale catalogue also included copies by Thornhill of works by Rembrandt, Van Dyck and, above all, Raphael.⁴²

⁴⁰ Vertue's notes on London's artists clubs, together with his previously unpublished notes on the Virtuosi of St Luke and a most informative essay by Ilaria Bignamini, appear in Bignamini's 'George Vertue, Art Historian and Art Institutions in London 1689-1768', *Walpole Society*, vol. 54 (1988).

⁴¹ *A Catalogue of the Intire Collection Belonging to Sir James Thornhill*, sale cat., London, 24 & 25 February 1734/5; and *Catalogue of Sir James Thornhill's Collection of Prints, Drawings, Models Plasters &c.*, sale cat., London, 26-28 February 1734/5. The nature of early sale catalogues make it impossible to identify the majority of lots, beyond the brief descriptions given, often as simple as 'Two Flower-Pieces' or 'A Sun-set. Italian'. However, it seems as though Thornhill kept oil sketches relating to all of his decorative schemes and avidly collected the work of others.

⁴² The first sale included three different sized copies after Raphael's tapestry cartoons, including one full-size set as the final lot.

Thornhill's particular interest in Raphael is no less evident in his collection of prints and drawings which, together with the artist's plaster models, comprised the second sale. Among the lots were several sets of engravings after Raphael's tapestry cartoons, including an off-print of Dorigny's series (made from a wet impression, thus reversing the designs back to their original aspect) and several hundred drawings of the same, many of which are cross-referenced, indicating where Dorigny or another engraver has departed from the originals. Together, the sale catalogues suggest that Thornhill made a close study of the work of other artists – both contemporary and old master – and that he set his sights on the most celebrated of them all.

The first detailed biographical sketch of Thornhill's life appeared in the second volume of Antoine Dézallier d'Argenville's *Abregé de la vie des plus fameux peintres* in 1745, complete with a brief description of the artist's painting in the Royal Naval Hospital at Greenwich. Although Dézallier criticised the painting in the upper hall at Greenwich for its 'incorrectness', he nonetheless conceded that the designs displayed 'a true genius in their author, and a great judgment and knowledge in treating the allegory'.⁴³ Nine years later, Dézallier's account was revised and translated by James Burgess for the third English edition of Roger de Piles's *The Art of Painting* (1754) which, in addition to de Piles's *Lives and Characters of above 300 of the most eminent painters*, included Bainbrigg Buckeridge's *An Essay towards an English School of Painters* (first published in 1706). The prominent inclusion of Thornhill's life among such an array of earlier painters confirmed the artist's place at the head of a distinct 'English School' of painting. Burgess's translation of Dézallier subsequently became the principal source of information on Thornhill's life for nearly 200 years and is included here as appendix A.

Later in the eighteenth century, John Hutchins's *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset* (1774) illuminated a different but no less important side to Thornhill's life. Although Hutchins has little to say about painted interiors, his meticulous research of the social topography of Thornhill's home county of Dorset places the artist among the squirearchy of south-west England, where familial connections gave him access to a wealthy and aspiring class of potential employers

⁴³ Translated by J[ames] B[urgess] in Roger de Piles, *The Art of Painting, and the Lives of the Painters: containing, a compleat treatise of painting, designing, and the use of prints*, London, 1754 (third edition), p. 138.

whom, like his more urbane London associates, he became adept at handling to the best advantage.⁴⁴

These well-documented sources provide the basis of current understanding of the artist and his work. The many sites of Thornhill's decorative projects yield further information in the form of building accounts, occasional letters and other local material. These documents are more abundant in the cases of the artist's public commissions – projects overseen by committee invariably leave more for the historian to consider. However, such sources rarely reveal more than what was necessary for the business in hand, typically recording the timing and cost of different projects, and occasionally identifying other artists and craftsmen associated with the same project.

During the course of my research, I have referred to a variety of other textual materials. These sources, which include newspapers, poems, political pamphlets, sermons and other ephemera from the period, are not often directly concerned either with James Thornhill or with painting of any kind. However, insofar as they circulated at the same time and in the same places, and were informed by similar preoccupations and issues, they are essential to a proper understanding of the artist's work. Of equal importance are the visual remnants of the past – from the illuminated manuscripts of the Painter-Stainers' Company through the plain plaster walls of London's City churches to the plans and architectural details of the buildings decorated by the painter – which help to recover something of the wider visual environment into which Thornhill's work intervened. These materials, far more than those typically considered by Thornhill's chroniclers, allow us to recover the range of meanings that the artist's work would have had for its earliest viewers.

Structure

The four chapters of this thesis pursue two interconnected narratives: one concerned with the fashioning of Thornhill's own artistic identity; the other with the meanings

⁴⁴ See John Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, esp. vol. 1, pp. 410-13 and vol. 2, pp. 245-46 and 450-53. Thornhill's Dorset patrons included Henry Seymour Portman, for whom he painted a staircase at Sherborne House, General Thomas Erle, who employed Thornhill in 1718 to paint the staircase at Charborough Park, and George Bubb Doddington, later 1st Lord Melcombe at Eastbury Park, where he painted the chapel and dining room ceiling. In 1722 Bubb Doddington also became Thornhill's political patron, securing his election as MP for Weymouth and Melcombe Regis.

and impact of the painter's work within the visual culture of early eighteenth-century England.

Chapter one considers Thornhill's career-long relationship with the political and visual structures of the City of London – from his induction into the painting trade as a young apprentice to his subsequent return as master of the Painter-Stainers' Company in 1720 – before examining a group of allegorical paintings made by the artist in the mid-1720s for the newly rebuilt Council Chamber of the Guildhall. Investigating Thornhill's earliest professional experiences in the City leads to a re-evaluation of the role of the Painter-Stainers' Company during the later seventeenth century, challenging the established art-historical view of the Company as an outdated, backward-looking institution of little or no relevance to the history of art. Re-reading Thornhill's Council Chamber paintings alongside a prevailing tradition of corporate heraldic imagery within the City reveals how the artist introduced a new kind of civic history painting into the Guildhall, at the same time confirming an important aspect of his own identity as a civic artist.

Chapter two moves across the City to St Paul's Cathedral, where Thornhill's eight scenes from the life of St Paul in the inner dome constitute one of the most ambitious displays of history painting in British art – and also one of the most overlooked. Produced at a time of acute political and spiritual instability, in an age when the display of religious painting in Protestant churches was regarded with suspicion, Thornhill's pictorialisation of the apostolic acts of London's patron saint sought to reinforce the identity of the Anglican Church. After examining the theological implications of the artist's work at St Paul's, the chapter considers the importance of the legacy in England of Raphael, whose celebrated tapestry cartoons provided the principal model for the painted dome, imbuing Thornhill's scheme with a powerful political resonance and artistic weight. Finally, it reveals how Thornhill's scheme attained new meanings when reproduced as a series of fine engravings and circulated within the secular realm of the virtuosi print collector (another politicised space whose emergence was facilitated by the economic and cultural developments of the 1680s and 90s). The result confirmed the artist's reputation as a leading exponent of that most elevated of genres: religious history painting.

A third chapter focuses on Thornhill's work for the 1st Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth in Derbyshire and asks why the artist became the painter of choice among England's post-Revolutionary aristocratic elite. At Chatsworth, Thornhill's painting

can still be examined alongside the work of his closest rivals, Antonio Verrio and Louis Laguerre. This chapter begins by looking at some of this earlier work, then concentrates on Thornhill's interpretation of the Ovidian tale of the fall of Phaeton and his depiction of the rape of the Sabine women, painted on the west stairs and in the second-floor saloon respectively. The artist's revival of these two violent narratives from classical mythology and early Roman history can be understood as part of a larger artistic project at Chatsworth that sought to assimilate and historicise the revolutionary events of England's immediate past within an existing and essentially conservative elite visual culture.

Thornhill's decoration of the Royal Naval Hospital at Greenwich provides the subject of the final chapter. This chapter begins by considering the troubled early building history of the hospital, before examining the circumstances that led to the decoration of the lower hall, the first part of the building to be painted. By looking in detail at Thornhill's work in the lower hall, the chapter shows how the artist adapted the kind of apotheosis ceiling painting previously identified with the palatial interiors of the Restoration court, in order to suit the very different, public environment of Greenwich. The final sections consider the decoration of the smaller, but no less important, upper hall – a separate commission conceived and painted several years after the lower hall. The pictorial issues involved in joining the two principal spaces of the painted hall can be understood in relation to the political requirement to represent the interrupted succession of William and Mary, Anne and George I as seamlessly as possible. Thornhill's eventual solution to both of these problems – decorative and ideological – resulted in a complete scheme that could be read by the visiting public as a visually unified, politically coherent allegory of the Protestant succession.

The scope of Thornhill's career, suggested by these four very different schemes, found clear expression in the decoration of the artist's own country house, Thornhill Park. Almost a century after it was painted, John Hutchins described a 'beautiful ceiling' in the drawing room of the house, 'painted by Sir James Thornhill, with his head at the centre'.⁴⁵ The painting itself was removed early in the nineteenth century, but its appearance can be ascertained from a late eighteenth-century aquatint of an original drawing by Thornhill, engraved by Conrad Metz for his *Imitations of*

⁴⁵ John Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, second edition, vol. 3, p. 675. See also William R. Osmun, 'A Study of the Works of Sir James Thornhill'.

ancient and modern drawings (fig. 7).⁴⁶ The print shows Pallas Athene, or Minerva, here in her more peaceful guise as patron of the arts, with a group of putti surrounding an unframed portrait of Thornhill – recognisable as the artist, even in Metz’s print, for having the same corpulent features as in John Faber’s 1732 mezzotint. The self-aggrandising message of the ceiling is clear, and becomes even more so when we consider that it was produced by the artist for his own country seat – itself an ostentatious symbol of the success that painting had brought.

Of equal interest are the four emblematic groups that occupy the corners of the ceiling. The components of these still-life arrangements and their significance as part of Thornhill’s carefully fashioned artistic identity can be seen more clearly in a closely related drawing in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 8). In the upper-left corner (the positions and compositions are reversed in Metz’s print), a painter’s palette and brushes sit between a beehive and a cornucopia in a composition described by the artist as ‘Industry rewarded with Plenty’. Other objects included in this civic-minded still-life are identified by the artist as emblems of Liberty, Trade, Vigilance and Merchandise. Underneath is a composition described as ‘Heroick Vertues &c.’, with Honour, Loyalty, ‘Love of ones Country’ and other virtues represented by a variety of martial and mythological motifs, including a Roman battle dress and a Herculean club. Next comes an assembly of religious motifs, including Charity, Chastity, Immortality, Magnanimity and Truth. Finally, in the upper-right corner, Thornhill has depicted the ‘Arts & Sciences rewarded with Laurels [and] Fame’ – the clearest allusion on the ceiling to the artist’s own unprecedented achievements in the field of painting. The four corners of Thornhill’s drawing room ceiling correspond broadly to the themes examined in the following chapters, each of which examines the artist’s intervention in a different sphere of early eighteenth-century cultural and political life.

By concentrating on four very different examples of Thornhill’s painting, it has been possible to give the artist’s work the kind of close attention and extended analysis that has been conspicuously absent from the study of decorative history painting in England, while suggesting, I hope, ways in which other, equally complex schemes might be approached in the future. Moreover, a close consideration of four of the most important of Thornhill’s surviving schemes reveals the artist to be a far more

⁴⁶ Conrad M. Metz, *Imitations of ancient and modern drawings from the restoration of the arts in Italy, to the present time*, London, 1798

sophisticated and accomplished painter than has often been allowed. During a career that spanned four decades, Thornhill reached a level of success achieved by no other English artist before him and few since. Painting made him wealthy and famous, enabling him to join the ranks of those 'people of quality and fortune' who had provided him with such a lucrative income.⁴⁷ During his lifetime he was praised by no less a critic than Richard Steele for his 'Masterly Hand, and uncommon Genius'; and following his death, on or shortly after 29 April 1734, he was publicly celebrated by the obituarist of the *Gentleman's Magazine* as 'the greatest History Painter this Kingdom ever produced'.⁴⁸ Prompted by such extraordinary claims, and by the sheer scale of Thornhill's enterprise, this thesis is an attempt to give the artist's work the close attention it clearly demands.

⁴⁷ J[ames] B[urgess] in Roger de Piles, *The Art of Painting, with the lives and characters of above 300 of the most eminent painters*, London, 1754 (third edition), p. 137.

⁴⁸ *The Lover*, 11 May 1714. Reprinted in [Richard Steele], *The Lover. To which is added, The Reader*, London, 1715, pp. 223-24; *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 4 (May 1734), pp. 274-75. Thornhill's death was also recorded in the *Daily Journal* (11 May 1734), the *Grub-street Journal* (16 May) and the *Weekly Register* (18 May). The *Gentleman's Magazine* obituary is reprinted in Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth: His Life, Art and Times*, New Haven and London, 1971, vol. 2, appendix F. The date of Thornhill's death is alternatively given as 4 May and 13 May (the latter not possible but cited in the *Gentleman's Magazine*).

CHAPTER ONE

Representing the City

The City of London – the square mile or so of land incorporated under the jurisdiction of the lord mayor – was the location for several defining episodes in James Thornhill's career. It was in the City that he began his professional life, as an apprentice of the Painter-Stainers' Company; and it was to the Guildhall, the political heart of the City, that Thornhill returned almost forty years later to undertake the last public scheme of his career. Understanding his relationship with the City and its various institutions is therefore essential to understanding Thornhill, both as an artist and as a public figure.

In 1774, John Hutchins remarked that Thornhill was 'bred an house painter, but afterwards applied himself to history painting with so much success, that he excelled all the English'.¹ When Thornhill entered the trade as a teenager, the typical painter working in the City was a well-trained artisan and a freeman of the Painter-Stainers' Company, more often than not finding employment in the collaborative industry of decoration. Even the more highly skilled among such men worked closely with members of other building-related trades – plasterers, carpenters and masons – all of whose work was routinely finished with the painter's brush. Of the different branches of painting represented by the Company, the house painters constituted the largest. House painters frequently specialised in fashionable grotesquery or in the painted imitation of materials such as walnut, marble and porphyry, real versions of which were so expensive as to be the preserve of only the grandest buildings. Even those painters who showed themselves competent in figurative work or landscape views – men such as Robert Agas, Francis Barlow and Robert Robinson – were likely to be deemed 'house painters' in the eyes of the Painter-Stainers' Company and were often employed in painting the wainscot walls of London houses and taverns, or in producing temporary images for the theatre and for public celebrations such as the annual lord mayor's procession. The City's house painters, along with the arms painters (specialising in heraldry) and leather gilders, accompanied by their journeymen assistants and apprentices, constituted the majority of painters working in

¹ John Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, London, 1774, vol. 1, p. 410.

London during the second half of the seventeenth century. For these painters, membership of the Company provided a variety of meaningful professional and social associations, a reliable source of apprentice labour and a limited degree of protection against the unauthorised practice of others.²

The Painter-Stainers' Company thus encompassed a wide range of practice, from the rendering of walls and ceilings with a single colour to the more skilled work of the arms painter and specialist house painters. At the lower end of the trade, professional painting could be defined in relatively straightforward, legal terms, as exemplified by the Company's successful restriction of the City's plasterers to the use of six colours 'mingled with size' only, which prohibited a plasterer from painting his own work in anything but the most basic way, and in doing so defined oil-based paint and the mixing of colours as the preserve of the painter-stainer.³ But at the other end of the profession, where the lines between the trade and what we more familiarly know as the 'art' of painting became more blurred, such precise definitions were harder to reach. And it was in this intriguing, shifting area between artistic and artisanal definitions of painting that Thornhill's earliest professional experiences can be located.

In addition to the occupational advantages and obligations of membership, freedom of the Painter-Stainers' Company conveyed citizenship, with a limited 'freedom' to participate in the political affairs of the City. London's citizens were responsible for electing the City's legislative Court of Common Council and, when a ward became vacant, for shortlisting candidates for the executive Court of Aldermen. The internal organisation of the Painter-Stainers' Company – based on the same medieval guild structure that shaped each of the City's sixty or so trade-based companies – was in some ways analogous to the political make-up of the Corporation as a whole, consisting of the ordinary freemen, or yeomanry, a more privileged livery and a governing Court of Assistants. Promotion through the Company's ranks conferred a higher status on the individual and signalled a greater participation in the

² The only comprehensive study of the Painter-Stainers' Company remains W.A.D. Englefield's *The History of the Painter-Stainers' Company of London*, London, 1936 (second issue with addenda).

³ The six colours, 'Whiting, Blacking, Redlead, Redoker, Yellow Oker and Russet', had been granted to the plasterers by Act of Parliament in 1602 (I Jac. I., c.4). The seventeenth century saw a prolonged dispute between the Company and the City's plasterers over what could and could not be painted by whom, and between the arms painters within the Company and the Heralds of the College of Arms. Both are discussed in detail in the Company's official history, W.A.D. Englefield, *The History of the Painter-Stainers' Company of London*. See also, J. H. Parker Oxspring, 'The Painter-Stainers and their dispute with the Heralds', unpublished typescript, Guildhall Library, 1966.

City's polity.⁴ The Company, therefore, provided a social and political framework in which the professional interests of the City's skilled painters coincided with the political and economic interests of the City as a whole. A good reputation or expertise in a particularly fashionable branch of the trade might have enabled a painter to charge a higher fee for his services. But it was his participation in the successive rites of apprenticeship, freedom and promotion through the Company's hierarchy that remained the most recognisable marks of an English painter's success at the outset of Thornhill's career.

This brief overview of the professional and political organisation of painters in the City of London marks out the terrain covered by this chapter, which considers three different aspects of Thornhill's association with the City over a period of four decades. The first two sections look at Thornhill's various dealings with the Painter-Stainers' Company, from his earliest encounter as a young and impressionable apprentice during the 1690s to his unlikely return as master of the Company thirty years later. The Painter-Stainers' Company has not attracted much interest among modern art historians. Reassessing these particular episodes in Thornhill's career questions the prevalent view of the Company as an 'essentially medieval and reactionary body', of little consequence to the history of seventeenth- or eighteenth-century art.⁵ In place of this rather dismissive analysis, and through using the archives of the Company itself, it is possible to argue for a more positive role for the Company, not only in the formation of Thornhill's own identity as an English artist, but more generally, in the establishment of painting as an intellectually oriented art among a significant number of English practitioners.

The final section of this chapter moves across the City from the Painter-Stainers' Hall to the Guildhall where, during the mid-1720s, Thornhill painted an allegorical scheme for the new Council Chamber. Thornhill's intervention in the decoration of the Council Chamber was the result not of a commission, but of the artist's own initiative – a gesture of his own apparently civic-minded generosity. The six paintings that he eventually presented to the City introduced the high-minded

⁴ Liverymen could sit at Common Hall, a higher electoral assembly responsible for choosing the City's four MPs and for participating in shrieval and mayoral elections. They could also stand for election to the Court of Aldermen, although a combination of life tenure, complex selection procedures and stiff property requirements ensured that the aldermancy remained a more or less oligarchic body until the nineteenth century.

⁵ Margaret Whinney and Oliver Millar, *English Art, 1625-1714*, Oxford, 1957, p. 81.

language of allegorical painting into the Guildhall for the first time, dramatically altering a visual environment that had hitherto been defined by sober portraiture and repeated heraldic devices. The centrepiece of Thornhill's scheme at the Guildhall has been described as an example of the 'new Augustan style' – a description that usefully captures the significant difference between this picture and the 'baroque' exuberance for which the artist is better known.⁶ But rather than seeking to understand Thornhill's Council Chamber paintings as part of a grand transition from one art-historical age to another, it seems more profitable to consider them in the context of the local surroundings of the Guildhall, in relation to the visual history and conventions of the City, and alongside the artist's other activities in the capital. By examining in detail these three separate yet clearly related aspects of Thornhill's career, a relatively unknown side to the artist, as a civic painter, begins to emerge.

Before returning to Thornhill's association with the capital's painter-stainers, it is important to note that in discussing the civic organisation of the City of London in relation to its visual traditions and innovations, I am describing a very different notion of the 'civic' to that usually associated with the history of the visual arts (and with history painting in particular) in Britain at the beginning of the eighteenth century. I am referring here to that other 'civic' realm occupied by the free man and citizen of the 'republic of taste' imagined, in its most theoretical form, by the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury and best explained by John Barrell in *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt*.⁷ Although full participation in London's polity was restricted to the City's liverymen, whose economic qualification set them above the lower yeomanry, London's free citizens were far from being the disinterested men of independent means imagined by Shaftesbury and his eighteenth-century followers. Indeed, it was precisely the free Londoner's 'interest in promoting the interests of [one, determinate occupation] and his own success in it' (which, according to the discourse of civic humanism, signalled the 'mechanic's' inability to participate in public life) that marked his qualification to participate in the political management of the City.⁸ The civic environment of London, from the poorest freemen at the lower

⁶ [Vivien Knight], *High Art at Guildhall: Thornhill, Rigaud and the City Corporation*, exh. pamphlet, London, Guildhall Library, 1984, unpaginated.

⁷ See Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711) and John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt*, New Haven and London, 1986, esp. pp. 1-68.

⁸ John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt*, p. 8. See also David H.

end of the trades to the fabulously wealthy merchants and financiers who dominated the Court of Aldermen was – while in no real sense any more egalitarian – a world away from the aristocratic fantasies of Shaftesbury.

The Painter-Stainers' Company

The first years of an artist's career are often retrospectively endowed with a special significance. After all, it is during this time, more often than not, that a painter begins to acquire the skills and the knowledge demanded by the age in which he is living, when the rudiments of his artistic identity are nurtured, and when the possibility – if not the degree or the direction – of his later success is first established.

Thornhill's career began on 9 May 1689, when he accompanied Thomas Highmore to the Painter-Stainers' Hall in Little Trinity Lane to be bound as an apprentice.⁹ For Thornhill's biographers, the relatively anonymous, trade-oriented nature of an apprenticeship in seventeenth-century London has sat uncomfortably with his later renown as a history painter, which sees him excelling in something regarded as altogether more noble than the kind of repetitive, artisanal work associated with English painter-stainers. The long-standing historiographic divide between the trade and the art of painting and, linked to this, between the visual culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Britain, has had a significant effect on the way Thornhill's career has been perceived. Barely a decade after the artist's death, Thornhill's first biographer, Antoine Dézallier d'Argenville, set out what became an orthodox evaluation of the artist's earliest experiences as a painter. Referring to Highmore, Thornhill's master, as a mediocre painter of 'limited talents', he wrote that Thornhill, becoming his own mentor, 'trusted to his own judgment and application; genius and taste supplying the place of a master'.¹⁰ More recently, and on a similar

Solkin, *Painting for Money: the visual arts and the public sphere in eighteenth-century England*, New Haven and London, 1992, esp. pp. 3-26; and Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, Cambridge, 1994, esp. pp. 143-53.

⁹ Painter-Stainers' Company Register of Apprentices Bindings, Guildhall Library MS 5669, 72r.

¹⁰ From a translation by J[ames] B[urgess] of Dézallier d'Argenville's *Abregé de la vie des plus fameux peintres* (1745), appended to Banbrigg Buckeridge, *An Essay towards an English School of Painters*, London, n.d. (third edition).

note, Thornhill's apprenticeship has been described as 'lost time' – time that had to be made up before his career could begin in earnest.¹¹

Given the date of Dézallier's observations (they were first published in 1745) and the likelihood that the two men had known each other during the 1720s, it may be tempting to read the Frenchman's testimony as a factually accurate account of Thornhill's career.¹² However, it is important to recognise how Dézallier's language (or, rather, that of his contemporary translator, James Burgess) falls into a familiar narrative, popularised by Vasari, of the individual artistic genius triumphing over the cultural constraints encountered in his youth.¹³ As if answering William Aglionby's often-cited complaint that England 'never had, as yet, any of Note, that was an English Man, that pretended to History-Painting', Dézallier expressed an already widely held belief that Thornhill had been England's long-awaited native history painter, uniquely capable of excelling his closest French and Italian rivals in that most elevated genre.¹⁴ Dézallier's suggestion that Thornhill's achievements owed little to an earlier generation of unremarkable trade-oriented English painters carried considerable weight in the middle of the eighteenth century, by which time a new generation of English artists were seeking to disassociate their activities from the taint of artisanship; and the idea that Thornhill's success had emerged against the grain – the result of latent 'genius' and innate 'taste' – has persisted ever since.

Relatively little is known about Highmore, who was fifteen years Thornhill's senior, or about the kind of painting that he practised. He is described in the Painter-Stainers' Register of Apprentice Bindings as the son of a gentleman, and the few known details about his subsequent career cast him as a well-connected, highly accomplished non-figurative painter at the more sophisticated end of that branch of the trade commonly known as house painting. His public life in the capital followed the conventional pattern of professional success and social respectability common to the City's livery companies. He rose steadily through the ranks of the Painter-

¹¹ Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England*, London, 1962-70, vol. 1, p. 69. Croft-Murray echoed Dézallier's assessment of Highmore's talents, dismissing him as 'a very dim figure'.

¹² Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England*, vol. 1, p. 69.

¹³ See in particular, the early biographies of Cimabue and Giotto. Eg: 'It was, indeed, a great miracle that in so gross and incompetent an age Giotto could be inspired to such good purpose that by his work he completely restored the art of design, of which his contemporaries knew little or nothing.' G. Vasari, *Lives of the Artists: Volume I*, trans. George Bull, London, 1987, p. 57.

¹⁴ William Aglionby, *Painting Illustrated in Three Dialogues*, 1685, xiv.

Stainers' Company, becoming upper warden in 1720, the year he died.¹⁵ Furthermore, his appointment as Serjeant Painter to Queen Anne in 1702 reveals Highmore's considerable success beyond the City, and points to his expertise in a variety of different specialisms, as well as an ability to co-ordinate the work of other painters on big projects. All of these were among the qualities required of a Serjeant Painter and are skills that would later be demonstrated by Thornhill in his ability to undertake several large-scale decorative commissions simultaneously. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Highmore had contributed to the decoration of Chatsworth House and Hampton Court, very probably accompanied on each occasion by his young apprentice, who later returned to both places to paint large decorative schemes in his own right.¹⁶ Given even these few details, it is possible to get a sense of the significance of the seven years or more that Thornhill spent with Highmore during the 1690s. However, the importance of Thornhill's early experiences as a painter can be appreciated more fully through a better understanding of the social and cultural environment of the Painter-Stainers' Company at the time of his apprenticeship.

Among the earliest of Thornhill's surviving drawings is a small sketch showing, in the lower part of the page, a group of putti symbolising the art of painting (figs 9 and 10). On the left is an infant artist, accompanied by two other figures. Next to them, in the centre, several other young painters admire a landscape piece that one of them has made, while further to the right, three others support a cartouched shield bearing a clear, if sketchy, resemblance to the armorial bearings of the Painter-Stainers' Company (see, for example, fig. 23).¹⁷ Finally, seated in the bottom right-hand corner, another putti is shown drawing. This particular sketch is notable for its juxtaposition of the figurative vocabulary of allegorical art and academic painting (both of which are abundantly on display elsewhere in the sketchbook) with the heraldic symbolism of the Painter-Stainers' Company. The inclusion of the Company's arms in what is essentially an allegory of painting as a liberal art would seem to suggest that Thornhill, at the outset of his career, regarded the Painter-Stainers' Company as meaningful to his own youthful artistic identity – a possibility

¹⁵ Guildhall Library MS 5669, 20 Nov 1674. Most of the other known details of Highmore's career are described in Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England*, vol. 1, p. 264.

¹⁶ See Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England*, vol. 1, p. 264. The nature of Highmore's contribution to the decoration of Chatsworth and Hampton Court is not known.

¹⁷ The Company's quartered coat of arms, with three escutcheons in the first and fourth quarters and three phoenix heads in the second and third, would match Thornhill's suggestive diagram exactly.

that would seem to contradict every assessment of the artist's career from Dézallier onwards. On the one hand, this image can be understood alongside the other drawings in Thornhill's sketchbook, as part of a compendium of the artist's aspirations and achievements as an independent painter. On the other hand, it is useful to consider these incidental putti alongside a number of rather different images, painted around the same time by a group of unnamed painter-stainers and still on display in the Company's hall (see, for example, figs 11-13).

The modest size and monochrome appearance of these closely related paintings indicate that they were subsidiary panels, not designed to occupy the central decorative space of the Company's hall, nor to be displayed as independent works of art outside of their intended environment.¹⁸ One of the images shows three putti studying a painting of an aged personification of Time (see fig. 11). Despite the inclusion of a painter's palette on the ground to identify the infants' artistic aspirations, the damaged appearance of the painting and, in a rather literal way, its venerable subject matter suggest that the object of the young painters' attention is the work of an 'old master', rather than an image of their own making. On the left, a reclining putto – one hand in the trickling water of a stream, the other holding a pair of dividers – appears to be assessing the merits of the painting that he and his companions have found. Both the subject and the composition of this painting bear an interesting resemblance to a group of putti at the centre of another early sketch by Thornhill (fig. 14), which also conveys a sense of artistic ambition within a civic context by including a group of infant painters alongside a quartered coat of arms. In fact, the artistic and intellectual pursuits of putti (as if acknowledging the immaturity of the paintings themselves) is a recurring theme of this little-known group of images at the Painter-Stainers' Hall. They were all made by painters, like Thornhill, whose proficiency in the trade had already been formally proven by a seven-year apprenticeship, but whose ambitions clearly reached beyond the traditional training of an English painter. And like the two designs from Thornhill's sketchbook, they display a combination of youthful ambition with a sense that a liberal artistic

¹⁸ These paintings, all of which are painted in oil on wood panels, are traditionally thought to have been made in or shortly after 1703, when the Company's Court of Assistants ordered that one of the upstairs rooms be wainscoted; see W.A.D. Englefield, *The History of the Painter-Stainers' Company* (second issue), p. 167. They are referred to collectively in the Company's terrier of 1723 as being 'in the little parlour upstairs' among 'eight and twenty pictures fixed in pannells given by several members benefactors of this Company'; see Guildhall Library MS 11505, 12v.

education required extensive practice and an intellectual engagement with other works of art. Most interestingly – whether by incorporating the Company’s arms, or by being displayed in the Company’s hall – all of the images discussed here (Thornhill’s included) suggest that, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Painter-Stainers’ Company provided an environment where that kind of discourse could take place. To understand the origins of this artistic ambition, we need to look in some detail at the aspirations and achievements of an even earlier generation of English painter-stainers.

The Painter-Stainers’ Hall provided an impressive environment for the Company’s meetings, for binding apprentices, holding elections and hosting official feasts. During the last quarter of the seventeenth century, it also became the venue for an annual feast organised by a group of like-minded Company members calling themselves the Society of Painters.¹⁹ This society appears to have held a regular St Luke’s supper at least since the mid-1670s, for in April 1677 the Company’s Court of Assistants ordered that any future events held by the Society, to whom they referred simply as ‘the paynters’, should begin and end earlier in the day and that ‘none be admitted into the hall at that time without a tickett from the master and stewards of the same feast’.²⁰ As well as ensuring that the events organised by the Society of Painters became more formal and, no doubt, more sober occasions, this intervention by the Company’s executive can also be regarded as a tacit acknowledgement of a growing interest in a more intellectual and independent-minded conception of painting among a significant section of its membership.

The elaborately designed ‘ticketts’, or invitations, that the society issued for its subsequent feasts, to which we will return, indicate an interest in figurative painting or, more specifically, life drawing as a means of improving painting (see figs 15-17). Drawing had always formed a part of the preparatory work of a painter. Arms painting, for example, or the symmetrical grotesquery that was popular during the seventeenth century, demanded considerable drawing expertise. But as a previous generation of painters had discovered, too much emphasis on drawing, particularly of the human figure, was regarded with suspicion by the Company’s authorities. By

¹⁹ Information on the size and activities of the Society of Painters is scarce. However, a lot can be gleaned from the invitations they issued and from the few entries in the Company’s minutes that refer to them, discussed below.

²⁰ Guildhall Library MS 5667/2 part 1, 212.

adding a potentially endless (and in itself unproductive) dimension to a painter's training, drawing from life could even be construed as contradictory to the seven-year apprenticeship system that underpinned the Company's authority. During the 1650s, a group of yeoman painters had requested the use of the lower parlour of the Painter-Stainers' Hall 'for an academe to make use of draweing to the life'. Their request was unequivocally denied by the Company's elders who, prompted perhaps by the morally ambiguous prospect of having a nude model posing in the esteemed surroundings of the hall, subsequently forbade all members from taking part in any such academy.²¹ By the end of the 1670s, however, a serious interest in figurative art and a sense of the skills required to produce it had become established among a significant number of English painters – evidently ambitious and organised enough to initiate their own society outside of the formal hierarchy of the Company. And it seems likely that any artistic activities held by the Society of Painters, outside of their known feasts, involved drawing practice of some kind, whether from a life model (as suggested by their invitation designs) or, like the putti in Thornhill's sketches, from cast figures. The emergence of a more academic approach to painting among certain painter-stainers, and the Company's gradual acceptance of their activities as a legitimate part of the work of a professional painter, were closely related to another, more familiar force of change in the history of British art.

It has long been recognised that the biggest single factor affecting English painting during the seventeenth century was the increasing presence of foreign artists. However, with few exceptions, previous discussions of the subject have concentrated on a handful of elite foreign painters and their influence on the tastes and habits of their royal and aristocratic patrons.²² But it is important to note that, following the disappearance in 1642 of the court as a cultural focal point and source of patronage for foreign painters, the Painter-Stainers' Company became the most visible way for incoming artists to join London's cultural economy. And to those highly skilled foreign painters who either remained, or arrived, in London during the interregnum, some form of association with the Company quickly became advantageous.

²¹ Guildhall Library MS 5667/2 part 1, 46r and v.

²² One notable exception is Susan Foister, 'Foreigners at Court: Holbein, Van Dyck and the Painter-Stainers Company', in David Howarth (ed.), *Art and Patronage in the Caroline Courts: essays in honour of Sir Oliver Millar*, Cambridge, 1993. Foister extends her discussion of painting during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to include the Painter-Stainers' Company; she is rare among recent art historians in regarding the Company as a serious factor in the history of art in early modern England.

The degree to which foreign painters were tolerated by the Company largely depended on the branch of painting they practised. Among English leather gilders, for example, who saw their specialism gradually fall out of fashion as the century progressed, or among those at the lower end of the trade, already vulnerable to the encroachment of unskilled labourers and wily plasterers, the further imposition of 'strangers' was resisted.²³ The novel skills displayed by foreign figurative painters, however, posed less immediate competition to the existing membership, and their acknowledgement by the Company prompted less opposition.²⁴ In 1649, the Company's officers ordered that 'all those Natives that be Picturemakers, and are admitted of this Company, who have not served to freemen of this Cittie [ie, an apprenticeship], shall pay £3 a man for their admittance, besides 20s more for ye duties of the hall'.²⁵ Despite the stipulation of 'native' painters, perhaps included to allay the fears of a minority within the Company, numerous foreign 'picturemakers' (a term used with greater frequency during this period to describe the makers of easel paintings) were subsequently admitted to the Company as 'stranger brothers'. These artists were mostly painters from the Low Countries working within the capital's fledgling portrait industry, or producing landscape overmantels and flower pieces for London's fashionable interiors.²⁶

Entries in the Company's minutes over the next three decades reveal a significant number of foreigners requesting admission, indicating a progressively closer association between the Company and immigrant artists.²⁷ By the time of the

²³ In 1675, for example, the admission of a well-known French gilder, Renatus Cozens (on the recommendation of the lord mayor) prompted resistance, being considered 'to the greate prejudice of the members of this company of the same profession'. It was subsequently ordered that no other foreigners would be made free without first giving the opportunity for existing members to appeal against their admission. See Guildhall Library MS 5667/2 part 1, 185-97.

²⁴ A very good study of the City companies' response to the changing political and physical environment of London during the seventeenth century (though not dealing specifically with the Painter-Stainers) is Joseph P. Ward, *Metropolitan Communities: trade guilds, identity, and change in early modern London*, Stanford, 1997. The dynamics of change that Ward identifies among the City's companies have proved useful to this section.

²⁵ Guildhall Library MS 5667/2 part 1, 8v.

²⁶ The term 'stranger brother' was also used by the Company to describe English painters admitted to the Company who, like Robert Streeter, the elder, had neither served an apprenticeship in the City nor inherited the right to freedom by patrimony. A stranger brother was entitled to the same commercial benefits (and subject to the same obligations) as freemen and was allowed to have apprentices, but was not automatically granted the political freedom of the City.

²⁷ An entry from 30 July 1662 (Guildhall Library MS 5667/2 part 1, 71) is fairly typical: 'At this court diverse Dutchmen appearing it is ordered that they should give their m[aste]r piece within 3 moneths next ensuing [...] w[hi]ch accordingly they did submit to the said order and promised performance thereof.' The names of six Dutch painters are mentioned, including Jacobus Houseman (Huysman). On

Restoration, two foreign painters – Balthazar Flusheere, a Dutch frame-maker and portrait painter, and John Baptist Gaspar (or Casper), a French portraitist and drapery painter – had been chosen as ‘stranger assistants’ and routinely sat alongside the master and wardens at the Court of Assistants, where they acted in an advisory capacity as representatives of the growing number of ‘stranger painters’ in the capital.²⁸ What had begun as an attempt by the Company to exercise its authority and gather additional revenue from foreign painters during the 1640s, soon became a mutually beneficial association.

Before long, the presence of the strangers was visible in the Painter-Stainers’ Hall. Picture-makers were typically admitted to the Company on condition that they submit a ‘proof piece’, or ‘master piece’.²⁹ As a result of this policy, the Company soon became host to a showcase of paintings by some of the most highly regarded, often academically trained, foreign painters then working in England. These works of art included examples of history painting, landscape, still life and flower painting by a variety of mostly Dutch and Flemish specialists.³⁰ The display of these pictures in the

17 June 1674, Jan Wyck appeared before the court and paid quarterage for himself and his father, Thomas.

²⁸ Flusheere’s history with the Company nicely illustrates the gradual acceptance of foreign artists. He was initially summoned by the Court of Assistants in 1652, under threat of prosecution, ‘for not being conformable’, However, on agreeing to pay his quarterage in arrears, Flusheere was accepted into the Company and, in February 1657/8, was chosen as a stranger assistant, after which he regularly took part in Company searches and committees. Peter Lely was also chosen as a stranger assistant at the same time as Flusheere, but does not appear to have been actively involved to the same extent. See, for example, Guildhall Library MS 5667/2 part 1, 19r-v, 23r and 53v.

²⁹ A typical entry in the Company’s minutes, from 6 March 1677/8 (Guildhall Library MS 5667/2 part 1, 228), reads: ‘Mr Adrian Vandest appeared now and p[ro]miseth to give his prooffe peece he lives with Vanbeck in Durham Yard.’ Similarly, on 15 Sep 1682 (Guildhall Library MS 5667/2 part 1, 272), Peter Vandermulen was admitted as ‘a Foreign Brother of this Company’, paid 40s and promised a proof piece.

³⁰ It is difficult to ascertain the precise number of proof pieces acquired by the Company during the seventeenth century as many of those collected before 1666 were destroyed during the Great Fire and several other paintings mentioned in the Company’s minutes have since disappeared. In 1681 the Court of Assistants agreed to prepare a book ‘for ye entering of all p[er]sons names that shall give any paintings to ye hall or have [been] benefactors’ (Guildhall Library MS 5667/2 part 1, 268), suggesting a significant number of donors, but the book has not survived. Nevertheless, some idea of the collection can be established by the later descriptions of Edward Hatton (1708), Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach (1710) and George Vertue. A list of paintings is included in the Company terrier, compiled between 1713 and 1723 (Guildhall Library MS 11505). The best list of paintings in the Company’s possession before the second world war is *The Painter-Stainers’ Company, A Catalogue of the pictures, prints, drawings etc., in possession of the Worshipful Company of Painter-Stainers at Painters’ Hall, London, 1908*. But unfortunately, again, many of the paintings described here were destroyed by fire whilst in storage, or subsequently dispersed. Among the artists who gave paintings to the Company are Jacob Pen, a Dutch history painter, Jean Baptist Monnoyer, Marcellis Laroon (Lauron), John Griffere (Griffier) and Jan Frans van Zoons. Later donors included Louis Laguerre and Sebastiano Ricci. I am grateful to Ernie Brocklehurst, Beadle of the Company, for showing me the paintings that remain in the Company’s Hall.

Painter-Stainers' Hall suggests that the Company's acknowledgement of foreign artists and the promulgation of new ideas among working English painters – including a greater familiarity with the vocabulary and genre distinctions of academic art – went hand in hand.³¹ They were hung alongside the more conventional civic iconography already on display throughout the Company's hall, characterised by the systematic arrangement of individual and corporate heraldry, and sober portraits that stiffly embodied the citizenship of earlier Company officials. The juxtaposition of these two very different kinds of imagery marked the cautious beginnings of a dialogue between two visual traditions, which was to result in the emergence of the aforementioned Society of Painters during the 1670s.

In 1677, a committee was appointed from among senior painter-stainers and prominent stranger associates 'to consider of the best method [of] regulating the paynters & encourageing of artistets [*sic*]'.³² The corresponding entry in the Company's minutes is of interest in itself as the first official, if rather awkward, use of the term 'artist' by the Company. Although no records remain of this committee's subsequent meetings, it seems highly probable that the decision to paint the ceiling of the Painter-Stainers' Hall (first proposed at the beginning of the following year) originated in their discussions – perhaps on the advice of an elderly Robert Streeter who, though not a Company man himself, sat on the committee as a 'stranger' alongside Flusheere, Gaspar and Peter Lely.³³ The ceiling was eventually painted in 1680 by Isaac Fuller the younger, who was perhaps the only English painter at the time with the necessary skills to carry out such a task (Streeter had died the year before).³⁴ Though Fuller's painting does not appear to have survived for long, its content is known from a later account, which describes a ceiling 'finely painted with Pallas triumphant with the Arts, and Fame (attended by Mercury) suppressing their Enemies, Sloth, Envy, Pride etc'.³⁵ Such lofty artistic themes are not usually

³¹ In April 1677, a committee was appointed from representatives of all branches of the trade to discuss a proposal for renewing the Company's charter and ordinances. Included for the first time as a distinct branch were the 'picturemakers', one of whose two representatives was Flusheere (Guildhall Library MS 5667/2 part 1, 213).

³² Guildhall Library MS 5667/2 part 1, 217.

³³ A Mr Stephenson was first nominated to paint the Hall although it is not clear what kind of painter Stephenson was; see Guildhall Library MS 5667/2 part 1, 228.

³⁴ Fuller had learnt to paint outside of the Company (most probably on the Continent with his father) and so would have been regarded as a stranger. Streeter had trained in Italy and sat on the committee, also as a stranger.

³⁵ [Edward Hatton], *A New View of London; or, an Ample Account of that City*, 2 vols, London, 1708,

associated with the Painter-Stainers' Company. However, the decision to decorate the ceiling in such a manner – in particular, Fuller's inclusion of 'the Arts' as part of a Pallasian allegory – can be understood best alongside the Company's other efforts (to borrow the words of the 1677 committee) to both regulate and to encourage a growing artistic trend among its membership by suggesting that the hall, now the venue for the Society of Painters' feasts as well as the Company's more official ceremonies, was the natural home for ambitious artists within the capital.

It must have been the same desire to retain a degree of influence over an aspect of painting that fell beyond the traditional remit of the Company that prompted the Court of Assistants to moderate the entertainments of the Society of Painters just a few months before. The earliest surviving invitation issued by the society, for its feast in 1680 (fig. 15), uses the Painter-Stainers' coat of arms to locate the society and its activities clearly under the auspices of its parent company.³⁶ The society's adoption of St Luke as the patron of their feast and the presence of a 'master and stewards' suggest a still more calculated imitation of the Company's own formalised sociability – more specifically, to the official St Luke's day feast, held each year to celebrate the election of the Company's officers. But the design departs from the familiar civic iconography of the Company with the inclusion of two messenger putti carrying attributes of the visual arts, who mimic the two panther supporters and phoenix crest of the Painter-Stainers' full armorial achievement (again, the arms as they appear in the Company's official minute book make a good comparison; see fig. 23). In this way, the Society's invitation fuses the established heraldic vocabulary of the Company's civic identity with the elevated conventions of grand-scale European art, echoing the juxtaposition of heraldry and academic art on the walls of the room in which the feasts were held. In doing so, it graphically describes the cultural environment in which a rudimentary idea of the painter as an artist could be (literally) entertained for the first time by a significant number of English painters.

By 1687, the Society of Painters enjoyed sufficient recognition to invite both Antonio Verrio and Godfrey Kneller to its dinner and, furthermore, to ask Verrio to

pp. 612-3.

³⁶ There is another impression of the 1680 invitation in the National Art Library in London, used for the society's feast in 1686. The 1680 version (illustrated) already shows signs of reworking around the date, suggesting that the same plate was used for all of the companies feasts from 1677, when the requirement of a 'tickett' was first imposed, until 1686.

design a new invitation for the occasion (fig. 16).³⁷ By far the most successful painter then living in England, Verrio no doubt enjoyed the chance to demonstrate his artistic superiority over an audience of aspirant English painters, and used the occasion to replace the society's existing invitation with a sophisticated allegory. His design centres around a youthful winged male, posing as Fame for a female personification of Painting, or *Pictura*, over whose shoulder peers a much older winged figure of Time. In holding a laurel crown above his own image, the young male model invites the feast-goers to recognise the importance of drawing as the principal means by which the intellectual content of art is conveyed.

However, a measure of caution is required before regarding Verrio's allegory as an image with which English painters could realistically identify during the 1680s, or as representative of an ideal of painting that was sustainable under the ideological umbrella of the Painter-Stainers' Company. Verrio's invitation highlights the rather uneasy coexistence of two very different conceptions of painting in England. On one side stood Verrio, in some ways the heir of Rubens and Van Dyck, at least insofar as he was a foreign courtly painter sharing the social space of his English aristocratic patrons. On the other side were London's native painter-stainers, whose public identity was still defined by the civic ideals of the livery companies and who were on a par socially with the carpenters and cordwainers of the City.³⁸ This cultural division (essentially between two definitions of what made a 'good painter') is inadvertently demonstrated by Verrio's representation of the Company's coat of arms in his design – it is modest in size, rather roughly drawn and, most strikingly, shown reversed. Of course, the reversal is merely a technical oversight on Verrio's part, but the artist's error is made conspicuous by the proficiency that his design displays in every other respect. It is a mistake, moreover, that any painter-stainer with even a rudimentary understanding of the printing process would surely have avoided, and it is in marked contrast to the importance afforded the arms in the society's earlier invitation.

Verrio's apparent lack of concern for the Company's heraldic tradition illustrates the

³⁷ The invitation leaves some uncertainty over Verrio's and Kneller's role at the feast. It seems improbable that they were there as stewards – as the invitation seems to imply – and more likely that they were invited as honorary guests. Neither artist (both of whose careers took a dramatic turn following the Glorious Revolution the following year) had any further contact either with the Company or the Society of Painters. Another impression of this design, in the British Museum, is inscribed in an old handwriting: 'Vario delin'.

³⁸ The City's livery companies were (and still are) ranked according to precedence, headed by the 'Twelve Great'. The Painter-Stainers were number 28, after the Carpenters (26) and the Cordwainers (27).

distance between his cultural sphere and that of the majority of London's native painters, for whom the significance of the City's heraldry would have been second nature. In other words, Verrio's unfamiliarity with the Painter-Stainers' civic iconography and the ease with which he projected a fully formed liberal argument for painting went hand in hand.

In a third and final invitation, used in 1690 (the last year in which a Society of Painters feast was recorded in the Company minutes; fig. 17), the two messenger putti that appeared in the Society's initial design make another appearance, now seated beside a large pedestal at the bottom of the page (fig. 18). Both are busy. The one on the left is drawing a (female) nude who is rather precariously balanced between the realms of allegorical figure and earthly life-model in the upper-right corner. His companion, sitting on an industrious beehive and putting his own life-drawing practice to good use, seems to be putting the finishing touches to a decorative assemblage of the liberal arts, which includes a painter's palette with the inscription 'R. Hayes fecit'. Richard Hayes was a house painter and sometime history painter, and is named on the invitation as master of the Society's feast that year. He was also an ambitious Company member, so it is perhaps unsurprising that his design departs from Verrio's in a number of significant ways. Hayes describes drawing as an industrious activity, likening the sketching putto's artistic ambition to his professional activity as a painter. Similarly, the object of the second putto's industry makes no allusions to the distant authority of old master art, but to a decorative panel of the kind that was already part of the productive output of more skilled English house painters (see fig. 19, for example), and with which Hayes, who has signed the palette, can comfortably identify. Meanwhile, the presence of the model posing as Truth, and an elderly figure of Time (behind whom is a loosely drawn array of military colours and trophies) in the upper half of the design, suggests that with further practice, and with time, the infant painters' achievements will match their aspirations to greatness. In contrast to Verrio's design, Hayes's invitation incorporates the putto's drawing practice into a civic-minded ideal of English painting under the (now correct) aegis of the Painter-Stainers' Company.

Among the Company's collection of proof pieces and other acquired works of art is a panel painted by Louis Laguerre depicting Perseus and Andromeda and another, of similar size, traditionally attributed to Hayes, which shows the Death of

Lucretia (see fig. 20).³⁹ The briefest of comparisons between Laguerre's *Andromeda* and Hayes's panel is enough to demonstrate the discrepancies in proficiency that persisted between the highly skilled foreign artists working in England at the end of the seventeenth century and those more ambitious English painters within the Company. More importantly, however, the comparison also reveals the extent to which the artistic presence of 'strangers' in the City had turned the aspirations of certain English painters towards a more academic kind of painting. Indeed, Hayes's figure clearly emulates Laguerre's painting, and even seems to have been designed to hang alongside the French master's canvas. The cultural conditions that produced the *Lucretia* painting in the Painter-Stainers' Hall (an image that can usefully be regarded as the material result of the kinds of practice so purposefully described by Hayes in his invitation design) were the same in which Thornhill's earliest artistic ambitions were formed. They depended to a significant degree on the activities and aspirations of an earlier generation of English painters and, in particular, of the Society of Painters, who provided the framework within which an intellectually elevated art, made by English artists, could at least be imagined by members of the Painter-Stainers' Company.

On the first page of the sketchbook that he began in 1699, Thornhill allegorised his own artistic progress. At the centre of the page (fig. 21), Minerva, or Pallas Athene, is about to be crowned by Fame. Behind her, Mercury is poised ready to carry word of the imminent event, while Apollo waits in the heavens with his Muses. Dotted across the page are several inquisitive putti. Most interesting in this respect are the contrasting figures on either side of the oval cartouche bearing Thornhill's name. On the right, a group of painter-putti help to prop up the shield while their companions learn to articulate the tools of their trade. They are balanced on the left of the drawing by Hercules, who serves as a reminder of the artistic labours yet to come, and of the virtue that Thornhill evidently perceived in their undertaking.

But if this sketch seems to reiterate the kind of dialectic between ambition and ability that had characterised the Society of Painters' activities, it is also clear that Thornhill's is a far more sophisticated vision of artistic progress than any produced by his fellow freemen. His use of architectural components and rolling clouds to first

³⁹ There is no mention in the Company's papers of any further contact with Laguerre, but the *Andromeda* painting is mentioned by several contemporary visitors to the Hall, including George Vertue, as by Laguerre – an attribution which seems entirely reasonable.

define then manipulate the picture space, and the narrative energy of his figures, are all characteristic of the much larger decorative schemes associated at the time with the likes of Verrio and Laguerre. Following the completion of his apprenticeship to Highmore in 1696, a further seven years passed before Thornhill was formally made free of the Company in 1703/4, shortly before he emerged as an independent artist working for Thomas Foley at Stoke Edith. It is most probable that he spent at least part of this interval at Hampton Court, either working directly under Verrio, or in close proximity to the Italian painter while an assistant to his former master. During this time, Thornhill seems to have acquired a detailed knowledge of the vocabulary of grand-scale decorative painting and an ease with anatomy that set him apart from his fellow countrymen.⁴⁰ The first page of Thornhill's sketchbook stands out as a confident declaration of the young artist's aspirations at the end of a formative decade that had begun with an apprenticeship and ended, in all probability, with experience of working alongside an established decorative history painter. The drawing suggests, moreover, that as a result of this combined experience, the concept of an English-born and -trained artist, an idea that had emerged among London's painter-stainers in the mid-seventeenth century, had found its likeliest candidate so far.⁴¹

The Painter's Arms

Many years later, in August 1720, James Thornhill received a visit from two senior members of the Painter-Stainers' Company. John Chillingworth and Robert Trevitt – both former masters of the Company – had been sent on behalf of the Court of Assistants to inform Thornhill that he had been chosen as their next master.⁴² The assistants' selection of Thornhill was unusual for two reasons. First, he had had little

⁴⁰ Guildhall Library MS 5667/2 part 1, 364 (1 March 1703/4). Thornhill paid the usual duties of 13s 4d for his freedom. Peter Monamy, the marine painter, was made free on the same day. Thornhill's association with Verrio at Hampton Court is discussed in Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England*, vol. 1, pp. 69-70 and 269-70. The evidence for their association, though compelling, is largely circumstantial, based on Thornhill's sketchbook, his relationship with Highmore and later comments made by Dézallier d'Argenville. Croft-Murray also suggests that Thornhill worked with Laguerre around the same time.

⁴¹ An additional significance may be read in the punning inscription of the title page: 'Jac: Thornhill. ejus Liber An: Dom: 1699'. 'Liber' clearly refers to the book itself, but it also Latinises the official rhetoric of the Painter-Stainers' Company, suggesting that by 1699 – before he officially obtained his freedom from the Company – Thornhill considered himself 'free' as an artist.

⁴² Painter-Stainers' Company Book of Orders and Constitutions, Guildhall Library MS 5667/2 part 1, 430.

to do with the Painter-Stainers since obtaining his freedom from the Company seventeen years earlier and, according to the Company's own ordinances, was ineligible to hold the position of master for that very reason, having neither served as a warden nor been chosen as one of the Company's governing assistants. Second, Thornhill had made a considerable fortune during the preceding decade, and was in the process of converting his professionally gained wealth into the social and material trappings of a gentleman – most notably by acquiring his family's old country estate in Dorset.⁴³ Besides his wealth, the public acclaim and official recognition (including a knighthood) that resulted from his recent work at the Royal Naval Hospital in Greenwich and at St Paul's Cathedral in London seem only to emphasise how little the Painter-Stainers' Company figured in his mature career and aspirations.

After obtaining his freedom in 1703/4, Thornhill retained little official contact with the Company for the best part of two decades.⁴⁴ He had accepted the livery in 1707, but as he was engaged in one of his first major decorative schemes at the time, for the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth, he chose to pay a fine in lieu of the obligations associated with the promotion.⁴⁵ Thereafter, the social and professional interests that Thornhill cultivated in the capital became decidedly west-facing. Indeed, while the Company's own strictures stated that Thornhill was not qualified to hold the position of master, there was a real possibility that he would have considered himself over-qualified and too refined to have any further association with the commercial and manual aspects of painting that the Painter-Stainers' Company unequivocally represented. It was, in many ways, an unlikely proposition for Chillingworth and Trevitt to have conveyed.⁴⁶

⁴³ A well-referenced account of this stage in Thornhill's career can be found in Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth, vol. 1, the 'Modern Moral Subject' 1697-1732*, New Brunswick and London, 1991, esp. pp. 96-100. See also John Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, 1861-73 (third edition), p. 625. It is unclear exactly when the artist bought the property at Thornhill, near Stalbridge. William Osmun plausibly suggests 1721, which would correspond with Thornhill's financial independence at that time and his subsequent election to parliament for the nearby constituency of Melcombe Regis; see William R. Osmun, 'A Study of the Works of Sir James Thornhill', unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1950, p. 175.

⁴⁴ Thornhill sought his freedom just before beginning his first major commission, at Stoke Edith in Herefordshire. His motive for doing so is revealed in the Company's Register of Apprentices Bindings. On the same day, Jonathan Joy, the son of a Deptford painter, was bound as Thornhill's apprentice. See Guildhall Library MS 5669/1 (1 March 1703/4).

⁴⁵ Guildhall Library MS 5667/2 part 1, 374, 379 and 380-1. Thornhill paid a £14 fine rather than act as a steward for the lord mayor's feast, which was a usual obligation of junior liverymen.

⁴⁶ The Painter-Stainers' admissions records confirm Thornhill's unprecedented promotion through the Company's ranks. He was hurriedly promoted to the Court of Assistants on 7 September 1720, just weeks before his election as master on 29 October, but after his nomination; see Painter-Stainers'

Nevertheless, Thornhill accepted the Company's offer and, in the event, served as an enthusiastic master, exceeding the usual obligations of the office with an uncommon generosity. To commemorate his term in office, he made a weighty contribution to the Company's collection of plate, giving a large silver cup inscribed with his name and arms, and the words 'Histor Pictor Regius', referring to his appointment in 1718 as History Painter to George I.⁴⁷ Significantly, Thornhill also donated his own coat of arms, in a gilt frame, to the Painter-Stainers' Hall, where they were displayed alongside the arms and portraits of previous Company officers and a diverse collection of other paintings, including many of the foreign 'proof pieces' that the Company had acquired in recent decades.⁴⁸ His decision to give his own arms, rather than the more usual gift of a three-quarter length portrait (such as the one Thornhill himself had painted for Richard Scott, to commemorate his term as renter warden in 1717; fig. 22), suggests a self-conscious identification with a particular notion of being a painter: one that employed the visual rhetoric of citizenship and civic participation, rather than the body language and ornament of cultured refinement adopted by Scott.⁴⁹ Moreover, the omission of a piece of Thornhill's own work, to hang alongside the now considerable number of paintings in the hall, indicates a deliberate eschewal of the kind of displays that we saw in the previous section of this chapter. Rather, as we can now go on to explore, Thornhill's identification with the older visual conventions of the hall signalled his affiliation to a traditional idea of Company membership and civic participation.

Thornhill's emblazoned arms added to a wealth of individual and corporate heraldry already on display in the Painter-Stainers' Hall – on the walls and in the windows, illuminating the Company's official manuscripts and decorating its plate.

Company Freedom Admissions Register, Guildhall Library MS 5668, 168r.

⁴⁷ The cup, made by Simon Pantin, still belongs to the Company. The full inscription reads: *Ex dono Jac. Thornehill Esq. Aurat. Histor Pictor Regius &c An Dom 1721*.

⁴⁸ Thornhill's arms comprised three black birds, each with a golden beak and legs, separated by a red chevron against a silver ground – officially defined as: *argent, a chevron gules between three birds sable, beaked and legged or*. The Thornhill arms (using a local variation of the name) were confirmed by the 1623 Visitation of the County of Dorset, published by the *Harleian Society*, vol. 20, London, 1885, pp. 91-2. (See also John Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, London, 1774, esp. vol. 2, pp. 450-3.) Thornhill also gave the Company a screen for the Hall. His gifts are recorded in the Company's minutes and in the Company's terrier (inventory) of 1723. Shortly before his term as master came to an end, Thornhill ordered a copy of the Company's by laws from the clerk. See Guildhall Library MS 5667/2 part 1, 434-5 and Terrier of the Painter-Stainers' Company (1713-23), Guildhall Library MS 11505, 9v-13r.

⁴⁹ The portrait of Scott was removed from the Company's Hall at some stage and returned as the gift of Edward Croft-Murray.

This display had a long history. In 1630, for example, the arms of the livery were ordered to be put into the hall window, in the same way as they already appeared in the upper parlour, and twenty years later, the arms of the master, wardens and Court of Assistants formed the second and third of three pages of heraldic illumination that John Withie painted as a preface to the Company's new minute book (figs 23-25).⁵⁰ The purpose of these formal heraldic displays was not to mark ownership or identify familial connections – as might be expected in a domestic setting – but to signal the shared civic values and common professional interests of the members represented. As part of a broader heraldic system that informed the decoration of livery halls and civic buildings across the City, such displays enabled all freemen, regardless of their seniority within the Company, to visualise their status as participants in the City's political structure. As was to be the case in 1720, the distinctive bearings of an individual's arms were significant only in so far as they registered his incorporation into the collective body of the Company, submitting his familial arms, at least temporarily, within the decorative context of the hall and its paraphernalia, and subsuming his heraldic identity within the impersonal heraldry of the City – that is, the Company's own prominently displayed arms and the familiar bearings of the Corporation of London itself.

The same civic-minded ideal of professional painting is embodied in two group portraits painted for the Painter-Stainers' Company during the 1630s to commemorate the mastership of Clement Pargiter and John Potkin, and their respective wardens (figs 26-28). Both paintings resemble a type of Dutch civic portrait that had, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, become synonymous abroad with an ideal of sober citizenship. The pictorial model of the upright burgher, brought to England by immigrant painters (one or two of whom almost certainly painted these pictures), proved easily adaptable to the civic ideals of London's livery companies.⁵¹

Though clearly representing the sitters as distinguished painter-stainers, the portraits carry no indication of either their individual skills as painters or their relative social standing outside the Company. The objects on the table in the Pargiter group,

⁵⁰ See W.A.D. Englefield, *The History of the Painter-Stainers Company* (second issue), p. 109. Both windows were destroyed in 1666.

⁵¹ An attribution of the Pargiter group to Cornelius Johnson was noted by William Englefield. He also makes some interesting remarks on both of these portrait groups; see W.A.D. Englefield, *The History of the Painter-Stainers Company* (second issue), pp. 14 and 16-20.

for example, include a book and silver inkstand, where we might reasonably expect to see the tools of a painter, and refer to the binding of apprentices in the Painter-Stainers' Hall. Similarly, there is no suggestion that Thomas Babb, the warden on Pargiter's left, painted the miniature of St Katherine that he holds, which also has a civic purpose by alluding to the feast held each year on St Katherine's day – one of the seasonal events around which the Company's internal affairs were organised.⁵² The relatively understated personal aspirations of London's painters, as described in these official portraits, clearly valued the good and virtuous management of the Company's affairs over any individualist claims for the artistic or intellectual value of painting itself. In keeping with the decorative conventions of the Painter-Stainers' Hall, the inclusion of each sitter's coat of arms, while often encountered in portraits of the period, has a particular significance within the context of a Company portrait. A new master was elected each year, and insofar as the arms and indeed the sitters themselves are arranged by rank, it is in accordance with the internal and rotating hierarchy of the Company, rather than any wider considerations of social status. These arms, and the repeated pattern established by the white-ruffed portraits of painter-stainers dressed in the Company's livery, served a similar purpose to the other heraldic decoration that pervaded the hall (and to which Thornhill added his own arms), creating a formally structured visual field wherein senior Company men were incorporated into the collected civic identity of the City.

Recognising Thornhill's willing submission to this highly codified tradition helps us to understand the significance of his return as master of the Company. His acceptance of the proposition brought by Chillingworth and Trevitt, and the subsequent incorporation of his arms into the civic milieu of the Painter-Stainers' Hall, can be understood as a calculated demonstration of his own civic credentials, reasserting an aspect of his identity as a painter that had apparently played little part in his public success over the previous two decades. Somewhat ironically, for an artist famed for painting the walls and ceilings of England's most prominent buildings, Thornhill's largest single benefaction to the Company was the provision of a new floor for its hall.⁵³ This generous donation fell in line with his more conventional gifts

⁵² Babb is described elsewhere in the Company's records as an arms painter and so is unlikely to have painted the image; see W.A.D. Englefield, *The History of the Painter-Stainers Company* (second issue), p. 93.

⁵³ See Guildhall Library MS 5667/2 part 1, 434 and Guildhall Library MS 11505, 13r.

by demonstrating an affiliation with the civic ideals and a concern for the material welfare of the Company, while resisting any specific artistic association with his fellow painter-stainers. Furthermore, from the conspicuous absence of any of his own paintings among his several gifts, we can infer that Thornhill perceived little value in publicly displaying his (by then famous) artistic credentials within an environment that represented the less glamorous side of the divide between the art and the trade of painting, and where English painters were routinely overshadowed by the work of strangers.

All of this gives Thornhill's mastership an air of nostalgia that would seem to confirm the suggestion of Iain Pears in *The Discovery of Painting* that his later dealings with the Company were fired by notions of tradition rather than by any social or artistic benefits that the post may have afforded.⁵⁴ Thornhill's artistic interests were by this time clearly focused in the west of the capital. He had been a founding director, then governor, of the famous artists' academy in Great Queen Street, before establishing his own drawing school at his home and studio in Covent Garden. Meanwhile, the authority of the Painter-Stainers' Company over London's artists (and, to a lesser extent, all other branches of the trade) had diminished considerably. In fact, the initial success of London's independent academies had played a decisive role in bringing to an end any influence that the Painter-Stainers' Company may have once held over the capital's artists. Crucially, in this respect, the inclusion of engravers and non-professional 'lovers of art' into the drawing rooms at Great Queen Street gave the academy subscribers access to a cultural and commercial network that the Painter-Stainers' Company could not hope to rival from behind the City walls.⁵⁵

Perhaps we can understand Thornhill's decision to return to the Company in 1720 better when we consider that, at the beginning of the year, he had been appointed Serjeant Painter following the death of his former master, and the position's previous incumbent, Thomas Highmore.⁵⁶ Significantly, the royal post's links with

⁵⁴ Iain Pears, *The Discovery of Painting: the growth of interest in the arts in England, 1680-1768*, New Haven and London, 1988, p. 119. However, Pears also implies that nostalgia also prompted Thornhill to join the Company in the first place, which, as the next section of this chapter will show, was not the case.

⁵⁵ The phrase 'lovers of art' is George Vertue's: see, for example, 'The Notebooks of George Vertue', *Walpole Society*, 20 (II), Oxford, 1931-2, p. 2.

⁵⁶ The kind of work that Thornhill was responsible for, and the rewards he received, as Serjeant Painter is well documented by William Osmun. For example, he calculates that in his first full year in the post (1721), Thornhill received a substantial £1,009 14s 11 1/2d for work, most of which he would have certainly subcontracted to other painters; see William R. Osmun, 'A Study of the Works of Sir James

the Painter-Stainers' Company can be traced back to the 1520s, when it was established under Henry VIII and first held by John Brown. As an alderman and a generous benefactor of the Company – he bequeathed the building in Little Trinity Lane that became the Painter-Stainers' Hall – Brown was in many ways the archetypal civic painter. His personal success, high political office and fraternal generosity provided a lasting example to London's painter-stainers, and are commemorated in a later, seventeenth-century portrait showing the painter in his alderman's robes (fig. 29).⁵⁷ More recently, Highmore, as well as Serjeant Painter, was upper warden of the Company in 1720, and would have made an obvious choice for master had he lived a little longer.⁵⁸ The persuasive examples of Brown, Highmore and other prominent Company members who had held the Serjeant-Paintership in the interim would have provided an important precedent for the Painter-Stainers' decision to break their own rules and appoint Thornhill as their master. In turn, Highmore's death and the subsequent machinations of the Company's Court of Assistants provided Thornhill with an opportunity – unique among his many self-fashioning moments – to renew his association with a conspicuously English ideal of painting.

Though hardly the most prestigious prize an artist could wish for, the mastership of the Painter-Stainers' Company was one distinction that could be enjoyed only by an Englishman. Thornhill's selective association with a civic tradition peopled by senior English painters positioned him within a local and national history of painting that remained inaccessible to his foreign contemporaries, whose standing in the Company had always been conditional. Even the elderly Godfrey Kneller, whose countless public accolades gave him a compelling claim to be Thornhill's social and artistic superior, could not aspire to lead the City's painters. Thornhill's year in office as master of the Painter-Stainers' Company, therefore, can be seen as a significant restatement of his own national identity. But more immediately, Thornhill's return to the Company demands to be understood as a public

Thornhill', 166-70. See also Jeremy Barker, 'Sir James Thornhill and the Debenture of 1725', *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries*, [1992], 301-04. Interestingly, Barker discovers that the Serjeant-Painter's wages were paid from the revenue of confiscated contraband.

⁵⁷ The portrait of Brown was most probably painted to replace an original lost in the Great Fire. As the Painter-Stainers' Company was not fully incorporated until 1581, Brown transferred from the Company to the Haberdashers' in order to stand as an alderman in 1523.

⁵⁸ The serving upper warden was conventionally chosen as the preferred candidate for master for the year following.

assertion of his identity as a citizen and a freeman – politically as well as professionally qualified to participate in the visual representation of the City. Five years later, Thornhill would consolidate his hitherto distinct civic and artistic roles in the City in an impressive set of paintings for the aldermanic chamber, in the esteemed surroundings of the Guildhall.

‘Something for ye oval’

In July 1725, the City’s Court of Aldermen appointed a committee to procure ‘new chairs and such other furniture as they should think wanting for the Council Chamber’, the meeting room of the lord mayor and aldermen (later known as the Aldermen’s Court Room) and one of the most important formal rooms in the Guildhall.⁵⁹ At a meeting of the new committee a few days later, while considering various proposals that had been elicited from the Corporation’s appointed workmen – including a plasterer, upholsterer and clock-maker, and Joseph Thompson, ‘the Cittie’s painter’ – Sir Harcourt Master informed those present that ‘Sr J. Thornhill would paint something for ye oval’.⁶⁰ It is unlikely that the furnishing committee, charged with providing appropriate seating, a reliable clock and suitably dignified surroundings for their fellow aldermen, would have included an allegorical ceiling painting as part of their plans had it not been for Thornhill’s generous proposal. There was certainly no precedent for the kind of painting for which Thornhill was renowned, either in the Council Chamber or anywhere else in the Guildhall, where the most ambitious paintings to date were a series of full-length portraits by John Michael Wright, painted during the 1670s to commemorate the role of the Fire Court judges. Nevertheless, the following year Joseph Thompson was asked to embellish the plasterwork ribs of the ceiling and prepare the chimney place in readiness for the installation of six new paintings by Thornhill.⁶¹

The completed scheme that Thornhill eventually presented to the aldermen in 1727 included a central oval medallion almost ten feet across, showing a female personification of the City between Pallas Athene (or Minerva) and Peace and Plenty

⁵⁹ Corporation of London Record Office (CLRO) Repertory 129, 313. The idea of furnishing the chamber had first been raised in May of the same year.

⁶⁰ Minutes of the furnishing committee (20 July 1725); CLRO Alchin Box S, bundle CXL, parcel 11.

⁶¹ Minutes of the furnishing committee (17 June 1726); CLRO Alchin Box S, bundle CXL, parcel 11.

(fig. 30). For the corners of the room, Thornhill painted four panels, each with a putto representing one of the cardinal virtues: Justice, Prudence, Temperance and Fortitude (figs 31-34). Justice then reappeared – this time accompanied by Mercy, Liberty and a handful of other allegorical figures – in the sixth and final canvas, a grisaille overmantel (now destroyed, but visible in an old photograph; see fig. 35).⁶²

The richly decorated plasterwork that surrounded Thornhill's paintings in the Council Chamber (see fig. 36) recalled Inigo Jones's ceiling at the Banqueting House at Whitehall (fig. 37). Jones's ceiling was completed in 1635 with the installation of nine paintings by Rubens glorifying the rule of James I, consistently regarded ever since as 'the greatest decorative paintings ever executed for an English interior'.⁶³ Both Jones's design and Rubens's allusions to artists such as Titian and Veronese invited comparison with the grandest of Venetian interiors, such as the sixteenth-century ceiling in the church of S. Sebastiano (fig. 38).⁶⁴ Given the prominence and impeccable artistic pedigree of Rubens's example in the Banqueting House, it is not surprising that almost a century later Thornhill should refer to it when devising a scheme for the compartmentalised ceiling of the Council Chamber. Where Rubens filled each of the four corner panels with an appropriately kingly virtue, for example, Thornhill used the smaller plasterwork divisions of the Council Chamber to present the four cardinal virtues as cornerstones of the City's administration. In both places, despite their considerable differences in size and subject matter, the structural symmetry of the ceiling is used to reinforce the political symmetry of the different virtues represented – in each case conveying a sense of an accomplished, balanced form of government.

Another notable precedent for Thornhill's scheme, rather different in terms of both scale and subject, could be seen in the vestry of the nearby church of St Lawrence Jewry, immediately adjacent to the Guildhall yard. The vestry (fig. 39) had

⁶² Both William Osmon and Edward Croft-Murray mention three additional allegorical monochrome paintings by Thornhill (of unknown subjects, now destroyed without visual record) as overdoors in the same scheme. However, I have found no firm evidence that these paintings were ever hung in the Council Chamber (or even that they were by Thornhill). They are not mentioned in the furnishing committee's papers and, whereas there are references to the preparation of the ceiling and the chimneypiece for the reception of the other paintings, there is no comparable mention for the overdoors. Finally, as Vivien Knight has remarked, their recorded size (60 x 96 ins) makes them too big to serve as overdoors, which would seem to exclude the possibility of their having been intended for the room; see [Vivien Knight], *High Art at Guildhall*, unpaginated.

⁶³ Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England*, vol. 1, p. 34.

⁶⁴ Croft-Murray discusses Rubens's Venetian models in Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England*, vol. 1, p. 34.

been decorated in the 1670s by the English artist Isaac Fuller the younger, with a quatrefoil ceiling panel representing the apotheosis of St Lawrence and an overmantel depicting his martyrdom. The pictorial relationship established by Fuller's two paintings between the walls and ceiling was well suited to the domestic scale of the room and prefigured a comparable relationship between Thornhill's ceiling pieces and overmantel in the Council Chamber. Thornhill knew Fuller's work well. In his younger days, he had drawn a careful copy of the ceiling at St Lawrence Jewry in his sketchbook (fig. 40), and he would also have been familiar with the ceiling of the Painter-Stainers' Hall, which Fuller had painted soon after. Perhaps Thornhill had these religious and civic examples of Fuller's work in mind when he proposed to the aldermen a scheme that, with his existing work at St Paul's Cathedral, would confirm his own position at the very centre of both the spiritual and the temporal governments of the City. As a young artist, studiously absorbing the painted environment around him, there is no doubt that Thornhill would also have become familiar with the work of Fuller's father, also called Isaac, whose decorative paintings were known to many on the walls and ceilings of various taverns and public buildings across the City.

Considered as a unified scheme, Thornhill's Council Chamber paintings can be seen as mediating between the two very different types of seventeenth-century decorative painting mentioned here: while displaying a sense of appropriate scale and an awareness of the relatively modest decorative painting that already existed in the close, urban environment of the City, Thornhill also aspired to the very highest forms of pictorial decoration associated with the towering reputation of Rubens. As well as working together as an autonomous scheme, the six paintings that Thornhill made for the Council Chamber need to be understood as part of the visual environment for which they were made.

Payments made to Joseph Thompson for his part in furnishing the Council Chamber included a substantial £6 for painting the king's arms, £2 for the City's arms, 10s for the lord mayor's and a more modest 12d each for painting 91 other unspecified coats of arms around the wainscot walls of the chamber.⁶⁵ These details from the furnishing committee's accounts provide an insight into the decorative context in which Thornhill's paintings would have been seen and understood. The

⁶⁵ Undated accounts of the Council Chamber furnishing committee [1727]; CLRO Alchin Box S, bundle CXL, parcel 11. Thompson was paid an additional £5 17s 3d for painting the walls and windows.

continued prominence of heraldry in the civic environs of the City – long after it had been superseded elsewhere by the classicist styles adopted by the court and church – can be attributed, in part at least, to the symbolic importance of the City’s corporate iconography in the aftermath of the Great Fire. During the 1670s and 1680s, the systematic display of civic heraldry conveyed a vital sense of political continuity at a time of disruption in just about every aspect of City life, and it remained a powerful symbol of the citizen’s political and professional identity well into the eighteenth century.

Following the partial survival of the Guildhall in 1666, the City governors took care to preserve what remained, retaining much of the early fifteenth-century character of the original structure during the rebuilding. The main entrance to the reconstructed Guildhall was embellished with the arms of 24 of the City’s livery companies, above which were the arms of the City and, at the very top, those of the crown. Also incorporated into the new entrance were six fifteenth-century statues, especially venerated for their antiquity and for ‘living the Fire of London’.⁶⁶ Looking out from either side of the entrance, the four allegorical virtues of Justice, Temperance, Fortitude and Discipline and two biblical figures (Moses and Aaron) stood as ‘living’ proof of the City’s resilience (fig. 41). Continuing inside, an eighteenth-century visitor would have seen the already familiar heraldic trinity of company, City and royal arms repeated around the walls of the Great Hall. But it was in the Council Chamber, following its refurbishment, that the City’s heraldic symbolism was most exhaustively laid out. Here the details of Thompson’s payments, mentioned above, provide a useful anatomy of the conventional political decoration of the City. The lesser ‘12d’ arms performed a similar symbolic function to the company arms elsewhere in the Guildhall – impressively representing the corporate basis of City politics, while in turn lending their collective authority to the more expensive, more prominently displayed mayoral and City arms. An engraving that honours the lord mayor and aldermen of 1678 by representing their arms around and beneath the City’s (fig. 42), graphically illustrates the diagrammatic, hierarchical logic that informed the decorative use of heraldry in the Guildhall and in company halls across London.

⁶⁶ From the inscription to an anonymous engraving of c. 1720 in the Guildhall Library, London. The statues were removed during the 1780s when the south front of the Guildhall was remodelled.

It is important to recognise these older decorative conventions in order to understand the ways in which Thornhill's images interacted with the existing visual components of the Guildhall. This interaction is most immediately evident in the four corner panels that Thornhill painted, three of which represented the same 'medieval' virtues that had survived the Fire, with a fourth showing Prudence in place of the original Discipline (helping to soften the severity of the City's pre-Reformation iconography). As the embodiment of civic virtue, Thornhill's ruddy-faced putti could hardly be more different to the pious, time-worn statues that guarded the entrance. However, the iconographic connection would have been easily recognisable as a sign of continuity between the ancient Corporation and the rejuvenated post-Fire administration. Of the four virtues represented, Justice retained the most resonance among early eighteenth-century Londoners – a fact that was reflected in the popular interpretation of the sword in the City's omnipresent arms as that of Justice. Thornhill acknowledged this by replacing the more usual scales of Justice used in a preparatory sketch for the corner panel (see fig. 43) with a sword in the final design.⁶⁷ The political relevance and iconographic familiarity of Justice also made it a fitting subject for the overmantel.

A preliminary sketch for the missing overmantel (fig. 44) illustrates how Thornhill set about marrying the grandeur of allegorical painting with the familiar iconography of the City. The upper half of the page consists of four rapidly executed sketches and descriptive annotations, each suggesting an alternative composition for the overmantel. The drawing offers a useful illustration of Thornhill's working method, in particular of the first tangible stage in the picture-making process, where an idea for a painting – expressed at first only by a title or verbal sketch – is tested and adjusted as it is given an initial pictorial form. John Elsum, author of *The Art of Painting After the Italian Manner*, recommended this kind of nervous drawing technique as the best way for an artist to form an image of his 'invention'. Having first formed a mental image of his idea, Elsum suggests, the painter should begin by making 'a light *Sketch* of this Idea [which] may be expressed in diverse manners to set his Subject in the clearer light: And this should be done before the heat of his

⁶⁷ Hatton describes the first quarter of the City's arms with: 'a sword (by some falsly called yt of St Paul, by others ye Dagger of Sr Wm Walworth but I take it to represent yt) of Justice'; [Edward Hatton], *A New View of London*, frontispiece. Justice was integral to the corporate identity of the City and great prominence was given to the Guildhall's role as the home of the City's judicature as seen, for example, in Wright's Fire Court Judge portraits.

Conception abates, by confused and random marks, that afterwards, at more leasure may be licked into forme.’⁶⁸

At the very top of Thornhill’s page is an inscription: ‘Vertue Heroique triumphing over Vice & Immorality attended by Religion [and] Liberty’. It bears little resemblance to any of the subsequent sketches, or to the overmantel as it was finally painted. However, it does indicate the scale of Thornhill’s ambition for the Council Chamber, suggesting the kind of heroic (or Herculean) virtue that had been employed by artists throughout the previous century to glorify successive English monarchs. Rubens’s inclusion of Hercules in a corner panel of the ceiling at Whitehall Palace is among the most magnificent of several examples and, more recently, Thornhill had included Heroic Virtue as part of his glorification of William III in the lower hall at Greenwich.⁶⁹ Returning to the drawing, we can see how Thornhill began to think about the overmantel by referring to an already proven icon of decorative-history painting, indicating his intention to represent the civic government of the City in a way that equalled the grandest manner known to an English audience. However, if a club-wielding Hercules was ideally suited to a demonstration of the supposedly inherent and decidedly masculine virtue of kings and princes, it was less effective as a vehicle for representing the civic authority of the City’s political elite: unlike the king, the annually elected lord mayor was never presumed to be a hero.

We can follow Thornhill down the page as he considered various arrangements around the central figure of Justice, developing the initial design by adding the City’s arms before pausing to consider the best position for Truth. Further down the page, a larger, more detailed sketch comes closer to the overmantel as it was painted, showing ‘Justice inviolable, embracing Mercy, who leans on the City Arms’.⁷⁰ The final design for the overmantel was clearly a more appropriate vehicle for illustrating the virtues of the City’s executive than was the rather more imperious quashing of Vice and Immorality with which the picture-making process had begun at

⁶⁸ Elsum’s advice belongs to chapter five of his treatise: ‘Of what moment Invention and Expression are to a Painter’. See John Elsum, *The Art of Painting After the Italian Manner. With Practical Observations on the Principal Colours. And Directions how to know a Good Picture*, London, 1703, p. 13.

⁶⁹ The figure of Hercules at Greenwich is described as ‘Heroic Virtue’ in James Thornhill, *An Explanation of the Painting in the Royal Hospital at Greenwich*, 1730. The most elaborate and sustained use of Hercules to signify kingly virtue was for William III at Hampton Court.

⁷⁰ The figures and arrangement remained the same in the final painting, except for the replacement of Loyalty and Concord with Honour and Honesty – two of the alternative emblems that Thornhill had noted to the left of the design.

the top of the page. The final design also served as a fitting introduction to the more impressive paintings on the ceiling.

The personification of the City of London, in the centre of the ceiling, is immediately recognisable from her coat of arms. Significantly, and in contrast to the cold metal of Pallas Athene's shield, Thornhill depicted the City's 'shield' as a stylised, gilded cartouche – of the kind that would have been painted by Joseph Thompson around the walls and coving of the Council Chamber, and which was incorporated into the plasterwork of the ceiling itself (see fig. 36). The cartouche not only confirms the identity of the central figure, but also defines the pictorial space of the oval as one where the long-established heraldic system of the City and the figurative language of allegory purposefully coincide.

The immediate figurative source for the oval painting came from Thornhill's own repertoire – more specifically, from a drawing and related oil sketch thought to have been made (though not used) as a design for the upper hall of Greenwich Hospital (fig. 45). It was one of a number of designs that Thornhill made depicting the late Queen Anne as the personification of her own dominion.⁷¹ The figure of 'Britannia as ye Queen' suggested another alternative model to Heroic Virtue and, when reversed, provided the blueprint for representing the City of London in command of Peace and Plenty (see figs 46 and 47). However, the image of Anne was able to convey such grandeur, in part at least, because the Queen appears at the centre of an almost overwhelming array of allegorical attendants. Such a profusion of bodies is markedly different to the finished Council Chamber oval which – spared of any concentric characters, with the exception of two putti – is highly ordered by comparison, and carefully metred by the unambiguous gaze and clear gesture of each figure. The relative moderation of the Council Chamber oval is reinforced by a number of formal and symbolic echoes that give the painting a notable internal symmetry. This is most evident in the three-part arrangement of Pallas Athene's shield, the City's cartouched coat of arms and the lord mayor's cap of maintenance, which echoes the formal arrangement of the figures themselves. A similarly symmetrical relationship exists between Peace and Plenty on the left and the two putti opposite, whose antics have caused the City's mace and the tassels of the cap of maintenance to fall as if mirroring the cornucopia at the City's feet.

⁷¹ The conflation of Anne and Britannia proved to be an effective and widely used alternative to the self-image of heroism preferred by Anne's male predecessors.

It is not necessary to describe all of the formal iterations in the painting to recognise the pictorial harmony that such patterning creates, or to see how the result could contribute to a fitting allegory of domestic peace and prosperity in the ordered visual environment of the Guildhall. But we can go further in identifying how Thornhill constructively fused the grandeur of allegorical art with the logic and economy of the existing decoration in the Council Chamber. His division of the picture space into discrete, repeated units, arranged within a coherent hierarchy recalls the systematic rationale that underpinned the heraldic decoration found in the Guildhall and elsewhere across the City. An instructive example of this decorative logic, this time taken from the Painter-Stainers' Hall, can be seen in a panel attributed to Joseph Goodhall, who served as master of the Company in 1705 (fig. 48). The clear vertical arrangement of company, City and royal arms in Goodhall's painting reiterates a decorative schema that would have been familiar to every London citizen (and which has been a recurring theme of this chapter). He reinforces the conventional hierarchy by depicting his company's arms, flanked by Apollo and Minerva, or Pallas Athene, on a stone base or pedestal on which the City can 'flourish' – suggested, quite literally, by the exaggerated cartouche surrounding the City's arms. The City's armorial bearings in turn support the triumphant arms of Queen Anne. A comparison between Goodhall's panel and the tripartite arrangement of shields and insignia at the centre of Thornhill's oval (fig. 49) helps to explain the purposeful economy of the Council Chamber scheme. Thornhill takes Goodhall's pictorial embellishments of the City's heraldic schema a stage further by translating the abstract symbolism of civic decoration into a full-blown allegorical composition. The result is an image, at the very heart of the City's political administration, that required neither a written explanation nor an audience well versed in the nuances of grand-scale painting to be instantly recognisable: it was an allegorisation of an already familiar political narrative.

Selecting and arranging a group of figures to make them conformable to an existing decorative environment is one thing. It is another, however, to enliven those figures with the full rhetorical potential of allegorical history painting. Thornhill represented the City of London as a long-haired, partially undressed female, wearing a mural crown and sitting on a cloud in the side-saddle posture that had become characteristic of the artist's work. The figure's crown, alongside the City's insignia (the cap of maintenance, mace and pearl-decorated sword) and the coat of arms,

makes her instantly recognisable as a personification of both the physical and the political environs of the Corporation. The personification of towns and cities has a long history in western art, deriving from Tyche, the Greek protector of cities, who since Alexandrian times had been represented wearing a crown of walls. Almost two thousand years later, during the sixteenth century, the inclusion of a castle, or mural crown, became particularly associated with the great commercial republics of Europe, where the allegorised female body provided an opportune abstraction of political authority – the commercial and defensive implications of the fortified crown providing a powerful alternative to the jewel-encrusted headgear of royal authority. For Londoners, the allegorical representation of their city had been made familiar by a recent, not to say more troublesome, example in Caius Gabriel Cibber's relief on the west dado of Wren's monument to the Great Fire of 1666 (figs 50 and 51). Thornhill's personification of London, seated commandingly above an intact heraldic display at the heart of the reconstructed Guildhall, is a long way from Cibber's embodiment of the City as a 'ruined' woman, languishing amid the rubble of her own civic architecture. In fact, we might well be forgiven for thinking that the Monument projected an image of the City that Thornhill would have wished to avoid. However, his decision to represent the City as a mural-crowned figure, notably similar in several physical details to Cibber's earlier model, suggests a deliberate engagement with the City's collective visual memory.

Cibber's relief and its accompanying Latin inscription famously describe Charles II benevolently directing relief to a helpless City ravaged by fire. But by the end of the seventeenth century, the Monument had come to commemorate far more than the fire alone. From the outset, Cibber played on the triumphal connotations inherent in Wren's pillar, drawing on the conventions of military art to implicate the ruin of the City by fire within a distinctly royalist narrative of the City's history. In portraying London as a defeated city before a victorious though merciful king, Cibber invited passers-by to draw comparisons between Charles's imagined rescue of the City from fire in 1666 and his triumphal return to the capital six years earlier. Within a decade of its completion, this confrontational subtext to Cibber's design had been magnified and the Monument had become the site of a prolonged struggle between the court and the City over the historical significance of the Fire. In 1680, at the height of widespread demands for the exclusion of the Catholic Duke of York from the succession (inflamed, perhaps, by Cibber's inclusion of the Duke dressed in

Roman military costume and holding a 'crown' of laurels), the City's exclusionist Court of Common Council ordered that an additional inscription be carved around the base of the Monument, significantly in English.⁷² The resulting inscription was typical of the anti-Catholic rhetoric that rolled from the capital's presses during the Exclusion Crisis. It not only omitted any reference to the king's alleged benevolence in the aftermath of the Fire, but blamed the destruction on 'the Treachery & Malice of the Papists', as part of a 'Horrid Plott For Extirpating the Protestant Religion, and old English Liberty and Introducing Popery and Slavery'. It is hard to imagine a more direct indictment of Cibber's image, or a more effective reversal of its narrative from one of triumphant rescue to one of brutal enslavement. At the centre of this ideological struggle over historical meaning was the torpid figure of the City of London.

The additional inscription around the Monument, though removed after the Crisis had abated, was deemed sufficiently important to be recut in 1689, once again steering the Monument's sculpture towards a whiggish version of events – as a terrible vision of a city enslaved under an autocratic monarchy. For Thornhill, as for the many Londoners who passed the Monument each day on their way to and from London Bridge, Cibber's relief projected a chaotic vision of the City in ruins. Whether its personification lay as a defeated rebel, as 'Old English Liberty' enslaved by absolutism, or simply as the hapless victim of a natural disaster (and I suspect that there was something of all three in most people's understanding), the London portrayed by Cibber served as a daily reminder of the turbulent events of its recent past, with which Thornhill's Council Chamber paintings seem purposely to engage. We have already seen how Thornhill gave new life to the revered cardinal virtues that guarded the entrance to the Guildhall by making them the subject of the four corner panels. In a similar way, he represented a rejuvenated City in the centre of the ceiling, with an almost regal command over a peaceful and prosperous citizenry, her physical confidence proclaiming her political authority and clearly contrasting with the bereft figure on the Monument.

⁷² See CLRO Journal 49, 156v and 224r. and, for a discussion of the Latin inscriptions on the Monument, John E. Moore, 'The Monument, or, Christopher Wren's Roman Accent', *Art Bulletin*, LXXX, no. 3 (September 1998), 498-533. For the exclusionist politics of the Common Councilmen, see Henry Horwitz, 'Party in a Civic Context: London from the Exclusion Crisis to the fall of Walpole', in Clyve Jones (ed.), *Britain in the First Age of Party: essays presented to Geoffrey Holmes*, London and Ronceverte, 1987.

By suggesting some of the main visual referents of the Council Chamber paintings, we can see how Thornhill created a pertinent allegorical identity for the City by drawing on a variety of recognisable narratives. But the completed scheme can also be read as a glorification of a decidedly modern aspect of the City – visualising a transition of the political identity of ‘the City’ from one of local government to that of a national financial capital. At the centre of this process is the collaborative exchange in Thornhill’s painting between the personified City and Pallas Athene: goddess of Wisdom and, more importantly, of prudent warfare.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, in the wake of the financial revolution of the 1690s, the interests of civic government and those of high finance were more closely entwined than ever before. To give one example of the ties between civic and commercial power, half of the directors of both the Bank of England and the East India Company at the time were liverymen.⁷³ The connection between high finance and civic politics was even greater among the City’s aldermen. One historian has calculated that, at the time of George I’s accession, 19 out of 26 aldermen had either held or would later obtain a directorship of at least one of the City’s major joint-stock companies.⁷⁴ More immediately, the committee appointed with the task of furnishing the Council Chamber included several of the City’s leading financiers. Heading the committee was Sir Harcourt Master (mentioned earlier as the alderman who informed his associates of Thornhill’s original intentions). Master was a money-lender and a former director of the South Sea Company who, according to Nicholas Rogers, ‘epitomised the new moneyed order’ in the City.⁷⁵ He sat on the committee alongside Francis Child, an MP, director of the East India Company and, from 1721, leader of Child’s bank. In all, the seven-strong committee accounted for six major directorships, making the overlap between the realms of civic government and private finance almost tangible among the most attentive section of Thornhill’s audience.⁷⁶ In occupying the ancient centre of civic government, therefore,

⁷³ Figures cited in Nicholas Rogers, *Whigs and Cities. popular politics in the age of Walpole and Pitt*, Oxford, 1989, p. 16. The City’s politically aspirant merchants and financiers typically obtained the freedom of one or other Company by redemption (ie, by purchase, usually from one of the twelve larger companies) although they were unlikely to have any practical association with the trade traditionally represented by their Company.

⁷⁴ Henry Horwitz, ‘Party in a Civic Context’, p. 191.

⁷⁵ Nicholas Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, p. 33.

⁷⁶ The seven committee members were: Harcourt Master, Francis Child, William Billers, Richard Hopkins, Francis Porten, John Tash and Robert Baylis. Information about them is taken from Alfred B. Beaven, *The Aldermen of the City of London*, 2 vols, London, 1913.

Thornhill's Council Chamber paintings also demand to be seen in relation to, and perhaps in some way representative of, this 'new moneyed order' of private financiers in the modern City.

The driving force behind the financial revolution was war – in particular, the need to borrow vast sums of money to undertake expensive and drawn-out campaigns in Ireland and on the Continent, first in King William's War (1689-97) and, latterly, in the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-13), which dominated Britain's foreign affairs under Queen Anne. A decade or so after the Peace of Utrecht, which brought a temporary and uneasy respite from war with France, and just months before Thornhill began work on the Council Chamber scheme, Daniel Defoe extolled the role of the modern financial City in Britain's ability to wage war effectively:

By this great article of public credit, all the king's business is done with cheerfulness, provisions are now bought to victual the fleets without difficulty, and at reasonable rates. The several yards where the ships are built and fitted out, are currently paid: the magazines of military and naval stores kept full: in a word, by this very article of public credit, of which Parliament is the foundation (and the city, are the architectures or builders) all those great things are now done with ease, which in the former reigns, went on heavily, and were brought about with the utmost difficulty.⁷⁷

Defoe was among the more eloquent of several early eighteenth-century commentators to acknowledge the City's seemingly endless ability to feed the national debt. The Bank, the trading companies and the stock market all aided 'the king's business', which was to command a well-fed, battle-ready army and navy to victory and still greater national glory. On the reverse of the same coin, Defoe also recognised the importance of warfare in sustaining the financial market that the debt had created. 'No sum is so great', he wrote in admiration, 'but the Bank has been able to raise', but 'if peace continues', he warned, 'there is a time coming [...] when the public debts being reduced and paid off, the funds or taxes on which they are established, may cease, and so fifty or sixty millions of stocks, which are now the

⁷⁷ Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, ed. Pat Rogers, Harmondsworth, 1971, p. 309.

solid bottom of the South-Sea Company, East-India Company, Bank &c. will cease, and be no more'.⁷⁸ In other words, money needed war as much as war needed money.

Thornhill had allegorised the City's role in 'the king's business' before, including a personification of London beneath a trophy-laden man of war as part of his paean to British naval power at Greenwich (fig. 52). On the same wall, Mercury descends from the left with an armful of captured French colours. This last detail may have been prompted by an actual event of 1706 when, following Marlborough's famous victory at Ramilles, an array of captured enemy standards and colours were paraded through London's streets before being permanently displayed in the Great Hall of the Guildhall, where they hung interspersed with the existing heraldry. The primary purpose of such a triumphal display was to rally support in the capital for an increasingly unpopular and expensive war abroad. But the installation of the trophies in the Guildhall can also be understood as an acknowledgement of the role of the City in Britain's war effort – particularly that played by the moneyed elite, for whom bankrolling Marlborough's campaigns proved a most profitable exercise.

Noticing some of the other ways in which Britain's military campaigns played a role in the visual representation and decoration of the City makes it easier to understand the contemporary significance of Thornhill's Council Chamber paintings as a visual counterpart to the modern City exemplified in Defoe's remarks, combining the civic management of the Corporation with the concerns of war finance in a single allegory. The personified figure of London assumes a protective role by obscuring the terrifying gorgon's head that adorned Pallas Athene's shield. In doing so, she effectively shields the other figures in the painting, and the painting's viewer, from the immediate effects of warfare. By eclipsing this potentially disturbing motif in this way, Thornhill encourages the viewer to focus on the more agreeable motifs proffered by Peace and Prosperity – the rewards of the City's judicious intervention. The personified City's backward glance, and her commanding position between the domestic peace and prosperity of her citizens and a battle-ready Pallas Athene thus reinforces the role assumed by the City's managers as intermediaries between the capital's private wealth and the nation's military fortunes. With the turn of a head, Thornhill powerfully worked the potentially conflicting political and economic interests of the modern Court of Aldermen into a single image of civic virtue, in

⁷⁸ Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, pp. 307 and 309.

which the benefits of war and peace are mediated by the healthy management of the City.

After the installation of his paintings in the Council Chamber, Thornhill was presented with a gold cup by the grateful aldermen. This gift, worth more than three times the total cost of all the other furnishings in the room, made clear the value that the aldermen placed on the artist's work, especially by comparison to that of his fellow painter-stainer, Joseph Thompson.⁷⁹ The terms of Thompson's employment as the 'Cittie's Painter' indicated the kind of recognition that a successful painter could typically expect from the City authorities, and the cash payments that he received for his work reflected and reinforced his artisanal status – equal in standing to the City's appointed plasterer, carpenter or upholsterer. In contrast, the valuable gold cup that Thornhill was given defined a transaction of an altogether different kind, completing a gentlemanly exchange that began with Thornhill's initial offer to make some unspecified painting for the oval in the Council Chamber. And as with his own gifts to the Painter-Stainers' Company in 1721, the cup that Thornhill received was endowed with a civic value beyond its material worth. A similar gold cup was usually presented to an alderman upon fulfilment of his year in office as lord mayor. The Corporation's gift to Thornhill thus acknowledged the artist's political contribution to the Guildhall, likening it to that of the aldermen who presided over the City.

Thornhill's artistic presence in the Guildhall depended on his unique status as a citizen and an artist, equally familiar with the visual conventions of civic decoration and history painting. The interaction between high-minded figurative art and the traditional decoration of the City's spaces has been a preoccupation of this chapter. That interaction helped to define Thornhill's earliest artistic aspirations, and we have seen how he later combined the two to articulate an idealised image of the modern City elite. A preparatory sketch for the corner panels in the Council Chamber (fig. 53) demonstrates – quite self-consciously – the significance of Thornhill's contribution to the City's civic iconography. It includes a design for a fifth panel with an infant artist sketching from a cast head, representing, we are told, 'Art and Commerce'. Although this fifth putto was not used (Thornhill presumably preferring to retain the

⁷⁹ The gold cup cost the City £225 7s, compared with £64 19s 6d that the furnishing committee paid, in total, to the other workmen, including Joseph Thompson, the painter, a mason, a plasterer, a carpenter, a smith and a clockmaker. Thompson was later paid an additional £71 15s for painting and gilding the plasterwork ceiling around Thornhill's pictures (see CLRO Repertory 131, 203, 246 and 342 and CLRO Alchin Box S, bundle CXL, parcel 11).

iconographic unity of the four 'cardinal virtues'), it seems that introducing Commerce and Art into the pantheon of civic virtues was exactly what Thornhill's Council Chamber paintings set out to achieve. And the affinity between the young figure in this sketch and the industrious putti discussed at the beginning of this chapter, which had characterised the Society of Painters a generation before, may be significant. For, ultimately, Thornhill's decorative achievements at the Guildhall are most usefully understood not only as the culmination of the painter's career in the City, but as the realisation of an artistic ambition that had been first expressed by English painters more than half a century before.

CHAPTER TWO

The Example of St Paul

In the summer of 1715, Thornhill and a small team of assistants began painting the inner dome, or cupola, of St Paul's Cathedral in the City of London. It was a formidable task. Measuring 130 feet across and rising to more than 200 feet above the cathedral floor, the painted dome would become the most expansive decorative scheme anywhere in Britain. Its monumental size was matched by the symbolic significance of the site as the centre of the Anglican Church in the city and the first English cathedral to be built since the Reformation.¹ The job of decorating the dome was complicated by the absence of any immediate or obvious precedent for decorating a Protestant church on such a grand scale, and by the diversity of attitudes towards religious painting within the Church of England at the time – attitudes ranging from the enthusiastic approval of an array of biblical subjects to the outright condemnation of all such imagery as 'Popish superstition'. These thorny doctrinal issues were compounded by the often conflicting political, financial and cultural demands made of decorative history painting by its patrons and viewers.

Yet the potential rewards of this difficult project were considerable. As well as its size and location, the commission to decorate the dome of St Paul's carried an additional cachet for Thornhill because it was decided by a competition, which attracted entries from some of the most highly regarded decorative painters in Europe. Thornhill's eventual success in the competition was a high-profile victory, not only over foreign artists already working in England, including the heavyweights Louis Cheron and Antonio Pellegrini, but also over the distinguished Venetian painter, Sebastiano Ricci, who had travelled to England in 1711 with the specific intention of winning the commission. According to George Vertue, Ricci promptly left the country in disgust when the job was given to an Englishman.² It did not go unnoticed

¹ The architectural history of St Paul's Cathedral is thoroughly documented. Among the most useful modern studies is Jane Lang's *Rebuilding St Paul's after the Great Fire of London*, London, 1956. 2004, 1400 years after the first cathedral was founded on the site, sees the publication of a major new work on the building and all aspects of its history.

² George Vertue, 'Notebooks', *Walpole Society*, vol. 18 (Vertue I, 1930), p. 39. The two other contenders were the Frenchman Pierre Berchett and the Neapolitan painter Giovanni Battista Catenaro. Louis Laguerre's possible involvement in the competition will be discussed by Teresa Sladen in Derek

at the time that, as the sole English contender, Thornhill had seen off the challenge of all comers from the Continent. His selection was something of a national triumph for those who had long complained that the potential talents of English painters were overlooked in favour of more fashionable artists from abroad. A notice in the *Weekly Packet*, announcing the result of the competition, welcomed the commissioners' decision and confidently predicted that, when finished, the dome would 'put to Silence all the loud Applauses we have hitherto given to foreign Artists'.³ Such notices appealed to a popular sense of cultural nationalism that the artist was fully prepared to exploit when the opportunity arose.

The events leading up to the commission have been discussed at length in recent years and, despite some significant holes in the cathedral records, the project is perhaps the best-known episode of Thornhill's entire career.⁴ The competition had been announced several years earlier, on 3 March 1708/9, with an open invitation to artists to submit designs for painting the cupola 'with figures' – with the proviso that the figurative content be 'confined to the Scripturall History taken from the Acts of the Apostles'.⁵ One month later, the commissioners duly accepted preliminary designs and proposals from five painters, of whom two – Thornhill and Pellegrini – were chosen the following February (1709/10) to submit further models in a second round of the contest, which seem to have been displayed in the cathedral's chapter house.⁶ At this point, the progress of the competition was afflicted by the delay and deferment common to grand-scale public projects of any period. Another year on, Wren observed that the commissioners were no closer to deciding how, or by whom, the

Keene, Arthur Burns and Andrew Saint (eds), *St Paul's, The Cathedral Church of London, 604-2004*, New Haven and London (forthcoming 2004).

³ *Weekly Packet*, 18-25 June 1715. The full notice reads: 'We hear, that the Commissioners for building and repairing St. Paul's Cathedral, have at last agreed with Mr. Thornhill to paint the Dome of that Cupola; and it is not to be doubted, when finish'd, but the exquisite Skill of this our celebrated Country-man, whose Memory must live as long as Hampton-Court or Greenwich-Hospital are in Being, will put to Silence all the loud Applauses we have hitherto given to foreign Artists.'

⁴ The minutes of H.M. Commission for Rebuilding St Paul's Cathedral 1685-1724 have been published by the *Wren Society*, vol. 16 (1939). The progress of the competition up to the appointment of Thornhill has been discussed most thoroughly by Carol Gibson-Wood in 'The Political Background to Thornhill's Paintings in St Paul's Cathedral', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 56 (1993), pp. 229-37. However, Gibson-Wood does not discuss the paintings themselves in any detail. See also William R. Osmun in 'A Study of the Works of Sir James Thornhill', unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1950, pp. 41-67 (the principal source for Croft-Murray's description). My own account of the commission in this section is indebted to all of these sources, as well as to conversations with Jeremy Barker and Teresa Sladen.

⁵ *Wren Society*, vol. 16, p. 107.

⁶ The commissioners later referred to the designs 'in the Chapter House' when announcing Thornhill as the winner of the competition. See *Wren Society*, vol. 16, p. 116.

cupola was to be decorated – or even if it should be decorated at all. Meanwhile, the possibility of finishing the dome in a simpler fashion, with plain coffering of the kind painted inside the miniature dome of Wren’s Great Model of 1674, seems to have been temporarily revived as a cheaper and less controversial alternative.⁷ Vertue later attributed the slow progress of the commission to what he described as ‘mighty contests and parties’.⁸ More recently, Carol Gibson-Wood has expanded upon Vertue’s theory, pointing to the alternating Whig and Tory leanings of the successive committees appointed to oversee the final stages of the rebuilding.⁹ No decision was made until June 1715, six years after the launch of the competition. The Rebuilding Commission was reconvened shortly after the accession of George I and Thornhill was instructed to paint the dome ‘after the midlemost of the 3 Designes w[hi]ch now hang in the Chapter House’. It was also at this point that the commissioners introduced a further caveat that would profoundly affect the final appearance of the cathedral: the agreed design was to be done in ‘Basso-Relievo’, that is, in imitation of a low-sculpted stone relief.¹⁰

Thornhill’s painting in the dome consists of eight equal bays, each containing a scene from the life of St Paul, framed by a continuous arcade of feigned architecture, which visually rests upon (and appears to extend) the piers and pilasters of the actual architecture below (figs 54 and 55). The narrative sequence of the apostolic acts of St Paul begins in the easternmost compartment with *The Conversion of Saul* (fig. 56). This opening scene faces the visitor approaching from the nave and echoes Francis Bird’s relief in the pediment above the west entrance (fig. 57), establishing a significant visual and iconographic continuity between the two main

⁷ In a letter of 25 January 1710/11 (in which the eighty-year old architect in effect absolved himself of responsibility for any future work in the cathedral), Wren told the commissioners: ‘As for Painting the Cupola; Your Lordships know it has been long under Consideration, that I have no Power left me concerning it, and that it is not resolved in what manner to do it, or whether at all.’ The following month (February 1710/11), the commissioners were shown new estimates for painting the dome: first, ‘with panels of histories taken out of the Acts of the Apostles’ (estimated at £3,500), and second, ‘with ornaments of architecture in basso relieve, and the mouldings heightened with gold’ (£2,000). It was also reported that ‘several are more inclined to this latter way than the other’. *Wren Society*, vol. 16, pp. 147 and 174.

⁸ George Vertue, ‘Notebooks’, *Walpole Society*, vol. 20 (Vertue II, 1932), p. 125.

⁹ See note 3 above. There has been a tendency to exaggerate the clarity and consistency with which political allegiances were recognised during the so-called ‘rage of party’ that defined the later years of Anne’s reign, although schism and uncertainty do seem to have had a significant bearing on the timing of the project.

¹⁰ *Wren Society*, vol. 16, p. 116.

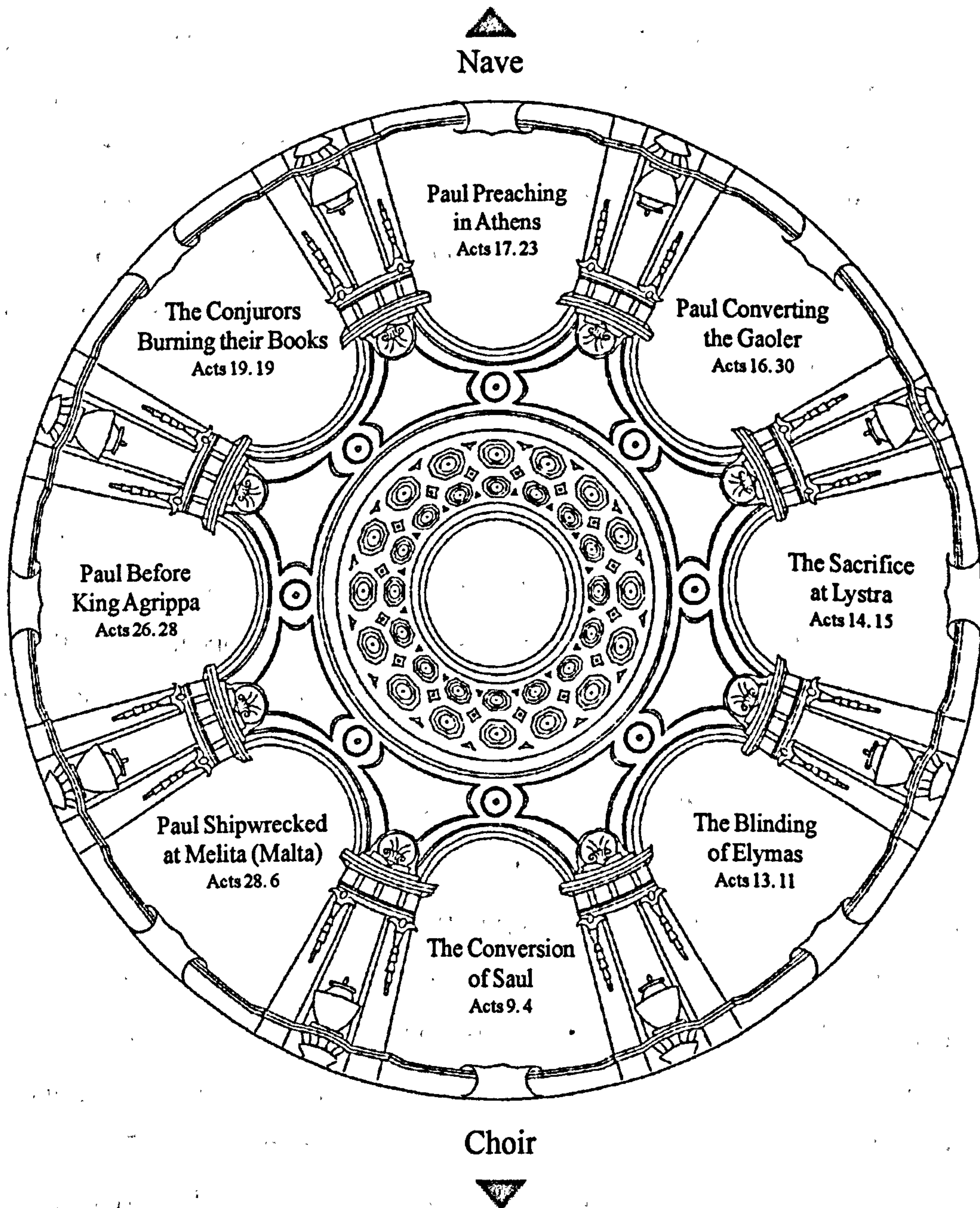


Diagram 1

Projection of Thornhill's painting in the dome of St Paul's Cathedral, showing the position of each scene when looking upwards from the centre of the crossing

Drawing adapted from Paine and Stewart, 'St Paul's Cathedral: an assessment of the dome paintings by James Thornhill', unpublished conservators' report, January 2001

decorative components of the church.¹¹ By reiterating the saint's own conversion on the road to Damascus, this initial bay also emphasises the principal theme of Thornhill's scheme – the promulgation of Christianity throughout the classical world by Paul, God's chosen apostle to the gentiles and, since early medieval times, the patron saint of the City of London. To the right (looking upwards from the cathedral floor; see facing diagram) is *The Blinding of Elymas* (fig. 58), in which Thornhill depicted the conversion of the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus after witnessing the blinding by Paul of a sorcerer, punished for making false prophecies. Continuing the visual narrative around the dome, in *The Sacrifice at Lystra* (fig. 59), Paul and Barnabas are shown protesting against the idolatrous beliefs of the Lycaonians who, having mistaken the two apostles for pagan gods, attempted to make a sacrifice in their honour. Thornhill then showed Paul and Silas converting their gaoler in the Macedonian city of Philippi (fig. 60), followed in the westernmost bay by *Paul Preaching in Athens* (fig. 61). In the next scene the apostle persuades the conjurors of Ephesus to burn their books of 'curious arts' (fig. 62), while in the penultimate bay, Paul recounts his own conversion as he defends himself before King Agrippa (fig. 63). And finally, we see Paul shipwrecked on the island of Melita (Malta), miraculously shaking off a viper that had leapt out of the fire, to the amazement of the onlooking islanders (fig. 64).

In each scene the horizon is obscured, with an accompanying loss of perspective that reduces the background to an assortment of classical architectural motifs, marking out a shallow, grid-like ground against which the apostle's animated gestures remain clearly visible, even when viewed from the cathedral floor several hundred feet below. The artist's effective use of the unusual trapezoid shape and truncated 'Basso-Relievo' picture space of the eight equal compartments enhances the rhetorical significance of the scheme by consistently presenting Paul as a dynamic figure: first as he is converted, then as he actively seeks to convert those around him.

The effects of damp, and of extensive restoration in the 1850s and again in the 1930s, mean that most of the original brushwork has long since been overpainted. However, recent paint analysis by Jane Davies Conservation, carried out in preparation for a new extensive restoration programme, goes some way to uncover

¹¹ The pediment relief was completed in 1706. Additionally, there are nine smaller carvings by Bird on and around the west front of the cathedral depicting episodes from the life of the saint. For an excellent description and discussion of the sculpture of St Paul's see Philip Ward-Jackson, *Public Sculpture of the City of London*, Liverpool, 2003, esp. pp. 361-81.

Thornhill's colour scheme. It revealed a complex but muted palette of predominantly lead white and iron oxide earth pigments that produce a range of stone-like browns, in accordance with the commissioners' wishes, with extensive gilding to highlight the *trompe l'oeil* architecture.¹² A close approximation of the original colouring is seen in the cathedral today. When completed, the painted dome formed part of an architectonic interior that was magnificent in scale but subdued in its colour and selective in its use of figuration, and which also included the remarkable geometric pavement laid by William Kempster (see fig. 65), the giant supporting arches of the crossing, and the off-white plaster and stone coffering of the vaulted ceilings.

Work in the main section of the dome was completed in just over two years, by which time Thornhill had submitted a proposal to extend the decoration upwards into the hidden 'third dome' that supported the cathedral's great stone lantern. In 1717 he produced a model to persuade the commissioners of 'the necessity of painting the Crown of the Cone', and the work was agreed the following year.¹³ Then, early in 1719, Thornhill was invited to submit a proposal for painting the tambour, or drum, below the dome, as well as for the half-domes and pendentives above the crossing.

Recent cleaning trials by the conservators Paine and Stewart have confirmed that the upper section of the drum was enriched with painted fluted pilasters, and that the rectangular panels beneath each window were decorated alternately with the crossed swords of St Paul and swags, repeating decorative and episcopal motifs that featured in the dome above and elsewhere throughout the cathedral (see fig. 66).¹⁴ The important role that these architectural details once played, establishing a visual continuity between the upper reaches of the dome and the main body of the church below, has prompted the decision to reinstate this aspect of Thornhill's scheme as part of the current restoration programme.¹⁵

¹² Jane Davies, 'St Paul's Cathedral: the dome paintings by Sir James Thornhill', unpublished paint analysis report, April 2000. The same tests also discovered a small amount of natural ultramarine, an expensive addition that would have given the painting a cooler hue and which, Davies suggests, indicates the high status of the paintings. The current restoration is being done by Paine and Stewart.

¹³ Several entries in *Wren Society*, vol. 15, p. 222-3; and vol. 16, pp. 116-32. Thornhill first proposed this additional work in June 1716. It had been completed by June 1719.

¹⁴ Paine and Stewart, 'St Paul's Cathedral: the results of uncovering trials within areas of the tambour', unpublished conservators' report, March 2001. I am very grateful to Dr Gordon Higgott of English Heritage for bringing the conservators' reports on Thornhill's work at St Paul's to my attention, and also to Stephen Paine for generously providing additional information about the current restoration. An earlier effort to clean the painting is documented in [Godfrey Allen], 'Cleaning St Paul's', *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, vol. 43, no. 19 (5 September 1936), pp. 1037-41.

¹⁵ The tambour was whitewashed by E.T. Parris while cleaning and repainting the dome during the

The extent of Thornhill's painting in the Whispering Gallery at the base of the drum has been a cause of some confusion in the past. The cathedral accounts note that Thornhill received more than £2,000 'For Painting and Gilding the Tambour of the cupola from the cupola to the Iron Balcony', which suggests that this phase of painting did indeed encompass the lower as well as the upper section of the drum.¹⁶ However, cleaning in the lower section has uncovered no evidence of decorative painting around the gallery.¹⁷

Proposals for the half-domes and pendentives below the Whispering Gallery were likewise unrealised. A small sketch, clearly inscribed in the artist's distinctive hand, consists of several configurations of the four evangelists, each arranged on a cloud as if ready to sit within one of the four semi-circular bays above the crossing (fig. 67).¹⁸ This drawing in fact helps to explain why the commissioners eventually decided, in their own words, to 'postpone the Painting the Triangular Pannels & the Quarter Spheres under the Iron Gallery'.¹⁹ The ethereal figures proposed here by Thornhill would have changed the tenor of the decoration considerably by introducing a celestial element that the commissioners had been at pains to avoid elsewhere in the cathedral by insisting on both the earthly subject matter and the muted tone of any painting in the dome – in effect banishing such baroque theatrics from the interior of the church.

The cathedral accounts reveal that all painting in the upper reaches of the church had been completed by the time the last of the scaffolding was taken down in the summer of 1721. It had been a major undertaking for which the artist was paid a total of £6,575.²⁰ The full extent of Thornhill's work at St Paul's can be seen in a remarkable mid century print published by John Gwyn and Samuel Wale in 1755 (figs 68 and 69). Its section view offers a unique representation of the painted dome, and shows how Thornhill and his team extended the architectural elements of the

1850s.

¹⁶ *Wren Society*, vol. 15, p. 224.

¹⁷ See Paine and Stewart, 'St Paul's Cathedral: the results of uncovering trials within areas of the tambour', unpublished conservators' report, March 2001, esp. p. 1; and Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England 1537-1837*, vol. 1, London, 1962, p. 74.

¹⁸ The figures in this drawing most closely resemble those painted by Charles de Lafosse in the pendentives below the main dome in the church of Les Invalides.

¹⁹ Rebuilding Commission minutes for 18 June 1720; *Wren Society*, vol. 16, p. 136.

²⁰ The cathedral accounts for the second half of 1721 detail the complete payments that Thornhill received for his work at St Paul's. The total includes £4,000 for the dome, £450 for the lantern and a £2,125 the drum. See *Wren Society*, vol. 15, p. 224.

decoration upwards into the lantern, and downwards into the drum. Edward Croft-Murray and other scholars have taken this print to be an accurate record of Thornhill's scheme. But as the evidence outlined above shows, such images should be treated with caution. While the engraving provides an impressively accurate description of the executed work, it also proposes an imaginary scheme for extending the painting downwards into the main body of the cathedral, 'agreeably to the original Intention of Sr Christopher Wren' (a spurious claim on the part of the publishers). Included in the proposal is a series of religious scenes in the Whispering Gallery, previously attributed to Thornhill, and a number of smaller figurative panels and religious landscapes nearer the cathedral floor, none of which were ever painted. But if Gwyn and Wale's engraving cannot be taken as a faithful record of work done, it does more reliably reveal that by the middle of the eighteenth century, attitudes towards church decoration had begun to change and that, within a generation, the subdued monochromatic paintings at the centre of St Paul's were somehow felt to leave the building wanting, and therefore needed to be supplemented. Instead of pursuing such responses, however, the following pages will attempt to retrieve something of the initial, early eighteenth-century impact of the painted dome by exploring the theological and artistic significance of Thornhill's designs, before considering how the images found new meanings in the realm of print.²¹

Native Simplicity

The completed scheme and its subsequent publication as a series of high quality engravings arguably did more to secure Thornhill's reputation among his contemporaries than any other single project of his career. But critical opinion has not always favoured Thornhill's scheme. For many nineteenth-century onlookers, the plainness of the decoration at St Paul's exposed what one embarrassed author described as a 'naked appearance' of the cathedral – an opinion that eventually led to the whitewashing of part of Thornhill's scheme and the addition of the brightly coloured mosaic work that still dominates the choir and crossing today.²² In more

²¹ The first section of this chapter has benefited from the comments of John English.

²² The embarrassed author was John Britton, writing in *The Original Picture of London, Enlarged and Improved*, London, 1826 (twenty-sixth edition), p. 84. Thornhill's painting narrowly avoided complete destruction later in the nineteenth century. In 1878 several proposals to cover Thornhill's painting in

recent times, the painted dome (when it has been noticed at all) has generally been thought dull, and the feigned architecture that features so prominently has been censured, above all by Wren scholars, for being contrary to the spirit of the architect's design. Kerry Downes typified the scorn of generations when he dismissed Thornhill's painting as one of two 'monumental [...] blemishes' inflicted upon the cathedral (the other being the hated balustrade that was added to the roof-line against Wren's wishes).²³ Even Edward Croft-Murray, usually one of the artist's more forgiving proponents, felt obliged to concede that the painted dome 'does nothing to add life and warmth to Wren's rather frigid architecture', although he did feel able to explain Thornhill's shortcomings, in part at least, by what he regarded as the 'absurd ruling' of the presiding committee that the entire scheme be painted the colour of stone – when 'what was needed', he suggests, 'was a splash of colour'.²⁴

Significantly, the relief carvings produced by Francis Bird for the pediment and portico of the west front have provoked a similar reaction over the past two centuries. John Summerson confirmed this longstanding antipathy when he wrote that 'Bird's work has always been condemned as inadequate to the occasion and it is, indeed, superficial and lacking in any original feeling for design'.²⁵

In the past decade, however, art historians have begun to view the painted dome in a more constructive light. Arline Meyer, for example, has understood the commissioners' final-hour intervention in the artistic process in relation to the need of the early modern Anglican Church to navigate between the Scylla of popery and the Charybdis of dissent, noting the Church's tendency to 'steer a middle, latitudinarian course [...] equidistant from Puritanism and Rome', both in matters of doctrine and decoration.²⁶ Meanwhile, Carol Gibson-Wood has drawn attention to the earlier

the inner dome with mosaic were submitted to the Dean and, in July, the St Paul's Completion [sic] Fund Committee proposed to cover the dome with painted paper, 'to try the effect of the proposed decoration of the dome' (reported in *Academy*, 20 July 1878). The proposed and actual redecoration of the cathedral prompted a prolonged and sometimes heated exchange in the press, with the most vocal opposition coming from the students of the Slade and London's other art colleges, who protested against 'the tyranny of disfigurements which those who are responsible for the "decoration" of St. Paul's unhappily seek to impose on posterity' (from an open letter published in *Academy*, 13 May 1899).

²³ Kerry Downes, *Sir Christopher Wren*, exh. cat., Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 1982, p. 72.

²⁴ Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England 1537-1837*, vol. 1, p. 74.

²⁵ John Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530-1830*, New Haven and London, 1993 (ninth edition), p. 218-19. In one very recent study, James B. Simpson and George H. Eatman's *A Treasury of Anglican Art* (New York, 2003), no mention is made of either Bird's or Thornhill's work at St Paul's.

²⁶ Arline Meyer, *Apostles in England: Sir James Thornhill & the legacy of Raphael's Tapestry Cartoons*, exh. cat., Columbia University, New York, 1996, pp. 70-1.

writings of two senior clergymen who were instrumental in handing the commission to Thornhill. Thomas Tenison was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1695 until his death in 1715, and William Wake was the Bishop of Lincoln for ten years before becoming Tenison's successor. Both men sat on the three rebuilding commissions appointed between 1709 and 1715, and both had published similar views on idolatry earlier in their career. Gibson-Wood observes, for example, how Tenison's *Of Idolatry* (1678) 'insisted on strict guidelines regarding both acceptable subject matter and appropriate use [of religious imagery]. For example, saints could be represented only in their mortal earthly roles' – a rule that is observed closely in Thornhill's decoration.²⁷ By being more sensitive to the historical context of the commission, both Gibson-Wood and Meyer open the door to a more detailed exploration of Thornhill's work at the cathedral. Rather than disregard the painted dome as an artistic failure, compromised by the unwelcome meddling of a group of dogmatic churchmen, Thornhill's scheme – both its style and content – can more usefully be understood as the product of a creative tension between the ecclesiastical and artistic demands of the commission, and more generally as a significant example of the collaborative nature of decorative history painting.

It is important to remember that the posthumous neglect of Thornhill's painting in the dome, including the obliteration of his work in the tambour in the 1850s, stems from a very different notion of ecclesiastical decoration to that held by the Church authorities at the beginning of the eighteenth century. For them, a 'splash of colour' would have introduced an objectionable tincture of Catholic luxury into the very centre of the Anglican Church. The painted scheme's unusual location, its sombre stone-like colouring and its rather sparing pictorial qualities may not have appealed greatly to visitors to the cathedral during the past two hundred years, but to earlier church-goers, those same attributes designated the cathedral as one of the most significant artistic sites of the modern capital.

The commissioners' decision to restrict Thornhill's palette indicates just how seriously the Church regarded the matter of the cathedral's decoration. If, as has often been suggested, Thornhill's painting is out of sympathy with Wren's original intentions for the dome, an explanation can be found in the changing requirements of the Church of England, which were markedly different at the beginning of George I's

²⁷ Carol Gibson-Wood, 'The Political Background to Thornhill's Paintings in St Paul's Cathedral', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 56 (1993), p. 232.

reign from what they had been when building work began four decades earlier; and in both cases, the public needs of the Church far outweighed the private desires of either the architect or the artist.

The outright condemnation of religious imagery remained a minority view within the Anglican Church of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and elaborate depictions of Christ and the apostles remained an acceptable form of decoration in the private chapels of palaces and country houses. However, in parish churches and other public places of worship, any attempt to depart from a handful of approved subjects, or to display images in a place other than above the altar, could be enough to arouse suspicions of encroaching popery among the wider clergy.²⁸ Archbishop Tenison's views represented the prevailing attitude towards images among the senior clergy. It was an attitude that, broadly speaking, recognised the potential instructional value of religious art (and implicitly acknowledged its cultural appeal to the laity), but which, aware of how effectively religious painting had been used by Counter-Reformation propagandists on the Continent, refused to allow the medium to be fully unleashed in English churches. Two very different but, as it turns out, closely related episodes from the time can help us understand how these issues informed the final stages of the rebuilding and decoration of St Paul's.

The legitimacy of images of the New Testament saints had been tested in 1684, when the parishioners of Moulton in Lincolnshire were refused permission by the zealous Bishop of Lincoln to display paintings of the apostles in their church. On appeal, however, the setting up of the images was declared lawful by the Archbishop of Canterbury, provided they would not be used for superstitious or idolatrous purposes. That the case went all the way to the archbishop indicates how seriously the matter was taken by all concerned.²⁹

Memories of the Moulton case were revived thirty years later during the extraordinary case of the Whitechapel altarpiece – a controversy that inadvertently, though very publicly, aggravated the contentious issue of religious imagery in churches at a critical stage in the history of St Paul's Cathedral. In April 1714, a

²⁸ Among the subjects that were acceptable to most clergy were images of Moses and Aaron (usually shown either side of an inscription of the ten commandments) from the Old Testament, and of the Last Supper from the New Testament. Attitudes towards the use of religious imagery within the Anglican Church during this period are touched upon by G.W.O. Addleshaw and Frederick Etchells in *The Architectural Setting of Anglican Worship*, London, 1948, pp. 158-61.

²⁹ The Moulton case is discussed briefly in G.W.O. Addleshaw and Frederick Etchells, *The Architectural Setting of Anglican Worship*, p. 161.

painting of the Last Supper by an unnamed artist was installed above the altar in St Mary's Church in the east London parish of Whitechapel. The subject of the painting was not in itself contentious, and would have been barely noticed outside of the parish but for one detail – a biting (and by all accounts unmistakable) resemblance between the figure of Judas and the Whig cleric Dr White Kennet, a political adversary of the Rector of St Mary's who, it was presumed, had ordered the likeness when he commissioned the painting.³⁰ The alleged similarity was gleefully reported in the press, prompting a minor pamphlet scuffle before the case was eventually referred to the Bishop of London and the offending painting ordered to be taken down.³¹

The debate that the Whitechapel incident reopened prompted the reissue, in 1714, of *The case concerning setting up images or painting of them in churches*, an uncompromisingly iconoclastic tract originally written by Thomas Barlow, the late Bishop of Lincoln who had opposed the Moulton parishioners thirty years earlier. To Barlow, the very idea of figurative decoration was anathema to a Protestant place of worship. In his rejection of the Moulton apostles, he had appealed to the legal inheritance of the Reformation, denouncing all religious painting as 'Popish Superstition'.³² In particular, his uncompromising condemnation of religious imagery cited the persuasive, if hopelessly outdated, authority of the 'Homily against peril of Idolatry' from the *Second Book of Homilies*, first issued by Elizabeth I in 1563. Although such uncompromising iconoclasm does not appear to have won many supporters in the eighteenth century, the revival of these arguments in 1714 resurrected the historical equation of religious imagery with idolatry at a time when Catholicism and its evil twin, arbitrary power, were once again perceived by many as a real and daily threat to English liberty. Fears of an impending Catholic rising were proven well founded the following year.

If the Whitechapel fiasco opened old wounds over the use of images, it also exposed the sometimes bitter and often overtly political discord within the Church

³⁰ White Kennet had been an enthusiastic champion of the Glorious Revolution and was chaplain and biographer of the 1st Duke of Devonshire. He subsequently became Bishop of Peterborough.

³¹ See, for example, [Willoughby Welley], *A Letter to the Church Wardens of White-Chaple, Occasioned by a New Altar-Piece Set up in their Church*, London, 1714; *An Answer to Willoughby Willey's Letter to the Church-Wardens of White-Chapel*, London, 1714; and *Images an Abomination to the Lord. Or, Dr Kenet's Reasons for Pulling Down the Altar-piece at White-Chapel*, London, 1714.

³² Thomas Barlow, Bishop of Lincoln, *The case concerning setting up images or painting of them in churches* [...] *Published upon occasion of a painting set up in White-Chappel Church*, London, 1714, p.7; originally published as one of *Several Miscellaneous and Weighty Cases of Conscience, learnedly and judiciously resolved*, London, 1692.

during the latter years of Queen Anne's reign – divisions that the senior clergy were keen to play down. In ordering the removal of the altarpiece, Bishop Robinson fudged the damaging question of whether or not the painting constituted a libel against Kennet, citing instead the more anodyne fact that the painting had been erected without first obtaining permission.³³ Nevertheless, the pamphlet-reading public, all too familiar with public quarrels between clergymen, could have been in no doubt that the incident was born of a far deeper schism that had emerged within the Church during the Exclusion crisis of 1679-81, and which had since become entrenched in the contemporary language of party politics. Clearly, any painting destined for St Paul's would inevitably invite the same concerns over the appropriateness of religious images. In the scheme eventually favoured by the commissioners, we can see how Thornhill set out to answer the unease of all but the most ardent opponents of religious painting by drawing on the apostolic example of St Paul to create a series of images that took the thorny issue of idolatry by the horns.

Strikingly, of the eight scenes that Thornhill eventually painted inside the dome, at least five show St Paul engaged against the idolatrous practices of the Roman Empire, inviting contemporary churchgoers to draw parallels with the equally superstitious rituals of the modern Church in Rome. In *The Sacrifice at Lystra* (fig. 59), for example, the apostle, finding himself the object of the Lycaonians' misguided faith, is shown physically rejecting their attentions (Acts 14. 8-15). Paul's gesture of defiance, as he implores his audience to 'turn from these vanities unto the living God', is surely intended as an appeal to the worshipers on the cathedral floor below as much as it is to the people of Lystra. Similarly, in the fifth episode (fig. 61), Thornhill depicts Paul preaching against the idolatry of the Athenians. Here, visitors to the cathedral witness the apostle telling the people of Athens: 'I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious', before explaining that his God is not found in the temples, or in artefacts of 'gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device', but in all things at all times (Acts 17. 22-29).

The implicit iconoclasm of Thornhill's designs was underlined in the official engravings that appeared soon after the paintings were completed. The inscription accompanying Gerard Vandergucht's engraving of *Paul Preaching in Athens*, for example, identified the precise moment that had been chosen from the New

³³ *The Whole Tryal and Examination of Dr Welton, Rector of White-Chapel, and the Church-Wardens*, London, 1714.

Testament – as Paul extolled the single (and invisible) God that lay behind the idols worshipped in the city, and declared: *Quem ergo ignorantes colitis, hunc ego vobis annuntio* ('Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you'). Whether depicting Paul preventing a pagan sacrifice at Lystra or preaching to the Athenians on 'Mars Hill' or, in a less familiar episode, persuading the sorcerers of Ephesus to burn their books of magic, it seems that Thornhill sought to reassure his patrons by tackling the difficult question of idolatry head-on, with a pictorial scheme that could itself be read as a powerful lesson against the misuse of images and other superstitious texts.

However, Thornhill's message is not simply about the rejection of irreligious icons. The first two episodes depicted in the dome address the issue of the religious use and abuse of the visual in a rather different way by associating the process of Christian conversion with physical blindness. First, Saul (Paul) loses the use of his eyes for three days when he is blinded by a heavenly light on his way to Damascus (Acts 9. 1-18; fig. 70). In turn, the apostle then deprives the sorcerer Elymas of his sight for attempting 'to pervert the right ways of the Lord', converting Sergius Paulus in the process (Acts 13. 6-12; fig. 71). Both paintings represent well-rehearsed episodes of Christian mythology, but when viewed in the context of contemporary anxieties over the visual aspect of worship, the implications of Thornhill's choice of subject become clearer: true Protestant enlightenment necessitated a temporary loss of sight, or an end to old ways of looking, before the individual could learn to see the world anew, stripped of the distractions and superstitions of false religion. In this way, Thornhill's paintings provided a powerful riposte to the opponents of church imagery by framing the viewer's own act of seeing (and recognition) within a pious setting. In other words, to view the painted dome – an action that requires a concerted effort of looking – was to acknowledge the spiritual perils of abusing one's eyesight. What is more, this lesson in Protestant vision was presented in such a way that associated modern Anglicanism with the uncorrupted early Church of St Paul, marking Catholic idolatry as an Elymas-like perversion of God's will.

The figure of St Paul had been implicated in contemporary theological debates in other ways. The Church historian Jeremy Gregory has recently observed how it was a regular conceit of eighteenth-century preachers in the cathedral to illuminate contemporary issues by drawing on the life and writings of its patron saint in their sermons, a number of which were subsequently published for wider consumption. By and large, Paul was valued by the clergy as a unifying role model for an institution

otherwise vulnerable to the damaging effects of schism. According to Gregory, moderate churchmen found in Paul a model of true Anglican behaviour: 'what they saw as St Paul's emphasis on practicalities, and this-worldly actions, as well as his stress on unity and concord, [were] useful paradigms with which to address current concerns'.³⁴ It is not surprising, then, that the saint should be called upon to address the same concerns in the dome that preoccupied the preachers in the pulpit below. But if Paul was regarded by most as a paragon of moderation, he could also be summoned by those intent on exposing the divisions within the Church. This was most spectacularly the case on 5 November 1709, when Henry Sacheverell delivered his infamous sermon on 'The Perils of False Bretheren', a ferocious attack on the Whig government and its Low Church allies, in which a whiggish Church of England was likened to the corrupt Church of Corinth decried by Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians.

The public interest in Sacheverell's sermon and his subsequent impeachment prompted an outpouring of caustic pamphlets and graphic satire, as well as sermons from politicking clergymen from both sides.³⁵ But there was far more at stake than the reputations of a few ambitious preachers. Lurking beneath the whole affair was a serious challenge to the meaning of the Glorious Revolution and the legitimacy of the Protestant Succession. (The first article of Sacheverell's impeachment was that he had preached 'that the necessary means used to bring about the said Happy Revolution were odious and unjustifiable'.)³⁶ One pamphlet, typical of the kind of dry scholarly literature that emerged in response to Sacheverell, sets out the general opinion of conservative Whigs and moderate Tories alike. *St Paul and her Majesty Vindicated* (1710), her majesty meaning Anne, took the form of an inquiry into the true meaning of Paul's precept that 'he who Opposeth the Government, Resisteth the Ordinance of God' (Romans 13. 1-2). The author distinguishes between 'the Government' referred to by Paul, which he agrees may never be resisted, and the individual 'Prince or

³⁴ Jeremy Gregory, 'St Paul's and Anglicanism, 1688-1800' in Derek Keene, Arthur Burns and Andrew Saint (eds), *St Paul's, The Cathedral Church of London, 604-2004*, forthcoming 2004. I am grateful to Jeremy for allowing me to read a draft of his chapter before its publication.

³⁵ The Sacheverell affair has received close attention from historians of the period. See for example, William Gibson, *The Church of England 1688-1832*, London, 2001, esp. pp. 78-81; and Jeremy Gregory, 'St Paul's and Anglicanism, 1688-1800'. For a discussion of its impact on London's print market, see Mark Hallett, *The Spectacle of Difference: graphic satire in the age of Hogarth*, New Haven and London, 1999, pp. 29-37.

³⁶ *The Tryal of Dr. Henry Sacheverell, before the House of Peers, for High Crimes and Misdemeanors*, London, 1710.

Ruler', who may justifiably be opposed if he acts with 'private Will' against the Government. It was an argument that cut to the centre of contemporary political debate, responding squarely to the accusation that resistance to James II in 1688 had been a betrayal of God as well as of the king.³⁷ The principal aim of such pamphlets (and this one is representative of many) was, it seems, to rescue Paul from the likes of Sacheverell and those who presented the saint as the instigator of the doctrine of non-resistance, or passive obedience, which underpinned Tory and High Church thoughts on government (and which ultimately pointed to Jacobitism). The author of *A Short Way with St Paul and Sacheverell* (1710) made much the same point rather more succinctly:

To impute to *St Paul* (for Example) what tends
To Oppression, and every Thing that is bad,
Is to justifie him, who then (amongst Friends)
Was not much in the wrong when he said he was mad.³⁸

Both Sacheverell's invective and the rebuffs of the more moderate clergy demonstrate the extent to which St Paul had become a contested figure, subject to rival claims in a struggle for doctrinal authority. As the commissioners deliberated over how best to finish the dome, London's patron saint was being called as a key witness by both sides in some of the most pressing political and theological debates of the time, and we can be sure that the pictorial retelling of Paul's story inside the building was subject to the same scrutiny and cross-examination.

One treatise, published in 1726, just a few years after Thornhill's work was completed, spelt out the case in defence of the revolution of 1688, insisting that far from advocating a doctrine of non-resistance, we find Paul 'more than once having Recourse to the Law, and claiming the Benefit of it, in Opposition to those ruling Powers that had acted contrary to it'. *The Example of St Paul* trawls the New Testament for instances of Paul's refusal to 'yield a tame Submission to Tyrants,

³⁷ *St Paul and her Majesty Vindicated (In Proving from the Apostle's own Words, Rom. XIII. That the Doctrine of Non-Resistance, As commonly Taught, is None of His)*, London, 1710.

³⁸ *A Short Way with St Paul and Sacheverell* was published as an appendix to *The Jacobite Plot: or, the Church of England in No Danger*, London, 1710.

governing according to Will and Pleasure, and not according to Law'.³⁹ Included among them were two episodes that had been painted in the dome a few years earlier – Paul's imprisonment by the Roman magistrates of Philippi (Acts 16. 16-33), and his appeal to King Agrippa against the claims of his Jewish accusers (Acts 26). In the second of these, we are told how Paul 'shew'd a just Regard for the civil Liberties of Mankind, whereof the Law is the Guardian' when appealing against what he regarded as 'the arbitrary and illegal Proceedings of Rulers'.⁴⁰ Of the eight biblical scenes represented in the dome, these two subjects were the least familiar to the history of art – certainly compared to the depiction of Saul's conversion, or to the three subjects that Raphael had also painted as part of his series tapestry cartoons, then on display at Hampton Court (see figs 58, 59 and 61). However, both of these subjects had already been represented at the cathedral by Francis Bird, in two of four panels the sculptor carved for the portico three years before Thornhill began work in the dome (see, for example, fig. 72).⁴¹ Though Bird's reliefs are simpler in design and much smaller in scale than Thornhill's stone-coloured paintings, the visual affinity between them is noteworthy. Both, it seems, are the product of a decorative programme that was more responsive to the contemporary concerns of the clergy, and more central to the public image of the Church, than has previously been recognised.

The Example of St Paul developed ideas that had been introduced in the pamphlet literature of Low Church, anti-Sacheverellite politics over the previous fifteen years, including the notion that simplicity in matters of doctrine and liturgy brought worshippers closer to God. What is most striking about the following extract, taken from a preface that emphasises the instructional value of contemplating Paul's life, is the intensely visual way in which the authors endorse the straightforward history that readers of the treatise could expect.

So shining a Character as the Apostle *Paul's* might easily be wrought up with many Embellishments [...] But at the same Time it may justly be said, that *it doth not need it*. The naked Representation of so many divine Excellencies, in their native Simplicity and in a contracted View, presents us with such a

³⁹ *The Example of St Paul*, London, 1726, p.116.

⁴⁰ *The Example of St Paul*, p.118.

⁴¹ The other two carvings depicted *Paul before Felix* and *Paul bitten by a viper at Melita*; see Philip Ward-Jackson, *Public Sculpture of the City of London*, Liverpool, 2003, pp. 369-70.

Constellation of Graces and Virtues, as is sufficient to excite Admiration and a holy Ardour to imitate them, without any artificial Colourings.⁴²

There is a clear parallel between this recommendation of the plain-style writing of *The Example of St Paul* and the ‘contracted View’ and monochrome finish of the paintings that decorated the inner dome. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine a more convincing endorsement of the eight ‘Basso-Relievo’ scenes that Thornhill and the cathedral commissioners had jointly conceived for the central space in St Paul’s.

For the nineteenth-century author cited earlier, the ‘naked appearance’ of the cathedral had become something of an embarrassment in need of colourful disguise. To the author of *The Example of St Paul*, by contrast, writing a century earlier, the ‘naked Representation’ of the saint’s life provided a way of expounding biblical truths without any unnecessary adornment. The didactic potential of the cathedral’s figurative components was already well understood, as James Wright acknowledged when describing Bird’s west-front carvings in 1708: ‘Within the Church the Pious Christian hears, | But here he sees, the Acts of Holy Paul.’⁴³ Far from the pale compromise that it would later seem, here the ‘native Simplicity’ of religious history – whether in painting or sculpture – was something to be praised.

After Raphael

If Thornhill’s scheme can be profitably explored in relation to contemporary debates on imagery within the Church, the eight narrative bays need also to be understood within the broader category of western religious painting, as works of art whose terms of reference reached beyond the ideological and physical spaces of worship. As part of his detailed study of Thornhill, William Osmun compiled an inventory of likely sources for the artist’s work at St Paul’s. He suggested, for example, that Thornhill’s *Conversion of Saul* is freely based on paintings of the same subject by Raphael, Rubens and Ludovici Carracci; and that various other figures in the dome derive from paintings by the likes of Pierre Subleyras, Louis Jouvenet and Simon Vouet. More generally, Osmun also points to an interesting affinity between Thornhill’s depiction

⁴² *The Example of St Paul*, preface (written by the Rev. T. Watts and J. Evans).

⁴³ James Wright, *Phoenix Paulina. A Poem on the New Fabrick of St Paul’s Cathedral*.

of St Paul in the dome and Eustache Le Sueur's series of the life of St Bruno, painted during the 1640s for the cloisters of Chartreux, Paris, and subsequently engraved by François Chauveau.⁴⁴ But it is Raphael's celebrated series of tapestry cartoons depicting the acts of the apostles Peter and Paul, installed in Wren's purpose-built gallery at Hampton Court Palace in the late 1690s, that is most consistently and properly cited as the artist's principal model.⁴⁵

Sometime around 1730, Thornhill made a sketch for a group portrait of himself and his family within an imaginative interior resembling the cartoon gallery at Hampton Court (fig. 73). The drawing (there is no trace of a subsequent painting) provides a valuable insight into the artist's own evaluation of his achievements and identity towards the end of his career. Thornhill depicts himself at the head of a respectable family, with his wife Judith (seated) and son John to his right. They are accompanied by the painter's extended family (notice Hogarth's respectful appearance on the far left); by two other named figures – possibly servants or long-serving studio assistants – and a dog. In the centre of the picture, and demanding at least as much, if not more attention as any of the other sitters, is a painting: a scaled-down copy of Raphael's *Paul Preaching in Athens*. The half-size image relates to one of three sets of copies of the Hampton Court cartoons (including one full-size version) that Thornhill made between 1729 and 1731, making it one of the artist's last recorded paintings.

Thornhill's copies of Raphael's cartoons have, until recently, been regarded as a lamentable coda to the artist's career – the efforts of a painter who, no longer capable of attracting worthwhile commissions, was forced to fill his time with the unpaid task of copying the work of another, untouchable artist from the past. Within the last decade, however, Thornhill's 'cartoons' have been the subject of an impressive exhibition and catalogue by Arline Meyer, which throws light not only on the circumstances surrounding their production, but also on their significance to Thornhill's career and their place in the subsequent history of British art.⁴⁶ Meyer

⁴⁴ William R. Osmun, 'A Study of the Works of Sir James Thornhill', unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1950, esp. pp. 58-62.

⁴⁵ In addition to Osmun (see previous note), see Arline Meyer's *Apostles in England: Sir James Thornhill & the legacy of Raphael's tapestry cartoons*, exh. cat., Columbia University, New York, 1996, esp. pp. 69-72.

⁴⁶ See Arline Meyer, *Apostles in England: Sir James Thornhill & the legacy of Raphael's Tapestry Cartoons*, pp. 20-51. See also Jeremy Wood, 'Raphael Copies and Exemplary Picture Galleries in Mid Eighteenth-Century London', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, LXII, no. 3 (1999), esp. pp. 395-401.

quite rightly refutes the suggestion that Thornhill had been ‘reduced to copying’ in his later years, and convincingly dispels the forlorn image of an ageing artist, obsessively replicating the marks of the revered Raphael. She points instead to the didactic value attached to the copying of exemplary works of art during the eighteenth century, arguing convincingly that Thornhill’s self-appointed task was a conscious attempt by the artist to ‘[position] himself as the doyen of an incipient “British School”’ – a school in which Thornhill assumed the role of ‘aesthetic broker’ between the artistic achievements of the High Renaissance and an art-starved British nation.⁴⁷

Two other aspects of this remarkable drawing make a direct link between Thornhill and Raphael’s cartoons. First is the inclusion of a brazier – an unusual addition to a conversation piece of this kind, but here clearly labelled at the centre of a grand but otherwise sparsely furnished room. Notwithstanding any practical explanations for the charcoal burner (as an aid to drying the painting, perhaps), it echoes the form of the circular temple in the featured copy of *Paul Preaching in Athens*, as well as recalling in its position, and to some extent its function, the altar at the centre of another of Raphael’s designs, *The Sacrifice at Lystra*. The second, more intriguing detail, is the fireplace in the background, which Thornhill describes as the ‘Gallery Chimney’ (and which, with the brazier, is the only other inanimate object labelled by the artist). The fireplace appears unusually high, making it clearly visible even above the heads of the tallest family members, suggesting that like the brazier, it was an integral feature of the proposed painting. Even without the verbal clue, the nervous marks of Thornhill’s pen reveal just enough detail to make the ‘Gallery Chimney’ recognisable as the fireplace from the cartoon gallery at Hampton Court, complete with John Nost’s distinctive carved mantel (fig. 74). Alone, these rather oblique references to the cartoons and their location would barely warrant so much of our attention. Together however, and alongside Thornhill’s copy, they present a variety of playful allusions that would have been recognisable to those with a connoisseurial interest in, and first-hand experience of, Raphael’s originals. Alongside

George Vertue suggested that Thornhill’s copies had enhanced the reputation of both artists (see *Walpole Society*, vol. 22 (Vertue III, 1934), pp. 39 and 43. Similarly, in 1734, Thornhill’s obituarist agreed that the cartoons had been ‘reviv’d’ by the English artist’s ‘curious Pencil’ (see *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 13 May 1734, pp. 274-74.)

⁴⁷ Arline Meyer, *Apostles in England: Sir James Thornhill & the legacy of Raphael’s Tapestry Cartoons*, p. 35.

the social mores of polite family life, and infiltrating the pictorial conventions of the conversation piece, Thornhill shows himself here immersed in the cartoons.

It is possible to trace the extent of Thornhill's engagement with Raphael's work by comparing the final version of *Paul Preaching in Athens* in the dome of St Paul's with a preliminary oil sketch of the same subject (one of only three known preparatory works to use a full range of colours; fig. 75). Several prominent features of the earlier painting, including the horizontal arrangement of bodies and the distinctively dressed figure of Paul preaching from the steps of an unseen building, recall Raphael's cartoon of the same subject (fig. 76). The inclusion of a circular peristyle temple and a statue of Mars in the middle distance further echo the built environment in Raphael's design. At the same time, Thornhill's arrangement of biblical figures within a luminous capriccio landscape seems to look towards the New Testament scenes of Nicolas Poussin. And yet, despite the ambitious artistic allusions of this sketch, as a design for the dome of St Paul's it is far from developed. Framed by little more than a tokenistic architecture of coffered ribs, it shows no attempt to reconcile the top of the panel with the difficult upper section of the domed ceiling. Nor does the sketch accommodate the exceptional viewing conditions of the cathedral, which place the viewer significantly lower than this painting implies. At this stage, it seems, Thornhill was more concerned with impressing a potential patron with his skills as an accomplished history painter – by interpreting an agreed subject in emulation of recognised old masters – than with finding a scale and situation appropriate for the inside of a dome the size of that at St Paul's.

Three of the scenes in the cathedral (figs 58, 59 and 61) have a direct counterpart in those of Raphael's cartoons that take the acts of St Paul as their subject (although in each case they are modified to suit the rather different format of the dome). Two other scenes (figs 56 and 60) depict episodes that Raphael had also included in his series, and which can be seen in the complete set of tapestries in the Vatican, but for which the cartoons no longer survive. The remaining three scenes in the dome represent episodes that Raphael did not paint but which can be seen as a continuation of the narrative sequence initiated by the cartoons. In other words, all eight of Thornhill's designs can be positioned in relation to Raphael's in one way or another, either by repeating or in some way complementing the biblical stories depicted by Raphael.

The intricate and surely deliberate way in which Thornhill's scheme weaves itself around the narrative of the cartoons is a form of pictorial dialogue that Thornhill invites us to pursue. We have seen how Thornhill's composition of *Paul Preaching in Athens* derived, at least in part, from Raphael's depiction of the same subject. Significantly, this is also the image in which Thornhill includes his own likeness – seated in front of an empty canvas and looking out towards the viewer from the right of the composition (fig. 77). The artist's choice of scene for his cameo appearance is interesting. As God's appointed apostle to the gentiles, Paul travelled throughout the Roman Empire, preaching to and converting all kinds of people, from the rude inhabitants of Melita to the royal entourage of Agrippa in Caesarea. In Athens, he addressed the philosophers of colonial Greece – the Epicureans and Stoics for whom the story of Christ represented a philosophical challenge as well as a spiritual awakening. If this image recalls the cartoon of the same subject at Hampton Court, the small detail of the artist's face also brings to mind Raphael's self-portrait in *The School of Athens*, with which the Italian artist claimed his place at the juncture of the classical and Christian intellectual traditions. We might even regard Thornhill's self-portrait in an allegorical way, seeing the artist as the embodiment of Painting taking his place alongside the other liberal arts (suggested by the various emblems of learning on the ground in front of Paul); and perhaps also as a reminder of the rhetorical potential of painting, drawing our attention to the fact that the apostle's persuading gestures are mediated by the artist's brush. However far we take our reading, Thornhill's presence amid the Athenian philosophers encourages a different approach to the painted dome of St Paul's: his outward gaze looks beyond the cathedral and the immediate ecclesiological concerns of the Church towards a canonical example of western art – Raphael's cartoons – and invites us to do the same. In order to understand better the nature and extent of this pictorial dialogue, we first need to recognise the near-mythical status of Raphael and his cartoons in the artistic and political imagination of eighteenth-century England.

The history of the cartoons is well documented.⁴⁸ They were made for Pope Leo X early in the sixteenth century as designs for tapestries to complete the

⁴⁸ The history of the cartoons is discussed thoroughly by John Shearman in *Raphael's Cartoons in the collection of Her Majesty the Queen and the tapestries for the Sistine Chapel*, London, 1972; and more recently, in Sharon Fermor's *The Raphael Tapestry Cartoons*, London, 1996. Ronald Paulson considers upon the status of the cartoons in eighteenth-century England in *Hogarth, vol. 1, the 'Modern Moral Subject' 1697-1732*, New Brunswick and London, 1991, esp. pp. 124-34. For a more recent discussion,

decoration of the Sistine chapel. They then passed through several collections and workshops in Europe, before being brought to England in the 1620s by the future Charles I as models for the royal tapestry works at Mortlake. For the next seventy or so years, Raphael's designs became known to English courtiers as valuable tapestries while the cartoons themselves remained out of view, each cut into four or five pieces and used infrequently when new working copies were needed by the Mortlake weavers. It was not until the 1690s, as part of the more extensive relocation of the royal household from Windsor Castle after the Glorious Revolution, that the several paper strips were permanently reassembled and installed at Hampton Court Palace. It was here, in the picture gallery of the newly remodelled palace, that the modern history of the cartoons began. The permanent display of the cartoons in Wren's purpose-built gallery prompted an unprecedented critical response, in poetry and prose – all of it praising what the poet Richard Blackmore described as the 'Wonders of great Raphael's Hand'.⁴⁹ In 1703, Blackmore, a self-proclaimed devotee of the Glorious Revolution (the Protestant religion and Williamite politics were among his favourite subjects as a writer), published 'A short description of the cartons [*sic*] of Raphael Urbin, in the gallery at Hampton-Court'.⁵⁰ The poem was among the first of several politically motivated responses to the restored Raphael paintings, as well as marking the beginning of an English obsession with the cartoons that lasted for more than a century.

Although at times Blackmore's verse suggests an awareness of the rhetorical specificity of painting that underpinned more theoretical claims for the art (as in the line: 'Did e'er the Soul such painted Passions own? | Were e'er her various Shapes to such Advantage shown?'), his connoisseurship rarely reached beyond the level of marvelling at Raphael's life-like figures ('That Lookers-on have oft a doubtful Strife, | If 'tis the Picture, or the real Life'). Instead, as might be expected from a poet whose previous output included *Right Zeal* (1696), Blackmore's first concern in writing

see Jeremy Wood, 'Rubens and Raphael: The designs for the tapestries in the Sistine Chapel' in *Bevlogen Vlieghe. Contributions on Seventeenth-Century Flemish Painting in honour of Hans Vlieghe*, Turnhout, forthcoming 2005.

⁴⁹ Richard Blackmore, *A hymn to the light of the world. With a short description of the cartons of Raphael Urbin, in the gallery at Hampton-Court*, London, 1703.

⁵⁰ Blackmore was a physician to William III and a knight. He was the author of numerous other religious essays and poems, among them, *Creation* (1712) and *Redemption* (1722); as well as several epic poems of English history, including *King Arthur* (1697), *Eliza* (1705) and *Alfred* (1723). In 1723 he also published *A true and impartial History of the Conspiracy against King William*.

about the cartoons was to provide a Protestant re-evaluation of the seven biblical stories that now occupied a privileged position next to the King's apartment at Hampton Court. The poem concludes with a description of *Christ's Charge to Peter*, a painting that conflates two critical episodes of Christian (and conspicuously Catholic) mythology, wherein Christ makes St Peter head of the Church.⁵¹ The appeal of such an image in sixteenth-century Rome is evident, but its reappearance at the heart of an avowedly Protestant court two hundred years later called for a poetic sleight of hand from Blackmore. He attempted to disassociate Raphael's design from its original political and doctrinal meaning (that is, as witness to the papal authority of Leo X and his successors, and to the primacy of Rome), and even from Catholic 'notions' of the artist, by refocusing the image through a distinctly Protestant lens. Having first insisted that Christ had invested Peter 'With Pow'r Divine, but not above the rest', the poet continued:

Much less this Grant did Sov'raign Right convey,
 Obliging all th' Apostles to obey
 Their Monarch Peter's Universal Sway:
 But do not ask what Raphael's Notions were,
 His Judgment might, his Pencil cannot err.⁵²

This may not be great poetry, but neither should it be dismissed as mere doggerel.⁵³ Blackmore's choice of words – his knowing manipulation of phrases such as 'Pow'r Divine', 'Sov'raign Right' and 'Universal Sway' – carried distinct political connotations for an audience used to the anti-papist and anti-absolutist rhetoric of the previous quarter-century. The Protestant credentials of the poem were further emphasised by being published as an appendix to Blackmore's longer, mystical poem, *A Hymn to the Light of the World*.

⁵¹ The subject of *Christ's Charge to Peter* is taken from Matthew 16: 17-19, in which Christ says to Peter 'I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven'; and John 21. 15-17, where Christ charges Peter to 'Feed my sheep'.

⁵² Richard Blackmore, *The Cartons of Raphael Urbin, in the gallery at Hampton-Court*, London, 1703, p. 26.

⁵³ Blackmore's literary obscurity was ensured by Samuel Johnson, who described his prose style (in *The Lives of the Poets*) as 'languid, sluggish, and lifeless'. More recently, Arline Meyer has suggested (in *Apostles in England*, p. 72) that Blackmore's description contributed little, either to the reputation of the cartoons or to the cause of religious poetry.

As a validation of the instructional value of religious painting within a Protestant context, Blackmore's descriptive poem helps explain how Raphael's cartoons were able to gain such authority in the artistic and political imagination of eighteenth-century England. A few years later Richard Steele confirmed the now Protestant identity of the cartoons by describing them in the *Spectator* as 'an Exercise of the highest Piety in the Painter', adding that 'these invaluable Pieces are very justly in the Hands of the greatest and most pious Sovereign in the World'.⁵⁴ Literary approval was accompanied by a considerable interest in printed reproductions of the paintings (Steele's praise had, in fact, been prompted by Queen Anne's public encouragement of Nicolas Dorigny's proposed engravings). By 1721, no fewer than six different sets of prints after the cartoons had been published in London, ranging in price from a few shillings for a relatively crude set to four or five guineas for a set of Dorigny's exclusive engravings.⁵⁵

Of central importance, not only to Blackmore's poem, but also to the later popularity of Raphael's cartoons in England, was their new location at Hampton Court. When Dorigny's prints were finally published in 1719 as *Pinacotheca Hamptoniana*, even the title identified the images with the palace and thus underscored the relationship between the painted originals and the cultural identity of the crown. Just how closely Raphael's cartoons had become associated with the English monarchy during the first quarter of the eighteenth century can be seen in the frontispiece that accompanied Simon Gribelin's engravings (fig. 78), republished in 1720 to coincide with the appearance of Dorigny's much-anticipated (and much larger) set.⁵⁶ In the top half of the page, beneath a portrait of Raphael, the seven surviving cartoons are shown as they were then displayed in the picture gallery at Hampton Court. Below them is a portrait of Anne, with a posthumous dedication to the Queen and a brief history explaining how the cartoons came to be at the palace:

The Seven Famous Cartons of Raphael Urbin, Drawn at the Command of
Pope Leo the 10th as Patterns for Tapestry; They were bought by K. Charles

⁵⁴ *The Spectator*, no. 226, 19 November 1711.

⁵⁵ For an interesting discussion of printed copies of the cartoons see Timothy Clayton, *The English Print, 1688-1802*, New Haven and London, 1997, esp. pp. 49-53; and Arline Meyer, *Apostles in England*, pp. 22-34.

⁵⁶ Gribelin's plates had first appeared, without the frontispiece, in 1707. Another elaborate frontispiece (designed by Louis Cheron) with a similar inscription accompanied a different set of engravings sold by Thomas Bowles in St. Paul's churchyard in 1721.

the first (at the Persuasion of Sr. P. P. Rubens) and brought from Flanders into England; afterwards K. William fix'd them in his Palace of Hampton-Court in the Gallery here Represented. In 1707 they were drawn and Engraven by Sim: Gribelin and by him most humbly Dedicated to Her Late Majesty.

Gribelin's inscription reassures a Protestant audience that, having been made for Leo X, the cartoons predated the Church of England's break with Rome. It then reminds us of the long association the images had since enjoyed with the English monarchy – how they had been among the most prized items of Continental art acquired by Charles I, and how they had once more become a cultural focus of the court under William and then Anne, having been largely overlooked in the decades that intervened. This description points to how the fortunes of the cartoons were understood to rise and fall with the political fortunes of the English, and that they provided a useful metaphor for the country's recent political history. The restored cartoons thus embodied a cultural continuity between the martyr king and the modern Protestant monarchy, and an early correlation between taste and political virtue, that appealed to conservative Whigs and moderate Tories alike.

Within a few years of their installation at Hampton Court, Raphael's designs attained a particular currency among England's whiggish elite. The Earl of Dorset built a new gallery to display an earlier set of painted copies at Knole; and the Dukes of Devonshire and Montagu decorated the state rooms at Chatsworth and Boughton respectively with tapestries made from the original patterns – all three men had been prime movers in the revolution of 1688.⁵⁷ Later in the century, Thornhill's own full-size copies were acquired by the Duke of Bedford and displayed in a dedicated picture gallery at Bedford House.⁵⁸ These examples raise the possibility that the conspicuous appreciation of Raphael's designs was equated with an approval of the Glorious Revolution and loyalty to the Protestant succession that followed. More generally, the ideological reinvention of the cartoons during the 1690s and 1700s points to the central importance of these highly valued artefacts in the cultural and political realignment of England's elite after the Glorious Revolution.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Robert Sackville-West, *Knole*, London (National Trust), 1998, pp. 36-38; and Francis Thompson, *A History of Chatsworth*, London, 1949, pp. 155-56.

⁵⁸ For the Bedford House Gallery, see Jeremy Wood, 'Raphael Copies and Exemplary Picture Galleries in Mid Eighteenth-Century London', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, LXII, no. 3 (1999), esp. pp. 395-401.

Returning to St Paul's, it can be argued that a sustained reference to the cartoons in the decoration of the dome would not only have had artistic and theological implications, but would have sounded a striking political note inside the cathedral. The corollary experiences of viewing Thornhill's scheme from the Whispering Gallery at St Paul's and seeing the cartoons in the royal picture gallery at Hampton Court (a comparison that was replicable in print for the majority who did not have access to the picture gallery at Hampton Court) extended the poet James Wright's earlier metaphorical description of the dome 'Piercing the Clouds in Figure of a Crown' by establishing a decorative and iconographic connection between these centres of ecclesiastical and royal authority in England, between Church and State.⁵⁹

Previous writers who have observed a resemblance between the painted dome at St Paul's and the Hampton Court cartoons have focused on the formal similarities between the two sets of images, or they have seen Thornhill's departure from Raphael's example in purely stylistic terms: that is, as a baroque variation of Raphael's Renaissance classicism.⁶⁰ I, too, have focused on the formal equivalences between the two series to suggest that the ability of the painted dome to evoke a comparison with the cartoon gallery at Hampton Court helped to steer the church (and with it the Church) in a distinct political direction. Having examined the considerable similarities between Thornhill's painting in the dome and Raphael's cartoons, we can now see how that dialogue continued by considering the equally significant *differences* that any careful comparison between the two schemes exposes.

The images that, on first appearances, are closest to Raphael's example are *The Blinding of Elymas* and *The Sacrifice at Lystra*. The third scene in the dome (fig. 59) and the sixth of the seven surviving cartoons (fig. 79) represent the same episode from the New Testament in which Paul, accompanied by Barnabus, heals a lame man while preaching in the city of Lystra. When the people of the city saw this miracle, 'they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men' (Acts 14. 11), and began to prepare a sacrifice in honour of the two apostles they mistakenly believed to be Mercury and Jove. This is the point at which both artists pick up the narrative, and here Thornhill's debt to

⁵⁹ James Wright, *Phoenix Paulina. A Poem on the New Fabrick of St Paul's Cathedral*, London, 1708/9

⁶⁰ For example, Paulson observes (with one eye on his main subject, Hogarth) Thornhill's baroque modification of the cartoons in such details as the draperies in *The Blinding of Elymas* and the altar in *The Sacrifice at Lystra*; see Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth, vol. 1, the 'Modern Moral Subject' 1697-1732*, p. 129.

Raphael is immediately apparent: the two bare-chested men in each picture are priests of Jove, shown with an ox that has been brought to the sacrificial altar; opposite them, Paul tears off his clothes to show that he, like the people of Lystra, is a man and not a god – with which protest, the story goes, he succeeds in preventing the pagan sacrifice. Thornhill’s familiarity with Raphael’s example is underscored in a sketch for the painting – one of a group of pen and wash drawings distinguished by their loose handling and by the relatively ornate architecture that frames each scene (fig. 80).⁶¹ With a few provisional marks Thornhill repeats, quite unmistakably, the right-hand group of figures centred on the ox and the two Lycaonian priests. Our attention is drawn to the axe, which Raphael uses to represent a critical moment in the narrative – held aloft by a priest, poised ready to deliver the fatal blow, its perilous position signals the very last instant at which the sacrifice could be stopped. (And it is the viewer’s recognition of and spiritual engagement with this critical moment that drives the message of the painting.) Thornhill’s drawing follows this arrangement particularly closely, clearly identifying the raised axe as a central motif, with a few lines to suggest the younger man, whose outstretched arm in Raphael’s composition lends an additional urgency to the scene. However, in the scene that was eventually painted in the dome, the axe has been removed to the edge of the picture, where it rests half-hidden and unthreatening over the priest’s shoulder. This alternative treatment of the axe highlights a strategic difference between the two paintings – quite apart from any formal concessions that Thornhill’s later image makes to the shape of the dome. In Raphael’s version (and in Thornhill’s drawing), the axe teeters between life and death; it is suspended between the conflicting religions represented in the picture, physically and symbolically separating Paul from the as-yet-unconverted crowd. In Thornhill’s final version, by contrast, the same motif signals the disarming effect of Paul’s preaching, and of the triumph of the Word of God over brute force.

Meanwhile, in his depiction of *The Blinding of Elymas* (fig. 58), it is clear that Thornhill again used Raphael’s example as a point of departure (fig. 81). A key figure in the episode is the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus, on whose conversion the episode hangs. Looking first at one of Thornhill’s preliminary drawings for the scene (fig. 82), we can see how the artist depicts the proconsul in more or less the same

⁶¹ BM 1913,1216.6-8. William Osmun (in ‘A Study of the Works of Sir James Thornhill’, pp. 55-56) argues convincingly that the ‘baroque’ frame of this drawing derives from designs for the decorated interior of the church at Les Invalides, published in J.F. Felibien’s *Description de la Nouvelle Eglise de l’Hotel Royal des Invalides* (Paris, 1706).

attitude as had Raphael – conveying the Roman’s surprise as he is taken aback by the sorcerer’s sudden loss of sight. In a later sketch for the same scene (fig. 83), and also in the final design, Thornhill once again moved the narrative forward momentarily, shifting the emphasis of the image away from the proconsul’s immediate reaction to the physical fact of Elymas’s blindness (emphasised in the first drawing by the blind man’s clawing gesture) to the spiritual realisation that the sorcerer’s punishment must have been a miracle initiated by Paul. In the final design of both episodes it is noteworthy that Thornhill selected a point in the biblical narrative that immediately *follows* that depicted by Raphael. In doing so he altered the rhetorical centre of the narrative from the tension of the seconds before the conversion to the spiritual certainty that came immediately after. In this, these two images align with the other six paintings in the dome by focusing on the success of Paul’s actions, and on the persuasiveness of the Word that was still preached from the pulpit of the modern cathedral.

The importance I have afforded certain details in Thornhill’s images rests on the viewer’s familiarity with Raphael’s alternative design. It is as a consequence of first recognising and then contemplating the similarities between the two sets of images that the significant differences become apparent. To modern eyes, these differences may seem rather inconsequential. After all, they depend on relatively small details – the turn of a head here, a slightly altered gesture there – and demand considerable attention to detail to be noticed in the cathedral. However, by the time Thornhill began working on the decoration of St Paul’s, there existed in England a considerable body of literature that promoted such scrutiny, and which discussed, compared and evaluated images in precisely this kind of way.

Continental theories of art had been trickling into England for a century or more before, but it was not until the beginning of the eighteenth century that any kind of serious-minded English art theory became established in England – partly a result of the activities of those individuals associated with the elite Virtuosi of St Luke in publishing important treatises by Charles-Alphonse Dufresnoy, whose *De arte graphica* was first translated in 1695, and Roger de Piles, whose *The Art of Painting* first appeared in English in 1706.⁶² One important addition to this cross-channel

⁶² Both of these important translations were supported by members of the influential Virtuosi of St Luke. The 1706 translation of Roger de Piles’s *The Art of Painting* was dedicated to the banker and art collector Robert Child, a member of the Virtuosi of St Luke during the 1700s and 1710s. See Ilaria

transfer of ideas was the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury's *A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules*, published in French in 1712 and in English the following year – a text that has attracted the close attention of art historians in the past twenty years.⁶³ Shaftesbury's *Notion* begins by contemplating which moment in Xenophon's tale of Hercules's crossroads encounter with Pleasure and Virtue is rhetorically the most powerful (and which should therefore be chosen by the painter committed to a morally instructive art), before embarking on a lengthy discourse on how, precisely, the chosen instant should be represented (see fig. 84). For Shaftesbury, the moral force of the subject – in this case, Hercules's decision to follow the steep and stony path of Virtue – was conveyed, above all, through the expressions of the human figure and a few emblematical devices: for example, the direction and manner of the hero's gaze; the 'ascending posture' of Virtue (sword in hand and with one foot slightly raised); or the 'negligent' hand gesture of Pleasure. Furthermore, Shaftesbury's often obsessive attention to detail favoured an economy of design that, as we have seen, was also a characteristic of Thornhill's designs for St Paul's: 'The fewer the objects are, besides those which are absolutely necessary in a piece,' wrote Shaftesbury, 'the easier it is for the eye, by one simple act and in one view, to comprehend the sum or whole.'⁶⁴

Shaftesbury's essay prompted the publication in 1715 (the year Thornhill began working in the dome) of Jonathan Richardson's influential *An Essay on the Theory of Painting*, followed four years later by the same author's *Two Discourses*, in which the principal arguments of the *Essay* were extended and refined. These later treatises are immediately relevant to a discussion of Thornhill's work at St Paul's, not least because the theory of painting they describe was written around an extended critical analysis of the Hampton Court cartoons and other works by Raphael, whom its author revered as 'the great Model of Perfection'.⁶⁵ Drawing on several earlier authors

Bignamini, 'George Vertue, Art Historian and Art Institutions in London 1689-1768', *Walpole Society*, 54 (1988), esp. pp. 29, 34 and 39.

⁶³ Most notably from John Barrell, in *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt*, New Haven and London, 1986.

⁶⁴ Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, 'A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules', in *Characteristicks of men, manners, opinions, times*, 1714 (second edition), vol. 3, p. 383.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting*, London, 1715, p. 172; Jonathan Richardson, *Two Discourses, I. An essay on the art of criticism, as it relates to painting ... II. An argument in behalf of the science of a connoisseur, etc.*, London, 1719. For a recent discussion of Richardson's *Essay* and *Two Discourses*, see Carol Gibson-Wood, *Jonathan Richardson: art theorist*

(including Shaftesbury), Richardson effectively rewrote the prevailing Continental theories of art for an English audience. He accordingly divided (history) painting into seven parts, ranked in order of priority. Among the most important attributes of painting, he identified 'Invention', 'Expression' and 'Composition': so valued because, as the 'instructive' elements of the art, they determined the intellectual and moral weight of the image. By way of demonstration, Richardson looked to the fourth of Raphael's surviving cartoons, *The Death of Ananias*. He identified the precise moment chosen by the artist, wherein lies the work's 'Invention', as 'the Instant of *Ananias's* Fall, and before all the People were apprised of it', adding with characteristic approval that this was 'the most advantageous that could possibly have been imagin'd'. Of almost equal importance for Richardson's theory was 'Expression', which he described as the principal means by which a painting communicates to the viewer. If 'Invention' determined the exact moment at which the artist intervenes in the chosen narrative, 'Expression' provided the general character of the work which, like the 'mood' or 'tone' of a painting, could be joyous, melancholy, terrible and so on. It included, but did not refer exclusively to, facial expressions, as Richardson insisted: 'Every part must contribute to This End; Colours, Animals, Draperies, and especially the Actions of the Figures, and above all the Airs of the Heads.'⁶⁶ As such, these attributes were given precedence over 'Drawing', 'Colouring' and 'Handling' which, while still essential to the success of the whole, Richardson identified as the lesser, 'pleasing' attributes of painting, appealing predominantly to the senses. A similar distinction between what could be described as the notional and the manual aspects of painting was made even more unequivocally by Shaftesbury, who (the more prescriptive of the two, and not a painter himself) regarded them as completely separable tasks and famously employed a master painter to execute *The Judgment of Hercules* on his behalf. Finally, a more elusive seventh attribute of painting, valued above all others, was identified by Richardson as 'Grace and Greatness' – encountered 'When a Man enters into that Awful Gallery at Hampton-Court, [and] finds himself amongst a sort of People Superior to what he has ever seen, and very probably to what Those Really were'.⁶⁷ Between them,

of the English Enlightenment, New Haven and London, 2000.

⁶⁶ Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting*, pp. 60 and 84; *Two Discourses*, p. 28.

⁶⁷ Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting*, p. 176. 'Grace and Greatness' is discussed at greater length by Richardson in *Two Discourses*, pp. 47-49.

Richardson and Shaftesbury outlined both a schema and a vocabulary for the critical analysis of painting among the visually literate virtuosi of eighteenth-century England. Revisiting St Paul's Cathedral, armed with Richardson's notion of 'Invention' and 'Expression' (by which was meant the selection and pictorialisation of the most potent moment within a narrative), it is possible to explain more fully the kind of viewing that Thornhill encouraged from his more visually sophisticated audience.

By looking at Thornhill's preparatory drawings for St Paul's (and there are more than 50 that survive for this scheme alone) it becomes clear that the artist experimented with the composition and detail of each scene right up until the moment when the final working models were made. In another sketch for *The Sacrifice at Lystra* (fig. 85), for example, the general disposition of the figures is the same, but Thornhill has altered the arrangement very slightly. To the left of the two apostles he has added another pagan worshipper, mistakenly offering a garland to Paul, as the two priests drag the sacrificial beast to the altar. In this drawing, it seems as though Thornhill is exploring the possibility of capturing a slightly earlier moment in the narrative. The composition is different again in a third drawing (fig. 86), which is closer to the final design. It is not necessary to insist on a particular chronology for these drawings. Collectively they show Thornhill restlessly playing around with the precise moment that the scene was to represent, and one way of understanding the (sometimes very small) differences between the several images is to see Thornhill repeatedly repositioning his own design in relation to Raphael's famous example.

The critical difference between Raphael's cartoon and Thornhill's depiction of the same scene may rest on little more than the turn of a head through ninety degrees, but with such a small adjustment Thornhill clearly situated his own design after Raphael and proposed an alternative pictorialisation of the subject matter. Thornhill thus encouraged the viewer to regard his paintings in the same serious-minded, theoretical way that was routinely applied to Raphael's cartoons, and even suggested that his own designs offered a more 'advantageous' solution than the greatest examples of the Italian Renaissance.

Print

It is a notable feature of the history of English art of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that, in the absence of a formal academy in the mould of the Accademia di S. Luca in Rome or the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in Paris, the emergence of a theory of painting took place, for the most part, on the printed page, and relied on (mostly imported) engravings and other printed reproductions. The printing press proved an effective tool in the establishment and growth of a theoretical discourse of painting in England, not least because those instructive aspects of painting that Richardson and others agreed were the most significant, that is, 'Invention', 'Expression' and 'Composition', also happened to be the attributes of painting that survived more or less intact when an image was engraved, whereas the lesser parts, including colour and the artist's physical handling of the paint, were obviously lost. This important attribute of engraving and other reproductive methods – facilitated by an established literature on the technical aspects of printmaking (by the likes of William Faithorne and John Evelyn), and by new and more sophisticated methods of marketing high-quality images to potential collectors – allowed a culture of connoisseurship to grow around prints in England at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Jonathan Richardson happily referred his readers to particular engravings when his theory of painting called for illustration; and Shaftesbury's lengthy analysis of history painting is demonstrated to his readers not by Paolo de Matthaeis's life-size canvas of *The Judgment of Hercules*, but by a miniature line engraving reproduced by Simon Gribelin to accompany the explanatory text – with no apparent loss in the force of his argument. In these circumstances, the translation of a painting into a print was implicitly viewed not as a dilution of the original image, but as a distillation of those aspects of picture making that eighteenth-century virtuosi regarded as the most vital. It is a significant mark of the artistic value that Thornhill placed on prints after his own work that, when he was knighted by George I in 1720, he presented the king with a set of engravings of his St Paul's designs.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ The history of print collecting and connoisseurship has been the subject of some significant research in recent years. For example, see Richard T. Godfrey, *Printmaking in Britain: a general history from its beginnings to the present day*, London, 1978, esp. pp. 19-42; Timothy Clayton, *The English Print, 1688-1802*; and Mark Hallett, *The Spectacle of Difference: graphic satire in the age of Hogarth*.

The intention to publish a series of high-quality engravings after Thornhill's paintings in the dome was announced in the press within weeks of the appearance of Dorigny's much-anticipated prints of Raphael's cartoons at Hampton Court. Dorigny's engravings had been nearly a decade in the making and, when they arrived, represented a high point in the reputation of the cartoons among a growing community of English print collectors. Thornhill's decision to publish his St Paul's series was no doubt prompted (at least in part) by the commercial success and critical acclaim that these and other ambitious publications had enjoyed in recent years. It also coincided with a number of other, less ambitious ventures into print by the artist, such as illustrations for a new edition of *Paradise Lost*; and, the following year, a series of illustrations for the collected works of Joseph Addison (including the trenchant *Death of Cato*; see fig. 87).⁶⁹ It was also in 1721 that a print after Thornhill's *Last Supper*, an altarpiece painted and presented by the artist to St Mary's Church in Weymouth, was published (fig. 88). This engraving, dedicated by the engraver Richard Parr to 'Sr. James Thornhill of Thornhill, Kt.', restated the artist's local credentials just months before his election as Member of Parliament for the region.⁷⁰ But of all his ventures into print, it was the St Paul's images that made the greatest impact on Thornhill's social and artistic reputation.⁷¹

Following Dorigny, Thornhill's St Paul's prints were sold by the still relatively novel method of subscription, with 'no more being to be printed than shall be subscribed for'.⁷² Handsomely priced at one guinea for the set, the prints were marketed exceptionally well. A newspaper notice announcing the subscription advised potential subscribers that they could view a proof of one of the plates at selected outlets across London, including Thomas Bowles's shop in St Paul's Churchyard – just a few yards from the painted originals – and off the Strand at the shop of the print seller and fellow member of the Virtuosi of St Luke, Edward Cooper. Beyond the capital, subscriptions were taken by appointed booksellers in Oxford, Cambridge and Bath, as well as at the 'Royal Hospital Coffee-house in Greenwich' – where those

⁶⁹ John Milton, *The Poetical Works of Mr John Milton*, 2 vols, London, 1720; and Joseph Addison, *The Works of the Right Honourable Joseph Addison*, 4 vols, London, 1721.

⁷⁰ Thornhill was elected MP for Weymouth and Melcombe Regis in 1722 and 1727. The altarpiece is still at St Mary's Church.

⁷¹ When, in 1720, Thornhill was knighted by George I, he presented the King with a set of the St Paul's prints.

⁷² *Daily Courant*, 15 October 1719. See also note 76 below.

who visited the hospital to see Thornhill's celebrated painted hall as it neared completion could sign up for a set of the St Paul's prints at the same time.⁷³ In this, as in every other aspect of their production and promotion, the St Paul's engravings were one of the most sophisticated publishing ventures of the time.

The decision to publish the series himself gave Thornhill greater control over the images than if he had sold the job wholesale to a publisher or engraver, as was more usually the case. For example, the task of producing working drawings from which the plates could be copied was typically the job of the engraver, or an assistant. However, not only did Thornhill make these important drawings himself; he did so with a particular engraver in mind for each plate. Two of the drawings include the handwritten instruction 'To be gravd by Monsr Simoneau ye Elder if possible' (see fig. 89). In the event, only one drawing, *Paul before King Agrippa*, was engraved by Charles Simmoneau, but it is significant that the commercial appeal of well-known engravers was such that Thornhill considered it worth the trouble of sending this drawing to Simmoneau in Paris in order to have his name on at least one of the eight prints. The fact that the plates were made by five of 'the best Engravers' – three of whom had previously assisted Dorigny on the cartoons – played a significant part in marketing the prints to Thornhill's desired audience, as did the Latin reference to the biblical source of each scene.⁷⁴ Indeed, it seems that Thornhill quite deliberately targeted his prints at the same serious-minded collectors that may have subscribed to Dorigny's exclusive engravings after Raphael.

Alongside the promise of monetary gain was the opportunity for an even greater artistic reward. When reproduced on paper, Thornhill's designs were subject to a kind of scrutiny that was not possible from the Whispering Gallery of St Paul's. Circulating within the largely secular domain of the virtuoso, they could be handled, studied and discussed under conditions that were far more conducive to the kind of close comparative viewing described earlier in this chapter. Roger de Piles vividly described the kind of connoisseurial attention that Thornhill could have anticipated for his engravings: 'By means of Prints, one may easily see the Works of several

⁷³ *Daily Courant*, 15 October 1719; see also Timothy Clayton in *The English Print 1688-1802*, pp. 54-55. Clayton's study of the English print market has been very useful for this section.

⁷⁴ See the subscription notice in the *Daily Courant*. The editors of the Walpole Society's transcriptions of Vertue's notebooks suggest that Baron and Beauvais were brought to England by Du Bosc, to help engrave Laguerre's paintings at Marlborough House in 1722. Vertue's characteristically chaotic punctuation does not make his meaning clear, however, he seems to mean that they came over to replace Du Bosc after he had parted company with Dorigny; see George Vertue III, p. 8.

Masters on a Table, one may form an Idea of them, judge by comparing them one with another, know which to chuse, and by practising it often, contract a Habit of Good Taste.’⁷⁵ Moreover, the history of print collecting tells us that such objects were often arranged, as well as by artist, ‘by the Gravers, without respect to the painters [or] by such and such Subjects’.⁷⁶ It is therefore likely that Thornhill’s eight scenes of religious history were interleaved (literally) with Dorigny’s or Gribelin’s engravings of the cartoons, allowing the artist’s inventive engagement with Raphael to be seen close up and fully appreciated.

One other feature of the completed St Paul’s engravings confirms that they were intended to align Thornhill with the old master. Early impressions of the plates were printed in a deep red ink (see, for example, fig. 90) which, as well as making the prints more attractive as decorative objects, purposefully placed the images at the top end of the print market and made an implicit reference to the work of Raphael. Before travelling to England to engrave the Hampton Court cartoons, Dorigny had acquired a reputation as Europe’s foremost engraver from his earlier reproductive work – among which was the *Planetarium* series of mosaic designs that Raphael made for the cupola of the Chigi Chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome (published in 1695, see fig. 91). These were highly prized by English collectors and, together with copies of other works by Raphael in Rome, formed the basis of the engraver’s reputation as the foremost translator of Raphael. The use of coloured ink brought to mind the red chalk that Raphael and other old masters often used in their drawings, thus increasing the appeal of modern reproductions by subtly suggesting that handling and discussing an engraving was not so different from handling and discussing a far more valuable drawing. Thornhill’s decision to follow Dorigny in using more expensive, more striking red ink – at least for a few select subscribers – suggests that the English artist sought not only to locate his own work within the highest realm of art, but also to encourage the kind of connoisseurial comparisons described above.

The commercial and artistic possibilities of the London print market were explored still further by the engraver and Rose and Crown Club member, Elisha Kirkall, who produced a rather different print after Thornhill’s version of *The*

⁷⁵ See Roger de Piles, *The art of painting, and the lives of the painters: containing, a compleat treatise of painting, designing, and the use of prints* [translated by John Savage], London, 1706, pp. 54-65. Also cited in Timothy Clayton, *The English Print, 1688-1802*, pp. 42-43.

⁷⁶ Roger de Piles, *The art of painting, and the lives of the painters*, cited in Timothy Clayton, *The English Print, 1688-1802*, p. 44.

Blinding of Elymas (fig. 92). Kirkall knew well how to turn the burgeoning print market to profit (the publication of a series of marine subjects in a sea-coloured blue-green ink was typical of his ingenuity and success as a printmaker). In 1722 he took subscriptions for a set of 'Twelve Prints in Chiaro Oscuro, from the original Drawings of the best Italian Masters' (see, for example, fig. 93), using an innovative printing technique he had developed for the purpose, the results of which emulated earlier Italian chiaroscuro woodcuts.⁷⁷ Kirkall's process combined traditional etching and mezzotint with a novel method by which lines were cut into a second plate of soft metal or wood. This second plate was then used to introduce a different ink tone, leaving areas of the white paper unmarked and slightly raised where the plate had been cut – giving the impression of a shaded drawing on coloured paper with brushed-on white highlights. Kirkall's invention was designed to appeal, first and foremost, to the virtuosi collectors of old master drawings (several of whom, including the Duke of Devonshire, allowed items in their own collections to be copied), and it earned him a certain fame in the early eighteenth-century art world.⁷⁸ The apparent success of this subscription encouraged Kirkall to use the same process to copy at least one of Thornhill's scenes from the dome. The result is something of a confection – and one that locates an aspect of Thornhill's artistic identity squarely within the commercial spaces of modern London. Although obviously reproduced from Nicolas Beauvais's engraving (fig. 94) and so several removes from the 'hand' of the artist that Kirkall's technique pretended to imitate, this rendition of *The Blinding of Elymas* gives a convincing likeness of some of Thornhill's own preparatory drawings (compare, for example, fig. 82), and would have been viewed as such alongside similarly reproduced drawings by 'the best Italian Masters'. (Kirkall also produced a mezzotint copy of Raphael's cartoon of the same subject, of which there is a faint copy printed in red ink in the British Museum.) Through the entrepreneurial world of the London print market, and thanks to a commercially led technical innovation by one of its more enterprising figures, Thornhill's work and reputation permeated still deeper into the English artistic imagination.

⁷⁷ The subsequent publication of Kirkall's prints was announced in the *Weekly Journal*, 12 September 1724.

⁷⁸ Kirkall's career as a printmaker and illustrator is described by Edward Hodnett in 'Elisha Kirkall c. 1682-1742', *The Book Collector*, Summer 1976, pp. 195-209. His technique is also mentioned by Timothy Clayton in *The English Print 1688-1802*, pp. 16 and 70; and by Carol Wax in *The Mezzotint: History and Technique*, New York, 1990, pp. 80-81.

Finally, the subscription for the full set of engravings after Thornhill's designs was first announced in the *Daily Courant* – a paper dedicated to bringing news of Britain's imperial expansion around the globe, and of the struggle against Catholicism in Europe. The same publication had also been used by Dorigny in 1711 to advertise his proposed engravings of Raphael's cartoons. Thornhill's advertisement (fig. 95) first appeared on 15 October 1719, alongside other notices recording the winners and losers within the erratic financial rhythms of the early eighteenth-century capital: an announcement the latest inflated price of South Sea stock, the results of the most recent lottery, details of a forthcoming bankruptcy sale and other details of the day-to-day exchange of property, goods and slaves. The lead item that day brought encouraging news from the Imperialist forces engaged against the Spanish forces. These apparently unconnected events, serve as a black and white reminder of the modern, commercial, war-ravaged world in which Thornhill's lofty artistic claims sought attention.⁷⁹ And it is significant that those claims – the most ambitious ever made on behalf of English history painting – could be made most forcefully when reproduced as engravings on paper.

A View from the Top

Even before the rebuilding of the cathedral was completed, the roof of St Paul's offered a rare and exciting view of the city and country beyond. In *Phoenix Paulina*, written in 1708 to celebrate the rebuilding of the cathedral, James Wright offered a poetic panorama of post-Fire London, as seen from the top of Wren's dome.⁸⁰ From this unique vantage point, Wright describes modern London as a 'Visionary Feast' of social and architectural order, in which the classicised edifices of the nation's religious, civic and military institutions rise among the 'Beauteous Squares' and 'well form'd' streets occupied by the capital's prosperous inhabitants. Looking first to the

⁷⁹ The same advertisement was repeated in the *Daily Courant* on 28 October, 30 October and 4 November 1719; and in the *Post Boy* for 24-7 October, 29-31 October and 31 October-3 November 1719. Here my observations are indebted to Mark Hallett's discussion of newspaper advertisements from the 1730s and 1740s in *The Spectacle of Difference: graphic satire in the age of Hogarth*, pp. 20-26.

⁸⁰ James Wright, *Phoenix Paulina. A Poem on the New Fabrick of St Paul's Cathedral*. As a young man Wright had written *A Poem, Being an Essay on the Present Ruins in St. Paul's Cathedral* (1668), a lament on the ruins of the old cathedral, followed by *Ecclesia Restaurata* (1677). Both poems were republished with a third in 1697 as *Three Poems of St Paul's Cathedral: viz. The ruins. The rebuilding. The choir. Phoenix Paulina* was written as a triumphant postscript to these earlier poems.

west, the poet sees Westminster Abbey ('the first Throne, and last Repose of Kings') and the Houses of Parliament ('the Chief of Civil Seats [where] the contracted Soul of Britain meets'), their juxtaposition an architectural manifestation of Britain's ancient and balanced constitution.⁸¹ Turning eastward, he spies an older city, 'thick' with new churches and civic halls, 'stately Hospitals' and 'crowded Wharfs', all lately recovered from the Great Fire. Beyond the complementary cities of London and Westminster, Wright beholds the royal palaces of Hampton Court and Windsor, rivalled in their magnificence only by the distant structures of Greenwich and Chelsea, where majesty and munificence combine, forcing the poet to ask: 'Or Hospitals, or Palaces? or are | They Garrisons? or rather, Each is all.' These and other emergent motifs of an expanding British Empire acquired a novel poetic twist when described from 400 feet above ground: busy traders 'swarm' like industrious ants on the streets below, while the Royal Navy's fleet, anchored in the Thames, 'seems a thick-set Wood of moving trees; | [...] Or a whole Forest floating on the Seas'. The physical and ideological centre of Wright's panorama is St Paul's itself, from where the vision unfolds. Wren's 'Glorious Pile' rises above the early eighteenth-century city as material proof of the unity between Church and state; its dome the crowning glory, not just of London, but of the whole nation:

The CUPOLA, that mighty Orb of Stone,
 Piercing the Clouds in Figure of a Crown:
 A Diadem that crowns not *Paul's* alone,
 But the whole Island, plac'd on her *Head-Town*.⁸²

Wright's visionary feast was more than just a literary conceit recommended in contemporary guidebooks and recorded in individual diaries. Viewing London from the top of the cathedral became a popular activity for city dwellers and visitors alike – a spectacle that rivalled the view from the Monument across the City. One visitor from the country remarked as early as 1704 (several years before the cathedral reached its full height) that what had pleased him most about the capital 'was a

⁸¹ Here Wright echoes the anonymous author of *The Cupulo* [sic], published in London in 1708, which begins with a comparable prospect of these two buildings.

⁸² James Wright, *Phoenix Paulina. A Poem on the New Fabrick of St Paul's Cathedral*, London, 1708/9.

Prospect of the City from the Top of St Paul's, a profound experience that he likened (rather obliquely) to 'our blessed *Saviour's* vision from the Top of the *Temple*'.⁸³ The German tourist Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach was equally impressed by what he saw. 'From the top,' he wrote in 1710, 'one can see almost the whole city, especially in the direction of Westminster. The prodigious size and length is amazing, though it is not so very wide.'⁸⁴ And *The Foreigner's Guide* (1729), one of several eighteenth-century guidebooks printed in both English and French, offered a more prosaic version of Wright's earlier description, promising that on a fine day 'you may agreeably observe the immense Largeness of the Town, the vast Number of Churches, Steeples, and publick Buildings; the Quantity of ships that look like a Forest, the Vessels and Boats on the *Thames*, and the fine Country about it'.⁸⁵ But perhaps the clearest testimony of the popularity (and novelty) of the view from the dome comes from the innumerable visitors who each paid the required sixpence to see for themselves. Having reached the top of the cathedral, Uffenbach noticed 'countless names written in chalk or scratched on the stone', each the unofficial endorsement of someone who had marvelled at one of the defining sights of eighteenth-century London. And clearly, this was a tradition that he and his companions felt compelled to continue, as his diary rather candidly admits: 'so we had ours done also by our man'.⁸⁶

Following the completion of the painted decoration, contemporary guides invariably also recommended that the visitor pause at the Whispering Gallery, the narrow balcony around the base of the drum. They did so partly because of the novel acoustics that gave the gallery its name, but more importantly because the gallery afforded a better view of Thornhill's paintings. The anonymous author of *The Foreigner's Guide* counted both the gallery and Thornhill's scheme among the sights

⁸³ The visitor was a Mr Wheeler, his impressions of London were retold by Richard Gwinnett in a letter of 1704, published in *Pylades and Corinna; or, Memoirs of the Lives, Amours, and Writings of Richard Gwinnett, Esq; [...]* and *Mrs Elizabeth Thomas*, 1736 (second edition), pp. 154-55, and cited in Robert Arnold Aubin (ed.), *London in Flames, London in Glory: poems on the Fire and rebuilding of London 1666-1709*, New Brunswick, 1943, p. 371-72 n. 267. Wheeler alludes to the temptations of Christ (*Matthew* 4: 1-11), when Jesus looks down from the top of the temple, being tempted by the Devil to throw himself off. I am grateful to Kate Newman for her help with this reference.

⁸⁴ Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach, *London in 1710, from the travels of Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach*, translated by W. H. Quarrell and Margaret Mare, London, 1934, p. 32.

⁸⁵ *The Foreigner's Guide: or companion both for the foreigner and native, in their tour through [...]* *London and Westminster*, London, 1729, p. 64.

⁸⁶ Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach, *London in 1710*, p. 32. The sixpence charge is mentioned in *The Foreigner's Guide*, p. 64.

of particular interest in the cathedral, urging the reader to pause on his way to the roof to take in ‘the whispering Place above [where] you will also much better observe the Beauty of the Painting’. Also recommended by the author were Francis Bird’s figurative carvings around the west entrance, and the ‘Designs given in by several of the greatest Masters of History-Painting, for the Inside of the Dome’ – still on display in the chapter house more than a decade after the competition had been settled.⁸⁷ Another guide praised ‘the fine view of the curious paintings’ from the gallery, identified the subject of each scene and even remarked upon the ease with which the gentle steps could be climbed by ‘notable visitors’.⁸⁸

Within months of its completion, Thornhill’s painted dome had clearly become an important sight in the city. The comments of contemporary guidebooks and visitors suggest, indeed, that one of the more considerable achievements of the artist’s career was to establish religious history painting as a central part of the visual experience of modern London. As part of what became a well-trodden passage through St Paul’s, the religiously charged images of the classical metropolis that Thornhill painted inside the dome mediated between the public, politically charged interior of the cathedral below and the ever-expanding spectacle of the modern city beyond.

⁸⁷ *The Foreigner’s Guide*, p. 64.

⁸⁸ *The Dimensions and Curiosities of St Paul’s Cathedral*, [London, 1730], p. 4 (reprinted several times during the eighteenth century).

CHAPTER THREE

A Revolution at Chatsworth

Two unassuming diagrams in Thornhill's British Museum sketchbook reveal the workmanlike approach that typically marked the beginning of a new decorative project (figs 96 and 97). Rough pencil markings size up the surfaces to be decorated while quick calculations in the margin estimate the cost of painting them, using one price for figurative work and another, lower price for 'stone'. Two walls and two ceilings totalling 217 square yards: estimated cost £142.¹ On the 'chimn[ey] side' wall, Thornhill has marked the position of two doors – alternative points of entry that would need to be considered when devising the scheme. On the opposite page, faint lines record the artist's initial thoughts on the possible mythological subject and composition of the 'staircase ceiling'. These two working drawings belong to a kind that Thornhill made throughout his career. They survive as the earliest visual record of a prospective commission, providing a summary map of the principal architectural features of the site and marking the physical limits within which any subsequent painting would have to work. Almost certainly produced before the commission itself had been secured, the status of these drawings is uncertain – at the time of making, it remained to be seen whether the walls and ceilings they describe would be transformed into imaginative mythological vistas by Thornhill, or remain as he has drawn them here, empty spaces awaiting the attentions of another painter.

Here, then, we see Thornhill at work: tentatively investigating the artistic possibilities of a new site on the one hand; touting for business in a narrow and competitive market on the other. His relatively low prices, measured in shillings rather than pounds per yard, reflect the artist's status as a relative newcomer to the field and suggest a bid, perhaps, to undercut a rival contender. A few words at the top of the right-hand page also help to explain Thornhill's modest costing by indicating

¹ The distinction between figurative painting and feigned architecture or other decorative grisaille, measured by the square yard, was the most frequent method used to establish the cost of large decorative commissions.

the potential value to his career of this particular project: 'D Devonshire Salloon Chatsw[or]th'.

Between February 1707 and April 1708, Thornhill spent a total of 50 weeks at Chatsworth, the Derbyshire country seat of William Cavendish, 1st Duke of Devonshire, during which time he decorated the staircase and second-floor saloon of the recently completed west front with mythological subjects from Ovid and Plutarch.² It was by far the most prestigious assignment of the artist's career to date and was followed by a number of important commissions for other leading aristocratic patrons, including the Dukes of Marlborough at Blenheim, Chandos at Canons and Ancaster at Grimsthorpe Castle, and the Earls of Pomfret and Nottingham at Easton Neston and Eastwell Park. Together, these prestigious appointments established Thornhill's reputation as the painter of choice among the whiggish aristocratic establishment of early eighteenth-century England. The artist's ability to win the endorsement of the nation's cultural and political elite – a body of patrons better known for eschewing English artists in favour of their more established, more cosmopolitan (and more expensive) counterparts from the Continent – had consequences for Thornhill's career that reached far beyond the financial rewards of the commissions themselves. The ability of a few dominant figures to steer the tastes and prejudices of a much larger body of aspiring patrons, in town and country, and to influence the decisions of major public commissioning bodies, should not be underestimated.

Thornhill's work at Chatsworth marked the end of a building programme that occupied the Duke for the last twenty years of his life, during which time the existing sixteenth-century house was entirely remodelled along classical lines.³ The transformation of Chatsworth from an Elizabethan prodigy house to one of the most magnificent country palaces of baroque England had begun in 1686, shortly after Cavendish, then 4th Earl of Devonshire, had been forced to retire from public life in

² The Chatsworth account book C21 reveal payments to Thornhill of £5 per week for a total of 50 weeks 'subsistence' between 19 May 1707 and 22 June 1708. I am grateful to Peter Day, former Keeper of Collections at Chatsworth, for bringing these unpublished payments to my attention. The west staircase and saloon are the only two rooms at Chatsworth that can be attributed to Thornhill with certainty, although over the years the artist has also been mentioned in association with the ceiling of the west entrance hall, now heavily repainted, and of the south front drawing room, since overpainted, as well as with a series of landscape panels and a large easel painting depicting Perseus and Andromeda, all now in the theatre at Chatsworth.

³ The standard published work on the building history of Chatsworth remains Francis Thompson's *A History of Chatsworth*, London, 1949.

the capital. As an MP during the 1670s, Cavendish had been an outspoken critic of the King and a fierce opponent of his Catholic brother and heir, the Duke of York. His alienation from the court was compounded during the 1680s: first over his support for the successive attempts of Parliament to exclude the Duke of York from the succession; then by the execution of his close friend and ally, Lord William Russell – an act of political as well as physical aggression by the crown that added a personal bitterness to Cavendish’s more calculated political aversion to any form of Catholic or absolutist government.⁴ After the accession of James II in 1685, Devonshire’s open hostility towards the new Catholic king made his presence at court increasingly difficult until finally, faced with the threat of imprisonment, he retreated to the relative safety of his native Derbyshire.⁵ From there, he continued to conspire against the king and, at the same time, set about rebuilding the house he had inherited with his title the previous year. On 30 June 1688, as the first phase of the rebuilding at Chatsworth was nearing completion, Devonshire added his coded signature to a secret letter inviting Prince William of Orange to invade England, having already made provisions to lead any subsequent uprising in the Midlands.

At the centre of the Earl’s initial plans for the house was the provision of a sumptuous state apartment and an equally grand Protestant chapel – an especially potent ensemble given the circumstances of Devonshire’s relationship with the court. By investing so heavily in the rhetoric of loyal hospitality implicit within the country-house state apartment, Devonshire declared a commitment to the idea of a political cohabitation between the crown and the country elite at a time when that relationship was at its most troubled since the 1640s.⁶ The construction of the state rooms and

⁴ Russell was executed with Algernon Sidney in 1683 for his alleged complicity in the Rye House Plot, a failed plan to assassinate the King Charles II and the Duke of York on their return from Newmarket. The executions were considered by many as an act of state aggression against those opposed to the king, making martyrs of Russell and Sidney.

⁵ Devonshire’s departure from Whitehall finally came about after a public altercation with one Thomas Colepeper (a colonel loyal to the King), which led to a trial and an enormous fine of £30,000. Refusing to pay, Devonshire was forced to flee the capital in order to escape incarceration. For a modern account of Devonshire’s life see Francis Bickley’s *The Cavendish Family*, London, 1911, esp. 147-84; and O.R.F. Davies, ‘The Dukes of Devonshire, Newcastle and Rutland 1688-1714: A Study in Wealth and Political Influence’, PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1971. Following Devonshire’s death in 1707, White Kennet recalled that he had been ‘a most signal Instrument’ in the Revolution in *A sermon preach’d at the funeral of [...] William, Duke of Devonshire [...] with some memoirs of the family of Cavendish*, London, 1708, p. 50.

⁶ Before the birth of the Prince of Wales in June 1688 it was assumed that the King’s eldest daughter, the Protestant Princess Mary, would succeed her father to the throne – a comforting thought for James’s opponents and a prospect that Devonshire seems to have been preparing for by this first phase of building.

chapel at Chatsworth and their subsequent decoration by Antonio Verrio and Louis Laguerre marked the beginning of a programme of building that would forever be associated with the political fortunes not just of its patron, but of the English aristocracy as a whole.

More than forty years ago, the architectural historian John Summerson suggested that Chatsworth ‘inaugurates an artistic revolution which is the counterpoint of the political revolution in which the Earl was so prominent a leader’.⁷ The implication of Summerson’s insightful remark is that the appearance of the new Chatsworth was determined, to a significant degree, by its patron’s resolute political stance during the 1680s, and by the success of the *coup d’etat* that he had helped to instigate. It is a compelling idea, but one that requires some explanation – not least because the notion of an artistic ‘revolution’ implies a radical visual break from the recent past that is not immediately apparent in either the architecture or the decoration at Chatsworth, both of which follow models that had been introduced within the Stuart courts of the previous quarter-century. The grandiose decorative schemes that Verrio had painted at Windsor, for example, did not stop being impressive after the departure of James II; and the tales of classical mythology could distinguish the liberally educated viewer from the mere onlooker as efficiently under a constitutional monarchy as they ever had under an arbitrary one.

However, the political events of 1688 posed a real problem for decorative painters: how could a form of visual art that had been refined over the previous two reigns to project the image of a sacred, all-powerful monarchy be made to appeal to a new generation of patrons, like Devonshire, who had positioned themselves in contradistinction to the absolutist policies of the Restoration court, and who were now enjoying the rewards of their actions? Nor is this simply a problem faced by modern art historians hoping to explain an apparent resurgence of interest in the ‘baroque’ (a stylistic tag more readily associated with Counter-Reformation Europe than Protestant England) after 1688. For Verrio, and especially for the younger Laguerre, recently arrived from Versailles, the need to redefine their own careers in the wake of the Glorious Revolution was an unexpected challenge – the consequences of which are perhaps nowhere more visible than in their contributions to the decoration of

⁷ John Summerson, ‘The Classical Country House in 18th-century England’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, vol. 107 (July 1959), p. 542.

Chatsworth, which contains some of the most spectacular and sophisticated decorative history painting ever produced in England.

Before looking at how Thornhill filled the empty walls and ceilings measured out in the pages of his sketchbook, it is important to consider in some detail the decoration that had already been painted at Chatsworth by the time of his arrival in 1707. After all, it was against the artistic standards set by the leading decorative painters of the time, as well as the political demands of his patron, that the success or failure of Thornhill's painting would be measured. The English painter's ability to decorate the Duke's walls and ceilings with designs that were capable of competing with the existing decoration at Chatsworth would go a long way in establishing his reputation as an artist of the highest rank alongside these foreign counterparts. Considering the existing decoration at Chatsworth may also help us to find an appropriate method of enquiry for understanding Thornhill's later contribution to the house. This chapter begins, therefore, with a tour through the great hall, painted by Laguerre and his only named assistant, 'Ricard', fifteen years before Thornhill's arrival.⁸

The Hall

On arriving at Chatsworth, an early eighteenth-century visitor would have entered the house via a relatively small, low-ceilinged entrance hall on the new west front (fig. 98).⁹ From here, they would have been shown along a narrow corridor, up a short flight of steps to a loggia that stretched along the north wall of the inner courtyard towards another, rather dimly lit lobby adjoining the back stairs. They would then have passed through a doorway on the right to enter the great hall.¹⁰ Successive generations of owners and visitors have commented on the inconvenience of this rather disjointed transition from front door to great hall, best visualised in Colen Campbell's ground-floor plan of the building (1715; fig. 99). The route was a result of

⁸ Painting in the hall began in 1692 when scaffolding was arranged for Ricard and completed by the Summer of 1694. It is signed by Laguerre and dated 1694 on the east wall. See Francis Thompson, *A History of Chatsworth*, pp. 112-14.

⁹ The west front, completed c. 1703, was designed by an unknown architect. See Francis Thompson, *A History of Chatsworth*, esp. pp. 70-71.

¹⁰ The Elizabethan loggia and gallery on the north side were rebuilt between 1703 and 1704 to match the new south gallery (also a two-tier arrangement of a loggia beneath an enclosed gallery). See Francis Thompson, *A History of Chatsworth*, esp. pp. 75-76.

the piecemeal fashion in which the existing Elizabethan courtyard house had been remodelled since the accession of William Cavendish as 4th Earl of Devonshire in 1684.¹¹ However, the unconventional layout of the 1st Duke's house is not without dramatic potential. It is not difficult to imagine the sense of anticipation as visitors were led from one dimly lit passage to another, deeper into what one modern writer described as the 'domestic slums' of the house; or to appreciate the drama of finally passing from the gloomy lobby – in effect, a form of screens passage – into the double-height hall beyond (fig. 100).¹²

Visiting the house in 1697, before the west front had been built, Celia Fiennes's impression of the new hall was of a room 'painted top and sides with armory'.¹³ It may not be the fullest description of the hall's expansive decorative scheme – the result of a collaboration between a team of artists led by Laguerre and Devonshire's resident sculptor, Samuel Watson – but it is a fitting response nonetheless. It was sufficient to acknowledge the historical function of the great hall of a country house as the repository of the household's arms and armour, a theme that often re-emerged in the martial or sporting subjects of its decoration, and to register the suitability of the military, and overwhelmingly masculine, environment of the Duke of Devonshire's hall.¹⁴ As the daughter of a gentleman, it would have been inappropriate for Fiennes to record much more interest in such manly matters.

The hall ceiling, the most striking element of the decorative ensemble, opens directly on to a crowded Olympian scene where Jove (Jupiter) and Juno preside over the apotheosis of a military hero, recognisable from the distinctive star above his forehead as the Roman dictator Julius Caesar (fig. 101). More specifically, Laguerre chose to represent the soul of the murdered Roman leader transforming into a 'fiery-tailed comet' as it is carried to heaven by Venus (shown by the artist in a chariot immediately beneath Caesar's feet). This climactic moment is described in the closing

¹¹ Francis Thompson succinctly relates the inconvenience of the 1st Duke's house and details the subsequent alterations that were made (including moving the entrance to the north front in the 1750s). See Francis Thompson, *A History of Chatsworth*, esp. pp. 111-12, 201-09 and 215-20. Nikolaus Pevsner (in *Derbyshire*, p. 133) describes the same arrangement as 'eminently inconvenient'. Knole in Kent, though much altered, provides a good surviving example of an Elizabethan courtyard house of the kind replaced at Chatsworth.

¹² See Francis Thompson, *A History of Chatsworth*, p. 111.

¹³ Celia Fiennes, *The Illustrated Journeys of Celia Fiennes*, edited by Christopher Morris, Stroud, 1995, p. 106.

¹⁴ For the martial tradition of country house decoration see, for example, Gervase Jackson-Stops, *The English Country House. A Grand Tour*, London, 1984, pp. 44-62; and Stephen Deuchar, *Sporting Art in Eighteenth-Century England*, New Haven and London, 1988, p. 88.

lines of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The passage below, taken from Jacob Tonson's illustrated translation of 1717, describes the moment when Venus, unable to prevent the murder, retrieves Caesar's soul from the senate where his bloodied body lay:

Her Caesar's heav'nly part she made her care,
Nor left the recent soul to waste to air;
But bore it upwards to its native skies:
Glowing with new-born fires she saw it rise;
Forth springing from her bosom up it flew,
And kindling, as it soar'd, a comet grew:
Above the lunar sphere it took its flight,
And shot behind it a long trail of light.¹⁵

To this Ovidian narrative, clearly portrayed in the centre of the ceiling, Laguerre added a supporting cast of Olympian regulars. Towards the far end of the ceiling (when viewed from the north end; see fig. 102), Justice, Heroic Virtue (played by Hercules) and Minerva drive Caesar's assassins from the scene – the murderers' naked bodies entwined with Envy and the monstrous Hydra as they tumble from the skies, still clutching their bloodied daggers. Elsewhere on the ceiling, various other deities, allegorical figures and attending putti put on an impressive display of gesturing limbs and exchanged glances, momentarily united in celebration of Caesar and in condemnation of his murderers.

Until the 6th Duke's alterations in the 1830s, the only source of natural light into the hall was a row of windows along the upper section of the west wall, interspersed with a series of painted military trophies and feigned pilasters. The correlation between this natural light and the pictorial light of the ceiling and accompanying walls heightened the dramatic potential of the room, as did the greater contrast between the illuminated upper level and the relative dullness of the wainscot walls and plain gritstone floor below.¹⁶ The long east wall facing these windows is

¹⁵ Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphoses in fifteen books. Translated by the most eminent hands*, London, 1717, book 15.

¹⁶ The appearance of the hall has altered significantly since the time of the 1st Duke, with the removal of the lower wainscot, a new marble floor and the addition of French windows along the courtyard wall. For details of these and other changes, see Francis Thompson, *A History of Chatsworth*, pp. 115-16.

dominated by an enormous image of Caesar attending a sacrifice at the entrance of a Roman temple (fig. 103). This wall-sized history painting, detached from the physical space of the hall by an illusionistic gilt frame, demonstrates Laguerre's familiarity with a French academic tradition that held Raphael and Poussin as its heroes – a testament to the time the artist had spent at the Académie Royale before travelling to England in 1684.¹⁷ It is supported on either side by more military trophies and feigned architecture, and by a pair of smaller medallions chronicling the Roman leader's rise to greatness: the first of these shows Caesar crossing the Rubicon, a decisive moment in the pre-history of the Roman empire; its pendant depicts the hero negotiating another stretch of water, this time the English Channel, on his way to tame the 'sea-girt Britons'.¹⁸

Towards the south end of the hall, opposite the entrance, the contemporary visitor would have seen the twin flights of William Talman's staircase rising in an elegant horseshoe shape towards a triumphal-style arch on the first-floor level (see figs 100 and 104), the florid motifs carved on the pilasters by Watson providing the pattern for the painted architectural details around the room. The stairs have twice been replaced, but their modern counterpart performs the same practical function as Talman's originals, leading the visitor upwards and out of the room towards the great stairs, decorated by Verrio in the late 1680s, and on to the state apartment that occupies the second floor of the south front.¹⁹ The ambitious decoration of the hall required the close collaboration of a team of painters and sculptors capable of exploiting the physical and architectural possibilities of Talman's building to dramatise the visitor's progress through the house.

A growing interest in the culture and mythology of ancient Rome meant that the military paraphernalia of antiquity and, in particular, images of the twelve Caesars (Julius and the first eleven emperors who adopted his name) became an established feature in the decoration of the hall and surrounding areas of country houses. In 1703, John Elsum referred to a well-established iconographic tradition when he included the 'Triumphs of Julius Caesar' and the 'Fables of Poetry' as subjects deemed suitable for

¹⁷ Laguerre studied at the French academy during the late 1670s and early 1680s. See Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England 1537-1837*, London, 1962-70, esp. vol. 1, p. 61. Much research remains to be done on the work of this important artist.

¹⁸ Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphoses in fifteen books. Translated by the most eminent hands*, book 15.

¹⁹ Talman's original staircase in the hall was replaced by the 6th Duke of Devonshire in 1833 and changed again 1912.

large decorative schemes ‘which may be apply’d to the Character of the Prince, or some of his Ancestors’.²⁰ Earlier examples could be seen at Longleat in Wiltshire, the archetypal ‘prodigy house’ of Elizabethan England, where busts of the Roman emperors were introduced into the bays of the south front (behind which the great hall of the house was located); and at Hatfield House in Hertfordshire, where the ribbed ceiling of the hall contained plaster-relief profiles of the twelve Caesars until they were removed in the nineteenth century.²¹ Although little is known of the appearance of the old Chatsworth that the 1st Duke replaced, it is plausible that the Roman subject of Laguerre’s scheme was suggested by a closer example, from the decoration of the original hall or from another part of the old house.

Approaching the new house, eighteenth-century visitors encountered the iconography of classical military heroism well before they reached the entrance to the building. As work in the hall was under way, two large stone pedestals, each surmounted by a winged sphinx-like creature were erected at either end of an iron palisade demarcating the entrance court to the west of the old building. These two pedestals (see, for example, fig. 105) were decorated with trophies that combine modern and antique military paraphernalia with emblematic references to the Cavendish family, to England’s joint monarchs William and Mary, and to Julius Caesar.²² The same iconography continued inside the courtyard with further carved trophies on the walls of the house (fig. 106) and several antique busts (subsequently moved to the greenhouse, where they can still be seen; fig. 107).

On entering the hall for the first time, the visitor, primed by the classical and martial motifs encountered on their progress towards and through the building, was invited to contemplate Caesar as a larger-than-life hero whose actions and triumphs on earth, represented by the painted scenes and emblems around the walls, prefigured the god like status he was afforded after death; meanwhile, Marcus Brutus and his accomplices are portrayed as demons, justly punished for their treachery. From here, it was but a short step to apply the same qualities and virtues attributed to Caesar – if

²⁰ John Elsum, *The Art of Painting After the Italian Manner*, London, 1703, p. 81.

²¹ For the hall ceiling at Hatfield, see Claire Gapper, John Newman and Annabel Ricketts, ‘Hatfield: a house for a Lord Treasurer’, in Pauline Croft (ed.), *Patronage, Culture and Power: the early Cecils 1558-1612 (Studies in British Art 8)*, New Haven and London, 2002, esp. pp. 76-77.

²² Two workmen, Burkett and Finch, were paid to install the two west-front pedestals in 1693; see Francis Thompson, *A History of Chatsworth*, pp. 60-61 and 211-12.

not to the prince, as Elsum suggested – to the owner and patron of the house, William Cavendish.

A preliminary drawing for the hall ceiling (one of only a handful of Laguerre's surviving drawings; fig. 108) provides important details of the artist's initial plans for the ceiling that would seem to corroborate these first impressions. The subject is the same, and several figures in the drawing appear more or less unchanged in the hall – notably the group immediately below Caesar, consisting of Venus (shown in a swan-drawn chariot), her attendant Graces and a winged personification of Victory. Additionally, in this drawing the figure of Caesar is surrounded by various allusions to Devonshire's noble lineage, and to his more recent honours. Towards the bottom of the drawing (fig. 109), for example, alongside figures of Hercules and a personification of Truth expelling a multitude of vices from the heavens, Laguerre has included a putto holding the Cavendish motto, *Cavendo Tutus*, in one hand and a snake, a reference to the family crest, in the other.²³ Furthermore, the medal that Caesar receives from Jove and the distinctive eight-pointed star that rises from Venus's arms (again, a reference to Ovid's description of the hero's soul; fig. 110) are surely intended to be read as allusions to Devonshire's investiture into the Order of the Garter in 1689 – one of several honours with which King William recognised his pivotal role in the Glorious Revolution. Roger Pratt described the kind of association suggested here between the decoration and its patron nearly half a century earlier, when remarking upon the importance of design in the 'beautifying of ceilings':

In a good design, which proceeds from the like invention [...] we are to take heed that no one figure be placed in a ceiling as it were by chance, and without any dependence upon anything else there, but that each one may do its part in its proper place towards the completing of some general storey [...] which will yet do much the better if it can be well made to have reference to anything of that family in whose house it is painted.²⁴

²³ The Cavendish motto, as well as punning on the family name, translates as 'Safety With Caution'.

²⁴ From the notebooks of Roger Pratt, c. 1660, reprinted in Bernard Denvir (ed.), *From the Middle Ages to the Stuarts: art, design and society, before 1689*, London, 1988, pp. 244–47.

Significantly, however, the heraldic emblems and biographical allusions that give Laguerre's drawing a contemporary moral and political certainty are conspicuously absent from the hall as it was eventually painted, as we can now go on to consider.

In addition to providing an exit from the hall, Talman's marble staircase fulfilled an important, though rarely acknowledged, second function: raising the visitor above the relative gloom of the ground floor to the upper part of the hall, and to the only position in the whole room from where Laguerre's scheme could be appreciated as a whole. Only here does its full force become apparent, as another crucial episode in Julius Caesar's story, hitherto concealed behind the viewer on the north wall, comes into view. As the visitor turns with the curve of the staircase and looks back at the hall from the landing, the murder of Caesar by Marcus Brutus and his fellow conspirators suddenly and dramatically dominates the room (figs 111 and 112).

The first plate of John James's and John Sturt's 1707 translation of Pozzo's *Rules and Examples of Perspective* (fig. 113) made clear that the position of the viewer should be among the very first considerations of the decorative painter. Modern art historians, too, have recognised that the concept of an ideal viewing station was regularly exploited by decorative history painters for rhetorical as well as for illusionistic purposes. In 1970, for example, Julius Held suggested that the individual panels of Rubens's ceiling in the Banqueting House at Whitehall were designed and arranged with a number of different viewing positions in mind – positions that were determined by the etiquette of state ceremony and the relative status of the viewer.²⁵ Similarly, in a study of the papal imagery of seventeenth-century Rome, John Beldon Scott has shown how the religious and political nuances of the painted ceilings in the Palazzo Barberini, by Andrea Saachi and Pietro da Cortona, can be fully appreciated only when viewed from certain strategic positions within the palace. And more recently, Andrea MacKean has made some interesting observations on the perspectival organisation of the painted ceilings at Windsor, highlighting the importance of the viewer's position in the working of Verrio's

²⁵ Held's observations were made as part of a convincing argument for returning the panels to what appears to have been Rubens's intended arrangement. See Julius S. Held, 'Rubens's Glynde Sketch and the Installation of the Whitehall Ceiling', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 112, (May 1970), pp. 274-81

designs, likening the artist's visual strategies with the moving spectacle of Charles II's coronation procession through London, devised by John Ogilby in 1661.²⁶

These different examples, Pozzo's included, demonstrate how the role of the spectator was an important concern of decorative history painters, and suggest how the viewer's position could be exploited to enhance the effectiveness of a painted scheme and the building it decorates. However, they all also assume a one-way relationship with that viewer. A contemporary visitor to Whitehall or to Windsor (described by Held and MacKean respectively) was defined by the paintings of Rubens and Verrio as a passive player in a dramatisation of royal power that was projected from the decorated surfaces – an experience that in both cases was analagous to the courtier's social position beneath the monarch. It will become clear that this is not the case in the hall at Chatsworth, where our initial experience of the apotheosised hero surrounded by the gods of Olympus is upset by the final image of Caesar as a pathetic, downfallen figure surrounded by the cold metal and grimacing faces of his assassins.

On the north wall, Caesar gropes helplessly out of the picture space as if he is about to fall into the room below. The murder scene makes a powerful contrast with the celestial pomp that greeted the Roman dictator on the ceiling. Even the inanimate surroundings seem to collude in Caesar's murder. The details of the painted arch are accentuated by the lighting (again, corresponding with the windows along the west wall), which throws into ironic relief the 'triumphal' connotations of the architecture, turning it into a place where conspirators lurk in the shadows. Laguerre's dramatic manipulation of light also results in the exaggerated shadow of Brutus on the wall behind, and the extinguished flame of Caesar's attendant. A drawing by Samuel Watson (fig. 114), shows the original extent of Laguerre's painting on the north side of the hall, before the wall was pierced on either side to accommodate the 6th Duke's communication galleries in the 1830s. The presence of an additional murderer on the left-hand side, leaving Caesar surrounded by assassins with no possibility of escape, added to the sense of claustrophobia as the dying hero spills into the hall. It also explains the mystery shadow that remains immediately to the left of Caesar.

²⁶ John Beldon Scott, *Images of Nepotism: the painted ceilings of Palazzo Barberini*, Princeton, 1991; and Andrea MacKean, 'The Shaping of Identity in Public Places: an examination of subjective identification in British decorated interiors, 1630-1800', PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 1999, esp. 119-38.

Watching ominously over this murderous scene is Pluto, guardian of the underworld, accompanied by the grim figure of death, who aims an arrow directly at Caesar, and by the three Fates, cutting the thread of his life (fig. 115). Occupying a narrow section at the north end of the ceiling, these figures remain unnoticed (and unintelligible) until viewed from the opposite end of the hall. Significantly, they are not included in Laguerre's initial sketch, which in their place shows an array of allegorical figures, including personifications of Justice and Fortitude, who endorse Caesar's elevation to the gods. By contrast, Pluto represents the antithesis of the heavenly welcome that Caesar enjoys on the ceiling. Furthermore, when first encountered, the images along the east wall form part of a visual sequence celebrating the Roman leader's military triumphs. Yet, from the vantage point of the staircase, where the prominence of Caesar's murder forces the viewer to reassess his earthly achievements, the critical moments in the dictator's life begin to read like a catalogue of the political and religious wrong doings of a vanquished tyrant, the large sacrifice scene on the east wall becoming a powerful prefiguration of Caesar's own death.²⁷

At some point, it seems, perhaps even after work on the ceiling had begun, Laguerre and his patron changed their minds and the Ovidian celebration of Caesar's heroism gave way to the most graphic depiction of his murder – a change of direction (and an interruption of the chronological sequence of the narrative) which, at the very least, confounds the viewer's initial expectations that the decoration is a celebration of its patron. Caesar's dying gesticulation mirrors his open-handed salutation to Jove and Juno on the ceiling, which from here appears in disarray, incomprehensible, its illusionism shattered. By replacing the celestial, bright splendour of the ceiling with the gloom and gravitational pull of the sublunar world, Laguerre challenged the modes as well as the established myths of decorative history painting: defying convention and turning our first impressions on their head, the lasting image of the hall is of the pathetic, filthy, bloody end of a hated tyrant.

Contemporary readers of Elsum's *The Art of Painting* were reminded of the need to take due account of the configuration of a room when designing its decoration. 'It ought [...] to be well consider'd and contrived,' Elsum advised, 'that the View be not taken on the wrong Side, but that it answer the Common View, and

²⁷ According to Suetonius, Caesar sacrificed before entering the capitol for the last time. The painting also refers to Caesar's position as high priest, or *Pontifex Maximus*, and may have been intended as an implicit reference to James II's popery.

Ordinary Lights. I say this because the Work herein made is frequently Historical, and some Histories are seen, where the Head is put where the Feet should be placed.’²⁸

Elsum’s comments are intriguing. They imply that the ‘wrong’ view of a decorative scheme could not only render the painting visually incomprehensible, but could actually subvert the history it attempts to represent – turning the world upside-down by showing ‘the Head [...] where the Feet should be placed’. Laguerre, it seems, purposefully ensures that when the hall ceiling at Chastworth is viewed for a second time, from the top of the stairs, Caesar’s head is precisely where, if he were to follow the accepted conventions, his feet should be.

A brief comparison between the hall at Chatsworth and the chapel on the south front (see fig. 116), decorated by Laguerre and Ricard in 1690, can help to explain more fully what was at stake. The arrangement of Verrio’s altarpiece of *The Incredulity of St Thomas*, Cibber’s carved reredos and Laguerre’s painting on the walls and ceiling are best viewed from the first-floor gallery (fig. 117) – a raised platform equivalent to the staircase landing in the hall. Clearly designed to be at its most effective from this privileged viewing position, the decoration thus defines the gallery as the most important, even the most spiritual, place for worshippers in the chapel. Not surprisingly, this raised gallery, richly decorated with wood carving, served as the Duke’s private pew. Considering the two rooms in succession, as Laguerre certainly did, completing the chapel in 1691 before moving to the hall, it is inconceivable that the French artist would not have appreciated the implications of seeing his paintings for a second time from a similar raised position at the south end of the hall.²⁹ Therefore, the disruption to the heroic narrative of Caesar, culminating in the graphic portrayal of his murder, was surely an intended part of the visitor’s experience of Chatsworth. The distinction between divine authority and earthly *realpolitik* established by the hall and chapel define these two rooms as reciprocal spaces in the highly politicised environment of Chatsworth, contrasting the harmony of the Protestant faith with the disruptive consequences of an arbitrary and idolatrous ruler on earth.

²⁸ John Elsum, *The Art of Painting After the Italian Manner*, p. 80. Elsum’s advice appeared in Chapter 23, called: ‘Advertisements in Painting the Roofs of Palaces, Chappels of Palaces, &c. Of the diverse sorts of Roofs. What measure is to be taken in respect of the Place or Form of the Building, and what maner of Figures are most fit for it.’

²⁹ Painting in the chapel must have been completed by August 1691 when labourers were paid to remove the scaffolding. Verrio’s altarpiece was installed in December 1693. See Francis Thompson, *A History of Chatsworth*, pp. 134-35.

What are we to make of this extraordinary twist in the visual narrative of the hall? The beginnings of an explanation can be found in the contemporary ambivalence that surrounded the figure of Caesar, often revealed in the various literary sources and translations that were available to the artist, his patron and their viewers. Whereas Ovid's celestial narrative provided a literary analogue for the ceiling, Caesar's murder is not described at all in *Metamorphoses*. The Roman biographer Suetonius, on the other hand, dwells on the deed at length, relating the same sense of blunt inevitability captured in Laguerre's design. Here is the moment of Caesar's death, as described in a contemporary translation of Suetonius published in 1688:

The Conspirators, under Colour of paying him their devoirs, gathering round him, as soon as he had taken his Place: *Cimber Tullius*, who had undertook the first Assault, pretending a Request to him, made his Approaches nearer than the rest; whom *Caesar* refusing to hear then, and signifying by his Gestures to him, to defer his Business till another time, he immediately seiz'd him by the Gown on both Shoulders; at which he crying out, This is *down-right Violence*; one of the *Cassii* making up to him, stabb'd him a little below the Throat. *Caesar* upon this, laying hold of the *Assassin's* Arm, struck it through with his Stile, and endeavouring to make his Escape, was hinder'd by a second Thrust; and now seeing the Ruffians ready to assail him on every side, with naked Daggers in their Hands, he muffled up his Head in his Gown, and at the same time, with his left hand, threw his *Robes* about his Legs, that being covered all over, he might die with the greater Decency. *And thus fell Caesar*, with three and twenty Wounds in his Body.³⁰

In the mid-1680s, in the aftermath of the Exclusion crisis, a new English version of Plutarch's *Lives* also appeared from the Whig publisher Jacob Tonson, the first new version since Thomas North's translation more than a century earlier.³¹ Plutarch, even more than Suetonius, portrayed Caesar as a megalomaniac whose ruthlessness belied his later reputation for clemency, whose rise to power was a catalogue of corruption

³⁰ Suetonius, *The lives of the twelve Cæsars, the first emperors of Rome [...] now done into English by several hands*, London, 1688, p. 59.

³¹ Plutarch, *Plutarch's lives. Translated from the Greek by several hands*, 5 vols, London, 1683-86. Thomas North's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans Compared Together* was first published in 1579.

and betrayal, and whose actions eventually plunged the state into civil war, forcing the end of the republic. He describes the frenzied seconds that followed Tillius's signal for the assault to begin in graphic detail:

Casca gave him [Caesar] the first cut in the neck, which was not mortal nor dangerous, as coming from one who at the beginning of such a bold action was probably very much disturbed [...] Upon this first onset, those who were not privy to the design were astonished, and their horror and amazement at what they saw were so great that they durst not fly nor assist Cæsar, nor so much as speak a word. But those who came prepared for the business enclosed him on every side, with their naked daggers in their hands. Which way soever he turned he met with blows, and saw their swords levelled at his face and eyes, and was encompassed like a wild beast in the toils on every side.³²

Plutarch also helps to identify the statue that towers over the murderers and their victim in Laguerre's painting in the hall as that of Pompey, one of the many victims of Caesar's rise to power:

Some say that he fought and resisted all the rest, shifting his body to avoid the blows, and calling out for help, but that when he saw Brutus's sword drawn, he covered his face with his robe and submitted, letting himself fall, whether it were by chance or that he was pushed in that direction by his murderers, at the foot of the pedestal on which Pompey's statue stood, and which was thus wetted with his blood. So that Pompey himself seemed to have presided, as it were, over the revenge done upon his adversary, who lay here at his feet.³³

Laguerre could hardly have chosen a historical figure who was more closely associated with the recent political turmoil of the country in which he now worked. While Julius Caesar had been identified with a certain type of masculine heroism for several generations, in recent years he had become specifically associated with the Restoration monarchy, for whom the Roman dictator provided a powerful model of

³² Plutarch, *Plutarch's lives. Translated from the Greek by several hands*, vol. 4 (1685), 'Caesar'.

³³ Plutarch, *Plutarch's lives. Translated from the Greek by several hands*, vol. 4, 'Caesar'.

absolute rule. The figure of Julius Caesar had featured in the political decoration of English palaces since the reign of Henry VIII, and continued to play a visible role in English royal culture well into the eighteenth century.³⁴ However, no English monarch, before or since, had personally embraced the mythology of the (in)famous Roman dictator as whole-heartedly or as theatrically as had Charles II.

Immediately after the Restoration in 1660, the public representation of the monarch *all' antica*, or in classical Roman garb, would have been disregarded by most as an unrecognisable, or at best inappropriate, form of fancy dress for a king.³⁵ By the mid 1680s, however, public statues representing Charles in the cuirass and paludamentum of a Roman military commander had been erected in major towns from Plymouth to Edinburgh. Furthermore, it is significant that the King's enthusiasm for 'the Roman Emperours Dress' gathered pace during the later years of his reign. As tensions over the court's increasingly autocratic style of government intensified, so did official efforts publicly to identify the present monarch not just with the collected 'Caesars' of antiquity, but with the most famous strategist and statesman of them all. Among the many classicising effigies of Charles II in the City of London – the site of the fiercest disputes between the crown and civic government during the latter years of the Restoration – was Grinling Gibbons's celebrated marble figure in the Royal Exchange (see fig. 118), with an inscription on its pedestal that announced the monarch as a direct political descendant of Julius Caesar, declaring 'CAROLO II CAESARI Britanico | PATRIAE PATRI'. Gibbons's carving attracted a flurry of response from London's presses, all of it remarking on the King's appearance (with cropped hair and finely detailed armour, it was the most emphatic classicisation of an English monarch thus far).³⁶

³⁴ For Henry VIII see Thomas Campbell, 'New light on a set of History of Julius Caesar tapestries in Henry VIII's collection', *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1998), pp. 2-39. The English monarchy's cultural investment in Julius Caesar is perhaps best exemplified by Charles I's acquisition, in 1630, of Mantegna's *Triumphs* and Titian's imaginary portraits of the Caesars.

³⁵ See Katharine Gibson's excellent study of the iconography of Charles II, "Best Belov'd of Kings": The Iconography of King Charles II', PhD thesis, University of London, 1997, esp. pp. 88-103.

³⁶ The epitaph *Patriae Patri* ('Father of His Country') was specifically associated with Julius Caesar by Suetonius, who notes the inscription written on a statue of the murdered leader in the Roman Forum. It was subsequently applied to Julius's successor, Augustus Caesar. Katharine Gibson traces the proliferation and increasing archeological accuracy of the King's classical persona. Out of 50 statues and other sculptures of Charles II made during his lifetime, she notes that 21 portrayed the king in Roman dress – more than any other type. See Katharine Gibson, "Best Belov'd of Kings": The Iconography of King Charles II', esp. pp. 97-102.

Meanwhile, loyal poets and historians explored the political lineage between the present monarch and his adoptive Roman predecessor. William Howell's *Medulla Historiæ Anglicanæ* (1679) was just one of several national histories published during the Restoration to add the weight of the past to the King's imperial claims, providing its readers with 'a comprehensive history of the lives and reigns of the monarchs of England, from the time of the invasion thereof by Julius Cæsar, to this present year 1679'.³⁷ Thus, by the end of his twenty-five year reign, Charles's identification as 'Caesari Britanico', Britain's Caesar, had become one of the principal strands of official Restoration mythology, establishing an image of royal authority that passed seamlessly to James on his accession in 1685.

The darker side to Caesar's character, explored in detail by earliest biographers, was conspicuously absent from the Ovidian interpretation of the dictator's career favoured by the court. But the close association between Caesar and the Stuart monarchy prompted opponents of the king to draw parallels between the absolutist tendencies of the Restoration monarchs and the tyrannical underside of Caesar's rule explored by Suetonius and Plutarch, in what amounted to a covert discussion of the limits and prerogatives of monarchy. The appeal of both Suetonius and Plutarch to English readers of the later seventeenth century was, in part, their candid portrayal of the power of 'great men'. Both authors avoided eulogy, but nor did they offer outright condemnation of their subjects' vices, preferring instead to suspend moral judgement – or, rather, to pass that responsibility on to their readers.

These ambiguities could be exaggerated and refined in translation, which is never free of contemporary ideological inflections and often deliberately laden with them. As early as 1672 (a year after the first statues of Charles II in Roman military dress had been unveiled in the capital), a new English edition of Suetonius's *Twelve Caesars* was published by the religious dissenter and radical Whig John Starkey.³⁸

³⁷ *Medulla Historiæ Anglicanæ* was in its third edition by 1687, as was Nathaniel Crouch's *Englands monarchs: or, a compendious relation of the most remarkable transactions [...] which have hapned [sic] during the reigns of the kings and queens of England, from the invasion of the Romans under Julius Caesar to this present* (first published in 1685). Both followed the initial success of George Meriton's *Anglorum Gesta; or, a brief History of England [...] since the first attempt by Julius Cæsar upon this island, to the Coronation day of [...] King Charles the Second*, which appeared in 1675.

³⁸ The first two statues of the King in Roman dress, both by John Bushnell, were erected in London in 1671, on the new Temple Bar and the new entrance to the Royal Exchange. John Starkey later became a member of the Green Ribbon Club and, in 1683, was forced to flee the country after republishing Nathaniel Bacon's *An Historicall Discourse*, a constitutional history of England that had first appeared during the Commonwealth. He was also implicated in the Rye House Plot.

Starkey's text, the first new English translation since Philemon Holland's version of 1606, was reissued five years later and was followed in 1688 by another successful English translation done 'by several hands'. Focusing on Starkey's edition (and its possible attribution to Andrew Marvell), Annabel Patterson has recently remarked that during the 1670s, Suetonius was reinscribed 'in the idiom of Restoration politics' and that 'with or without the benefit of translation, [he] served as a resource for those debating and disputing the values of monarchical or imperial power'.³⁹

After describing the dictator's moderation in victory and other military virtues, Suetonius's anonymous translators of 1688 turned to Caesar's vices:

And yet his Vices so far out-balance his Virtues, that he may seem to have abus'd his Authority, and deserv'd death; For he not only arrogated too great Honours to himself [...] but accepted others too big for the Circumstances of bare Mortality to support.⁴⁰

Explaining the conspirators actions as a defence of Roman liberty, the translation continues:

Encourag'd, from the uneasiness of the People themselves, under the present state of affairs, who began now, both in private and publick, to withdraw their Allegiance, and wish for some bold Patriots to assert their invaded Liberties.⁴¹

Rather than depict Caesar's death as a prelude to his apotheosis, many contemporary readers, it seems, were drawn to the defensive noises of the conspirators that both Suetonius and Plutarch had discussed at length. In an age of stinging licensing laws that proscribed any overt criticism of the crown, this renewal of interest in Julius Caesar as a fatally flawed character even included a new production of Shakespeare's play, itself steeped in the constitutional anxieties of the previous century, staged to make Brutus a more sympathetic figure.⁴² By first cataloguing the ways in which

³⁹ Annabel Patterson, 'A Restoration Suetonius: a new Marvell text?', *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 61, no. 3 (September 2000), pp. 463-64 and 478.

⁴⁰ Suetonius, *The lives of the twelve Cæsars*, p. 53.

⁴¹ Suetonius, *The lives of the twelve Cæsars*, p. 56.

⁴² William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar. A Tragedy. As it is Now Acted at the Theatre Royal [...] printed*

Caesar had 'abus'd his Authority', then locating the conspirators' motives in 'the uneasiness of the People', these modern translators anticipated contemporary justifications for deposing James II in 1688.

Among the earliest and most determined of such justifications came one from none other than the then Earl of Devonshire. In a statement to the peoples of Nottingham and Derby in the days after William's landing at Torbay, Devonshire explained the imminent danger posed by James's intransigence, citing the ways in which the King had abused his authority, not least by 'dispensing with all the established Laws at his pleasure [and] branding all Man with the Name of Rebels, that but offered to justifie the Laws in a Legal Course'.⁴³ He continued by casting himself and his fellow conspirators as the kind of 'bold Patriots' described by Suetonius – using language that would not have been out of place among the recent examinations of Caesar. 'We own it Rebellion' he declared:

to resist a King that governs by Law; but he was always accounted a Tyrant, that made his Will the Law; and to resist such a One, we justly esteem no Rebellion, but a necessary Defence.⁴⁴

The appearance of Caesar on the ceiling of the hall, at the heart of Devonshire's seat at Chatsworth, could hardly have escaped these powerful associations.

In their respective *Lives*, the Roman biographer Suetonius and his Greek contemporary Plutarch both purport to give an impartial account of their subjects; in the case of Julius Caesar, offering a balanced account of the virtues and vices that enabled his rise to the dictatorship of Rome, and which led eventually to his murder. In doing so, they cast themselves as dispassionate observers of their subject, and invite their readers – or at least those capable of taking the same disinterested view of such grave matters – to contemplate the actions of Caesar and of those who opposed him. Laguerre's painting in the hall can be understood in a similar way. By presenting the darker side to Caesar's greatness, Laguerre offered an alternative to the Ovidian

by H.H. Jun. for Hen Herringman and R. Bentley, London, 1684.

⁴³ William Cavendish, 1st Duke of Devonshire, *The Declaration of the Earl of Devonshire, and other Nobility and Gentry assembled at Nottingham, November 22 1688*, appended to White Kennet, *A sermon preach'd at the funeral of [...] William, Duke of Devonshire*, London, 1708, p. 200.

⁴⁴ Devonshire, *The Declaration of the Earl of Devonshire, and other Nobility and Gentry assembled at Nottingham, November 22 1688*, p. 201.

perspective of the Roman leader proposed on the ceiling. While it is worth pausing to remember that many – perhaps most – visitors would have recognised Laguerre’s paintings simply as a suitably elevated form of decoration for the great hall (here we may recall Celia Fiennes impression of a hall ‘painted top and sides with armory’), to the classically educated, politically engaged aristocratic acquaintances of the Duke, the hall at Chatsworth provided a highly charged pictorial re-evaluation of a political life and death.

The pictorial incongruity of Caesar’s apotheosis on the one hand and his murder on the other subverts the conventional wholeness of a room – the expectation that the formal arrangement of a decorative scheme would complement the history it is telling. The result is that the various surfaces of the hall do not present a single coherent history of Caesar, but two alternative histories of the Roman dictator. Traversing the room becomes an almost iconoclastic experience, during which the myth and image of Caesar is dismantled as the room unfolds, forcing the visitor to contemplate an alternative Caesar – one whose ambition had got ‘too big for the Circumstances of bare Mortality to support’, and who may just have got what he deserved in the end. It is a dramatic and surely quite deliberate manipulation by Laguerre of a fundamental precept of decorative history painting – the pictorial and narrative harmony of the whole – for political effect. Most dramatic of all, perhaps, is the position of authority in which such a scheme places the viewer. The visitor is cast as a modern-day Suetonius or Plutarch, a dispassionate observer of Caesar’s fate, occupying a position of visual and political authority from where to ruminate on the limits of individual power.⁴⁵

Laguerre’s ambitious decoration demonstrates how the established narratives and techniques of decorative history were destabilised by the political events of 1688. It is one of the first and remains one of the most imaginative decorative responses to the Glorious Revolution. As the visitor turned away from Caesar’s gruesome murder for the final time, it was with a new authority. Unlike the decorated ceilings at Windsor, where the courtier-viewer was cast as a passive recipient of the singular absolutist message projected from successive surfaces, the visitor to Chatsworth

⁴⁵ Laguerre’s decoration in the hall at Chatsworth makes interesting comparison with Verrio’s later painting on the King’s staircase at Hampton Court, which also invites the viewer to judge the merits and vices of Caesar, this time against the example of Alexander the Great.

became an empowered, active agent in determining the meaning of Laguerre's painting in the hall.

In his 1949 study of the house, Francis Thompson, then Keeper of Collections at Chatsworth, described the hall as 'a kind of microcosm of the whole, intended to give the newcomer a general idea of the sort of thing he might expect to find at Chatsworth'.⁴⁶ It is, in many ways, an accurate evaluation of the room and its decoration. Laguerre's painting in the hall demonstrated that, if the unprecedented political and cultural demands of Chatsworth were to be met, new strategies of display would have to be devised from the existing apparatus of decorative history painting. The painter's exploitation of the visitor's movement into and through the room, his sensitivity to the contemporary political inflections of classical characters and myths, his exploration of the rhetorical potential of light and shadow, and of the spectacle of violence, outlined the beginnings of an alternative pictorial language that any future painted decoration in the house would have to address. Thornhill must have been among the most attentive of contemporary viewers in the hall, and it is now possible to see how the English painter responded to Laguerre's remarkable challenge.

The West Stairs

The west stairs at Chatsworth (fig. 119) circumvent the hall and state rooms, taking the visitor from the main entrance to the beginning of what would have been, had he lived to see its completion, the 1st Duke's own apartment on the second floor – a smaller but no less formal counterpart of the state apartment to the south (see fig. 120).⁴⁷ Suitably grand, the staircase can be understood as part of an alternative route into the public accommodation of the upper floors, leading the visitor to a quarter of the house that was more closely associated with its owner than any other part of the building. The importance of the west stairs within the formal geography of the house was emphasised during their construction in 1702, when building work on the west front was interrupted to allow the half-built stairwell to be enlarged.⁴⁸ Its public status

⁴⁶ Francis Thompson, *A History of Chatsworth*, p. 112.

⁴⁷ The best analysis of the formal country house apartment, and the example which prompts me to read the arrangement of rooms in the west front as being such, is Mark Girouard's in *Life in the English Country House*, New Haven and London, 1978, esp. 145-62. However, owing to the 1st Duke's death in 1707, it is not known if, or how, he had hoped the other rooms in the apartment would be decorated.

⁴⁸ For an account of the building of the west front, see Francis Thompson, *A History of Chatsworth*,

was afterwards confirmed by its decoration: by the finely wrought iron balustrade, the carved stonework that announces the uppermost level and, above all, the remarkable painted ceiling (fig. 121).

Here, Thornhill represented the climactic moment in the story of Phaeton, the ill-fated son of the sun god Apollo. More specifically, he chose to depict the moment when, to save the earth from complete devastation, Jove launches a thunderbolt at Phaeton's wayward chariot, sending the impetuous youth hurtling towards his grave. The events leading up to Phaeton's violent end are described in the second book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. As a mark of recognition towards his illegitimate son, Apollo granted Phaeton one wish, to which the young mortal immediately responded by asking to drive the sun's chariot for a day – a task so perilous, Ovid suggests, that not even the other gods would have dared to attempt it. But bound by his word and unable to dissuade his son, Apollo had no choice but to allow Phaeton's fateful request, from which point the story accelerates towards a predictably disastrous conclusion. Unable to handle his father's fire-breathing horses, Phaeton immediately loses control of the chariot, careering blindly through the heavens before heading perilously close to the earth, drying up the oceans and enveloping the ground in a terrible firestorm. Here, in George Sandys's popular seventeenth-century translation, we follow Phaeton's final few seconds as Jove, witnessing the destruction, 'mounts the highest Turret of the skie' and as a last resort brings Phaeton's destructive journey to a crashing end:

He thunders; and, with hands that cannot erre,
Hurls lightning at the audacious Charioter.
Him strooke he from his seat, breath from his brest,
Both at one blow, and flames with flames supprest.
The frighted horses, plunging severall wayes,
Breake all their tire: to whom the bit obayes:
The reignes, torne beame, crackt spokes, disperst abroad,
Scorcht Heaven was with the Chariots ruines strow'd.
But, soule-lesse *Phaëton*, with blazing haire,
Shot head-long through a long descent of Aire;

esp. pp. 70-74 and 184-86. A survey of Chatsworth made by John Barker in 1700 (which survives as a copy by Wyattville, illustrated by Thompson, p. 82, plate 28) shows a much smaller staircase by the south-west corner of the courtyard. However, it is not clear whether this represents the original Elizabethan staircase or the planned new one.

As when a falling starre glides through the skie,
Or seemes to fall to the deceived eye.⁴⁹

Thornhill's depiction of Phaeton's descent is, by any measure, a highly accomplished example of decorative history painting, boldly demonstrating the artist's abilities as a ceiling painter within the artistically competitive environment of Chatsworth. Compared to the great stairs in the south-east corner of the building (fig. 122), where Verrio had painted a triumphant Cybele charging optimistically towards the adjoining state rooms in her lion-drawn chariot, the west stairs provide a relatively austere ascent to the upper floors of the house. Cybele, the Phrygian and Roman goddess of nature, is accompanied in Verrio's scheme by Ceres and Bacchus in the midst of a musical cavalcade. Rich in the sensuality of music and colour, and wholly in keeping with the productive identity of these three gods, the harvest-festival-like atmosphere of Verrio's ceiling, seen alongside the richly carved steps, lavish gilding and painted grisaille walls, introduces a celebratory change of tempo to the visitor's passage after the violence of the hall. Though both staircases operate within the same broadly defined rules of scenographic painting, the image of Phaeton's untimely death provided a powerful visual antidote to Verrio's celebration of life and renewal, raising the possibility that Thornhill purposefully set out to distinguish his own painting from the example of his more experienced predecessor.

The relative success of Thornhill's work for the Duke of Devonshire can perhaps be demonstrated most effectively by a further comparison – this time with the artist's only known earlier commission, for Thomas Foley at Stoke Edith in Herefordshire, which he completed the previous year. For Foley, Thornhill painted a staircase with the equally gruesome Ovidian tale of Niobe. On the ceiling (fig. 123), he depicted Apollo and Diana who, intent on punishing Niobe for repeated insults against their mother, take the somewhat extreme measure of slaughtering all of her children (who appear on the walls below), turning Niobe herself into stone. Thornhill's rather different treatment of the airborne figures at each site reveals the artist's greater control at Chatsworth over the peculiar spatial demands of ceiling painting. In the earlier scheme, the drama of the story is compromised as Apollo, at the centre of the composition (fig. 124), seems to be overwhelmed by gravity – as if,

⁴⁹ Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished Mythologized And Represented in Figures*, translated by George Sandys, London, 1632, book 2.

mid-slaughter, he is about to freefall into the stairwell below. In the more accomplished painting at Chatsworth, Thornhill ensured that the central figure of Jove (fig. 125) remains anchored securely behind the picture plane, from where, assuming the viewer's willingness to engage with the fiction in the first place, he convincingly delivers the full force of his thunderbolt. Thus locked in the centre of the ceiling, Jove forms a hub around which the rest of the composition, including the hapless figure of Phaeton painted in the deep coving of the ceiling, revolves. In contrast to the powerfully foreshortened figure of Jove, the vertiginous sensation of Phaeton's uncontrolled fall is accentuated by a plume of grey smoke, rising as if from the scorched earth below, which extends the upward, spiralling movement of the stairs far into the sky. By harnessing the dramatic potential of the painting's architectural support in this way, the narrative on the ceiling is animated by the visitor's own movement as he climbs up and around the staircase.

Before examining further the significance of Thornhill's inventive decoration on the west stairs, it is important to ask why the tragic story of Phaeton should have been deemed a suitable subject for the Duke's staircase in the first place. The fall of Phaeton had been a favourite subject for artists and patrons on the Continent since the sixteenth century and was among the episodes most often featured in illustrated editions of *Metamorphoses*. Among the finest of several 'Englished' versions of Ovid's text available to early eighteenth-century readers was George Sandys's illustrated edition of 1632, quoted above, with designs by the decorative painter and tapestry designer Francis Clein. Clein's illustration to Book 2 (fig. 126) is representative of a pictorial type that, during the course of the seventeenth century, made the unfortunate hero of Thornhill's ceiling one of the most recognisable characters of the classical literary canon, portraying Phaeton as a naked youth tumbling headlong towards the earth with his father's chariot and horses close behind. Clein's design also demonstrates how Phaeton's demise typically found meaning within the larger narrative sequence of Ovid's text, where the tragic nature of the protagonist's death is underlined by the subsequent metamorphosis of his bereaved sisters, included in the lower-right corner of the engraving, who turn into trees out of sorrow. It is this episode, rather than the antics of Phaeton, that qualifies the story for inclusion in Ovid's collected fables of physical transformation.

Neither were such juxtapositions confined to illustrated editions of Ovid. Decorative schemes depicting other episodes in the story had been painted by Verrio

on the Queen's staircase at Windsor and, closer still, by Laguerre in one of the state drawing rooms at Chatsworth. Both were accompanied by subsidiary scenes depicting Phaeton's sisters.⁵⁰ For the Duke of Devonshire, Laguerre had chosen the moment when Apollo, unable to dissuade Phaeton from taking his chariot, rubs his son's face with a divine ointment in the vain hope of protecting him from the deadly heat of the sun (fig. 127). Other scenes from the ensuing tragedy are incorporated into the coving around the room, including a stylised version of Phaeton's fall (fig. 128) and a depiction of his grief-stricken sisters, providing a conventional narrative and decorative frame through which the ceiling is clearly intended to be read as part of an Ovidian tragedy.

An interesting interpretation of the fall of Phaeton as a subject for decorative painting, one that is well suited to the concerns of this discussion, was proposed by Kerry Downes in his 1977 study of the architect John Vanbrugh. The subject of Downes's analysis was not Thornhill's ceiling at Chatsworth, but Antonio Pellegrini's painted dome in the great hall of Castle Howard in Yorkshire, executed a couple of years after Thornhill's work. Contrasting the subject of the Castle Howard painting with the earlier episode that Verrio had painted on the Queen's staircase at Windsor (which was destroyed in the nineteenth century), Downes recognised a contemporary political significance in Pellegrini's work. Focusing on the disastrous consequences of Phaeton's adventure, he suggested that the painted dome at Castle Howard provided a politically charged sequel to the Windsor staircase. Downes proposed that to contemporary visitors, Phaeton's demise provided 'a political comment on the presumption of the absolutist monarchy of Charles II and James II' and at the same time, looking further afield to Louis XIV's obsessive identification with Apollo at Versailles, that it registered the collapse of the French king's god like ambitions in Europe.⁵¹ As an explanation of Pellegrini's painting, Downes's argument has much to recommend it – not least the well-documented political ambitions and Williamite convictions of the 3rd Earl of Carlisle, the patron of Castle Howard.⁵²

⁵⁰ Verrio's painting on Queen's staircase at Windsor were described in 1742 by George Bickham (who also inexplicably attributed the decoration to Thornhill), before being taken down by Jeffry Wyattville early in the nineteenth century. The ceiling represented Apollo granting permission to his son to drive the chariot, and was accompanied on the walls by a scenes including Phaeton's sisters changing into trees and Cygnus turning into a swan. See Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England 1537-1837*, pp. 241-42.

⁵¹ Kerry Downes, *Vanbrugh*, London, 1977, p. 33.

⁵² Carlisle's political career is usefully summarized by Charles Saumarez Smith in *The Building of*

Downes's explanation of Pellegrini's ceiling was cross-examined by Charles Saumarez Smith, writing a few years later, who argued that the artist's or patron's choice of subject is not, in itself, an effective explanation of the potential contemporary political meaning of a painting. 'The problem with this form of interpretation', he suggested, referring to Downes's reading of the story of Phaeton in the light of the political events of the 1680s, 'is that what applies to Pellegrini must apply to Verrio', raising the improbable scenario that the Queen's staircase at Windsor anticipated the eventual collapse of the absolutist style of government that Verrio celebrated in his painting elsewhere in the palace.⁵³ Unfortunately, though, Saumarez Smith then retreats from the challenge of Downes's interpretation, rejecting the possibility of any political nuance in contemporary understandings of the Phaeton myth in favour of what he describes as a humanist understanding of Pellegrini's ceiling. For Saumarez Smith, the exhibition of the dramatic failure of human endeavour amid the splendour of Castle Howard is in itself a sufficient explanation of the story's appeal 'without recourse to secondary meaning'.

As Saumarez Smith noted, Phaeton, the over-ambitious prince who would not listen to the wise council of others, had been a recurring character in Parliamentary propaganda during the civil war. To this we can add the story's reappearance in the mid-1680s, following the Duke of Monmouth's rebellion (of which Devonshire, along with many other exclusionist Whigs, had disapproved). The violent parallels between Monmouth and Phaeton proved irresistible to the anonymous author of *The unfortunate Phaeton, or the fall of ambition* (1686), for example, who seized upon the themes of illegitimacy and over-ambition common to the two anti-heroes, portraying both as reckless bastards. The story of Phaeton's fall was thus loaded with several, often contradictory meanings. The fact that it had been used to different political ends in the past does not preclude its re-use, as Saumarez Smith seems to conclude, but surely highlights the suitability of this hubristic story for political representation in general and helps us to understand its enduring popularity in western elite culture.

These two rival iconographical readings of Pellegrini's painting provide us with useful markers for understanding Thornhill's earlier painting at Chatsworth: Downes by focusing our attention on the political demands that were undoubtedly

Castle Howard, London, 1997 (second edition), pp. 12-17. He was, for a short time in 1701, First Lord of the Treasury.

⁵³ Charles Saumarez Smith, *The Building of Castle Howard*, pp. 106-08.

made of such schemes; and Saumarez Smith by preferring a less specific interpretation, appealing to the universal pathos of the story and helping to explain the lasting appeal of the narrative to an audience several thousand miles, and as many years, away from the tale's origins. However, neither explanation looks beyond the literary subject of the painting. As a result, they ignore the potential of the pictorial and spatial aspects of decorative history painting to shape the visitor's response. In other words, by concentrating on the subject but ignoring how it was painted, both Downes and Saumarez Smith regard the painted cupola at Castle Howard as a benign translation of its chosen literary source, and their disagreement is essentially over the meaning of Ovid's text to eighteenth-century readers, rather than over Pellegrini's or any other painter's representation of it. Laguerre's work in the hall at Chatsworth demonstrated that decorative painting could hold different, conflicting meanings even within the same scheme, and that how a painted interior was devised and seen could be at least as important as the initial choice of subject in determining those meanings.

Drawing attention to the specificity of decorative painting in the ideological representation of classical mythology brings us back to Thornhill's distinctive treatment of Jove and Phaeton on the ceiling of the west staircase at Chatsworth. Thornhill's painting marks a significant departure from the established interpretation of Ovid's story by removing the moment of Phaeton's death from its immediate literary context, omitting those sentimental aspects of Ovid's narrative that had served as a political cushion for Phaeton's fall in earlier engraved and painted examples. Of equal significance is the greater prominence Thornhill affords the pivotal figure of Jove and his fatal thunderbolt. The originality of Thornhill's ceiling thus lies in its composition, which shifts the focus of an already familiar myth away from the often sentimentalised figure of Phaeton towards Jove, whose (now heroic) intervention saves the earth from destruction. The visual effectiveness of the figure of Jove largely depends on Thornhill's successful use of foreshortening – specifically by the introduction of a 'side-saddle' posture that would become a familiar motif in his work (see, for example, fig. 129).

In 1689, a similarly stripped-down image of Phaeton and Jove was appropriated for the official mythology of the Revolution when a medal (fig. 130), stamped in honour of William and Mary's coronation, featured an image of Jove expelling Phaeton from the skies with the ominous legend: NE TOTUS

ABSVMATVR ('Lest everything be destroyed').⁵⁴ The implication of the medal is unambiguous: James's misguided faith and absolutist ambitions had left him unable to handle the reigns of government, necessitating swift and decisive intervention if the nation (already in flames) was to be saved from absolute ruin. The appearance of the joint monarchs' profile on the obverse left no doubt over the direct political point that was being made. Something of the impact of Thornhill's staircase painting can be inferred from another brief comparison – this time with the ceiling of the King's drawing room at Windsor (known only from a rare engraving by Peter Vandrebanc; fig. 131), where Verrio painted a triumphant Charles II charging through the heavens in a chariot. The sight of Phaeton being dumped unceremoniously from the skies at Chatsworth must have made a powerful and politically loaded contrast to the Apollo-like posturing of Charles enthroned on the ceilings at Windsor.

It is not necessary to insist that either the artist or his patron would have had such literal comparisons in mind, or that they would have viewed the story of Phaeton as a kind of celestial re-enactment of the Glorious Revolution itself, to recognise the extraordinary resonance that Thornhill's ceiling must have had for an audience whose understanding of modern Britain depended entirely on the belief that William's intervention in 1688 had been a moral and political necessity. By drawing on an already familiar narrative that had recently been implicated in the historical revisionism that followed the Glorious Revolution, and by emphasising the role of Jove in that narrative, Thornhill invites the viewer to re-read the established Ovidian language of decorative history painting that Verrio had introduced into England during the 1670s. Few other classical myths could so neatly encapsulate the Revolution principles that had defined the greater part of his patron's adult life. By visually reinventing the story of Phaeton, Thornhill managed to create a culturally apposite mythology for the Duke's staircase. In doing so, he began the task of reconstructing the mythological canon that Laguerre had so dramatically dismantled in the hall. Now, having reached the top of the west stairs, we continue our passage through the house by moving into the adjacent saloon.

⁵⁴ I am very grateful to Peter Day for first bringing this medal to my attention. Another medal from 1689 likened the arrival of William to the rescue of Andromeda by Perseus, and a similar analogy between William and James, and Jove and Phaeton is suggested in a medal commemorating William's intervention in Ireland in 1690; see Edward Hawkins, *Medallic Illustrations of the History of Great Britain and Ireland to the Death of George II*, London, 1885, vol. 1, pp. 663-64, nos 26-28 and p. 705, no. 114.

The Upper Saloon

The scene that confronts the visitor on the north wall of the 'upper saloon' at Chatsworth (figs 132-135), facing us as we enter the room from the adjoining stairs, is of an overcrowded Roman forum spilling into the room as a band of swarthy soldiers grapple with a group of defenceless women. The urgency of the image is intensified by the concentration of life-size figures immediately behind the picture plane (at one point bringing the viewer to within inches of a rearing horse), and by the looming classical facades behind: the towering buildings obscure the horizon and encircle those women who have yet to be caught or trampled in the commotion, as if the fabric of the city itself were in collusion with the soldiers.

The story that Thornhill represented here with such drama is the abduction, or rape, of the Sabine women, a key moment in the early history of Rome more familiar to art historians through seventeenth-century depictions by the likes of Pietro da Cortona and Nicolas Poussin (fig. 136). According to the legend, retold by several ancient authors, Rome in its earliest days was threatened by a serious shortage of women, without whom the newly founded city was destined to a brief and unremarkable existence. After the failure of more peaceful efforts to secure wives for his followers, Romulus (shown to the right in the middle distance of Thornhill's painting; fig. 137) devised a plan to steal the daughters of the neighbouring Sabine tribe, using the chance discovery of an underground altar as a ruse to set his scheme in motion. The ensuing drama, during which the Roman race is violently inaugurated and the future of the city secured, is described by Plutarch, here in a translation attributed to John Dryden.

Upon discovery of this altar, Romulus, by proclamation, appointed a day for a splendid sacrifice, and for public games and shows, to entertain all sorts of people: many flocked thither, and he himself sat in front, amidst his nobles clad in purple. Now the signal for their falling on was to be whenever he rose and gathered up his robe and threw it over his body; his men stood all ready armed, with their eyes intent upon him, and when the sign was given, drawing their swords and falling on with a great shout they ravished away the daughters of the Sabines, they themselves flying without any let or hindrance.

They say there were but thirty taken, and from them the Curiae or Fraternities were named; but Valerius Antias says five hundred and twenty-seven, Juba, six hundred and eighty-three virgins: which was indeed the greatest excuse Romulus could allege, namely, that they had taken no married woman, save one only, Hersilia by name, and her too unknowingly; which showed that they did not commit this rape wantonly, but with a design purely of forming alliance with their neighbours by the greatest and surest bonds.⁵⁵

In *The Art of Painting*, published four years before Thornhill began working at Chatsworth, John Elsum described the different character types that should be mastered by a good history painter: 'Let Old Men be grave, Ladies beautiful', and so on. He saved his most detailed instructions for virgins and soldiers. 'Let a Virgin be fair,' he advised, 'modest, humble, fresh, tender, plump, with hair that is light, shining, waiving, and airy'; and for the seven or eight soldiers that ought to occupy the foreground of a battle scene, he recommended that the artist make 'their Shoulders broad, strong, and Musculous, their Arms and Legs gross, so that nothing Sweet or Tender may appear in their Bodies, but let them be fierce, stout, and terrible [...] excepting the General Officers, who must be represented Sprightly, Noble, and Brave'.⁵⁶ With these instructions, addressed as much to the viewers as to the makers of history painting, Elsum provided a detailed (if also oversimplified) physiognomy for what he described as the 'masculine and feminine sorts of painting'.⁵⁷ In the upper saloon at Chatsworth, Thornhill not only gave a bold demonstration of these gendered and socially distinct figure types, but, in the story of the Sabine women, he also found a narrative that placed the two in dramatic and violent juxtaposition.

The story of the Sabine women had been a popular subject among artists and patrons in Rome, where the foundation myth of the ancient city had an immediate and obvious political value for its modern-day elites, but paintings of the subject were rare outside of Italy.⁵⁸ Without the supernatural element of other mythological, or 'heroic'

⁵⁵ Plutarch, *Plutarch's lives. Translated from the Greek by several hands*, vol. 1 (1683), 'Romulus', pp. 89-90.

⁵⁶ John Elsum, *The Art of Painting After the Italian Manner*, pp. 65 and 73.

⁵⁷ Among the 'Universal Rules [...] necessary to a good Painter' Elsum also advised his readers: 'Observe that all the Several maners of Painting are reducible to Three sorts, as are the Orders of Architecture, Masculine Feminine, and Juvenil.' See John Elsum, *The Art of Painting After the Italian Manner*, p. 76.

⁵⁸ The rape appears at least twice, for example, in the decoration of the Palazzo dei Conservatori,

rape narratives, it is not difficult to see why a story of the entrapment and abduction of a group of defenceless women by armed soldiers might not have been regarded as the most appropriate subject for the visual arts outside of Rome – making its appearance as a highly visible part of the decoration at Chatsworth both interesting and in need of some explanation.

Thornhill had experimented with the subject before arriving at Chatsworth, producing an oil sketch as a proposal for Foley's hall at Stoke Edith (fig. 138). This image, together with a drawing of the same subject in Thornhill's sketchbook (fig. 139), indicates the artist's awareness of Poussin's versions of the subject, one of which he and his patron would have known from Étienne Baudet's recent engraving.⁵⁹ Today there are two other pictorial versions of the subject in the Devonshire collection at Chatsworth. The first, a drawing by Nicolas Poussin (fig. 140), is one of a handful of surviving studies for the artist's two well-known paintings of the subject. The second is a small oil painting on copper by the German artist Johann Rottenhammer (fig. 141), who produced several versions of the same composition while in Venice and Rome at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Although neither of these pictures can be associated with certainty to the collection of the first Duke, a strong possibility remains that the decoration of the upper saloon was born of a shared interest in the subject between the artist and his patron. Certainly, beyond the circles of Thornhill and Devonshire, images of the rape of the Sabine women were pretty much unknown in England.⁶⁰

The story of the Sabine women was a morally problematic one – as much for the ancient Romans themselves as for the readers and viewers of eighteenth-century England. Visually, depictions of the story shared common ground with those of other mythological rape narratives, derived from Ovid and other authors. These included the several assignations of Jupiter and of Apollo, and the abduction of Proserpina by Pluto. However, unlike these episodes, several of which Thornhill represented during

Rome's civic palace on the Capitoline.

⁵⁹ The Louvre version of Poussin's painting, made during the 1630s for the French ambassador in Rome, had been acquired by Louis XIV in 1685. It was engraved by Étienne Baudet around 1700 as part of a series of paintings and sculptures reproduced from the French royal collection. The British Museum has a good impression of Baudet's print.

⁶⁰ It is difficult to ascertain when these objects entered the Devonshire collection. Poussin's drawing bears the stamp of the 2nd Duke, but this does not preclude the possibility that it was acquired by his father – as was the case with several other marked drawings in the collection. I have come across no other version that was produced for an English patron prior to Thornhill's experiments with the subject.

his career (see, for example, figs 142 and 143), the Sabine story posed an additional problem for artists and their patrons: the threat of social disorder.⁶¹ After all, this was not Jupiter or Apollo or Pluto in pursuit of the Sabine daughters, but the lowly band of soldiers, crooks and misfits that had gathered around Romulus in the earliest days of Rome. And the unruly behaviour and uncontrolled sexuality of these men, as they seized their Sabine victims, meant that the potential of the story to descend into a libidinous riot was never far away.⁶²

Visually, Thornhill's depiction of the rape is also suggestive of a more recent graphic tradition that stemmed from Jacques Callot's *Miseries of War* series from the 1630s.⁶³ Violent scenes of military rape and murder reappeared during the Dutch wars of the 1670s with Romeyn de Hooghe's propagandist prints of marauding soldiers, depicting atrocities allegedly committed against Dutch townspeople by Louis XIV's army (see, for example, fig. 144).⁶⁴ Such images demonstrate, at one extreme, the kind of anti-heroic reading that Thornhill's painting was exposed to.

Two very different interpretations of the original Sabine myth can be found in the contrasting accounts of Ovid and Plutarch, both of which appeared in new English translations at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The troublesome combination of the narrative's earthy subject matter and its earthbound, unrefined protagonists is exemplified in Ovid's infamous erotic poem, *Ars Amatoria*, the Art of Love. Ovid's account revels in the disorder of the attack, contrasting in graphic detail the excited enthusiasm of the soldiers on the one hand with the distress of their victims on the other, at one point even likening the encounter to that between a predator and its quarry:

There, while they sit in rustic majesty,

⁶¹ Thornhill also painted a grisaille version of *Apollo and Daphne* at Chatsworth, above a door in the passage connecting the upper saloon with the closet of the state apartment.

⁶² The moral dangers of the story were further problematised by religion. In a discussion of earlier, Roman depictions of the subject, Norman Bryson has suggested that the original foundation mythology of the rape, when viewed through a Christian lens, became 'an outrage which shows the criminality of pagan Rome, and of the histories which celebrated it'; see Norman Bryson, 'Two narratives of rape in the visual arts: Lucrecia and the Sabine Women', in Sylvana Tomaselli and Roy Porter (eds), *Rape: an historical and cultural enquiry*, Oxford, 1989, pp. 216-36.

⁶³ Callot published two series of *Miseries* etchings in 1633, at the height of the Thirty Years War. See Diana Wolfthal, 'Jacques Callot's Miseries of War', *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 59, no. 2 (June 1977), pp. 222-233.

⁶⁴ De Hooghe's etchings were produced for Abraham van Wicquefort's *Advis Fidelle aux Veritables Hollondais* (The Hague, 1673), which described the actions of the French army against the Dutch villages of Bodegrave and Swammerdam in 1672.

Each lover had his mistress in his eye;
 And whom he saw most suiting to his mind,
 For joys of matrimonial rape design'd.
 Scarce could they wait the plaudit in their haste;
 But ere the dances and the song were past,
 The monarch gave the signal from his throne,
 And rising, bade his merry men fall on.
 The martial crew, like soldiers, ready press'd,
 Just at the word (the word too was the best),
 With joyful cries each other animate;
 Some choose, and some at hazard seize their mate.
 As doves from eagles, or from wolves the lambs,
 So from their lawless lovers fly the dames.
 Their fear was one, but not one face of fear:
 Some rend the lovely tresses of the hair:
 Some shriek, and some are struck with dumb despair.
 Her absent mother one invokes in vain;
 One stands amaz'd, not daring to complain;
 The nimbler trust their feet, the slow remain.
 But nought availing, all are captives led,
 Trembling and blushing, to the genial bed.⁶⁵

Ovid's visceral description is very different to the prose account of Plutarch in his *Life of Romulus*, cited earlier. Whereas Ovid spent upwards of twenty lines relating the attack in detail, Plutarch dealt with the actual violence in just half a sentence, followed by a lengthy justification of the abduction and a defence of Romulus's men whose behaviour, we are assured, was that of a disciplined outfit, acting only out of the best intentions. Ultimately, Plutarch's version points to the political necessity that had inspired the Romans' actions, proposing that they had not acted wantonly, 'but with a design purely of forming alliance with their neighbours by

⁶⁵ Ovid, *The Art of Love In three books* [...] *Translated into English verse by several eminent hands*, London, 1709, pp. 253-54. The subversive dangers of *Ars Amatoria* were acknowledged by ancient and modern audiences alike. Marlowe's translation of Ovid's *Amores*, which included substantial parts of *Ars Amatoria* was burnt in 1599 by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London.

the greatest and surest bonds'. Ovid, in contrast, describes the abduction as a base reward of 'fresh whores' bestowed by Romulus upon his army of 'merry men':

Thus Romulus became so popular;
This was the way to thrive in peace and war;
To pay his army, and fresh whores to bring:
Who wouldn't fight for such a gracious king!⁶⁶

Significantly, Thornhill's depiction of the subject at Chatsworth invites both of these very different readings. On the one hand, the violence depicted in the foreground recalls the excess of Ovid's account, which embraced (and even celebrated) the social disorder and sexual violence of the story. On the other hand, Thornhill introduced a sense of order on to the north wall – limiting the potential for the narrative to descend into the kind of anarchy envisaged by Ovid. One of the ways in which his painting does that is by turning to the more sober conventions of grand-manner portraiture when representing the mounted figure in the centre (fig. 145). More specifically, Thornhill conflates two long-established kinds of equestrian portrait in this central composition. A good example of the first – the rearing-horse type, popular among young aristocratic men throughout the seventeenth century – can be seen in an earlier French painting of a youthful William Cavendish that still hangs at Chatsworth (fig. 146). The second is exemplified by the more imperious, frontal stance of Van Dyck's *Charles I on horseback with M. de St Antoine* (an image that appears to have provided a more specific model for the horse's head in Thornhill's painting; fig. 147). In focusing on such a figure, Thornhill alludes to another choice moment in Plutarch's account of the abduction, when a group of Romans, described by the author as 'some of the meaner sort of men' were accosted by 'some of superior rank' while 'carrying off a damsel, excelling all in beauty and comeliness and stature'. When these men of rank had been reassured that the foot soldiers' intention was not to keep their captive for themselves, but to take her to a 'brave and worthy' young officer, they commended the soldiers and allowed them to continue.⁶⁷ With these literary and pictorial allusions, the exchange between the foot soldier and his

⁶⁶ Ovid, *The Art of Love In three books*, p. 254.

⁶⁷ Plutarch, *Plutarch's lives. Translated from the Greek by several hands*, vol. 1 (1683), 'Romulus', p. 90.

mounted commander in the centre of the painting effectively polices the scene, allowing the qualified spectator to distance himself from the 'meaner sort' of Roman (and hence from the immediacy of the attack) by assuming a socially and morally elevated position alongside those of 'superior rank'.

The literary comparisons with Thornhill's painting can be extended further. According to Plutarch, Romulus's men remained on their feet in the moments before the abduction, 'their eyes intent upon him'. But the same soldiers, when described by Ovid, showed no such regard for discipline. Sitting in 'rustic majesty', they ogled their prey: 'Each lover had his mistress in his eye'. The different scoping tendencies of the soldiers, described here immediately before the attack, provide us with a useful way of thinking about the role of the spectator in the upper saloon, and of the different kinds of looking demanded by Thornhill's painting. On entering the room, the visitor is implicated, by his own vision, in the erotically charged acts of violence that dominate the picture surface. By looking further into the picture space, however, the north wall can be reread as a successful military operation conducted by a disciplined army in an unbroken chain of command that eventually leads back to (and connects the viewer with) the commanding figure of Romulus in the middle distance. The transition between these two very different outcomes can be thought of, in visual terms, as a process of looking beyond the immediate foreground and into the perspective depth of the picture, implying a greater intellectual engagement with the narrative. The visual possibilities of the north wall thus allow the viewer to negotiate between two very different interpretations of its subject – differences that are exemplified in the behaviour of Romulus's men in the respective accounts of Ovid and Plutarch.

Uncompromising in its choice of subject and direct in its claims on our attention in the already heavily decorated environment at Chatsworth, Thornhill's work on the north wall of the upper saloon is an aggressive piece of painting in more ways than one, continuing a pictorial strategy of violence that had been employed elsewhere in the house. At the same time, it seems that Thornhill attempted to endow the north wall with the kind of morally instructive purpose and elicit the same kind of close viewing that was usually reserved for academic history painting, a form of art exemplified by Poussin's *Rape of the Sabines*. Unlike history painting proper, however, Thornhill's invention was not seen in framed isolation, but conceived as part of a scheme involving several equally prominent surfaces.

In terms of both its pictorial structure and its content, the south wall of the upper saloon (fig. 148) represents the antithesis of the violence and disorder of the opposite side of the room. The arrangement centres on a painted female statue, a personification of Concord, standing in a feigned architectural niche looking across at the scene of discord on the north wall. Beneath her feet is a grisaille mantelpiece depicting a scene from the early life of Romulus and Remus. To the left of this statue, Thornhill painted four women collecting and carrying jugs (presumably for a feast that is taking place somewhere beyond our view; fig. 149). More strikingly, to the right, is a reclining female nude, also looking out towards the viewer and to the scene opposite (fig. 150).

From both their physical appearance (which again recalls John Elsum's generic ideal: 'fresh, tender, plump [...] with hair that is light, shining, waiving') and their colour-coded dress, these female figures are clearly to be identified as the same women as those being abducted on the opposite side of the room. Though lacking a clear narrative, the south wall alludes to the later history of the Sabine women who, following their abduction, subsequently accepted their new roles as Roman wives and mothers. The prominence of Concord in the centre also refers, indirectly, to the Sabines' celebrated battlefield intervention (an episode best-known today from David's later eighteenth-century painting), which finally forced a peace between their warring fathers and husbands. Furthermore, the reclining figure on the right can be identified, more specifically, as Hersilia, the most prominent – and, Thornhill suggests, the most beautiful – of the Sabine women who, according to Ovid, became the wife of Romulus and whom Plutarch credits with an eleventh-hour speech that united the two tribes. The tripartite division of the south wall was determined, on a practical level, by the need to incorporate the fireplace into the design: this is the 'chimney side' noted in Thornhill's initial sketch for the project.⁶⁸ The result is a painting that reads like a triptych of feminine virtue, in which a clearly defined social order is maintained between the domestic tasks fulfilled by the ordinary Sabine women on the one side, and the aristocratic ease and beauty of Hersilia on the other.

One important aspect of this whole scheme, alluded to already, is the agency and impact of the gendered, socially specific gaze of the viewer. That distinction is

⁶⁸ Thornhill had used a similar solution, bringing the chimney breast forward of the picture plane with architectural painting and using a curved colonnade to demarcate an enclosed space behind, in the saloon at Stoke Edith a few years earlier.

reaffirmed around the room by an array of decorative subsidiary figures and motifs (see, for example, figs 151 and 152). In each corner, the Duke's insignia, comprising an intertwined C[avendish] and D[evonshire], fills the coving. Underneath these, flanking the windows on the east and west walls, stand the four cardinal virtues, invariably associated with notions of good government and here depicted in their conventional female form. Elsewhere, assorted military emblems adorn the wainscot and other marginal spaces of the saloon. These collected motifs frame the story of the Sabine women in a way that brings to mind the advice of Roger Pratt and John Elsum – that the decorative painter present his subject in such a way that could be 'apply'd' to the owner of the house. In doing so, Thornhill privileges a particular kind of spectatorship: that of the politically active, classically erudite, aristocratic male.

Behind the heroine's left shoulder, a bearded man encourages the viewer to compare and contrast Hersilia's feminine virtues with the embodiment of masculine, heroic virtue in the form of a statue of Hercules. The sexual difference portrayed on the north wall as a violent encounter is thus refigured as a legitimate, virtuous act. On both walls, the female body is objectified for the complicit gaze of that viewer. On the north wall, it was defined as a morally problematic, unruly form of spectatorship that required the intervention of the mounted officer in the centre of the ceiling and of the commanding figure of Romulus in the distance (both of which added a Plutarchian sense of order to an otherwise unruly Ovidian scene). On the south wall, those two types of looking converge on the body of Hersilia, her Venus-like appearance providing a focus for two integral aspects of male aristocratic self-fashioning – an overtly sexual demonstration of masculinity on the one hand and a notion of political virtue rooted in the classical tradition on the other.

Hersilia appears for a final time on the ceiling, where Thornhill's pictorialisation of the ancient myth concludes with her apotheosis (figs 153 and 154). In this final scene, the artist turned once more to Ovid, this time to the episode described in Book 14 of the poet's less-controversial *Metamorphoses* when, shortly after Romulus's death, Hersilia is taken to Olympus to be reunited with her husband.⁶⁹ As we have seen, an apotheosis or other Olympian cloudscape had been a dominant theme for this kind of grand-scale ceiling decoration. But this particular ceiling is striking, not least because the apotheosised character is female, which was less typical

⁶⁹ Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphoses in fifteen books. Translated by the most eminent hands*, book 14, ll. 829-851.

and departs both from Laguerre's painting in the hall and from the second of Thornhill's oil sketches for Thomas Foley, which focused on the earlier deification of Romulus. At Chatsworth, the ceiling marks the culmination of a scheme that began with a violent clash between the sexes on the north wall and ends in the glorification of female heroism, in the form of Hersilia, who takes centre stage in a harmonious reunion with Romulus. In this way, the upper saloon offered a powerful answer to the violent conclusion of the painted hall.

To draw towards a conclusion, we can return to the political life of the principal patron of Chatsworth. The Duke of Devonshire's relatively low profile during the 1690s, and his avoidance of the so-called 'rage of party' under Queen Anne, meant that his later political career has remained in the shadow of the historically more visible Junto, the predominantly Whig ministry led in the first instance by the Earl of Shrewsbury.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, he remained an archetypal country Whig and, as a Privy Councillor, a Knight of the Garter and Lord Steward of the Household, he continued to be a loyal confidant of the Protestant monarchy, committed to the political and religious principles that had defined his earlier public life and to the revolution to which he owed his status, his fortune and even his life.⁷¹

Devonshire was also something of a poet. Among a handful of poems to his name, two are of particular interest here – both addressed to Britain's female monarchs. They belong to a tradition of aristocratic self-fashioning literature and are distinguished less by artistic merit than by the way they present first Queen Mary and then Queen Anne as virtuous beauties, renowned for their combination of Protestant piety and feminine good looks.⁷² In the first of the two poems, an elegy for Mary written shortly after her death in 1694, the late queen is described by the Duke as a 'bright Nymph', whose mere appearance is said to have 'heal'd' a once-divided nation:

⁷⁰ The Junto was led, in the first instance, by Charles Talbot, 15th Earl (later 1st Duke) of Shrewsbury, Charles Montagu (later 1st Earl of Halifax), and Edward Russell (later 1st Earl of Orford and cousin of the executed William Russell); all of whom had conspired in the revolution.

⁷¹ Shortly after the coronation in 1689, Devonshire was made a Privy Councillor, Knight of the Garter and Lord Steward of the Household; he became a Duke in 1694 and, in 1706, (the year before his death) was involved in negotiating the Union of England and Scotland.

⁷² Devonshire's eulogistic poetry was published some years after the Duke's death in an anthology of aristocratic poetry that also included the pornographic verse of the Earl of Rochester. Both were integral and not incompatible aspects of male aristocratic culture. See John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester et al, *The Works of the Earls of Rochester, Roscommon, Dorset, the Duke of Devonshire, &c.*, London, 1721.

Long our divided State
 Hung in the Balance of a doubtful Fate,
 When one bright Nymph the gath'ring Clouds dispell'd,
 And all the Griefs of Albion heal'd:
 Here the united Land obey'd,
 No more to Jealousie inclin'd,
 Nor fearing Pow'r with so much Vertue join'd.
 She knew her Task, and nicely understood
 To what Intention Kings are made;
 Not for their own, but for their People's Good.⁷³

In a similar vein, Anne, the subject of the second poem, 'The Charms of Liberty', is 'a Queen by Heaven bestow'd, | To right the Injur'd, and subdue the Proud'.⁷⁴ Both poems are rich in the language of constitutional monarchy and aristocratic whiggery. Mary's greatest virtue was that she 'knew her task', which was to reject all notions of absolutism and rule for the 'People's Good'; while Anne is presented as the faithful and pious nemesis of French aggression, and as the protector of 'Liberty'. Like Mary, Anne's greatest virtue, according to the Duke, is not the result of the power invested in her as monarch, but her ability to inspire by her own pious example – specifically, in this poem, by persuading Parliament to secure funding for Marlborough's campaigns against Tory calls to end Britain's involvement in the costly war.

In praising the virtues of first Mary then Anne, Devonshire exploited the political potential of their femininity by eulogising Britain's monarchy in a clearly gendered way. Significantly, both King William and Prince George are conspicuously absent from the Duke's literary efforts. The legacy of the Glorious Revolution and the liberties it secured are in this way portrayed in the Duke's poetry as the result of a balanced partnership, a marriage even, between a feminised crown and a patriarchal landed aristocracy. That relationship finds a parallel in the encounter between the

⁷³ William Cavendish, 1st Duke of Devonshire, 'On the Death of the late Queen', appended to White Kennet's *Memoirs of the Family of Cavendish*, Dublin, 1737, ll. 1-10.

⁷⁴ William Cavendish, 1st Duke of Devonshire, 'The Charms of Liberty: a poem, in allusion to the Archbishop of Cambray's Telemachus', in Petronius Arbiter (Titus), *The works of T. Petronius Arbiter, in prose and verse*, London, 1710 (second edition), ll. 140-41. The Archbishop of Cambray's 'Telemachus' in the poem's long title refers to François Fénelon's tale of Ulysses's son, read throughout Europe as a criticism of the Louis XIV's style of government.

viewer and Thornhill's painting in the upper saloon. Both take as their subject an emphatically feminine kind of heroism, glorifying it as the agent of concord, and as the passive complement of an avowedly masculine kind of virtue.

The parallels between Thornhill's depiction of the story of the Sabine women and Devonshire's poetic deification of Mary and Anne can be taken a little further. The outcome of the Sabine myth centres on the dual role of Hersilia and her Sabine sisters as both the daughters and the wives of warring tribes – of two armies that eventually became reconciled, ensuring the future of the Roman republic, as a result of the women's actions. There are several intriguing parallels to be drawn between this ancient myth and early eighteenth-century non-radical efforts to defend the Glorious Revolution that focused on the dual identities of the Princesses Mary and Anne, who as daughters of the deposed James II *and* as wives of Protestant princes bridged an otherwise irreconcilable break in the succession. Such comparisons would have had a particular relevance for Devonshire – not least because during the Glorious Revolution itself, the Duke had personally escorted Princess (later Queen) Anne from London to Nottingham, and had subsequently become one of her closest political advisers.

It is possible, therefore, to conclude by suggesting that the painted surfaces of this room would have been understood as an idealised allegory of the political events and consequences of the Glorious Revolution, extending the political narrative of the west stairs; and that for the Duke and his political allies, its culmination on the ceiling represented an ideal union between a feminised monarchy and a patriarchal aristocracy. But decorative history painting is rarely so literal in its allusions, and any attempt to be so here would throw up some rather difficult anomalies: Princess Mary and Princess Anne were certainly not the victims of a violent attack in 1688. Nevertheless, when represented on the walls and ceiling of the upper saloon at Chatsworth, the founding myth of the Roman republic provided an auspicious classical precedent for the extraordinary sequence of events that had defined the Duke's adult public life. The previous half-century had seen the traditional ruling class to which he belonged undermined and, politically speaking, emasculated by the Restoration monarchy, provoking a decisive military solution that subsequently had to be incorporated into the cultural, as well as the political, life of the nation. The upper saloon, or Sabine Room as it is now more often known, provided a politicised, gendered model of conflict and resolution, alongside which these turbulent events

could be imagined and given a sense of historical order within the established realm of elite, classically oriented culture. In the process, Thornhill's scheme extended and helped to redefine the role of decorative history painting among Britain's country-house building elite.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Royal Hospital at Greenwich

The visual spectacle offered by the painted hall at the Royal Naval Hospital in Greenwich has changed little since Thornhill completed it nearly 300 years ago. From the colonnaded porch of the King William Building (fig. 155), the visitor enters an impressive antechamber, or vestibule, with a domed ceiling supported by a giant order of Composite columns and pilasters enriched with painted fluting and gilded capitals (fig. 156). On each of three sides of the chamber is a large grisaille tablet, with the names of the hospital's most generous benefactors painted in gold. Each tablet is flanked by a pair of winged figures and by two well-dressed 'Charity-Boys', painted as if carved in white marble. One of these boys, on the eastern wall, points up towards an arched window bay where there once stood a painted figure of Charity.¹ In the cupola, painted around the points of a compass that used to hang from the centre, are allegorical figures representing the four winds. Thus oriented, by the compass and by the hospital's charitable objectives, the visitor continues up a flight of steps into the much larger lower hall, where Thornhill's painted decoration centres on an elaborate posthumous glorification of the joint monarchs William and Mary (fig. 157).

The first printed explanation of the lower hall appeared in *The Lover*, one of Richard Steele's less well-known periodicals, on 11 May 1714. Despite Steele's claim that he had written his account from memory, having seen the hall only twice, it is a considered and programmatic description of Thornhill's allegory, most probably written in collaboration with the artist, who was a friend. Before embarking on his 'plain Account' of the painting, Steele was quick to acknowledge the difficulty of translating such 'a great and noble Design' on to the pages of his journal. 'The Regularity, Symmetry, Boldness and Prominence of the Figures are not to be described,' he suggested to his readers, 'nor is it in the Power of Words to raise too great an Idea of the Work'.² Nonetheless, his description of the central section of the ceiling (fig. 158), in which King William is shown deftly juggling the personified

¹ [James Thornhill], *An Explanation of the Painting in the Royal-Hospital at Greenwich*, by Sir James Thornhill, Greenwich, 1726, p. 8.

² *The Lover*, 11 May 1714. Reprinted in [Richard Steele], *The Lover. To which is added, The Reader*, London, 1715, p. 224. *The Lover* had a short run, from 25 February to 27 May 1714.

virtues of good government while stamping on the nation's nemesis (represented as a humiliated French king), is still the best that exists and thus worth quoting at length.

IN the middle of the Oval are represented King *William* and Queen *Mary*, sitting on a Throne under a great Pavilion or Purple Canopy, attended by the four Cardinal Vertues, as *Prudence*, *Temperance*, *Fortitude* and *Justice*.

OVER the Queen's Head is *Concord* with the *Fasces*, at her Feet two Doves, denoting mutual Concord and innocent Agreement, with *Cupid* holding the King's Scepter, while he is presenting *Peace* with the Lamb and Olive Branch, and *Liberty* expressed by the *Athenian* Cap, to *Europe* who laying her Crowns at his Feet, receives them with an Air of Respect and Gratitude. The King tramples Tyranny under his Feet, which is exprest by a *French* Personage, with his Leaden Crown falling off, his Chains, Yoke and Iron Sword broken to pieces, Cardinal's Cap, triple crown'd Mitres, &c. tumbling down. Just beneath is *Time* bringing *Truth* to Light, near which is a Figure of Architecture, holding a large Drawing of part of the Hospital with the Cupola, and pointing up to the Royal Founders, attended by the little *Genii* of her Art. Beneath her is *Wisdom* and *Heroick Virtue*, represented by *Pallas* and *Hercules*, destroying *Ambition*, *Envy*, *Covetousness*, *Detraction*, *Calumny*, with other Vices, which seem to fall to the Earth, the place of their more natural Abode.³

The remaining spaces, to the east and west of this central oval, are decorated with a large elliptical arch extending upwards from the pilasters of the supporting wall (figs 159 and 160). Under each arch, a balustrade is painted along the width of the ceiling to form a gallery, busy with figures. Here also are two of the most visually striking elements of the whole scheme: projecting from beneath the arch at both ends of the hall is the stern of a ship, near life-size and laden with trophies. A Latin inscription around the frieze dedicates the hospital to the nation's naval veterans and identifies Queen Mary as the hospital's principal benefactor.⁴ Finally, the eight tall

³ [Richard Steele], *The Lover. To which is added, The Reader*, pp. 225-26.

⁴ The inscription, translated by William Osmun in 'A Study of the Works of Sir James Thornhill', PhD thesis, University of London, 1950, p. 252, reads: 'By Royal piety, under the auspices of Mary, the Palace of Greenwich is dedicated to seamen needing help, so that they may dwell securely and be publicly maintained, who have watched over the public security, in the reign of William and Mary,

window bays along the north wall were originally filled with canvases depicting ‘the most social VIRTUES’.⁵ At the far end of the hall, half a dozen more steps lead the visitor through a proscenium arch (fig. 161) and into the smaller upper hall.

On the upper hall ceiling (fig. 162) is a double portrait of Queen Anne and Prince George of Denmark surrounded by a gilt frame and, in comparison with the lower hall, a more modest gathering of allegorical figures. Seated to the left is Hercules in his usual guise as Heroic Virtue; to the right is an undressed female later identified as ‘*Concord Conjugal*’.⁶ Prince George assumes an unusual prominence in this painting as Lord High Admiral (a role in which he was notoriously ineffectual), and it is to him as much as to the Queen that Neptune offers his trident, signalling the supremacy of the Royal Navy. The winged figures of Liberality, or Plenty, Victory and Piety (with her crown of flames), complete the group around the royal couple.⁷

The scheme concludes on the west wall of the upper hall with a glorification of Britain’s Hanoverian princes (fig. 163). George I is seated at the centre, with the Prince of Wales (later George II) and a young Prince Frederick to his left. They are accompanied by other members of the royal family, and by a further array of allegorical bodies – some descending from the sky, others assembling at the feet of the royal party. The theme of maritime power, so prominent elsewhere in the hall, continues on the right with a winged figure of Naval Victory holding a trident in one hand and, in the other, a scroll recording Britain’s most recent sea triumphs, the last of which was the British defeat of the Spanish fleet off the coast of Sicily in 1718.

Viewed in this sequential way, from the entrance to the west wall, Thornhill’s complex scheme seems a coherent and unified whole, representing no fewer than five successive monarchs (six including Prince Frederick, who died before his father). Important in creating this impression of pictorial and political unity is the chorus of Virtues and other personifications that appear at each stage of the scheme. These characters supply the recurring motifs – the cornucopias and laurel crowns, the scales

1694.’ For the Latin original, see appendix B, p. 14.

⁵ These figures were added some time after the painting in the lower hall had been completed, probably in 1717, and are now lost. They were: Humanity, Benignity, Goodness, Generosity, Mercy, Liberality, Magnanimity, and Hospitality. See [James Thornhill], *An Explanation of the Painting in the Royal-Hospital at Greenwich*, p. 14.

⁶ [James Thornhill], *An Explanation of the Painting in the Royal-Hospital at Greenwich*, p. 16.

⁷ Concord Conjugal, Liberality and Piety are included in a longer list of attributes identified in a preparatory drawing for the upper hall ceiling (now in the Huntingdon Library, inv. no. 63.52.257) under the heading ‘Vertues reciprocal to both Princes’.

and swords – that forge a continuous allegory of good government from one monarch to the next. The visual coherence of the scheme is reinforced by the non-figurative elements of the decoration: by the use of a single order for both the real and the *trompe-l'oeil* architecture throughout; by the uniform details of the painted mouldings, trophies and inscriptions in both the lower and upper halls; and not least by the soft architecture of the clouds, which roll across the two ceilings before tumbling down to earth on the west wall, allowing the illusion of a single pictorial space broken only by the supporting framework of the building. In this way, the scheme progresses without interruption from one painted surface to another – from a glorification of William and Mary on the lower hall ceiling to Queen Anne on the upper hall ceiling and finally to the Hanoverian princes on the far wall.

That is certainly the impression that was encouraged by a second description of the hall, first published to coincide with the completion of Thornhill's work in 1726. Incorporating redrafted elements of Steele's earlier essay with a detailed account of the vestibule and upper hall, *An Explanation of the Painting in the Royal Hospital at Greenwich* (appendix B) provided an official, inexpensive guide to the completed scheme, making the complex iconography of Thornhill's painting comprehensible to an ever-growing number of visitors – many of whom would have been encountering this type of sprawling allegory for the first time.⁸ At the same time, the *Explanation* exercised a degree of control over the viewer's experience, guiding its reader from one part of the hall to another, giving cause to dwell on some parts of the painting by discussing them at length while glossing over other details with a cursory '&c'. Most importantly, it encouraged the viewer to read the scheme in a particular order (roughly in the sequence in which it has been described here) and therefore to understand the whole as a seamless celebration of England's recent Protestant monarchs, united by the common themes of national prosperity and military success.

To better understand the way in which the *Explanation* presented the painted hall to its eighteenth-century viewers we can usefully turn to the set descriptions and stage directions for the contemporary theatre that began to be printed and sold to audiences around the same time. The programme for the first production of *Britannia*, for example, an English opera by John Frederick Lampe performed at Haymarket in

⁸ The official *Explanation* was sold at the entrance of the painted hall for sixpence and was probably written by, or at least with the co-operation of, the artist.

1732, included a comprehensive description of its elaborate stage, or 'Transparent Theatre', complete with a souvenir engraving (fig. 164). Designed by Thomas Lediard, the set was 'illuminated and adorn'd with a great number of emblems, mottoes, devices, and inscriptions, and embellish'd with machines, in a manner entirely new'. According to the programme, the purpose of Lediard's elaborate lighting and stage mechanics was twofold: 'This sort of Theatres [*sic*] has a double Use for at the same Time that they delight the Eye, the Emblems, Devices and Inscriptions, which are mostly borrow'd from the Ancients, not only divert, but instruct the Mind'.⁹ The common language of the *Explanation* and the theatre programme suggests that Thornhill's scheme was similarly intended to both entertain and educate the minds of its viewers.

Indeed, the accompanying libretto of *Britannia* points to the theatrical experience that awaited the visitor to Greenwich. In the first act of Lampe's opera, the characters of Discord and Faction attempt to draw Britannia (played as a nymph or goddess) into an unnecessary war. However, their plans are foiled by the repeated interventions of Concord, whereupon Britannia, the 'Impartial Umpire of all *Europe's* Fate', condemns her enemies 'to be for ever chain'd at the Foot of her Throne' (see fig. 165). The drama culminates with a festival in honour of Britannia and her monarch, George II, during which several Olympian gods descend on to the stage 'in a Machine of Clouds'.¹⁰ The official *Explanation* presented the painted hall at Greenwich as a comparable form of secular, patriotic entertainment that could be enjoyed by any visitor willing to pay a shilling at the entrance (the *Explanation* was an additional sixpence). The royal narrative of Thornhill's scheme, like a contemporary stage production, progresses uninterrupted scene by scene towards its finale – at which point the painted clouds also descend in honour of Britain's Hanoverian rulers.¹¹

⁹ [John F. Lampe and Thomas Lediard], *Britannia. An English Opera [...] with the Representation and Description of a Transparent Theatre*, London, 1732, prefatory argument.

¹⁰ [John F. Lampe and Thomas Lediard], *Britannia*, p. 14, prefatory argument and p. 31. The kind of stage machinery employed by Lediard had been introduced a century earlier by Inigo Jones, for the staging the court masques for Charles I.

¹¹ On a related note, the musicologist Barnaby Ralph has suggested an interesting comparison between the aesthetic thrust of Thornhill's painting in the lower hall at Greenwich and the rhetorical structure typical of Baroque musical composition, particularly the sonata. The 'argument' or 'oration' of the work, he suggests, follows an oratorical template that typically began with an introduction (*exordium*), moved on to a statement of facts (*narratio*), put forth the main positive points (*divisio*), and so on to a recap of the whole argument (*peroratio*). From 'The dual aesthetic in English music and art of the eighteenth century', paper given at the BSECS Annual Conference, St Hugh's College, Oxford, 3-5

However, if we reconsider the painted hall in the light of other evidence, including the minutes and accounts of the hospital's governing directors, the artist's preparatory work for different parts of the scheme, and a range of documents and debates concerning the early history of the hospital, a rather different story begins to emerge. For example, the minutes of the hospital's fabric committee reveal that the vestibule, the first part of the scheme to be encountered and the first to be described in the 1726 *Explanation*, was in fact the last to be painted, almost two decades after work in the lower hall had begun. The same records also reveal that the lower and upper halls, the two main components of the decoration, were distinct projects initiated by separate commissions under different circumstances (see fig. 166). Painting began in the lower hall in 1707, several years after the death of its main subjects, King William (who died in 1702) and Queen Mary (who died in 1694). It was completed by 1714, at which point the west wall was still pierced by a row of windows. Three years later, Thornhill was asked to extend the decoration into the upper hall. In the meantime, the death of both Queen Anne and of her appointed successor, the Electress Sophia of Hanover, had brought the German-speaking George I to the English throne – an event that could hardly have been imagined when work on the first phase of decoration began.¹² In other words, the appearance of political and pictorial unity suggested by the completed decoration and underlined by the official *Explanation* belies the more disjointed and unpredictable way in which the painted hall and the events emplotted on its walls and ceilings came about. By looking behind the surface of Thornhill's finished painting and looking separately at the constituent parts of the scheme, it will be possible to reveal some of the ideological 'machinery' that lay behind this most theatrical of Thornhill's productions. First, to discover why any thought was given to painting the hall in the first place, it is necessary to consider the earlier building history of the hospital.

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¹² The minutes of the hospital directors, responsible for the building and related works, are collected in the Admiralty Papers at the Public Record Office. The entries relating directly to Thornhill's work have been collected by William Osmun in 'A Study of the Works of Sir James Thornhill', esp. pp. 273-97. The chronology of the commission has been discussed more recently in relation to the building works, and usefully summarised, by John Bold in *Greenwich: an architectural history*, pp. 145-53 and 271.

‘In the View of all the World’

In 1728, Nicholas Hawksmoor remarked that the riverside site at Greenwich had been chosen for the hospital over Winchester and other unnamed places because it was ‘in the View of all the World [and] in the Sight of (the grand Emporium) *London*’.¹³ Located on a bend in the river, between the busy navy yards of Woolwich and Deptford, Greenwich had long been valued as a strategically important and visually impressive location. The prestigious royal history of the place dated back at least to the beginning of the sixteenth century, when Henry VII built the summer palace of Placentia in Greenwich as a rural alternative to Westminster.¹⁴ In the 1630s, Inigo Jones’s celebrated Queen’s House reaffirmed Greenwich’s royal status, updating it to suit the cosmopolitan tastes of the Stuart monarchy, and following the Restoration, Charles II appointed John Webb as the architect of a proposed new palace. However, only part of this was built before the project was abandoned in the 1670s, and for the next three decades it stood as a reminder of the thwarted ambitions of the Restoration monarchs. By the last quarter of the seventeenth century, Greenwich had become a rather ambiguous monument to the previous 200 years of royal patronage. Viewed from the river, Jones’s Queen’s House, partially obscured by the last remaining ruins of the red-brick Tudor palace, stood in stark contrast to the unfinished shell of Charles II’s palace, which then served as a preposterously grand gunpowder store. Though magnificent in parts, the site as a whole projected a flawed and disjointed image of royal grandeur.

The idea of transforming Webb’s half-built palace at Greenwich into a hospital for disabled and retired seamen was first mooted by James II in 1687.¹⁵ The Catholic king was well aware of the value of grand gestures of royal munificence. Following his accession in 1685, James had become an enthusiastic patron of Chelsea Hospital, one of several architectural projects left unfinished at his brother’s death.

¹³ Nicholas Hawksmoor, *Remarks on the founding and carrying on the buildings of the Royal Hospital at Greenwich*, London, 1728, p. 13.

¹⁴ For the early history of Greenwich, see Clive Aslet, *The Story of Greenwich*, London, 1999, esp. pp. 47-139.

¹⁵ H.M. Colvin et al, *The History of the King’s Works*, vol. 5, 1660-1782, London, 1976, p. 151. The architectural and institutional history of Greenwich Hospital is discussed most thoroughly by John Bold in *Greenwich: an architectural history of the Royal Hospital for Seamen and the Queen’s House*, New Haven and London, 2000, esp. pp. 95-136 and 271-72. See also Christine Stevenson, *Medicine and Magnificence*, New Haven and London, 2000, esp. pp. 71-84.

And like any Briton who had travelled to France in recent years, he cannot have failed to notice the political as well as the practical worth to his cousin, Louis XIV, of the Hôtel des Invalides, the magnificent military hospital in the centre of Paris. Both Chelsea and Les Invalides were later to provide important architectural and institutional models for Greenwich, but by the time work on the new hospital began, barely a decade later, James had been dethroned and the royal site was destined to become the showpiece of a new regime.¹⁶ When, in 1695, the necessary lands and initial funds were formally granted and a commission appointed to oversee the work, King William backdated the bequest so as to include his wife, the recently deceased Queen Mary, on the royal warrant.

As the building progressed in the decades that followed, Mary's reputation as the hospital's principal founder grew considerably, and was literally spelt out in the aforementioned inscription that Thornhill painted in the entablature of the lower hall, which declared that the hospital had been founded 'By Royal piety, under the auspices of Mary'.¹⁷ According to Nicholas Hawksmoor, writing more than thirty years after the Queen's death, Mary 'had several times honour'd *Greenwich* with her personal Views of the Building erected by King *Charles* II as Part of his Palace, and that built by Mr *Inigo Jones*, called the Queen's House'. Furthermore, she had been intent that both buildings should be preserved during any future development of the site, and that an open approach from the river up to the Queen's House be created so that Jones's building could be used as a royal villa 'for her own Retirement, or from whence Embassadors, or public Ministers might make their Entry into LONDON'. In Hawksmoor's opinion, Mary had been not only sensible of the economics of architecture, but also mindful of the political imprudence of any heavy-handed demolition of projects associated with her royal predecessors: noting the Queen's 'absolute Determination' to protect the palace begun by her uncle, he recalled her opinion that the unfinished building 'was both beautiful and durable, and even Proof against so scandalous a Fate, as that of Demolition by sacrilegious Hands'.¹⁸

¹⁶ Comparisons between Greenwich and other military institutions were made from the outset. In 1695, an abridged translation of Le Jeune de Boulencourt's *Description générale de l'Hotel Royal des Invalides* (Paris, 1683) was published in London as *A Pattern of a well-constituted and well-governed hospital*. The English edition was dedicated to William III and coincided with the foundation of the new hospital at Greenwich.

¹⁷ Translation by William Osmun, see note 4 above.

¹⁸ Nicholas Hawksmoor, *Remarks on the founding and carrying on the buildings of the Royal Hospital at Greenwich*, pp. 12-13.

The earliest surviving plans for the naval hospital, thought to have been submitted by Wren in 1695, show little regard for the late Queen's intentions for the site. The first plan proposed the demolition of Webb's unfinished building, replacing it with an entirely new complex to the east of the current site.¹⁹ A second proposal (see figs 167 and 168) retained the essence of Webb's original plans for the site and recalled Wren's earlier designs for Charles II's palace at Winchester. It incorporated the existing block into a long three-sided courtyard that stretched some 200 yards from the riverbank up to a large domed building, and in doing so obscured any view or access from the Queen's House to the river.

However, the design eventually agreed upon by Wren and the hospital commissioners moved away from the absolutist rhetoric of the earlier Stuart plans for Greenwich and Winchester, which, like Les Invalides, had focused on a single monolithic dome as an architectural expression of the supreme authority assumed by their royal patron. The result was a configuration that apparently conformed to Mary's vision for the site. Wren's final design for the hospital (fig. 169) comprised four large courtyard buildings arranged symmetrically around an open processional way that reached from the Queen's House down to the Thames. Webb's earlier palace block was incorporated into the north-west building and was answered by a near-identical structure to the east. Behind these, Wren added a pair of larger buildings, each carrying a smaller dome giving the hospital its distinctive skyline.

Hawksmoor's suggestion that Mary's detailed vision of Greenwich 'naturally drew on the Disposition of the Buildings, as they are now placed and situated' implied that the new hospital's most distinguishing architectural features – its palatial façade, twin domes and open central axis – had been inspired by the Queen's desire to accommodate the architectural history of the site within any new development.²⁰ In this way, Hawksmoor's text retrospectively forged a link between the Queen's 'natural' inclination towards the royal site on the one hand and the emergence of an alternative to the architectural language of absolutism on the other – a connection that

¹⁹ This plan is in the collection of All Souls College, Oxford, and is illustrated in John Bold, *Greenwich: an architectural history*, p. 101, fig. 137. The chronology and possible sources of Wren's designs have been discussed by John Summerson in *Architecture in Britain 1530-1830*, New Haven and London, 1993, pp. 176-79 and 221-32; and by John Bold (pp. 98-104).

²⁰ Nicholas Hawksmoor, *Remarks on the founding and carrying on the buildings of the Royal Hospital at Greenwich*, p. 14.

sought to associate the fabric of the new hospital, its design and its aims with the innate virtues of one of its founding monarchs.

The hospital that was to be housed in Wren's buildings was built on the premises of benevolence and patriotism. The royal warrant inaugurating the hospital in 1695 summarised the objectives of the project and set out a patriotic argument that would be repeated at every stage during its construction. Nothing, it stated, was more likely to enhance the nation's honourable naval tradition, or encourage ever-greater numbers to embark on the always difficult and often very short life at sea,

than the making some competent Provision, That Seamen, who by Age, Wounds, or any other Accidents shall become disabled for the Service at Sea, and shall not be in a Condition to maintain themselves [...] may be supported at the publick Charge; and that the Children of such disabled Seamen as shall happen to be Slain in His Majesties Service, may, in some reasonable manner be provided for and Educated'.²¹

Britain's dominion of the seas required a constant supply of motivated and obedient seamen to serve the nation's royal and merchant fleets, and everyone agreed that a willing crew was more effective than a pressed one. One interested onlooker, Joseph Gander, put the case rather more directly when pressing for the speedy completion of the hospital nearly a decade later: 'To Provide for the *Sick and Wounded*,' he wrote, 'is to Push 'em *forward* to venture their Lives for the Country'.²²

Gander's remarks appeared at the end of a longer treatise celebrating the maritime supremacy of the Royal Navy under the 'Empress of the sea', Queen Anne. As well as reiterating the benefits to the nation of a hospital dedicated to the welfare of naval veterans, he also recognised the strategic importance of the site, anticipating Hawksmoor's later emphasis on its visual prominence. Gander clearly understood that the success of the project depended as much on the outward display of munificence, and on the buildings as an architectural spectacle, as it did on any comfort the hospital might one day provide for England's old sailors:

²¹ *Commission for Greenwich Hospital (1695)*, cited in Joseph Gander, *The Glory of Her Sacred Majesty Queen Anne [...] with some remarks on the Royal Hospital at Greenwich*, pp. 119-22.

²² Joseph Gander, *The Glory of Her Sacred Majesty Queen Anne, in the Royal Navy, and her absolute sovereignty as Empress of the sea, asserted and vindicated: with some remarks on the Royal Hospital at Greenwich*, London, 1703, dedication.

The Royal Hospital of *Greenwich* being Situated on the River *Thames* (the most Glorious Silver Stream under Heaven) and in the View of all Foreigners that Navigate the River up to *London*, so well as our own Natives. It must undoubtedly highly aggrandize Her Majesty, and the nation if it were Finished and Endowed, to the great Rejoycing of the Seamen, and Astonishment of our Enemies, to see so Glorious a Pile of Building Compleated and Endowed, notwithstanding the great Expençe of the War. ²³

These enthusiastic remarks on the public function of architecture were followed by a carefully phrased warning about the dangers of allowing such a high-profile project to fall into neglect: ‘On the other Hand,’ Gander continued, ‘if it be not done, it will be a Discouragement to the Seamen, and a Reflection to the Publick’.

By 1703, the year these observations appeared in print, it had become evident that the hospital was in financial trouble. The promised £2,000 a year from the royal chest had failed to materialise and, with the recommencement of war with France the previous year, the monthly levy on sailors’ wages, previously the hospital’s only reliable source of funding, had all but disappeared. The resulting shortfall was noted by John Evelyn who, retiring as the hospital’s treasurer in the same year, calculated that the half-built institution needed a colossal (and very precise) £128,384 in order to be completed – in addition to nearly £90,000 that had already been spent.²⁴ What is more, the detrimental effect of this shortage of funds was plain for all to see. When work on the hospital began in 1696, Wren had taken the unusual step of preparing the foundations for the entire site before concentrating on building upwards. By fixing the ‘footprint’ of the building from the outset, he discouraged any later alterations to his master plan – and indeed, his design remained more or less intact, despite the intervention of at least four other surveyors before the building was finally completed. But another, less propitious consequence of the architect’s forethought was that

²³ Joseph Gander, *The Glory of Her Sacred Majesty Queen Anne [...] with some remarks on the Royal Hospital at Greenwich*, p. 122.

²⁴ From the treasurer’s accounts, cited in John Bold, *Greenwich: an architectural history*, p. 121. Bold notes that more than three quarters of the £89,879 obtained for the hospital to August 1703 had been raised through the 6d levy on sailors’ wages. For Evelyn’s earlier involvement in the planning of Charles II’s palace at Greenwich, see H.M. Colvin et al, *The History of the King’s Works*, vol. 5, p. 140. For a list of initial sources of funding for the hospital, see: PRO ADM 67 vol. 1, p. 8 (31 January 1695/6).

substantial areas of the site, while started, remained visibly undeveloped for several years. A modern projection of the site, made for John Bold's recent study of Greenwich and based on a close reading of the hospital accounts, shows how far the building had progressed by the time financial troubles forced work to a temporary halt at the end of the decade (fig. 170).

As both the royal warrant of 1695 and Gander's writings make clear, the completion of the hospital was seen as vital to the future success of Britain as a maritime and trading nation. Ironically, with the recommencement of war, the building site on the bank of the Thames became the focus of widespread public fears over the future sustainability of Britain's royal and merchant fleets and everything that depended on them.²⁵ The problem of bankrolling a massive 40,000-strong navy prompted a wave of proposals for ensuring Britain's dominion of the seas, some making extravagant claims for their public worth. For example, the author of *The Path-Way to Peace and Profit*, published in 1693/4, promised to save the navy at least £100,000 a year by increasing the productivity of the naval dockyards, in which, as a shipwright, he confessed a considerable interest.²⁶ Other writers focused their attention on funding the building work at Greenwich. Gander's remarks prefaced his own proposal to use revenue from Britain's wool industry to meet the construction costs (and indeed, it seems that it was the renewal of hostilities with France that triggered his interest in the hospital).²⁷ Rival schemes ranged from traditional lotteries and taxes of one sort or another (including an early form of vehicle tax) to an unlikely proposal for a navy-wide swear box which, despite its fundraising potential, would have made a somewhat inappropriate contribution to the hospital's reputation.²⁸ In the

²⁵ The size of the Royal Navy at the beginning of the eighteenth century is discussed by John Brewer, in *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783*, Cambridge, MA, 1990, esp. pp. 29-31.

²⁶ George Everett, *The Path-Way to Peace and Profit*, London, 1693/4. Everett, a Deptford shipwright, proposed making such huge savings through a series of harsh labour reforms.

²⁷ The commercial bias revealed in the long title of Gander's treatise is significant: *The Glory of Her Sacred Majesty Queen Anne in the Royal Navy and her absolute sovereignty as empress of the sea asserted and vindicated: also a treatise of navigation and commerce: with some remarks on the Royal Hospital at Greenwich, and improving the woollen manufactory*. Four years earlier he had published *A vindication of a national-fishery* (London, 1699), 'wherein is asserted that the glory, wealth, strength, safety and happiness of this kingdom [...] doth depend (under God) upon a national-fishery'.

²⁸ See, for example: John Dennis, *An Essay on the Navy*, London, 1702, esp. pp. 51-53; Thomas Hoskins, *A Proposal for a Fund for Greenwich-Hospital and Registered Seamen*, n.d.; J. W.'s *proposals for Greenwich Hospital*, [London, 1700]; *The Case of the poor Sailors of the English-Navy, in respect to their Hospital at Greenwich*, [London, 1705]; and *The charitable adventure, for the benefit of Greenwich Hospital*, London, 1720.

event, none of these entrepreneurial schemes was adopted. However, they all emphasised the complex interdependence of Britain's naval strength and what Hawksmoor described as the nation's 'extended Commerce abroad', as well as, indicating the unprecedented level of public interest that surrounded the hospital and the weight of expectation that rested on its completion.

Artists, too, were quick to seize upon the iconic potential of the new hospital, and images of the building, whether in the background of busy river scenes or incorporated into a view from Greenwich Park, became standard topographical subjects for landscape painters and printmakers of the eighteenth-century. Two very different paintings, both of which have been attributed to the Dutch painter Jan Griffier the elder, demonstrate how the visual arts engaged with and helped to shape public perceptions of the site.

The first, a panorama of Greenwich with the City of London in the distance, painted around 1705 (figs 171 and 172), is one of a handful of contemporary paintings to show the building in its unfinished state.²⁹ Far more than simply documenting the construction progress, this painting locates the hospital at the centre of an ideological landscape: the building is surrounded by cultivated parkland and pictured next to the Thames, busy with traffic on its way to and from the capital, which itself is marked by the new drum and dome of St Paul's, clearly visible at the centre of the composition. The painting is suggestive of the aggrandising prospect imagined by Joseph Gander a few years earlier, when he pictured the hospital beside 'the most Glorious Silver Stream under Heaven'. But like Gander's verbal sketch, Griffier's painting also points to the potential dangers of such a high-profile building site. His representation of the unfinished (and worse, apparently deserted) hospital buildings threatens to undermine the ordered, political landscape in which the structure is shown – articulating, even more directly than the mental images conjured by contemporary pamphleteers, the fear that Greenwich would become 'a Discouragement to the Seamen, and a Reflection to the Publick'. To contemporary travellers and would-be sailors observing the building site from the river or surrounding park, the semi-clad blocks of the Queen Anne Building, the exposed foundations of what would one day become the Queen Mary Building and the roofless colonnade of the King William Building, must have looked more like a neglected ruin than the intended showpiece of a victorious and

²⁹ This painting is illustrated, in its cleaned and cropped state, by John Bold in *Greenwich: an architectural history*, p. 133, fig. 179.

benevolent nation. It would not have helped that Griffier was better known in England as a painter of classical architectural ruins.

The second image (fig. 173), from around 1712, provides a more optimistic prospect, with the new hospital and the Queen's House beyond providing a suitably grand backdrop for a royal disembarkation in the foreground.³⁰ However, this painting is as much an exercise in concealment as it is a display of royal magnificence and munificence. It is not by accident that only half of the hospital is visible: when the painting was made, the east side of the site had barely raised above the level of the foundations, which had been laid some fifteen years previously. Torn between a desire for topographical accuracy and the need to provide a stately setting for the royal party on the water, the artist obscured the still-unfinished eastern ranges behind the billowing sails and gun smoke of a royal yacht. In doing so, this painting, more diplomatic than the first, attempted to veil wider contemporary concerns, not only over the slow progress of the hospital, but over the future sustainability of the navy.

The evidence examined so far suggests that the image of the hospital portrayed to the public, in both word and picture, was a fragile one. Tempering the widespread enthusiasm for the project was a growing concern that the site would become a negative icon in the view not only of locals and sailors, but of the country's enemies.³¹ Given these circumstances, it is perhaps no surprise that, in 1699, the fabric committee published two engravings of the hospital: a bird's-eye by Jan Kip and a detailed plan of the site. The likely revenue from the subscription sales of these prints was negligible – of far greater value was the chance to project a more positive image of the hospital as it was 'designed and advancing', in the words of those responsible.³² A third print, a perspective prepared by Simon Gribelin (fig. 174), showed what would later become known as the William and Mary buildings capped with a pair of simpler, less flattering domes to those that were eventually built. This

³⁰ John Bold convincingly proposes 1712 as the latest probable date for this painting. At the end of that year the red brick pavilion, visible immediately to the west of the King Charles building, was demolished and rebuilt in stone. See John Bold, *Greenwich: an architectural history*, p. 113, fig. 151.

³¹ Tellingly, Hawksmoor (in his *Remarks*, p. 21) recalled that in 1702, the House of Commons appointed a committee to assess the progress of the hospital following a complaint that the project was 'in a very bad Condition'. The implications of the building site for Britain's enemies are suggested by another painting of the unfinished hospital, made by Jean Rigaud for Louis XIV around 1710.

³² 100 copies of the perspective and plan were published in 1699 (in June and September respectively). See *Wren Society*, vol. 6, pp. 39-41; and Christine Stevenson, *Medicine and Magnificence: British hospital and asylum architecture, 1660-1815*, pp. 76-77.

print was never issued, probably for that very reason, but it makes a notable contrast to Griffier's more candid views.

In an interesting discussion of these prints, Christine Stevenson has observed how, once published, Kip's engravings prompted a number of pirated images of the hospital. In 1708, in an effort to retain some control over the public image of the project, the commissioners announced in the *London Gazette* that another 'true and perfect design' was in preparation.³³ In the meantime, Hawksmoor, in his capacity as Clerk of the Works, had commissioned an impressive wooden model of the complex. Made to Wren's specifications, the model went further than the engravings, giving a three-dimensional view of the whole site,³⁴ At the same time, the fabric committee ordered that a cabin be prepared on the site for a public exhibition – a showcase that presumably included both the wooden model, Kip's perspective and the engraved plan, all of which encouraged visitors to look beyond the building site outside and imagine the hospital as it would one day be.

Another image of the building, an annotated plan prepared around 1701 by Nicholas Hawksmoor (fig. 175), is equally revealing. The plan itself is fairly minimal, showing little more than the outer walls of the hospital's component buildings and the principal entrances into the compound, all of which are identified by a key on the upper left of the page. John Webb's earlier palace block is renamed the 'King Charles 2d' building after its original patron, and facing it is a near-identical structure, the Princess (later Queen) Anne building, designated for widows and orphans. Adjoining these to the south are the larger courtyards of the King William and Queen Mary buildings, housing a hall and chapel respectively in their northern ranges. A more detailed explanation to the right reveals the scale of the project that had been undertaken by subdividing the site into around 50 individual wards, each accommodating between 12 and 72 pensioners – in total, outlining provision for more than 2,000 pensioners (several times the capacity of Chelsea). More than a sketch, it is likely that this drawing was made for presentation of some kind, possibly as an explanation of the wooden model that Hawksmoor had acquired some months before.

³³ See Christine Stevenson, *Medicine and Magnificence: British hospital and asylum architecture, 1660-1815*, esp. pp. 76-79.

³⁴ Hawksmoor was paid £57 for obtaining three models: one of the hospital (now in the collection of the National Maritime Museum, London) and two of surrounding buildings. See *Wren Society*, vol. 6, pp. 39-41; John Wilton-Ely, 'Wren, Hawksmoor and the Architectural Model' in John Bold and Edward Chaney (eds), *English Architecture: Public and Private*, London and Rio Grande, 1993, esp. pp. 157-58; and John Bold, *Greenwich: an architectural history*, pp. 104 and 113-16.

It is not the number or even the size of the various buildings and wards that is most interesting here, but the names they are given, and the relationship between the ground plan and its accompanying text. The individual wards of the hospital were named in various ways associated with each of the four monarchs that gave their name to the buildings. Thus, among the sixteen wards of the King Charles building we find the ship that had carried the king back to England in 1660, the 'Royall Charles', commemorated alongside 'Restauration' and 'Monke' (after the general credited with bringing about the king's 'Happy Return' – the name of another ward). These stood alongside the eight larger wards of King William – a building that resonated with such Protestant slogans as 'The Torbay' (commemorating the place of William's landing in 1688), 'The Boyne' and 'La Hogue'. The named wards of the Princess Anne and Queen Mary buildings follow a similar patriotic logic.³⁵

As interpreted here by Hawksmoor, Wren's master plan provided a structure – an architectural 'plot' – onto which England's recent political history, from the Restoration of Charles II to the most recent naval and land battles of William's reign, could be projected. The organisation of the site into named buildings and wards, or 'courts' and 'galleries', was a highly selective, ideological exercise, defined as much by its omissions as by what is included. Notably, the reign and religion of James II finds no place in the Protestant history of military and monarchical success that begins to take shape on Hawksmoor's page. The result is a history in which the joint monarchy of William and Mary is accommodated by the symmetry and order of the hospital's architecture, and where the Restoration and the Glorious Revolution are given a reciprocity within a distinctive political narrative. Finally, by naming the various wards, Hawksmoor's drawing allowed visitors to imagine the hospital as a working institution, pre-empting the completion of the actual building by several decades.

This section has been concerned with the visibility of Greenwich during the earliest stages of the hospital's construction, and with some of the ways its directors responded to public perceptions of the site as an incomplete, even counter-productive

³⁵ The names of all the wards included in Hawksmoor's 1701 plan are listed in John Bold, *Greenwich: an architectural history*, appendix 1, pp. 268-69 (see also pp. 107-08). Many of the names were also assigned to ships in the royal fleet. Within a few years the names of some wards had been changed to incorporate the nation's most recent military triumphs. For example, 'The Torbay' and 'La Hogue' become 'Ramilies' and 'Marlborough' in Hawksmoor's later *Remarks* (p.20). A century later ward names included 'Hardy', 'Nelson' and 'Rodney'.

architectural symbol. In particular, the fabric committee attempted to influence those perceptions by encouraging people to visit the site and by employing various forms of display and representation to promote an image of the hospital as an institution that was at least on the way to completion. The same concern informed the commissioners decision, in 1703, to admit the first residents to the King Charles Building, long before any other part of the hospital was inhabitable.³⁶ These different visual strategies, including the sight of the uniformed pensioners themselves, can be understood, in part, as a response to an unregulated and potentially undermining body of information and opinion about the hospital that was available to the viewing and reading public. They were joined, within a short time, by the more substantial decision to divert resources away from the slow and costly building in order to decorate part of the interior.

In April 1704 Queen Anne issued a warrant appointing (or, in most cases, reappointing) a general court of commissioners to bring the hospital to completion. Headed by the royal consort, Prince George of Denmark, the commission included an impressive array of courtiers, clergy and civic dignitaries. Among the most prominent were Sidney, 1st Earl of Godolphin, and John, 1st Duke of Marlborough, two of the most powerful men in England at the time. They were joined by other leading statesmen and higher clergy, including Thomas Tenison, Archbishop of Canterbury and Henry Compton, the influential Bishop of London – as well as by senior representatives of the City and the judiciary. Of the 120 or so named commissioners, twenty-five were made directors and charged with the day-to-day management of the works and with ‘all other Matters and Things whatsoever relating to the Building, Carrying on, and Finishing of the said Hospital’.³⁷ The preamble to the warrant reiterated the usual patriotic argument for the hospital and, significantly, acknowledged the need for public charity by giving specific instructions to the commissioners to encourage and administer the gifts and endowments from anyone willing to ‘contribute to the Advancing so Charitable a design’.³⁸ It was this standing committee, headed by Christopher Wren, that in 1705 instructed Mr Dogood, a plasterer, to prepare the hall ceiling ‘after the best manner fit for painting’. Two years

³⁶ PRO ADM 67/3 f. 12 (25 November 1703).

³⁷ *Her Majesty's Commission for Greenwich Hospital, for Seamen. April 8 1704*, London, 1704, p. 11. The hospital directors replaced the role of the fabric committee appointed by William in 1695.

³⁸ *Her Majesty's Commission for Greenwich Hospital*, pp. 14-15.

later, on 12 June 1707, Hawksmoor was asked to erect scaffolding in the lower hall for ‘the painter’, presumably referring to Thornhill.³⁹

Two figures stand out as particularly important in the commissioners’ decision to employ Thornhill at Greenwich. Immediately before he began working at the hospital, the artist had been employed by the Duke of Devonshire, in the most important undertaking of his career so far at Chatsworth (the subject of chapter three). The Duke’s death in August 1707, before painting in the lower hall had begun, does not preclude his likely role in the earlier stages of the Greenwich commission. Indeed, it is inconceivable that the hospital directors would not have sought the recommendation of their fellow commissioner, one of the country’s most prolific and discerning patrons, before entrusting such a high profile project to the otherwise little-known English painter. The second figure is James Bateman, a senior alderman and founding director of the Bank of England. Bateman was, according to Steele, ‘the first Proposer, and the first Benefactor’ of the ceiling.⁴⁰ When Bateman became lord mayor in 1716, Thornhill prepared a design for the staircase of his London residence. Bateman’s role in the commission, and Thornhill’s debt to him, is further suggested in one of two unexecuted designs for the ends of the lower hall ceiling, now in the collection of the National Maritime Museum. In this drawing, Bateman appears as ‘Merchandize’ alongside several other contemporary figures, each symbolising one of the professions, including Christopher Wren as ‘Surveying’, Nicholas Hawksmoor as ‘Archit[ecture]’, and Thornhill himself as ‘Painting’.⁴¹ Several of the other hospital commissioners, including the Dukes of Marlborough and Montagu, would also become patrons of Thornhill. Among those commissioners who also sat as directors, with immediate responsibility for commissioning the painted hall, were Sir Francis Child, one of the aldermen for whom Thornhill decorated the Council Chamber in the 1720s, and William Draper, treasurer of the hospital after 1703, whose seat at Addiscombe House in Surrey Thornhill also decorated.⁴²

³⁹ PRO ADM 67 vol.3. A ceiling ‘fit for painting’ was specified as one plastered ‘with kids hair, well trowled and floated’.

⁴⁰ Richard Steele, *The Lover. To which is added, The Reader*, London, 1715, p. 229.

⁴¹ National Maritime Museum PAH 3345. Thornhill’s design for Bateman’s ceiling survives in the British Museum.

⁴² For the Council Chamber decoration, see chapter one of this thesis. For Addiscombe House, see Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England 1537-1837*, vol. 1, p. 266. Thornhill’s association with another of the Greenwich commissioners, the Earl of Godolphin, is recorded in a rather different way, in the group portrait commissioned by Andrew Quicke around 1710 (see fig. 2).

The artist's actual name first appeared in the official records on 17 July 1707, when he was asked to prepare the ceiling, by priming it himself as soon as the scaffolding was ready, and to 'make such Alterations in his designe, in inserting what more he can relating to maritime affairs, till the same shall be approved by the Board'.⁴³ It is clear from the commissioners' first recorded instructions to Thornhill that there had already been several meetings with the artist, and that a preliminary design had been agreed. As Edward Croft-Murray has suggested, that design was probably the oil sketch of the central oval, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 176).⁴⁴ One important detail of this sketch deserves a special mention. Just below the royal couple is a large drawing of the King William Building, supported by the female figure of Architecture who gestures towards the king with her left hand while pointing to the building named in his honour with her right. Like Griffier's paintings, the drawing offers a partial view of the hospital, providing a subtle reminder to the hall's early visitors that another, equal part had still to be built. In the final painting (see fig. 158), Thornhill added a putto at the bottom of the drawing. The infant's task was clear: to cajole the visitor into following the example of the hospital's royal founders by contributing towards its completion.

'Maritime affairs'

In July 1717, Thornhill petitioned the hospital directors for what money he was still owed for his work in the lower hall at Greenwich, which had been finished for at least three years. Before agreeing a figure, the directors instructed Hawksmoor and John James to investigate the cost of other painted schemes around the country. Among those identified as suitable comparisons were Thornhill's own recently completed decoration at Blenheim, Robert Streeter's earlier painting on the ceiling of the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford, and Verrio's royal commissions at Windsor and Hampton Court. Thornhill himself was rather more ambitious, adding Rubens's work

For a detailed discussion of this painting see David H. Solkin, *Painting for Money: the visual arts and the public sphere in eighteenth-century England*, pp. 40-47.

⁴³ PRO ADM 67 vol. 3, p. 223, cited by Edward Croft-Murray in *Decorative Painting in England 1537-1837*, vol. 1, p. 71.

⁴⁴ See Edward Croft-Murray in *Decorative Painting in England 1537-1837*, vol. 1, p. 71.

at the Banqueting House to his own list, which he submitted to the same board of directors the following month.⁴⁵

The artist's inclusion of the Banqueting House was not wholly unjustified. After all, the type of royal panegyric Thornhill painted on the ceiling at Greenwich had been established in England by Rubens on the Whitehall ceiling nearly a century before. Moreover, it was a scheme that Thornhill knew well and referred to often, not least of all in his early designs for Greenwich.⁴⁶ However, in terms of subject matter and style, both Thornhill and his employers would have agreed that there was a more immediate precedent for the artist's work in the lower hall: Verrio's painting on the ceiling of St George's Hall at Windsor Castle.

An initial comparison between Charles Wild's early nineteenth-century watercolour of St George's Hall, made for W.H. Pyne's *Royal Residences* (fig 177), and Thornhill's painting in the lower hall at Greenwich (see fig. 157) reveals a strong affinity between the two painted rooms – a likeness prompted, first and foremost, by the palatial scale of the hall at Greenwich and the architectural similarity between the two interiors. Both halls presented their respective decorators with an expansive area of uninterrupted plaster of more or less equal length (although at 50 feet, the hall at Greenwich is considerably wider). Verrio's use of feigned architecture to divide the scheme into three distinct sections, with a large oval at the centre, proved an equally useful way of articulating the ceiling at Greenwich, where Thornhill projected an open pavilion on an even grander scale.

Created as part of Hugh May's extensive reshaping of Windsor for Charles II and decorated in the early 1680s, St George's Hall, together with the adjacent chapel, formed the climax of a decorative programme that reached across no fewer than twenty-five painted rooms and staircases, occupying Verrio and his team for more than a decade from the mid-1670s to the end of Charles's reign. Along with most of the other painted rooms at Windsor, the hall was demolished in the 1820s during Jeffry Wyattville's remodelling of the castle for George IV. As a result, knowledge of

⁴⁵ See Edward Croft-Murray *Decorative Painting in England 1537-1837*, vol. 1, p. 75. Other schemes chosen by the commissioners included work by Sebastiano Ricci at Burlington House and by the French painters Charles de Lafosse, Jacques Parmentier and Jacques Rousseau at Montague House.

⁴⁶ For example, as Edward Croft-Murray observed in his notes, cited in the British Museum Prints and Drawings database (unpublished), the central figure in a preliminary sketch for the lower hall in the artist's sketchbook (f. 66 v) is clearly modelled on the figure of James I in *The Unification of Scotland and England* panel at the Banqueting House. The same sketch also includes the inscription 'March 6th 1706/7', the date of the Act of Union between the two nations, suggesting a further parallel with the Whitehall painting.

Verrio's expansive scheme has depended on a handful of later drawings and contemporary descriptions. However, in an important essay that brings this evidence together for the first time, along with a recently rediscovered fragment of the ceiling, Katherine Gibson has provided a detailed explanation of the elaborate allegory of monarchical power that was once played out on the walls and ceiling of St George's Hall.⁴⁷ As its name suggests, the hall associated the Stuart king with England's patron saint and, more specifically, with the Order of the Garter, both of which were commemorated on the painted walls.⁴⁸ The iconography of the royal Order continued on the ceiling, where the painted octagonal moulding at either end framed a giant star and garter surrounded by allegorical figures. In the central oval, Verrio depicted the apotheosis of Charles II, showing the king in his garter robes in front of a rainbow that spanned the entire width of the ceiling. This colourful motif, Gibson suggests, not only alluded to Charles's judicial supremacy, but also pointed to the Christ-like status assumed by the Stuart monarchs.⁴⁹ In this, the hall was in keeping with the rest of Verrio's decoration at Windsor, in which the king was portrayed in a variety of messianic roles, each room reinforcing the divine assumptions of the Restoration monarchy.⁵⁰

Using a later drawing of the St George's ceiling by John Francis Rigaud (fig. 178) and the rediscovered painted head of the king (fig. 179), the only piece of Verrio's scheme to survive, Gibson also draws attention to the number and significance of hats, helmets and crowns that encircled the body of Charles II, identifying each piece as a clearly legible marker of his monarchical ambitions. At the centre, the King himself wears a garland of laurel, while to his right, the winged figure of Victory presents the helmet of Mars as a putti struggles with the ostrich-

⁴⁷ Katharine Gibson, 'The decoration of St. George's Hall, Windsor, for Charles II: "too resplendent bright for subjects' eyes"', *Apollo*, vol. 147, no. 435 (May 1998), pp. 30-40.

⁴⁸ The north wall depicted the Black Prince in a triumphal procession towards Edward III, the founder of the Order. Other emblematic. In 1698 Celia Feinnes recorded a 'large picture of St George encountering the Dragon' on the upper (east) wall. Other emblems of the Order decorated the windows along the west wall. See Katharine Gibson, 'The decoration of St. George's Hall, Windsor, for Charles II', p. 36.

⁴⁹ Katharine Gibson, 'The decoration of St. George's Hall, Windsor, for Charles II', pp. 34-35. Gibson suggests the rainbow shows Charles in the position of *Giuditio* (Justice) in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologica* and alludes to the usual portrayal of Christ the Judge.

⁵⁰ The prototype for Verrio's work at Windsor survives in one of the very first images that the artist produced for his royal patron, an easel painting of the *Sea Triumph of Charles II*, still in the Royal Collection. For an interesting discussion of the decorated state apartments at Windsor, see Andrea MacKean, 'The Shaping of Identity in Public Places: an examination of subjective identification in British decorated interiors, 1630-1800', PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 1999, esp. pp. 119-30.

plumed hat of the Order of the Garter. In the upper part of the oval, two female figures hold the St Edward's crown, made for Charles's coronation in 1661. Meanwhile, at his feet, the monarch receives the crowns of the three kingdoms of the British Isles. More striking than these latter crowns, however, are the three bare-breasted women that hold them. The inclusion of these personifications so close to the King points to a significant aspect of Charles's royal identity that imagined the Restoration monarch's notorious sexual promiscuity as proof of his political legitimacy. In particular, Verrio's depiction of England, Scotland and Ireland as royal concubines languishing at the King's feet recalls the opening lines of *Absalom and Achitophel*, Dryden's loyal defence of the Restoration first published in 1681, in which the poet celebrates the 'Promiscuous use of Concubine and Bride' of the biblical figure of David as an essential kingly virtue. The literary historian Harold Weber observes that the role of the anonymous royal mistresses in Dryden's verse was to 'passively serve and reflect [the king's] overwhelming male power, bearing the stamp of male vigour and warmth'.⁵¹ Verrio's painting contains a similar conflation of sexual and political power. The personified nations emphasise the reach of the King's earthly authority; at the same time their exposed sexual identity and wilful subservience to the King serve as a metaphor that naturalises the relationship between ruler and ruled. Thus Charles was surrounded by a range of symbolic objects and bodies, all of which referred to the potency of his reign. The once-spectacular result was a glorification of royal power in which all things, including the viewer's attention, gravitated towards the body of the monarch.

Howard Colvin's description of Verrio's work at Windsor as 'falsomely and unrealistically propagandist in the manner accepted throughout Europe in the seventeenth century' might be applied equally well to the lower hall ceiling at Greenwich – the allegorical language of kingship during the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was not the preserve of absolute or would-be absolute monarchs.⁵² However, while working within the same recognisable format, Thornhill's scheme differs from Verrio's in a number of subtle but significant ways that combine to project a very different image of William and Mary's reign to that of their predecessor. These differences become apparent with a closer inspection of the

⁵¹ John Dryden, *Absalom and Achitophel*, l. 6, cited and discussed by Harold Weber in *Paper Bullets: Print and Kingship under Charles II*, Kentucky, 1996, esp. pp. 88-92.

⁵² H.M. Colvin et al, *The History of the King's Works*, vol. 5, p. 322.

main central oval at Greenwich. An extended comparison between these two important decorative projects provides a useful way of understanding Thornhill's later scheme, beginning with the preponderance, and symbolic importance, of headwear in both images.

As at Windsor, political headdress features prominently in the celebration of monarchical power on the ceiling of the lower hall. But whereas at Windsor the headwear on and around Charles's body alluded without exception to the King's royal command, at Greenwich hats of one kind or another are used to represent the limits of royal power and to demonstrate the dangers of assuming too much power, even as they continue to be used as symbols of royal authority (see fig. 180). Most notably, the soft red 'Athenian Cap', denoting liberty, which William hands to Europe, contrasts with the heavy papal crown and 'triple crown'd Mitre' that fall beneath the figure of Tyranny, whose own 'Leaden Crown' slips into the shadows.⁵³ The sartorial symbols that frame William's image at Greenwich belonged to a literary and visual culture that reached beyond the confines of grand-scale decorative history painting. The triumph of 'Protestant liberty' over the perceived twin evils of popery and arbitrary government had been a principal trope of English political discourse for the past thirty years or more, and the cap of Liberty and the assorted trappings of Catholic worship scattered beneath the King's feet had become familiar polar symbols of Protestant freedom and Catholic oppression.

The motif of William trampling on his popish enemy marks another significant departure from Verrio's painting, locating Thornhill's design within a Protestant visual tradition that can be traced back to the earliest court paintings after the Reformation, such as the anonymous portrait of a youthful Edward VI presiding over the downfall of the pope (fig. 181). This powerful iconographic trope was revived during the Restoration crisis of the 1680s, adding to the significance of its reappearance at Greenwich. In 1684 (the year Verrio's painting in St George's Hall was completed), John Foxe's famous history of Catholic oppression, *Acts and monuments*, the 'Book of Martyrs', was updated and reissued with the provocative addition of 'like persecutions which have happened in these later times'.⁵⁴ An

⁵³ [Richard Steele], *The Lover. To which is added, The Reader*, p. 226.

⁵⁴ John Foxe, *Acts and monuments of matters most special and memorable, happening in the church [including] the bloody times, horrible troubles, and great persecutions against the true martyrs of Christ [...] whereunto are annexed certain additions of like persecutions which have happened in these later times*, 3 vols, London, 1684 (ninth edition).

accompanying engraving (fig. 182), itself copied from a woodcut first published in 1570, made an implicit challenge to the official image of the monarchy promoted at Windsor by referring to a time when the English crown was unambiguously defined as the enemy and conqueror of the Church of Rome.⁵⁵ In the mid-1680s, a time of widespread disquiet over the impending accession of the King's Catholic brother, James, this engraving and Verrio's painting of English kings represented opposing ideas over the future course of government in England. By combining the two at Greenwich, reintroducing such anti-Catholic imagery into one of the most prominent sites of official royal display, Thornhill attributed the strength and legitimacy of William and Mary's reign to their successful defence of the nation's Protestant identity. At the same time, by replacing the papal figure of earlier images with a defeated enemy, alternately described to the painting's original viewers as 'a *French Personage*' and '*Tyranny and Arbitrary Power*', Thornhill defined the imperial wars against France that had been instigated by the Glorious Revolution, and which continued as he painted, as another triumphant chapter in England's historical struggle against the spectre of Catholicism.⁵⁶

The military narrative suggested by William's attitude, by his armour and by his triumph over Tyranny, ensure that the King's body remains the site of a strong masculine notion of power. However, the terms of the Dutch king's male authority are again significantly different to that of Charles at Windsor. Leaning backward, his arms outstretched as he negotiates between Peace and Europe, William exudes an air of natural command and almost nonchalant ease in his position and role as defender of the Protestant faith. Although he, too, is surrounded by idealised female figures, here they are more benignly represented as virtues – qualities, rather than nations, possessed by the king – and are positioned behind William's throne. Meanwhile, the more conventional attitude and attributes of royal authority are carried by Mary, who occupies a less prominent position beside her husband. Holding a sceptre and commanding the direct attention of the viewer with her outward gaze, it is the figure of Mary that maintains the more conventional, regal posture assumed by her uncle at

⁵⁵ This engraving and the woodcut it copies derive, in turn, from Hans Holbein the younger's portrait of Henry VIII and the wardens of the Barber-Surgeon's Company, still owned by the Company's in London. See also Christopher Lloyd and Simon Thurley, *Henry VIII: Images of a Tudor King*, London, 1990.

⁵⁶ [Richard Steele], *The Lover. To which is added, The Reader*, pp. 225-26; and [James Thornhill], *An Explanation of the Painting in the Royal-Hospital at Greenwich*, p. 10.

Windsor. Mary thus forms a pertinent link both to Charles and to her then reigning sister Queen Anne, while William focuses his attentions on more active affairs of state. The notion of royal power is in this way refigured as a balanced partnership between the two monarchs, achieved not through political or sexual subjection, but through the ‘mutual Concord and innocent Agreement’ suggested by the complementary attitudes of William and Mary and underlined by the two doves at the couple’s feet.⁵⁷

William’s open-armed posture and averted gaze not only signal the different character of his rule compared to that depicted by Verrio, but in fact serve to draw our attention away from the royal bodies at the centre – initially to the two figures on either side, defining the monarch as a judicious mediator restoring the balance of power between Peace and Europe; but ultimately, towards the other figures and details that occupy the rest of the ceiling. In this way, Thornhill’s design seems to counteract the centripetal dynamic more often observed in this type of celebratory, celestial ceiling – a tendency demonstrated most forcefully by the gravitational pull of Charles’s body in Verrio’s painting at Windsor. If, in the central section of the ceiling, Thornhill begins to reconceptualise the image of the monarchy in the light of the momentous disruption of the Glorious Revolution, it is in the outer edges of the decoration that these differences become most apparent, and where the scheme continues in ways that extend beyond the lifetime and immediate concerns of its central characters.

The degree to which the royal couple at the centre of the ceiling became subsumed within a wider patriotic spectacle at Greenwich is suggested by Steele’s early description of the ceiling, and by the testimony of another visitor, Ralph Thoresby, a Leeds antiquarian who visited the painted hall with some friends a few weeks after the publication of Steele’s essay. Thoresby recorded his impression of Thornhill’s newly completed painting in his diary:

We viewed the Royal Hospital, fitter, indeed, for a Royal residence, than poor mariners, &c: the hall is admirably painted, by Mr Thornhill; in the centre of the oval, upon the roof, are the pictures of King William and Queen Mary,

⁵⁷ [Richard Steele], *The Lover. To which is added, The Reader*, pp. 225-26. Both of these ceilings can be understood as pictorial solutions to the problem of representing the barren marriages of their respective royal subjects – one by flaunting the virility of the king, the other by taking refuge in the personal affection between the king and queen.

with the Liberal Arts, &c. All the several apartments of the said ceiling are delicately performed: amongst the Astronomers is Dr Flamstead, with the scheme of an almost total eclipse of the sun, with the date April 22, 1715.⁵⁸

Thoresby was mistaken on one point of detail – the ‘Liberal Arts’ are among the few allegorical regulars that do not appear on the ceiling at Greenwich. However, this apparent oversight contrasts with the rest of his short account, which is notably precise, focusing on a single event – a solar eclipse calculated to take place on 22 April the following year which, as a Fellow of the Royal Society, he would have a keen interest in. The way Thoresby’s brief account moves from a general, if inaccurate, recognition of the royal panegyric at the centre of the ceiling to the specific, contemporary detail of the eclipse in the corner – giving equal importance to both – is suggestive of the novel kind of viewing that Thornhill’s painting at Greenwich encouraged.

Of all the figures represented in the lower hall, it is significant that Thoresby should single out Flamstead, the first and still serving Astronomer Royal, for special attention. He appears in the south-east corner of the ceiling (figs 183 and 184) behind his self-designed arc telescope and accompanied by his assistant, Thomas Weston. In his left hand is a diagram of the eclipse with the date clearly visible. Alongside his contemporaries Christopher Wren, Edmund Halley (portrayed by Thornhill further along the same gallery) and Isaac Newton, Flamstead was a key figure in the foundation of the Royal Observatory, located just a few hundred yards from the hospital. Flamstead had spent the previous four decades at the observatory mapping the stars and charting the passage of the moon with the hope and principal aim of solving the problem of accurately determining a ship’s longitude at sea. The full results of Flamstead’s stellar observations, the most accurate ever made and the first to be based on telescopic observations, were not officially published until 1725, six years after his death, although the nature and importance of his work at Greenwich had been a source of public interest for several years.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ralph Thoresby, *The Diary of Ralph Thoresby*, ed. Joseph Hunter, 2 vols, London, 1830, entry for 14 July 1714.

⁵⁹ The history of the longitude question has received a good deal of attention in recent years, most popularly by Dava Sobel, whose *Longitude* (London, 1995) discusses both the scale of the task and the potential rewards associated with solving the longitude problem. See also J. E. D. Williams, *From Sails to Satellites: the origin and development of navigational science*, Oxford, 1992.

The strategic and commercial advantages of being able to pinpoint a ship's position anywhere on the globe were immeasurable for Europe's competing imperial powers. But hitherto, maritime navigation had relied on the educated guesswork of experienced sailors, using methods that were at best inefficient and at worst disastrous.⁶⁰ More accurate navigation at sea required a ship's captain to be able to keep time relative to a fixed position on land, using the time difference and the speed of the earth's rotation to calculate the longitudinal distance between the two points, and it was widely understood that the accurate mapping of the stars, combined with the study of the moon's trajectory offered the best chances for Britain's continued maritime success. Both of these of these scientific activities are clearly shown here and further suggested by the inclusion of other astronomers and instruments around the edge of the ceiling. At the opposite end of the balcony, looking back across the hall towards Flamsteed, Thornhill painted a figure identified in the official *Explanation* as the sixteenth-century astronomer Tycho Brahe. Near him, closer to the centre, we see Copernicus 'with his SYSTEM in his Hand', with a third figure in between them: 'an old Philosopher pointing to some remarkable Mathematical Figures of the incomparable Sir *Isaac Newton*'.⁶¹ In the event, the eclipse that Flamsteed correctly predicted, in fact to within a few seconds, was hailed as a moment of great significance. Several pamphlets and sermons were published to coincide with the event, and while some were more scientifically grounded than others, most shared the opinion of the author of *Dr. Flamstyd's triumph over astronomers* by acknowledging of the national importance of the astronomer's work.⁶²

Focusing on the figure of Flamsteed draws attention to the importance of the edges of the painting in determining the way the rest of the ceiling, including the

⁶⁰ The urgency of the longitude problem was underlined in October 1707, with the loss of four Royal Navy warships and over 2,000 crew on rocks off the Scilly Isles – a disaster attributed to navigational error. On 8 July 1714, a week before Thoresby's visit, the Longitude Act had inaugurated a prize fund with a massive £20,000 reward promised to whoever could determine longitude at sea to within half a degree.

⁶¹ [James Thornhill], *An Explanation of the Painting in the Royal-Hospital at Greenwich*, p. 12.

⁶² For example: *The surprising Monument, or a description of the great Eclipse of the Sun, 22nd April 1715, together with Dr Flamstead, M. Halley, M. Whiston, Dr Partridge and several other astrologer's opinion of what may happen*, London, 1715; and *Dr. Flamstyd's triumph over astronomers occasioned by his late warning to England: A true and exact description of the eclipse of the sun which happen'd on the 22d. of April*, London, 1715. Some authors explored the religious ramifications of the eclipse, although this example is not as foreboding as its title suggests: *The Black-Day, or, a Prospect of Doomsday. Exemplified in the great and terrible eclipse, which will happen on Friday the 22d of April, 1715*, London, 1715.

royal party at the centre, was perceived. The immediate focus of Flamsteed's attention in Thornhill's painting is the moon, visible in Flamsteed's diagram, as noted by Thoresby, and seen again more prominently under the main arch at the other end of his telescope in the form of Diana, the goddess of the moon. Looking back at the figure of Diana through the interpretive lens of Flamsteed's telescope has a significant effect on the way this and the other allegorical figures on the ceiling are perceived, encouraging the viewer to re-read the rest of the ceiling, not only as a conventional royal glorification, but also as a celebration of modern navigational science and maritime strength. Indeed, Steele's account, which also mentions Flamsteed's eclipse, describes Diana not as an abstract divinity or as a motif belonging to a courtly style of painting, but in relation to the tides and the potential dangers they hold for sailors. Similarly, according to the later *Explanation*, Flamsteed is shown observing 'the Moon's Descent upon the SEVERN, which at certain Times when she is in her *Perigee*, makes such a Roll of the Tides, called the *Eagre* as is very dangerous to all in its Way'.⁶³ The conventional language of courtly painting is, in this way, co-opted into a more modern visual celebration of Britain's maritime identity.

Dominating the east end of the hall (see fig. 159) is the stern of a captured Spanish galley filled with more trophies – a reference, Steele tells us, to the capture of Gibraltar by the Royal Navy in the same year as Marlborough's victory at Blenheim. Beneath this we find England's two other major waterways: 'The *Humber* with his Pigs of Lead' and the Severn 'with her *Lampreys*'.⁶⁴ This forthright display of British military power and commercial might is echoed at the other end of the hall (see figs 52 and 160), where Thornhill painted a British man of war, identified by Steele in his 1714 essay as 'the *Blenheim*', named after Marlborough's first and most famous land victory during the War of the Spanish Succession in 1704.⁶⁵ Approaching it from the left is a winged figure of Victory carrying an armful of captured French colours. Underneath, surrounded by a myriad of other allegorical and earthly figures, is the personified City of London, held aloft on the shoulders of the rivers Thames and Isis. She carries what appears to be a bundle of wool under her left arm and receives a

⁶³ [James Thornhill], *An Explanation of the Painting in the Royal-Hospital at Greenwich*, p. 14.

⁶⁴ [James Thornhill], *An Explanation of the Painting in the Royal-Hospital at Greenwich*, p. 12. The same waterways gave their names to the various gates into the hospital complex, as described by Nicholas Hawksmoor in his site plan, discussed earlier in this chapter (see fig. 175).

⁶⁵ [Richard Steele], *The Lover. To which is added, The Reader*, p. 228.

basket full of seafood from another female figure while beneath is the Tyne, 'pouring forth his plenty of *Coals*'.⁶⁶

The likes of fish, coal and wool are not the usual stuff of allegory, but here they form an integral part of the decoration alongside Flamsteed and the more conventional cast of allegorical figures. These motifs, together with the artist's allusions to recent celebrated victories on land and sea, all of which occurred after William's death in 1702, point to the significant relationship between domestic wealth and maritime power highlighted by Joseph Gander and other pamphleteers at the beginning of the century. The images of William and Mary at the centre of the ceiling are thus subsumed within a more comprehensive glorification of Britain's military and commercial strength that chronologically and thematically reaches beyond their direct influence. By combining the established rhetoric of royal greatness with an equally enthusiastic celebration of Britain's mercantile, military and civic greatness, the lower hall ceiling establishes a causal link between William and Mary's reign and the Glorious Revolution that brought them to the throne on the one hand and the nation's present and future prosperity on the other. Moreover, the scheme confirms the importance of the hospital that had been founded by the joint monarchs at the heart of that relationship.⁶⁷

Three thousand copies of the official *Explanation* were printed and sold in the first fifteen years after the decoration was completed.⁶⁸ After describing the decoration of the cupola and listing the names of those benefactors' commemorated on the walls, it reassures the visitor that, through their simple act of viewing Thornhill's painting, they too were contributing to the charitable purposes of the hospital:

N.B. Out of all that is given for shewing these HALLS, only Three-pence in the Shilling is allowed to the Person that shews it; the Rest makes an excellent Fund for the yearly Maintenance of One Hundred and Forty poor Boys, who

⁶⁶ [James Thornhill], *An Explanation of the Painting in the Royal-Hospital at Greenwich*, p. 12.

⁶⁷ Many authors, from Steele onwards, have dwelt upon the variety of non-royal imagery in Thornhill's painting in the lower hall. Most recently, Andrea MacKean suggests that, at Greenwich, Thornhill 'brought together the structures and the compositions traditional to decorative history painting with the new spaces of public discourse and exchange, natural science and commercial maritime expansion'. See Andrea MacKean, 'The Shaping of Identity in Public Places', p. 194 (also pp. 179-94).

⁶⁸ This figure undoubtedly understates the actual number of visitors to the hall during the same period, which must have been several times higher.

are the Sons of Mariners that have either been slain or disabled in the SERVICE of their COUNTRY.⁶⁹

It is noteworthy that the recipients of the visitors' charity were not the sailors themselves, but their afflicted sons – children, it seems, making a more palatable object of charity than the old and uncouth. They also made a better investment. Clothed and fed at the visitors' expense, the young boys were 'taught such a Share of *Mathematical Learning*, as fits them out to the *SEA Service*, [which] helps to make a perpetual Supply of skilful Seamen, who are the Safeguard of our COUNTRY'. In this way, the *Explanation* and the vestibule it describes altered the tone of the painted decoration at Greenwich in a subtle but significant way, introducing an element of sentiment into a visual experience that was previously governed by a more brazen form of patriotism. By giving ordinary visitors an opportunity to participate in an act of national benevolence and, by proxy, in a continuous cycle of nurture and sacrifice for the common wealth, Thornhill's painting positions the hospital at the formation of what has been described as the 'charitable public sphere', and anticipates the later (and visually, very different) decoration of Thomas Coram's Foundling Hospital, initiated by William Hogarth during the 1740s.⁷⁰

Some indication of the success of Thornhill's painting in the lower hall can be suggested by returning to the example of Ralph Thoresby, whose impressions of the hall are described above. It was the prospect of seeing Thornhill's painting that drew Thoresby to the hospital, perhaps after reading Steele's essay, and it seems that he was sufficiently impressed by what he saw to contribute towards the completion of the hospital. It is likely that Thoresby was the same 'Ralph Thursby' commemorated among the great and the good on one of the three tables of benefactors painted in the vestibule twelve years later after giving a substantial donation of £500 towards the cost of completing the hospital. Thus Thoresby, one of the very first visitors to the painted hall, himself became an example to other viewers. The whole' wrote Steele

⁶⁹ [James Thornhill], *An Explanation of the Painting in the Royal-Hospital at Greenwich*, p. 8. In 1712 the hospital commissioners resolved to accommodate 'orphans of the sea' and to prepare them for maritime service (see John Bold, *Greenwich: an architectural history*, p. 225).

⁷⁰ David Solkin, *Painting for Money: the visual arts and the public sphere in eighteenth-century England*, New Haven and London, 1993, p. 158, but see pp. 157-74. Andrea MacKean discusses the charitable objectives of the hospital in some detail as part of an informative discussion of Thornhill's painting at Greenwich, in 'The Shaping of Identity in Public Places: an examination of subjective identification in British decorated interiors, 1630-1800', PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 1999, pp. 178-258.

encouragingly, referring to Thornhill's scheme in the lower hall, 'raises in the Spectator the most lively Images of Glory and Victory, and cannot be beheld without much Passion and Emotion', and if Thoresby's example is anything to go by, decorative painting had never been called upon to appeal to such a diverse public, nor so successful in inciting visitors to part with their money.⁷¹ Two months after Thoresby's visit, an event of far greater magnitude than Flamsteed's eclipse took place – one that could not have been predicted when painting in the lower hall began seven years earlier.

The Landing of George I

When George I stepped foot on English soil for the first time, in 1714, the *London Gazette* reported the event in characteristic style:

Greenwich, September 18.

About Six this Evening His Majesty and his Royal Highness [the Prince of Wales] came to this Place, where they were met at their Landing by most of the Nobility, and great Numbers of the principal Gentry, and passed to His Majesty's House in the Park, through an infinite Crowd of people, who received them with loud Acclamations.⁷²

For the architects of the succession, George's arrival represented the triumph of those principles and interests first inscribed in the Declaration of Rights in 1689 and confirmed twelve years later by the Act of Succession. Most importantly, the event secured Britain's Protestant future and confirmed the right of Parliament to operate within a limited monarchy. However, within months of George's coronation, the first Jacobite uprising became a violent reminder that the law alone could not guarantee the future of the English monarchy, and that many people in Britain – not just disaffected Catholics – continued to hold a flame for the Stuart cause. The latter years of Queen Anne's reign had been characterised by what one anonymous poet described as 'the poison of party-zeal', and even as Anne lay dying, some within her

⁷¹ [Richard Steele], *The Lover. To which is added, The Reader*, p. 229.

⁷² *The London Gazette*, 18-21 September 1714.

government were allegedly scheming to prevent the planned transfer of power to the Hanoverians.⁷³ For opponents of the new regime, 18 September 1714 was an aberration and marked the imposition of yet another unwelcome foreign king in the face of what they regarded as the far stronger claims of the exiled Stuart princes.⁷⁴ Without winning the cultural as well as the legal argument for the succession, the future of the Hanoverian monarchy and, with it, the perceived liberties safeguarded by the Glorious Revolution could not be assumed safe. The job of reconciling the nation's Stuart past with its Hanoverian future required the energies of those writers, preachers and artists who worked on behalf of the crown: in the press, from the pulpit, in the realm of music and, not least of all, in the visual arts.

So when, in July 1717, Thornhill was asked to prepare a further set of designs for paintings in the upper hall at Greenwich that would, in the words of the hospital commissioners, 'make the whole appear uniform', the artist faced two closely related challenges.⁷⁵ First was the artistic problem of extending a scheme that had been conceived several years earlier as a self-contained whole and which, as noted earlier, had been admired at the time for its 'Regularity' and 'Symmetry'. The second, equally challenging, task facing the painter was to represent the most recent developments in English political history in such a way that would 'appear uniform' with what had gone before. The demands for pictorial and political uniformity were inseparable, and both are implied in the commissioners' carefully worded instructions to the painter. Any new work that did not cohere visually with the painting in the lower hall would risk undermining the earlier decoration by accentuating the dynastic complications brought about by the Glorious Revolution. On the other hand, a scheme that successfully incorporated the Hanoverian succession within an extended, visually harmonious display of the nation's Protestant history could go a long way to smooth over the ideological fault lines of the previous three decades and thus make the status quo harder to find fault with.

Thornhill's response to these challenges can be seen in two of the lesser-known paintings at Greenwich – facing each other on the north and south walls of the upper hall (figs 185 and 186). Both are around 20 feet across and are painted in a brown-green colour with gilded highlights and surrounded by a painted gold frame.

⁷³ *A Poem on the Arrival of His Majesty King George*, London, 1714, unpag. dedication.

⁷⁴ According to the laws of hereditary succession, George was only 52nd in line to throne.

⁷⁵ PRO ADM 67/5, p. 63 (27 July 1717).

The first painting, on the left as you enter the upper hall, is an allegory of William's arrival at Torbay in 1688, described succinctly in the official *Explanation* of Thornhill's painting as 'the REVOLUTION, or the *Landing* of the Prince of ORANGE'. It portrays William welcomed ashore by Britannia and two other figures, later identified as '*Reason of State, and Love of her Country*', having been carried safely across the channel by Neptune. Jupiter observes from above, accompanied by Juno, who points eagerly to a scroll with the motto ANGLORUM SPES MAGNA, 'England expects great things'. On the opposite wall, above a fireplace, Thornhill painted 'the ACCESSION, or *Landing of King GEORGE at Greenwich*'.⁷⁶ Here the new Hanoverian king is shown in a horse-drawn chariot escorted by St George on horseback and by a train of allegorical figures led by Religion, Liberty, Truth and Justice. The King Charles Building of the hospital is clearly visible in the background. In the lower left corner of the painting, beneath the personification of the Thames, an unarmed soldier representing the rebels of the 1715 uprising cowers before the royal procession.

The triumphal symbolism of both these images is heightened by Thornhill's use of grisaille, an allusion to the monumental bas-relief carvings of ancient Rome, and by the Roman military costume worn by both princes. In addition to these immediate visual similarities, the artist exploits the spatial organisation of the hall to suggest an equivalence between the events depicted, using the double portrait of Anne and her consort Prince George on the ceiling as an additional link between William and George. The result is a remarkably neat interpretation of the nation's recent royal past, one that harnesses the architectural symmetry of the room to present William's landing in 1688 as a precedent and, by implication, as a validation of the subsequent accession of George I a quarter of a century later. This comparison was indeed encouraged by the official *Explanation* as it guides the visitor from one side of the room to the other.

William's landing at Torbay was already firmly established in the popular historical and visual imagination. The timing of William's landing at Brixham could not have been better for those who welcomed it. The date, 5 November, was already an auspicious one for the English – as today, universally associated with the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot. Moreover, the year 1688 marked the centenary of the defeat

⁷⁶ [James Thornhill], *An Explanation of the Painting in the Royal-Hospital at Greenwich*, pp. 17-18.

of the Spanish Armada off the same south Devon coastline. How conscious contemporaries were of the coincidence of these events is illustrated by a cheaply produced woodcut from a modest book of prayers and homilies called *The Protestant's crumbs of comfort* (1690; fig. 187). Despite the typesetter's mistake in misdating the first image (1558 instead of 1588), the artist's juxtaposition of William's landing with both the defeat of the Armada and the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot required no further textual explanation. The Revolution was readily incorporated into a pictorial and providential history of the nation. The fortuitous alignment of dates encouraged the belief among supporters of the Revolution that William's landing and the consequent change in monarchy had somehow been guided from above, and that divine approval of the Protestant cause was revealed in the patterns of history. Furthermore, the fact that William had landed at Torbay, rather than his intended destination in the north of England, was popularly ascribed to divinely inspired weather conditions that had hurried William's fleet safely through the English Channel while confining James II's navy to the Thames estuary. To those who regarded the Glorious Revolution as a blessing, these details were happily accepted as proof that God was on their side. The blessing of 'Protestant wind' was elaborated by preachers up and down the country, and 5 November, which also happened to be the day after William's birthday, became an annual day of thanksgiving for the nation's 'double deliverance' from popery.⁷⁷

When it came to representing the moment of William's landing, there was no shortage of models for Thornhill to draw upon. The circumstances of the event suited a variety of pictorial formats and, within months of the Revolution, the image of William's arrival was circulating at all levels of visual culture. Jan Wyck, a Dutch painter who came to England in the 1670s, called on a well-established form of court painting in his equestrian portrait of William (fig. 188), in which the invading prince presides over the landing operation from a royal white charger. Medallists typically explored the allegorical possibilities of the occasion. For example, on the reverse of one medal stamped in 1689 to commemorate the event (fig. 189), George Bower

⁷⁷ The notion of the 'Protestant wind' had originated in 1588, when the invading Armada was foiled by strong offshore winds. Gilbert Burnet (later Bishop of Salisbury) accompanied William on his journey from Holland and was a key figure in reviving the myth in 1688. See, for example, *A Sermon Preached [...] 23rd December, 1688*, London, 1689. For a recent discussion of William's journey and its associated mythology, see C. Jones, 'The Protestant Wind of 1688: myth and reality', in *European Studies Review*, vol. 3 (1973), pp. 201-21.

represented an exhausted figure of Justice being revived on the shore by a soldier as William and his army disembark in the background. Another medal, by Bower's contemporary R. Arondeaux (fig. 190), provided the immediate model for Thornhill's allegory on the north wall at Greenwich: on the obverse Arondeaux depicted the Prince of Orange in Roman military dress being welcomed ashore by a grateful Britannia beneath the legend: DEO VINDICE IUSTITIA COMITE, 'God our protector, Justice our companion'.

Two drawings survive that show Thornhill's preparatory experiments for the north and south walls (figs 191 and 192). The compositional similarities between the two images – reversed, so that if seen on opposite walls both would proceed in the same direction – indicate the artist's early intention to portray the two royal landings as reciprocal events. The first drawing represents William's landing as a relatively straightforward contemporary scene that is not, in fact, so dissimilar from the woodcut included with *The Protestants crums of comfort*. It shows the Prince of Orange stepping from a barge, visible beneath the bow of a larger ship, on to the rocky shore at Brixham, from where he is ushered towards what looks like the entrance of a campaign tent on the far right. A small crowd of supporters has gathered beneath the cliffs in the middle distance. One significant detail is the inclusion, above William's head, of the ship's ensign – lifted by the wind in a way that suggests a gentle onshore breeze. Such was the mythology that surrounded the Prince's landing that Thornhill could have been confident that this simple motif would have been sufficient to bring to mind the 'Protestant wind'.

Interestingly, attempts to attribute the same kind of providential significance to George's landing had met with little success. For example, the clergyman author of *The Protestant Jubilee* made a dubious connection between George's landing and the trial of Charles I – a coincidence based not on the date of the King's actual arrival, but on 20 January, which had been arbitrarily designated a day of thanksgiving for his safe crossing, and which also happened to be the first day of Charles's trial. Unsurprisingly, no one seems to have shared the preacher's enthusiasm for this less than remarkable 'jubilee'.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ *The Protestant Jubilee* (London, 1714/15) celebrated 'our wonderful Deliverence [on both occasions] when we were just at the Brink of Ruin'. It was one of many sermons preached on 20 January, the majority of which, such as *The Way to Stable and Quiet Times* (London 1714/15), made less outlandish claims.

In his initial pair of sketches for the north and south walls, Thornhill attempted to draw a more persuasive visual parallel between George's arrival at Greenwich and William's much fabled landing. In the second drawing of the pair, the Hanoverian king is shown just off-centre, walking towards another tent-like structure on the far left. The arrangement of these two landing scenes is so close that there can be little doubt that they were conceived together. However, while the first drawing required little in the way of explanation beyond the simple inscription along the top of the page, the margins of the second image are crowded with the artist's notes.

The second sketch is perhaps the best known of all Thornhill's surviving drawings. It has attracted the attention of art historians primarily because of the artist's suggestive annotations, in which he considers the most appropriate way of representing the subject.⁷⁹ Down the left side of the page, Thornhill has listed five likely 'Objections [that] will arise from ye plain representation of ye K[ing's] Landing as it was in fact, & in ye modern way & dress'. The first, for example, was that the king had landed at night, 'w[hi]ch to represent would be hard & ungraceful in Picture'. He then suggests that to represent all of the nobles then present would introduce 'to[o] much Party' into the picture, as several had since fallen from grace, and that to represent them all accurately would, in any case, be difficult. Further down, he notes: 'The Kings own dress then [was] not Gracefull, nor enough worthy of him to be transmitted to Posterity'. And finally: 'There was a vast Crowd w[hi]ch to represent would be ugly, & not to represent would be false'. On the other side of the page, Thornhill answers each potential objection in turn, explaining the details of his drawing as he does so. The proposed solution to the problem of George's inappropriate attire, for example, was to 'Make ye King's dress as it now is & as it should have been then, rather than what it was'; while the artist's nervousness about depicting the vast and potentially ugly crowd prompted him to 'Take ye Liberty to lessen ye Crowd as they ought to have been then'.

Previous art historians have discussed this intriguing image in relation to the debates that re-emerged within and around the Royal Academy towards the end of the

⁷⁹ The best discussions of this drawing remain Edgar Wind's 'The Revolution in History Painting', *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, vol. 2 (1938-39), pp. 123-24; and Charles Mitchell's 'Benjamin West's "Death of Wolfe" and the Popular History Piece', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 7 (1944), pp. 25-26. Other comments, deriving from the earlier suggestions of Wind and Mitchell, can be found in Lindsay Stainton and Christopher White, *Drawing in England from Hilliard to Hogarth*, London, 1987, pp. 234-35; and Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth, vol. 1, the 'Modern Moral Subject' 1697-1732*, New Brunswick and London, 1991, pp. 122-24.

century over whether or not such details as modern dress, individual likeness, setting and so on were suitable for the kind of heroic narratives expected of grand-manner history painting. Thornhill's commentary on this drawing is certainly important for our understanding of the subsequent history of British art, but it also reveals a more immediate issue. The cause of the artist's deliberations, it seems, are not yet the internal problems of history painting, but the historical status of the event itself. In dwelling on the details of the landing, Thornhill attempted to elevate the moment of George's after-dark arrival above the prosaic representation typified by the report in the *London Gazette*, cited at the beginning of this section, and to give it something like the same symbolic weight and cultural significance that was inherent in the image of William's arrival. Thornhill's copious annotations provide no explanation for the decision to abandon the contemporary mode of this pair of drawings in favour of the two allegorical scenes he eventually painted. There is a good deal of sense in William Osmun's suggestion that to introduce a new type of non-allegorical painting into the hall at this stage 'would have been awkward and probably not as successful a decoration'.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the evidence of the two drawings, one with notes the other without, suggests that while William's landing needed little embellishment, George's arrival could not do without it. Despite Thornhill's liberal reinterpretation of the event, it seems that his efforts did not go far enough to answer the objections that the artist had pre-empted on the left-hand side of the page. Whatever the reason, Thornhill did not dwell on the 'ungracefull' circumstances of George's landing for long and, with a further pair of drawings (figs 193 and 194), abandoned any thought of 'plain representation'.

The second pair of drawings, which became prototypes of the final designs, are of a similar size and format to the first, use the same kind of paper, and were probably made at the same time as alternative designs for the hospital commissioners to consider alongside the first pair. The design for the north wall is once again identified in the artist's hand as the landing of the Prince of Orange at Torbay. In a series of further notes, Thornhill describes how 'Britannia welcomes him ashore, receiving him w[i]th open arms, &c.' as 'Oppression & Tyranny fly before him'. Both of these details recall Arondeaux's earlier medal, which included in the background the figures of James II and his priest, Father Petre, fleeing with the infant Prince of

⁸⁰ William Osmun in 'A Study of the Works of Sir James Thornhill', p. 266.

Wales (whose birth in the summer of 1688 had sparked the Revolution). Meanwhile, the myth of the 'Protestant wind' is suggested by the presence on the right of 'Nept[une] & all ye Sea Deitys' who see William safely ashore, and by the figure of 'Jove or Supream Providence' who presides over the event from a cloud. Down the right-hand side of the page, Thornhill identified a variety of allegorical figures and emblems, many of which are included in the design: from 'Vertuous Acts' and 'Love of ones Country' at the top to 'Superstition' and 'Tyranny' at the bottom.

Meanwhile, the even more elaborate allegory that Thornhill subsequently adapted for his painting on the south wall can be explained by looking at the outpouring of loyal poetry that accompanied the Hanoverian succession, and by one poem in particular that described not the landing itself, but the new king's long journey from Hanover to London in 1714. Samuel Croxall's *An Ode Humbly Inscrib'd to the King* was printed for Bernard Lintott at the Cross-Keys in Fleet Street shortly after George's arrival in England. Dedicated to the Earl of Wharton, Croxall's *Ode* is among the more sophisticated panegyric poems that welcomed the accession of the new king. It was written, we are told by its author, 'in the Stanza and Measure of SPENCER', a literary reference that also made a connection between his own subject, the Protestant King George I, and Spenser's, the Protestant Queen Elizabeth I. George's imminent arrival is celebrated in the opening lines of the poem as the beginning of an era of peace and stability after the troubled later years of Anne's reign – a new golden age, Croxall suggests, that warranted the kind of panegyric that Edmund Spenser had delivered when he 'sung the Glories of Eliza's Reign'.⁸¹ After mourning the loss of 'Anna's faint declining Star', the poet compares England at the end of Anne's life with the corrupt Roman Empire, 'fir'd with ambitious Pride' and wounded 'Thro Party-Discords (cruel and ingrate)'. He then likens England's new monarch to Augustus, as one who promptly took 'the troubled Helm' and 'Sav'd the weak Vessel from the Waves and Wind'.⁸² In the tenth stanza, having fallen into a visionary reverie, Croxall begins a lengthy and very elaborate description of George's journey to England following the news of Anne's death. The opportunity for a

⁸¹ Croxall placed himself in a line of English poets that included Chaucer and Spenser. His other work included *The Vision* (1715), another reverie vision of English liberty and kingship, very similar to the *Ode*.

⁸² Such poems rarely, if ever, cast aspersions on Anne herself, attacking instead those High Church men thought to have deceived the Queen, corrupting the political system from within and making England susceptible to invasion from without.

comparison between the new king and his Dutch predecessor presents itself as George crosses the continent, when he reduces the ‘friendly Provinces’ to tears by reminding them of their virtuous William:

In Him they see Great WILLIAM’S Virtues live,
Of ev’ry Regal Quality possest:
The thoughtful Brow, the firm intrepid Breast,
Stern Manhood mix’d with Pity’s kind Allay,
To quash the Proud, to succour the Distrest,
And damp the Tyrant’s Hopes with sore Dismay,
As the dark Shades of Night fly from approaching Day.

Towards the end of George’s sea crossing, by which time we are halfway through the poem, the ‘ancient Thames’ carries the King and his military escort towards its landing, pausing ‘with a kind Delay’, so that the gathered crowd can absorb the spectacle. What follows is a lengthy allegorical description of George’s ‘Imperial Train’ or ‘cavalcade’, illuminated by Phoebus’s bright sun. Leading the pageant on the ground in Croxall’s *Ode* is Liberty, banishing ‘Despair [and] Tyrannick Pow’r’ from the scene. She is followed, in turn, by True Religion, wearing a mitre and carrying, in one hand, ‘a Cup with precious Wine o’erflow’d’, and in the other a ‘huge Book well known to all’. Both of these figures and their attributes are identified in Thornhill’s second drawing just as Croxall describes them. Next the poet describes the striking figure of Commerce: an ‘odd Fantastick Dame’ riding on the soft woolly back of a Ram (an allusion to the wool industry that provided Britain’s chief export), she wears a Turkish turban and carries ‘a strange Indian Fan’ to protect her from the scorching sun. Behind her follows Justice with her distinctive silver balance, accompanied by the armoured, Pallas-like figure of Courage.

It is clear that the similarities between Croxall’s poem and Thornhill’s drawing are more than a coincidence. In fact, Croxall’s description of George I anticipates Thornhill’s ‘Royal Cavalcade’ so closely as to leave us in no doubt that the *Ode* of 1715 provided the allegorical tableau that the artist adapted, several years later, for the upper hall at Greenwich. Towards the end of the procession comes ‘Dread Majesty [...] | Rob’d like a pompous King’ on a chariot of ivory and crystal. His companions – Prudence and the mounted figure of ‘Britannic Pow’r’ who, in his

right hand, 'brandish'd high a Sabre keen' – are both identified in Thornhill's sketch (see fig. 195). Thornhill made several changes to this fulsome allegory before reaching the final design, most noticeably by removing Croxall's exotic personification of Commerce and transforming 'Britannic Pow'r' into the king's namesake, St George (see figs 186 and 196). With these and other specific allusions to the *Ode* gone, the importance of Croxall's poem in suggesting a solution to the problem of representing George's otherwise unremarkable landing has been lost. In Croxall's ornate and highly descriptive poetry, it seems that Thornhill found a means to escape the ordinariness of George's landing. The result was a visually arresting scheme that dramatised the transfer of power to the Hanoverians in a way that could at least bear comparison with the more alluring spectacle of William's landing across the hall. However, once he had landed safely, George had a lot more to offer, as the final element of Thornhill's scheme at Greenwich reveals.

'A new breed of men'

If the Hanoverians could offer anything to the people of Britain, it was the promise of stability – an assurance, as far as was possible, that the Protestant monarchy was finally back on a predictable, hereditary course; or that it was, in the language of the 1701 act designed to secure its future, 'settled'. That, at least, is the message inscribed on the west wall of the upper hall (fig. 163). The motto incorporated below the coving – IAM NOVA PROGENIES CAELO, 'A new breed of men' – is taken from Virgil's so-called 'messianic' fourth eclogue, in which the poet heralds a new golden age following the birth of a son and heir to the Emperor Augustus. A second motto, held by one of the putti in the lower-right quarter of the west wall, belongs to the same Virgilian couplet and reads: IAM REDIT ET VIRGO, 'Justice returns'.⁸³ Well known to the eighteenth-century authors and readers of English 'Augustan' poetry, the fourth eclogue provided an appropriate introduction to Thornhill's painting in the upper hall.⁸⁴ Removed from its immediate literary context, the 'new breed' referred to by

⁸³ Virgil, 'Fourth Eclogue', ll. 8-9: '*Iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna; | iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto.*' These lines were translated by Dryden as: 'Justice returns, returns old Saturn's reign, | with a new breed of men sent down from heaven.'

⁸⁴ Until the nineteenth century, the fourth eclogue was widely understood as a prophesy of the birth of Christ, giving it a special place within the classical canon and leaving it open to politically diverse interpretations. In 1703, for example, William Walsh welcomed the accession of Anne as a triumph of

the poet could also be interpreted by an eighteenth-century visitor as being ‘carved [in stone]’ (*caelo*) – a claim underscored by the inscription itself, painted to appear as if it actually had been carved in the marble frieze of the surrounding architecture.⁸⁵

Below this inscription, mediating between the literary and pictorial components of the scheme, is the messenger god Mercury. The correlation between dynastic longevity and the permanence of classical architecture suggested in the painted entablature is repeated further down by the appearance of a female figure holding a large stone pyramid, identified by the artist as ‘*Stability, or the Glory of Princes*’, and by her gesture towards the dome of St Paul’s Cathedral in the background (see fig. 197). Beneath the all-important figure of Stability are the more familiar personifications of Time, Justice and (just visible in between them) another female figure described in the 1726 *Explanation* as ‘the *Golden Age* restored [...] pouring forth *RICHES, &c* from a *Cornucopia*’.⁸⁶ They are followed, in turn, by Providence handing the royal sceptre to George I who is seated beside a large globe and surrounded by other members of the royal family (fig. 198). Even without the published description, the overall message of Thornhill’s painting on the west wall is unambiguous: the Hanoverians were here to stay, and the future of the Protestant succession was safe in their hands – or rather, in their blood.

The almost pantomime-like presentation of the west wall, emphasised by the proscenium arch that divides the two halls and by the great red curtain being drawn back to reveal the scene behind, is wholly in keeping with the theatrical rhetoric of the earlier decoration, discussed at the beginning of this chapter. This and the repetition in the upper hall of an allegorical vocabulary of virtuous kingship made familiar in the lower hall maintains a visual continuity between the representations of the Hanoverian princes and their royal predecessors. Indeed, the first impression encouraged by Thornhill’s design is that the personified virtues and values that had previously defined the reign of first William and Mary, then Anne, have now descended from the heavens to reside with George and his royal heirs.

High Church Toryism in his poem *The golden age, from the fourth Eclogue of Virgil, &c.*, substituting the same lines with the following acidic couplet: ‘The vile, degenerate, whiggish off-spring ends, | A high-church progeny from heav’n descends.’

⁸⁵ When viewed from the lower hall the inscription is truncated even further by Hawksmoor’s proscenium arch, to read: NOVA PROGENIES, ‘A new breed of men’.

⁸⁶ [James Thornhill], *An Explanation of the Painting in the Royal Hospital at Greenwich*, p. 20.

However, the spiralling cascade of bodies is given an additional twist with the inclusion of six more of the king's grandchildren (fig. 199). Like the overflowing cornucopia held by the adjacent figure of Plenty, the royal offspring appear to spill on to the proscenium steps in an impromptu demonstration of the abundance of the king's progeny. There is, however, nothing accidental about the appearance and attitude of these royal children, or that of their more senior counterparts, centred on the king and his eldest grandson, Prince Frederick. The conventions of bodily deportment, gesture and dress that inform this image of the king and his family belong not to the celestial world of baroque allegory, but to the earthbound, interior realm of dynastic family portraiture.

Allegorical painting routinely incorporated individual likenesses (we have encountered several examples already at Greenwich) and, conversely, portraiture often assumed the trappings of allegory and myth. But the highly visible juxtaposition of pictorial types in this painting is unusual and marks the most significant departure yet from the kind of courtly allegorical painting encountered elsewhere in the hall. The distinction between the spaces of allegory and domestic portraiture on the west wall is particularly noticeable in the marked difference between the larger-than-life allegorical figures on the one hand and the life-size royal family on the other (best appreciated by comparing the personified figure of Naval Victory with that of the Prince of Wales to the right of the composition). This shift in scale has been observed by other art historians, but it has usually been regarded as an oversight. Croft-Murray considered the discrepancy in style between the royal portraits and the allegorical figures 'disturbing'.⁸⁷ More recently, in an essay on the east European painter Dietrich Ernst Andreae, Gerrit Walczak has drawn attention to the same stylistic differences in order to confirm Hogarth's claim that this royal party was painted not by Thornhill, but by a 'Mr. Andrea, a Foreigner'.⁸⁸ The comments of these three writers – Croft-Murray, Walczak and Hogarth – remind us that any large decorative scheme is very likely the work of more than one painter, but the consensus of opinion

⁸⁷ Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England*, vol. 1, p. 76.

⁸⁸ Gerrit Walczak, "'The man that workt for Sr. J. Thornhill": Dietrich Ernst Andreae (c. 1695-1734) in England', *The British Art Journal*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2001), esp. pp. 13-18. Hogarth's comments appeared in his 'Britophil' essay in the *St James's Evening Post*, 7-9 June 1737. Walczak's research uncovers a good deal of information about Andreae, previously a rather enigmatic figure whose involvement at Greenwich had long been known but little understood. For other views on west wall, see Charles Mitchell, 'Benjamin West's "Death of Wolfe" and the Popular History Piece', p. 25; and Andrea MacKean, 'The Shaping of Identity in Public Places', esp. pp. 186-90.

that the disparity in scale was an unintentional consequence of employing a second 'hand', especially one as evidently accomplished as Andreae's, is not convincing. It is unlikely that such a noticeable difference between the earthly and celestial zones of the painting, equally apparent in the physical contrast between the cotton-wool cloudscape on the one hand and the intricate detail of the carpet beneath the king's feet on the other, was anything but a deliberate part of Thornhill's design – even if, as now seems certain, it was executed by an assistant. Putting aside the question of who painted what, the striking intrusion of domestic portraiture into a scheme otherwise governed by the conventions and logic of celestial allegory raises other important issues.⁸⁹

Over the previous two centuries, the dynastic portrait had been one of the most effective means of establishing in visual form the supposedly 'natural' authority of the monarchy. Having been used to great effect by Holbein for Henry VIII, the conventions of grand-scale family portraiture were refined during the earlier part of the seventeenth century to suit the changing requirements of the Stuart court, and extended to meet the new needs of a nobility making itself more and more visible through painting. For the past half-century, however, as the crown passed with uncertainty from one childless incumbent to another, the powerful pictorial strategy of the dynastic portrait (and with it the very idea of a 'royal family') had been necessarily and conspicuously absent from the imagery of monarchy in England.⁹⁰ With the arrival in 1714 of three generations of Hanoverian princes, the political and artistic potential of the king's progeny could be exploited once more.

No one had been more successful at representing the ideal royal family than Anthony Van Dyck. And perhaps more than any other painting, his portrait of *Charles I, Henrietta Maria and their two eldest Children* (1632; fig. 200) became a reference point in English art for representing the gender and generational dynamics of hereditary succession: notice, for example, how on the west wall at Greenwich, Thornhill anticipates the 'natural' transfer of royal authority from one generation to another through the affectionate prop of the royal knee. Such details draw our

⁸⁹ For a brief but interesting discussion of Thornhill's depiction of George I and his family, see Simon Schama, 'The Domestication of Majesty: royal family portraiture, 1500-1850', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Summer 1986), pp. 155-83.

⁹⁰ Kneller's portrait of *Princess Anne with the Duke of Gloucester* (c. 1694), of which there are two versions in the National Portrait Gallery, is a rare (and partial) attempt to construct an image of natural succession during the intervening years.

attention to the artifice of family portraiture. An earlier drawing for the wall, which identifies Prince Frederick as a considerably larger sixteen-year-old, reveals how his age (but not that of the other royal grandchildren) was manipulated by the artist in the final painting.⁹¹ In fact, at eighteen, Frederick was too big for his grandfather's knee by the time painting on this part of the wall commenced in 1725, but in an era when primogeniture – the ideology of the first-born – was paramount, it was highly valuable to portray this 'new breed of men' across three visually distinct generations.

The return to a linear succession needed to be marshalled carefully if the previous quarter-century of royal history and the legal basis on which it stood, in contrast to the powerful claims of the Stuart heirs, were not to be undermined. One contemporary poet, writing in the same year that Thornhill began painting the west wall at Greenwich, recognised that the Hanoverian branch had to be grafted on to the already hybridised Orange-Stuart tree with care. Welcoming the accession of George II in 1725 – the first father-son succession for exactly 100 years – he suggested that the accident of birth was not the new king's *only* claim to the English throne:

Nor more by *Lineage*, than by *Virtue Thine*.
From Heaven deriv'd, in Pity to our Woes,
By *Virtue*, first, the Right to Rule arose.⁹²

By the end of the poem, however, the new branch had taken successfully, as the 'blooming Youth' of the Hanoverians revives an orange tree that no longer produces fruit:

GREAT FREDERICK, Image of his Sire, appears!
Paternal Virtues all his Soul engage;
And blooming Youth divines a fruitful Age!
So, on the yellowing Orange-Tree, appear,
The flowery Tokens of a golden Year;

⁹¹ The drawing for the west wall (National Maritime Museum PAH3344) is inscribed with the ages of the sitters (and is thus dateable to c. 1723). The king's younger grandson, William Augustus (b. 1721) is shown much closer to his actual age at the time, as are the two youngest children (one playing with a dove) either side of William, whom Thornhill identifies as the prince's younger sisters (b. 1723 and 1724).

⁹² William Pattison, *An Epistle To His Majesty, King George II. On his Accession to the Throne*, from *The Poetical Works*, London, 1728.

Fair, o'er the falling Fruits, new Beauties rise,
And all the sweet Succession never dies.

The 'falling fruits' in this poem recall the overflowing cornucopia in Thornhill's painting, whose echo in the abundance of royal progeny serves to suggest that the right of succession is as natural. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given their crucial role in producing this progeny, the Hanoverian women were as important as the princes in the reconstruction of the public image of the royal family after 1714. Most prominent among them in Thornhill's painting is Princess Caroline, shown behind the king as both mother to the royal grandchildren *and* as a personification of Prudence, identified by the mirror she holds. She is accompanied to her left, by the King's daughter, Sophia, Queen of Prussia, holding a fasces, one of the attributes of Concord. Further to the left the King's mother, the Electress Sophia of Hanover, makes a posthumous appearance as Cybele, the goddess of nature, while the three royal granddaughters are painted by Thornhill as 'the little GENII of PAINTING, POETRY and MUSICK'.⁹³ These royal princesses could comfortably assume this dual role in Thornhill's design partly because the conventions of female portraiture, inherited from the previous century, allowed and even encouraged this kind of allegorical role play. Prudence was an appropriately feminine virtue for the Princess to assume in a portrait. But as we have seen here and in earlier chapters, Prudence was also routinely employed in a purely allegorical way as one of the attributes of good government – not least in the lower hall at Greenwich, where William is accompanied by the four Cardinal Virtues, including, most prominently, Prudence seated above the king's head. To her left is Concord, holding the same distinctive attribute as Princess Sophia on the west wall. Thus these female protagonists not only mediated between the fantastical space of royal allegory and the more earthly, carpeted realm of portraiture on the west wall, but also aided the visual unity between the upper and lower halls, and the political transition between the Hanoverian monarchs and their Stuart predecessors.

The literary historian Emma Jay has shown how Caroline's arrival on English soil was welcomed with relief by those who regarded her as 'the guarantor of dynastic

⁹³ [James Thornhill], *An Explanation of the Painting in the Royal Hospital at Greenwich*, p. 21.

promise'.⁹⁴ In the absence of George I's estranged wife, who had been incarcerated in Hanover for adultery for the previous twenty years, it was the King's daughter-in-law who assumed the role of fertile royal mother in the poetic and political imagination of Whig writers such as Joseph Addison, whose poem *To Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales* greeted Caroline's arrival in 1714 with the couplet: 'No longer shall the widow'd land bemoan | A broken lineage, and a doubtful throne'.⁹⁵

Comparisons between the feminine virtues of Caroline and that of her royal predecessors Anne and Mary also helped to bridge the Stuart-Hanoverian divide. The west wall maps out a long and healthy future for the Hanoverian succession, at the same time, it should be added, using the cosmetic of family portraiture to disguise the considerable antagonisms within George's own rather dysfunctional family.⁹⁶

On the west wall at Greenwich, Thornhill employed a variety of strategies to re-establish the concept of natural, hereditary succession in the public image of the monarchy. But more than presenting a united front of their own, the Hanoverian royal family are painted in such a way as to appear the ultimate and natural heirs to England's recent royal past – their installment unifying and making sense of the complex and troubled sequence of events that brought them to the throne. Their arrival on the scene sends a message that England's interrupted monarchy was all part of a divine plan that had now come to fruition, and their progeny promised that the country would never suffer such interruption again. In both visual and political terms, Thornhill had addressed the problem of making the hall 'appear uniform'.

⁹⁴ Emma Jay, 'Queen Caroline: royal mother', paper delivered at the Hanoverian Court Culture conference, Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, 5 April 2003. See also Jay's forthcoming PhD thesis.

⁹⁵ Joseph Addison's poem, *To Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales, with the Tragedy of Cato. Nov. 1714*, cited by Emma Jay. The king's former wife was at the time incarcerated in Hanover for adultery and had been since 1694.

⁹⁶ Aside from the king's marital history, his relationship with the Prince of Wales was fraught with difficulty and, for a time, the two men represented opposing sides of a divided political elite in Britain, as George II and Frederick would do during the 1730s.

CONCLUSION

One of the principal aims of this thesis has been to investigate the role of decorative history painting in English visual culture during the decades following the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89. To this end, the four preceding chapters have examined Thornhill's artistic intervention in four very different arenas, looking in each case at how the painter refigured the forms and subjects of an art that had previously been associated, above all, with the Restoration court – adapting conventions to fit new spaces and audiences. At the Guildhall, Thornhill devised a series of paintings that complemented the existing heraldic iconography and civic values of the City at the same time as picturing modern London as a healthy, financial corporation. In the dome of St Paul's Cathedral, the artist produced a biblical scheme at a time when the very idea of images in religious spaces was contentious and, in the process, helped to reassert the spiritual authority and unity of the Anglican Church within the capital. In the aristocratic environment of Chatsworth, he rivalled Verrio and Laguerre in his attempt to reinterpret the Ovidian world of myth and violence that had been introduced a generation earlier in the service of the Restoration monarchy for a patron who had been instrumental in its overthrow. Finally, on the walls and ceilings of the Royal Naval Hospital at Greenwich, Thornhill constructed a series of images that served as both a monument to and a manifesto of the Protestant succession, creating a scheme that took shape at the same time as many of the historical events it commemorates unfolded.

The architectural support of decorative history painting, while presenting challenges that prompted Shaftesbury to dismiss all such painting as the 'wilder sort', also provided an opportunity for drama and for the active involvement of the viewer in determining the meaning of a decorative scheme. This opportunity was often exploited by Thornhill, from the relatively crowded, compartmentalised ceiling of the Council Chamber through the dynamic environment of the west stairs at Chatsworth to the expansive, uninterrupted surfaces of St Paul's and Greenwich. All of these examples of Thornhill's work also demonstrate the artist's awareness of how decorative painting became subsumed within a wider visual experience – as one surface within a room, one room within a house, or as a component within the much more expansive spectacle of the modern metropolis. The importance of the buildings that Thornhill painted, and the ways his images engaged the viewer in some of the

key political and intellectual issues of the time, demonstrate how decorative history painting played a more central, and more varied, role in the visual experience of early eighteenth-century England than has generally been recognised.

In examining Thornhill's work at four different locations, four distinct strands of his artistic identity have emerged. These are his role as a civic artist, fostering a career-long relationship with the ancient institutions of the City; as a religious history painter, purposefully and consistently attempting to position himself alongside the most celebrated history painter of all, Raphael; as a socially aspirant artist specialising in the kind of heroic mythological subjects favoured in elite aristocratic circles; and finally, as the artistic champion of Britain's Protestant monarchy.

Thornhill was keenly aware of the political function of decorative painting, and of the propaganda value of the narratives that he devised. Indeed, it was his job to make the accidental and temporary appear inevitable and permanent. Using the evidence of some of the artist's many surviving drawings, we have been able to recover some of the creative and intellectual processes behind the illusion that England in the early part of the eighteenth century was a plentiful, pious and victorious nation, well governed by the right people. Moreover, this was an illusion that Thornhill wilfully entered into, skilfully using painting to serve his own interests as much as those of his patrons. So much so, that these two interests are often difficult to separate – in celebrating the perceived achievements and virtues of his countrymen, Thornhill himself became 'our celebrated Country-man'; his pencil became 'a *British Pencil!*'¹

The interconnected narratives of, on the one hand, the public significance of decorative history painting and, on the other, the fashioning of Thornhill's artistic identity, converge in the artist's self-portrait on the west wall of the upper hall at Greenwich (fig. 201).² Here, Thornhill assumes the attitude, and wears the wig and buff jacket, of an early eighteenth-century gentleman as he gestures towards George I, the recently deceased king who had conferred his knighthood five years earlier (an honour signified by the red riband worn by the artist). Immediately above Thornhill is

¹ *Weekly Packet*, no. 155, 18-25 June 1715; Colen Campbell, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, vol. 1, London, 1715, p. 6.

² Most of the painting on the west wall at Greenwich, including the figure of the artist, was very probably executed by an assistant, Dietrich Ernst Andreae (see Gerrit Walczak, "The man that workt for Sr. J. Thornhill": Dietrich Ernst Andreae (c. 1695-1734) in England', *The British Art Journal*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2001). esp. pp. 13-18). However, a surviving drawing for the west wall, now in the collection of the National Maritime Museum, indicates that Andreae closely followed Thornhill's design.

the figure of Naval Victory, whose scroll of British maritime successes is partially obscured by the artist's head. Deeper in the background, behind the personification of Naval Victory, is the towering presence of St Paul's Cathedral (see fig. 197) – a symbol of the Protestant piety of the Hanoverian princes pictured below, and of the visual and institutional harmony of the hospital and the church, but also very evidently a self-referential allusion to the artist's other great work in the capital.³

As well as gesturing towards the King and his progeny on the west wall, Thornhill's hands – both of them – draw our attention to the painted surface of the hall, inviting the viewer to dwell not only on the scenes depicted, but also on the means of their depiction. Surrounded by the themes of Protestantism, constitutional monarchy and imperial adventure – as both the creator of, and a leading participant in, a pictorial celebration of the modern nation – Thornhill confidently asserts the value of decorative history painting for the future prosperity of the nation.

If the image of the artist, dwarfed by the vast surroundings of the hall, suggests the importance that decorative history painting could once claim, it also points to one significant reason why the type of grand-scale decoration popularised by Thornhill did not continue to be made by others beyond the painter's lifetime. The palatial grandeur of the Royal Naval Hospital was never again attempted, as later charitable institutions adopted more frugal forms of promotion and display. The role of artists in the decoration of country house interiors also changed – as walls and ceilings became more compartmentalised and decorative plasterwork grew ever more refined, the space apportioned to the decorative history painter became progressively smaller until, by the end of the century, it had disappeared altogether. And following the completion of St Paul's, no other Protestant cathedral was built in England for more than two hundred years. The elite architectural spaces of the later eighteenth century required new decorative solutions in which decorative history painting gradually became less important.⁴ But the later demise of such painting should not

³ The two buildings were several times connected in contemporary topographical poetry. See, for example, James Wright's *Phoenix Paulina. A Poem on the New Fabrick of St Paul's Cathedral*, London, 1708/9. Their respective painted schemes had been linked before, in 1719, when visitors to the painted hall had the opportunity of subscribing for a set of the engravings after Thornhill's St Paul's paintings. See chapter two of this thesis, especially the sections: 'Print' and 'A View from the Top', and fig. 95.

⁴ A vivid example of these changes can be seen by comparing Thornhill's work in the lower hall with the plaster-rich decoration of the chapel in the Queen Mary Building at Greenwich, designed by James Stuart in the 1780s. For a useful survey of eighteenth-century interior decoration see Charles Saumarez Smith, *Eighteenth Century Decoration: design and the domestic interior in England*, London, 1993.

blind us to its historical importance for Thornhill's generation. By the time of the artist's death, in 1734, the Hanoverians were firmly ensconced and were set to rule for another hundred years, Jacobitism was a spent force and the ideological divisions that had emerged during the Restoration crises of the 1680s (and which had fuelled the 'rage of party' under Queen Anne) had shifted – now all but the most fervent Tory accepted the outcomes of the Glorious Revolution. On this evidence, Thornhill's contribution to the cultural defence of the Revolution had been remarkably successful. But by turning to the conventions of portraiture as the best way of asserting the Hanoverian presence in the final scene at Greenwich, Thornhill also anticipated the decline of the kind of theatrical decoration that he had painted on the lower hall ceiling twenty years earlier. Once the image of monarchy had descended from the ceiling, grounded by the certainty of a healthy progeny on earth, there was neither the need nor the opportunity for it to return. Thornhill had done his job.

APPENDIX A

The Life and Character of Sir James Thornhill

This life of James Thornhill was translated, with amendments, by 'J.B.' (traditionally identified as James Burgess) from Antoine Dézallier d'Argenville's *Abregé de la vie des fameux peintres*, Paris, 1745, vol. 2, pp. 227-30. It appeared in the third edition of Roger de Piles's *The Art of Painting, with the lives and characters of above 300 of the most eminent painters: containing a complete treatise of painting, designing, and the use of prints* [translated by John Savage]. *With reflections on the works of the most celebrated masters [...]* Translated from the French, London, 1754, pp. 136-39. Savage's translation of *The Art of Painting* (first published in 1706) also included Bainbrigg Buckeridge's *An Essay towards an English School of Painters*. Buckeridge's *Essay* and Burgess's life of James Thornhill were both published in facsimile by the Commarket Press in 1969.



Sir JAMES THORNHILL,

THE son of a gentleman of an ancient family and estate in Dorsetshire, was born in the year 1676. His father's ill conduct having reduced him to sell his estate, the son was under the necessity of seeking for a profession that might support him. Young Thornhill came to London, where his uncle Sydenham the famous physician, supplied him with the necessary assistances for studying under a middling Painter, whose limited talents being of little use to his disciple, he trusted to his own judgment and application; genius and taste supplying the place of a master, by the strength of which he made a surprizing progress in the enchanting art of Painting.

He travelled through Holland and Flanders, from whence he went into France, where he bought several good pictures; amongst others, a Virgin of Annibal Carrache, and the history of Tancred, by Poussin. If he had seen Italy, his works would have had more delicacy and correctness. His only view in travelling seemed to be acquiring a knowledge of the tastes of different nations, and buying up good pictures, in which he was very curious.

Thornhill's merit soon spread his character, and raised his reputation to the highest pitch. Queen Ann appointed him to paint in the dome of St Paul's, the history of that saint, which he executed in a grand and beautiful manner on eight pannels, in two colours relieved with gold.

Her

Her majesty also nominated him her first history Painter. He afterwards executed several publick works; particularly at Hampton-Court, where he painted an apartment, wherein the queen and prince George of Denmark her husband are represented allegorically; as also another piece painted intirely on the wall, where the same subject is treated in a different manner. The other parts of the Paintings there are done by Antonio Verrio the Neapolitan.

These great works having established his reputation, procured him much employment among people of quality and fortune.

His master-piece is the refectory and saloon of the sailors Hospital at Greenwich. The passage to this refectory is through a vestibule, where Sir James has represented in two colours the winds in the cupola, and on the walls boys who sustain pannels to receive the inscription of the names of the benefactors. From thence you ascend into the refectory, which is a fine gallery very lofty, in the middle of which king William III. and queen Mary his wife, are allegorically represented sitting and attended by the Virtues, and Love, who supports the sceptre. The monarch appears giving peace to Europe; the twelve signs of the Zodiack surround the great oval in which he is painted; the four seasons are seen above; lastly, Apollo, drawn by his four horses, making his tour through the zodiack.

This Painter has represented in the angles the four elements, and the Colossal figures that support the balustrade, where the portraits of those able mathematicians, that have perfected the art of navigation, are painted; such as Ticho Brahé, Copernicus, and Newton. The ceiling is all by his own hand, but he employed a Polander to assist him in painting the walls, which he has adorned with those Virtues that are suitable to the intention of the fabrick; such as Liberality, Hospitality and Charity. The saloon above is

not so beautiful as the cieling, you ascend to it by several steps.

The cieling represents queen Ann and prince George of Denmark, surrounded with heroic Virtues; Neptune and his train bringing their marine presents, and the four quarters of the world presenting themselves in divers attitudes to admire them. The late king George I. is painted on the wall facing the entry, sitting with all his family around him. On the left hand is the landing of king William the III. prince of Orange, afterwards king of England; on the right, that of king George the first at Greenwich. These great works would have been certainly more esteemed, if they had all been by Sir James Thornhill's own hand: They are entirely from his designs, but one cannot help in looking at them criticizing their incorrectness; one would even wish there were fewer figures. These works display a true genius in their author, and a great judgment and knowledge in treating the allegory; talents which must necessarily produce great and rich compositions.

As Sir James had acquired a considerable fortune, he laid out part of it profitably, in buying back the estates his father had sold, and in rebuilding a beautiful house, where he used to live in summer time. He was knighted by king George II. but by the iniquity of the times, he had the honour to be turned out from his publick employment, in company with the great Sir Christopher Wren, to make room for persons of far inferior abilities, to the reproach of those who procured their discharge; after which, to amuse himself, he did not leave off Painting easel pictures. The ill treatment he met with, was thought to have impaired his health; at last, after a year's sickness, he died in the country in 1732, at the age of 56, in the same place where he was born. By his marriage he left a son and daughter.

This

This Painter was well made, and of an agreeable humour. He was several years chosen member of parliament; and was also chosen fellow of the Royal Society of London, which admits eminent artists into its body, as well as men of learning. He designed a great deal from practice, with a great facility of pencil. His genius, so well turned for history and allegory, was no less so for Portrait, Landskip, and Architecture; he even practised the last science as a man of business, having built several houses.

He had a fine collection of designs of great masters, which he had collected with diligence, and which did honour to his taste; these he shewed very readily to strangers.

There are a set of prints engraved after the Paintings on the cupola of St Paul's.

APPENDIX B

[James Thornhill], *An Explanation of the Painting in the Royal-Hospital at Greenwich*, by Sir James Thornhill, Greenwich, 1726.

The directors of Greenwich Hospital ordered three printings of the *Explanation*, with parallel texts in English and French, on 10 December 1726, 20 August 1730 and 4 July 1741 (each of 1,000 copies). Though published anonymously, it was probably written by, or certainly with the co-operation of, the artist.

The following transcription was made by Barnaby Ralph in 2002 from a facsimile of the original edition provided by The Greenwich Foundation for the Royal Naval College. The even-numbered pages only are in English, and have thus been transcribed. Spelling, italics and capitalisation have been preserved as in the original along with, where possible, spacing and paragraphs. I am grateful to Barnaby for allowing me to include his transcription here.

AN
EXPLANATION
OF THE
PAINTING
IN THE
ROYAL-HOSPITAL
AT
GREENWICH,
BY
Sir James Thornhill.

Published

By Order of the DIRECTORS of the said
HOSPITAL, for the Benefit of the CHARITY-
BOYS maintained there.

Sold by the PORTER of the HOSPITAL.
[Price 6d.]

The CUPOLA.

IN the Center is a Compass, with its proper Points duly bearing. In the Coving or Dish of the *Cupola* are the four WINDS painted in Stone Colour, in *Alto-relievo*, with their different Attitudes,

EURUS, or the East Wind, arising out of the East, winged, with a lighted Torch in his Right-hand as bringeth light to the Earth; with his Left-hand he seems to push the Morning Star out of the Firmament: The Demi-Figures and Boys which form the Groupe shew the Morning Dews that fall before him.

AUSTER, or the South Wind, his Wings dropping Water, is pressing forth Rains from a Bag, the little Boys near him throwing about Thunder and Lightning.

ZEPHYRUS, or the West Wind, accompanied by little *Zephyrs* with Baskets of Flowers, scattering them around him: The Figure playing on the Flute, signifies the Joy and Pleasure of the Spring Season.

BOREAS, or the North Wind, with Dragon's Wings, denoting his Fury, his boisterous Companions are flinging about Hail-stone, Snow, & c.

The Three Sides of the CUPOLA.

Over the three Doors are large oval TABLES, with the *Names* in Gold Letters of such BENEFACTORS as have given One Hundred Pounds or upwards towards the Building of this Charitable Foundation.

Names

Names of BENEFACTORS.

	<i>Pounds.</i>
<i>King William III.</i> _____	19500
<i>Archbishop of Canterbury</i> _____	206
<i>Lord Somers</i> _____	500
<i>Earl of Pembroke</i> _____	500
<i>Duke of Shrewsbury</i> _____	500
<i>Earl of Portland</i> _____	250
<i>Lord Godolphin</i> _____	200
<i>Sir Stephen Fox</i> _____	200
<i>Sir John Trevor</i> _____	200
<i>Lord Chief Justice Holt</i> _____	100
<i>Queen Ann</i> _____	6472
<i>Ralph Thursby, Esq;</i> _____	500
<i>Thomas Blackmore, Esq;</i> _____	100
<i>John de la Fountain, Esq;</i> _____	2000
<i>Benjamin Overton, Esq;</i> _____	300
<i>Sir James Bateman</i> _____	103
<i>James Taylor, Gentleman</i> _____	102
<i>Robert Osbolston, Esq;</i> _____	20000
<i>Sir John Cropley</i> _____	2000
<i>Mr. Evelyn</i> _____	2000
<i>John Evelyn, Esq;</i> _____	1000
<i>Sir Thomas Lane</i> _____	100
<i>Sir John Houblon</i> _____	100
<i>Lord Chief Justice Treby</i> _____	100

<i>Sir</i> Patience Ward _____	100
<i>Sir</i> William Ashurst _____	100
<i>Sir</i> Richard Onslow _____	100
Richard Smith, <i>Esq;</i> _____	116
Elizabeth Bridges _____	100
<i>Sir</i> Jonah Child _____	300
Brokes Bridges, <i>Esq;</i> _____	350

There

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There are many other lesser Benefactors, which are register'd in a Book for that Purpose.

These TABLES are adorned with *Demi-seraphims*, who extend their Wings over them and denote M E R C Y.

Each *Table* is attended by two *Charity-Boys*, as if carved in white Marble, sitting on great *Corbels* pointing up to the Figure of C H A R I T Y in a Niche, intimating that *what Money is given there is for THEIR SUPPORT*.

N.B. Out of all that is given for shewing these HALLS, only Three-pence in the Shilling is allowed to the Person that shews it; the Rest makes an excellent Fund for the yearly Maintenance of One Hundred and Fort[y] poor Boys, who are the Sons of Mariners that have either been slain or disabled in the SERVICE of their COUNTRY.

Out of this Fund these Boys are entirely provided for, are cloathed, fed, and are also taught such a Share of *Mathematical Learning*, as fits them out to the S E A Service, and consequently helps to make a perpetual Supply of skilful Seamen, who are the Safeguard of our COUNTRY.

Explanation of the GREAT-HALL.

In the middle of the great *Oval*, under a Canopy of State, and attended by the four *Cardinal VIRTUES*, are King *William* and Queen *Mary, Concord* sitting between, *Cupid* holding the Scep-

ter,

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ter, while King *William* presents P E A C E and L I B E R T Y to *Europe*, and tramples on *Tyranny*, and *Arbitrary Power*.

Underneath is a Figure of *Architecture*, holding a DRAWING of Part of the *Hospital*, and pointing up to the Royal Founders.

Near them is *Time*, bringing *Truth* to Light: below them is *Wisdom* and *Virtue*, represented by P A L L A S and H E R C U L E S destroying *Calumny*, *Detraction* and *Envy*, with other Vices.

In the Circumference of the *Oval* are the twelve *Signs* of the *Zodiac* with their proper Attitudes, over which preside the four *Seasons* of the Year.

SPRING or FLORA, over *Aries*, *Taurus*, *Gemini*. SUMMER or CERES, over *Cancer*, *Leo*, *Virgo*. AUTUMN or BACCHUS, over *Libra*, *Scorpio*, *Sagittarius*. HYEMS or WINTER, over *Capricornus*, *Aquarius*, *Pisces*.

A P O L L O on high, drawn by four white Horses, the *Hours*, &c. flying round him, *Dews* falling before him, going his celestial Course thro' the *Zodiac*, and giving Light to the whole Ceiling.

The Oval Frame is supported by stone Figures, and grouped withal Sorts of marine *Trophies* in Stone Colour.

Each End of the Ceiling is raised in Perspective, with *Balustrades* and *Colossean Figures*, which support Elliptical Arches, forming *Galleries*, in which

are

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are the several *Arts* and *Sciences* relation to Navigation.

In the middle of the Gallery next the upper Hall, is the Stern of a *British Man of War*, with a Figure of VICTORY filling her with *Spoils* and *Trophies* taken from the Enemy.

Under the *Man of War* is a Figure that represents the CITY OF LONDON sitting on THAME and ISIS, with the smaller *Rivers* bringing Treasures unto her. The River TINE is there pouring forth his plenty of *Coals*.

In the Center of the Gallery, at the lower End of the Hall, is the *Stern* of a *Spanish Galley* filled with *Trophies*, &c. Under it is the SEVERN, with her *Lampreys*, and the HUMBER with his *Piggs of Lead*, with which THAMES and the TINE compose the four great *Rivers of England*.

On the Left-hand is that noble Danish Knight *Tycho Brache*, near him is *Copernicus*, with his SYSTEM in his Hand; by him is an old Philosopher pointing to some remarkable Mathematical Figures of the incomparable Sir *Isaac Newton*.

On the Right in this Gallery is the celebrated *English Astronomer* the Reverend Mr. *Flamsteed*, who holds the Construction of the great Eclipse which happened *April* the 22nd, 1715. Close by him is his ingenious Disciple Mr. *Thomas Weston*, who was late Master of the *Academy in Greenwich*: He is assisting Mr. *Flamsteed* in making Observations, with a large Quadrant (whilst an Old Man

at

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at the Clock is counting the Time) of the Moon's Descent upon the SEVERN, which at certain Times when she is in her *Perigee*, makes such a Roll of the Tides, called the *Eagre* as is very dangerous to all in its Way.

In the four great Angles, are the four ELEMENTS, *Fire*, *Air*, *Earth*, and *Water*, with their several Symbols, offering their various Productions to King *William* and Queen *Mary*, while *Fame* at one End of the *Oval* descends, sounding the Praise of the Royal Pair.

In the *Frize* around the Hall is this Inscription.

PIETAS, AUGUSTA, UT HABITENT SECURE, ET PUBLICÆ ALANTUR, QUI PUBLICÆ SECURITANTI INVIGILARUNT, REGIA GRENOVICI MARIE AUSPICIIS, SUBLEVANDIS NAUTIS, DESTINATA, REGINANTIBUS GULIELMO ET MARIA, MDCXCIV.

On the North-side of the Hall are painted in Niches Eight of the most social VIRTUES, viz. *Humanity*, *Benignity*, *Goodness*, *Generosity*, *Mercy*, *Liberality*, *Magnanimity*, and *Hospitality*.

The *Sides* are decorated with fluted PILASTERS, SHELLS, &c.

The UPPER-HALL.

In the Ceiling, which is elevated in Perspective, is Queen *Anne*, with Prince *George of Denmark*,

supported

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supported by *Virtue* HEROICK, *Concord* Conjugal, *Liberality*, *Piety*, *Victory*, &c.

NEPTUNE surrendering his *Trident* to the *Prince* as *Lord-High-Admiral* of the *British Seas*.

NEPTUNE is attended by *Tritons* and other *Deities* of the SEA, bringing their respective Offerings, while JUNO or the AIR, with ÆOLUS, God of the Winds, are commanding a *Calm*.

In the Covings are the four QUARTERS of the World, *Europe*, *Asia*, *Africa*, and *America*, with their several Attitudes, &c. admiring our Maritime Power.

In the Angles of the Covings are the ARMS of *England*, *Scotland*, *France* and *Ireland*, adorned with great *Festoons* of *Sea-Shells*, *Trophies of War*, vast *Pots of Flowers*, which embellish the Compartments, &c.

On the Left-hand Side, as you enter the *Upper Hall*. In the great *Basso Relievo* height'ned with Gold is the REVOLUTION, or the *Landing* of the Prince of ORANGE, who is welcomed on Shore by *Britannia*, attended by *Reason of State*, and *Love of her Country*.

Behind this glorious Prince is *Neptune*, *Amphitrite*, &c. giving up their great Charge, little *Cupids* riding in the Sails.

Over the Prince's Head is a Figure that signifies *Good Omen*; JUPITER, or *Divine Power* holding a Scroll, on which is this *Motto*.

ANGLORUM SPES MAGNA.

On

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On the Right-hand over the Chimney is the ACCESSION, or *Landing of King GEORGE* at *Greenwich*; On his Right-hand is PEACE, on his Left-hand HAPPINESS; He is led on by TRUTH and JUSTICE, RELIGION and LIBERTY; before him falls REBELLION.

St. GEORGE the tutelar Saint of *England*, attends his sacred *Carr*, treading on a slain *Dragon*. Over his Head is ETERNITY, holding an immortal Crown to reward good Princes, FAME flying before him sounding his Praise.

At a Distance is a *View* of Part of the *Royal-Hospital*, with Crouds of People rejoicing at his Majesty's happy Arrival.

On the Great Front

Is MERCURY, Messenger of the *Gods*, descending, who with one Hand points to the present Royal Family, and with his other to this *Motto* above in the *Frize*.

JAM NOVA PROGENIES CÆLO, &c.

Angels, Cupids, &c. Drawing the Curtain, and opening the Scene, where his Majesty is sitting, and leaning on a Terrestrial Globe, as PROVIDENCE descends, and puts the Scepter into his Hands.

On his Right-hand is PRUDENCE, represented by the PRINCESS of WALES, also CONCORD with the *Fasces* by the Queen of *Prussia*.

Over

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Over the King's Head is ASTREA with her *Balance* returning to the *Earth*, which is represented by CYBELE, or the Princess SOPHIA.

Under ASTREA are little *Cupids* with this *Motto*.

JAM REDIT ET VIRGO, &c.

Alluding to JUSTICE and the *Golden Age* restored, who is on her Right-hand pouring forth *RICHERS*, &c. from a *Cornucopia*.

Over all is a *Figure* holding a PYRAMID, which signifies *Stability*, or the Glory of Princes.

On his Majesty's Knee leans Prince FREDERICK, by him his Royal Highness the Prince of WALES, on whose Left-hand is a Figure representing NAVAL VICTORY with a *Trident*, *Rostral Crown*, *Palm* and *Laurel*, holding a vast SCROLL, on which are recorded several of the Gallant ENGLISH ACTIONS at SEA.

PEACE and PLENTY are offering at his *Majesty's Feet*: the little GENII of PAINTING, POETRY and MUSICK, represented by the Three young Princesses: round the *Cornucopia*, are Prince *William*, and his other Sisters playing with a Dove, shewing the Love and Harmony in this illustrious Family.

Great Variety of *Cupids* are flying with vast *Festoons* of *Flowers*, wreathing them round the C O L U M N S: Some bringing Baskets, others

throwing

throwing Flowers into the VASES, which are in great *Golden* ALTARS, sending forth Incense between the Pillars; all together denoting the extraordinary JOY on this great Occasion.

As you go out of the Hall, on the Left-hand of the *Arch* in *Basso-Relievo*, heightened with *Gold*, is shewn that our *Trade, Commerce, and Publick Wealth* are chiefly owing to our NAVY.

BRITTANIA pointing to a FIGURE denoting the *Publick Weal*, while MERCURY points to the *Stern* of a Ship, on the Ensign of which is written.

SALUS PUBLICA.

PLENTY underneath, pouring *Riches* into the Lap of COMMERCE, who is sitting on *Bails of Goods &c.* holding a *Rudder*, the *Emblem* of NAVIGATION.

On the Right-hand side of the *Arch* is represented the *British Power* by BRITANNIA holding the *Trident* between OCEANUS and CYBELE, pointing to a Figure, leaning on a *Pillar*, which signifies PUBLICK SECURITY; by her is a *Man of War*, where there is this *Motto*.

SECURITAS PUBLICA.

All these *Basso Relievo's* are supported by TRITONS, and all the *Basements* adorned with *Trophies Marine*.

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