

**J. Philip McAleer, *Rochester Cathedral, 604–1540: An Architectural History*. Toronto, Buffalo, and London, University of Toronto Press, 1999, 314 pp., 108 illus., \$70 Cdn**

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J. Philip McAleer, *Rochester Cathedral, 604–1540: An Architectural History*. Toronto, Buffalo, and London, University of Toronto Press, 1999, 314 pp., 108 illus., \$70 Cdn.

Over the past twenty years, Philip McAleer has written a large number of articles on aspects of English medieval architecture. They have been characterized by painstaking research into the buildings and their documentation. No stone would go unexamined, nor would any antiquarian correspondence or sketch miss the scrutiny of our architectural sleuth, and all would be reported in dense texts and weighty footnotes. This tradition continues unabated in *Rochester Cathedral, 604–1540: An Architectural History*. McAleer sets out to revise earlier detailed studies of the cathedral, in particular those of Ashpital, St John Hope, and Fairweather.<sup>1</sup> McAleer's study adopts an "archaeological approach, with an emphasis on stylistic development" (xvii). He announces, "I have not deliberately rejected a contextual approach so much as I have failed to find significant political, social, economic, or religious events – with perhaps one exception – that seemed to touch directly on the cathedral, and that would or could explain not only its particular forms, but even when or why work stopped or started when it did" (xvii). One may applaud such admirable caution at a time when it is all too trendy to read into the architecture all sorts of meaning that may never have been intended by the patron or architect.

The book is divided into seven chapters that present a chronological analysis of the building starting with "The Pre-Conquest Church." The small apsidal building partially uncovered under the present west front, long believed to be the King Aethelberht's cathedral of 604, is no longer so associated. McAleer sensibly dismisses Hope's claim for a larger Anglo-Saxon cathedral that was based on foundations discovered outside the south nave aisle wall. He similarly strikes down Radford's notion that two short lengths of wall that meet at an oblique angle, uncovered north and east of the present north-west crossing pier, were part of a late eleventh-century cathedral. The result is that the location of an Anglo-Saxon cathedral cannot be identified.

Chapter two, "The Free-Standing Tower," examines the plain structure located between the north and northeast transept, now known as Gundulf's Tower, after Bishop Gundulf (1076/7–1108), the builder of the first Romanesque church. McAleer questions the association with Gundulf. He shows that originally the tower was entered at second-floor (English first-floor) level though a doorway in the west wall reached by a wooden staircase. It is suggested that the tower was built soon after the Conquest prior to the commencement of construction of the present cathedral.

"The Late-Eleventh-Century Romanesque Building" is considered in chapter three. A starting date of 1082/3 is suggested.

McAleer reconstructs the crypt under the eastern half of the original presbytery, with apsidal terminations to the main span and the aisles (fig. 9). The original eastern arm, with solid walls that separated the aisles from the presbytery and choir, is reconstructed with two square groin vaults over the main span and four groin-vaulted bays in the aisles (fig. 10). Parallels for solid-walled eastern arms are discussed, but no explanation is offered for the form of the putative vault. La Trinité at Caen might have been cited, even though there the aisle-presbytery rhythm is not the same as that proposed for Rochester. St Albans Abbey would provide another analogue, while Cerisy-la-Forêt (Manche) had solid walls between presbytery and aisles, and a wood roof over the main span. Most importantly, McAleer calls for the elimination of the reconstruction, by Ashpital and Hope, of a long, straight-ended choir to Gundulf's cathedral (p. 6). This is quite clearly presented (pp. 26–38), and yet we then read: "If the restoration of an aisled, straight-ended presbytery is correct – and, as has been seen, there is considerable room for doubt – it becomes the earliest of a general type that was to have greater currency in the following century" (p. 50). And, "This unexpected, unconventional form of the east end, if indeed it actually existed..." (p. 52). If the reconstruction is not correct, why is the reader subjected to three pages of analysis of something that did not belong to Gundulf's church? More straightforwardly, he reconstructs a conventional crossing and transepts, and a nave completed in the eleventh century terminated by a sectional façade. Here the only point for debate would seem to be whether or not the transepts had chapels. It is possible that there were square-ended chapels, for which there are parallels at Romanesque Lincoln Cathedral and Sherborne Abbey, or, alternatively, "unconventional" (p. 44) altar niches. The latter occur in many eleventh- and twelfth-century minor cruciform churches as at Worth (Sussex), Milborne Port (Somerset), Bishop's Cleeve (Glos.), to name just three, and on a similar scale to Rochester at Exeter Cathedral.

"Alterations and Rebuilding in the Twelfth Century" are presented in the fourth chapter. The present nave is convincingly dated after the fire of 1137, not from 1115–25, as suggested by Hope. The variety in the design of the nave piers – which match north to south and change east to west – is recognized as an aesthetic choice within a single campaign rather than a series of changes of mind. The west front is allied to Le Mans Cathedral and Lindisfarne Priory for the turrets, and to Castle Acre Priory, St Botolph at Colchester, Croyland Abbey, and Hereford Cathedral for the rich blind arcading. Romanesque Hereford Cathedral might also supply a parallel for the chorister passage for the Palm Sunday procession.<sup>2</sup> McAleer recognizes the importance of Parisian and northern French exemplars for the sculpture of the west front, most completely explored by Deborah Kahn in her essay "The West

Doorway at Rochester Cathedral.”<sup>3</sup> However, he challenges Kahn’s interpretation of the sources in reinstating Poitevin parallels, first cited by Edward Prior and Arthur Gardner in *An Account of Medieval Figure-Sculpture in England*.<sup>4</sup>

There is only very brief further discussion of Hope’s proposed east end and whether an extension to Gundulf’s east end was made by Bishop Ernulf (1114–24) or after the fire of 1137. Mention is made that now lost “stones with the lozenge pattern, which Hope and others at the time thought were similar to work associated with Ernulf at Canterbury and elsewhere at Rochester, that is, the chapter house, are now dated to the second not the first quarter of the twelfth century” (p. 71). This dating of the chapter house is accepted even though Ernulf is documented as having built it, along with the dormitory and refectory. Some discussion of this anomaly in connection with the distinct marks of fire damage (from the 1137 fire?) would have been welcome. As it is, aside from the vault in the west range, there is no further discussion of the twelfth-century cloister, even though there are remains of the dormitory door with Tournai marble shafts, flanked by intersecting blind arcades, and fragmentary dark marble columns. These are especially interesting in connection with the use of dark marble in England prior to the rebuilding of the choir of Canterbury Cathedral after a fire in 1174. They belong to a group of rich cloisters in the south of England, such as at Battle Abbey, Glastonbury Abbey, St Nicholas’s Priory at Exeter, Lewes Priory, Shaftesbury Abbey, and the infirmary cloister at Canterbury Cathedral.

Chapter five, “The Early Gothic Rebuilding,” makes a significant contribution in re-dating the major rebuilding to shortly after the fire of 1179 rather than around 1200, and in having the south transept completed about 1240 rather than around 1280. Stylistic connections are seen with Canterbury Cathedral but there is no discussion of the unusual two-storey elevation, otherwise only seen in early Gothic cathedrals in Britain at Llandaff and Dunblane. The “Y” tracery of the south transept windows is paralleled with that in the southwest chapel at Lincoln Cathedral, which McAleer dates quite conservatively to 1240 to 1245 (p. 140). Be that as it may, his argument for the completion of the south transept around 1240 may be reinforced with reference to the “Y” tracery in the chapter house of Lichfield Cathedral and the west front of St Nicholas at Great Yarmouth (Norfolk).

“Later Gothic Alterations and Additions” are discussed in chapter six. These include Bishop Hamo’s portal, the central tower, the wooden ceiling of the south choir aisle, much re-fenestration, the so-called Lady Chapel, and the vaults of the major transept. The latter were executed in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, and, in the southern arm, in wood rather than in stone as in the northern arm. The tradition of

wooden vaults in England is ably discussed, although we might add to McAleer’s parallels, examples in the cloister at Lincoln Cathedral, Exeter Cathedral transepts, Winchester College chapel, Winchester Cathedral choir, and the Fitzalan Chapel in the collegiate church of St Nicholas at Arundel (Sussex).

The final chapter briefly mentions problems that remain with the interpretation of the building and rightly indicates that the form of the east end of Gundulf’s church could be solved with careful excavation. It is hoped that this excavation can be carried out in the near future.

In general, the book is not easy reading; 163 pages of text are accompanied by 118 pages of copious footnotes. While the latter provide essential information for future researchers, for the most part they should probably be recommended only to the most avid detectives of the cathedral fabric and connoisseurs of antiquarian method. Then, there are amazingly precise metric conversions of imperial measures, for instance 19 feet becomes 5.7912 m (p. 11), along with strange turns of phrase such as “none – with the exception of one –...” (p. 22). There is a nine-page “Essential Bibliography.”

The small format of the book works satisfactorily for the illustration of profiles of base mouldings and antiquarian sketches of details, but it is hardly conducive to the reproduction of adequate plans and photographs of a medieval cathedral. Be that as it may, the quality of the majority of the general views would not merit a larger format; they have not been taken with a perspective-control lens with the result that converging verticals abound. It is strange that art and architectural historians, who are in the business of analyzing the visual, are all too often satisfied with low-quality images. What has become a woeful practice for classroom and conference presentations has now unfortunately contaminated the academic press. The publisher should be ashamed about the poor quality of the plates. *Rochester Cathedral, 604–1540: An Architectural History* will do nothing to attract a wider audience to a monograph on a medieval cathedral. This is a great pity. Images can look good, and texts made accessible to the non-specialist, as indicated by Eric Fernie’s exemplary monograph *An Architectural History of Norwich Cathedral*.<sup>5</sup>

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#### Notes

- 1 A. Ashpital, “Rochester Cathedral,” *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 9 (1854), 271–85; W.H. St John Hope, “The Architectural History of the Cathedral Church and Monastery of St Andrew at Rochester,” *Archaeologia Cantiana* 23 (1898), 194–328, and 24 (1900), 1–85; and F.H. Fairweather, “Gundulf’s Cathedral

- and Priory Church of St Andrew, Rochester: Some Critical Remarks on the Hitherto Accepted Plan," *Archaeological Journal* 86 (1929), 187–212.
- 2 *Medieval Art and Architecture at Hereford Cathedral: The British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions*, David Whitehead, ed., (Leeds, 1995), 15–28.
- 3 Deborah Kahn, "The West Doorway at Rochester Cathedral," in

- N. Stratford, ed., *Romanesque and Gothic: Essays for George Zarnecki* (Woodbridge, 1987), 129–34.
- 4 Edward Prior and Arthur Gardner, *An Account of Medieval Figure-Sculpture in England* (Cambridge, 1912), 198.
- 5 Eric Fernie, *An Architectural History of Norwich Cathedral* (Oxford, 1994).

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Carol Gibson-Wood, *Jonathan Richardson: Art Theorist of the English Enlightenment*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2000, 264 pp., 89 black-and-white illus., \$75 U.S.

This book combines the traditional strength of the artist's monograph with the appeal of more recent fashions for studies of small artistic communities, especially those based in London.<sup>1</sup> The main body of the text begins with an examination of the artistic micro-climate around Lincoln's Inn Fields, where Richardson spent the early and middle sections of his career. Richardson's diverse group of friends and acquaintances, we learn, included the surgeon William Cheselden, Edward Harley and other members of the Royal Society, Ralph Palmer, a barrister-at-law, together with that most celebrated member of Richardson's circle, Alexander Pope. The Richardson-Pope association is evocatively described as founded upon mutual respect for textual study of the ancients and spiced by hoaxes and jokes, such as a Miltonian pastiche that goes unnoticed by Richardson. This section also includes insights regarding pupil-master exchange in Richardson's studio and a glance at the professional relationship between the artist and his son Jonathan Richardson junior, co-author of *An Account of Some of the Statues, Bas-Reliefs, Drawings and Pictures in Italy &c. with Remarks. By Mr Richardson, Sen and Jun* (London, 1722). The unique character of a relationship based on the domestic *ménage* of Richardson's home, however, has yet to be explored in a way that will fully reveal its art-historical and art-critical implications.

Central to Gibson-Wood's text is the discussion of social aspiration and the painting of portraits. Part one, "The Annals of a Chequered Life," offers a detailed variant of a familiar argument first versed by scholars such as Iain Pears, David Solkin, and John Barrell,<sup>2</sup> in which the eighteenth-century portrait painter attempted to elevate the status of his craft by employing a generalized visual language, in order to approximate the dignity of history painting. In Joshua Reynolds's case, this was accomplished by the widespread use of classical dress and a lack of attention to trifling details. In Richardson's case, we read, portraiture was justified by its value as an "improving" exercise for the sitter (who is encouraged to engage in self-reflection) and, by association, a didactic experience for the viewer, who, it is hoped, will think highly of the sitter (pp. 187–88).

The tirelessness with which Richardson built up a lucrative portrait practice, and what amounted to a studio "empire" on more than one site, through hard work and a strategic marriage, is well conveyed by Gibson-Wood. This process of self-transformation from mere "face-painter" to professional artist is equally applicable to the careers of Richardson's contemporaries such as Godfrey Kneller, John Closterman, and Michael Dahl and extends to those of his seventeenth-century predecessors, including Richard Gibson (who became the King's painter) and, more famously, Anthony van Dyck.

And yet the reader is left in no doubt that Richardson's two major contributions to art theory were also central components of his self-made greatness. Although distinctive for reasons that the author makes clear, Richardson's case was, however, entrenched in a pre-existent pattern of financial, artistic, and social progress applicable to portraitists active in England after 1630, as I have suggested above. A full sense of this is not gained from Gibson-Wood's text, and is part of a broader omission to engage with the issue of Richardson's place in the artistic community and the art-critical canon of late sixteenth-century to mid-eighteenth-century Britain. This lacuna is no doubt due to the methodology chosen by the author as laid out in the introduction.

In the opening pages of this book we are told that the author's method of assessing the prolific portrait painter, collector, and art theorist is "philosophical analysis" (pp. 2–4). This technique does, indeed, allow a close examination of Richardson's place in the environment of ideas found in early eighteenth-century Britain. Richardson, in Gibson-Wood's view, offered an "alternative" programme of artistic discernment that drew from contemporary thought, particularly from the writings of John Locke. The constituent parts of this programme are laid out in part two of the book, "An English Theory of Painting," and prioritized as imagination, information, instruction, pleasure, and beauty.

It is hard to disagree with Gibson-Wood that Richardson's *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (1715) was a distinctive contribution to the literature on taste published after 1711. Its emphasis on the potentially didactic notion of painting was, indeed, the most significant since Anthony Ashley Cooper's *Treatise, vii. viz. A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature*