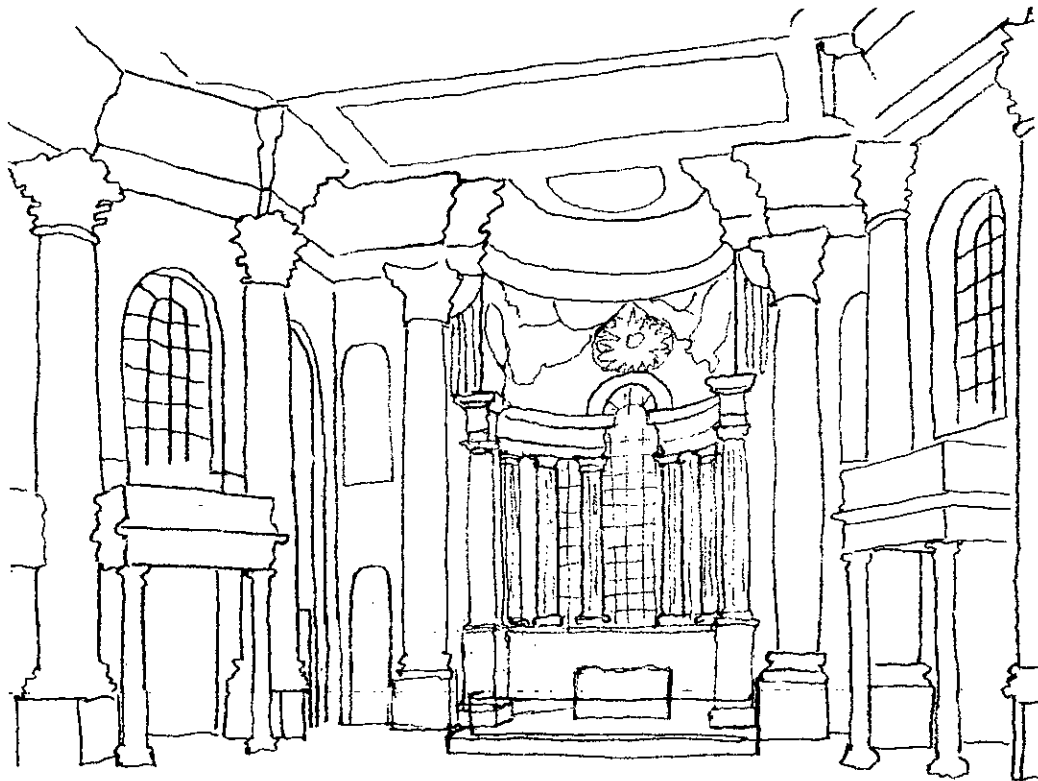


St PAUL'S CHURCH DEPTFORD LEWISHAM

*A Set of Sketch Reconstruction Drawings to
Illustrate Phases in the Design and
Development of the East End of the Church*



by

Richard Lea

Historical Analysis & Research Team
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1. Introduction

The Historical Analysis and Research Team has been asked to study the development of the east end of the church of St Paul, Deptford in Lewisham. In May 2000, a fire broke out in the east end of the church while it was undergoing restoration and repair with the assistance of Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage grants. The fire caused damage to the interior of apse, destroyed the lower parts of the east window and soot blackened the whole of the interior. The damage has necessitated a review of the proposed treatment of the east end and English Heritage has undertaken research and analysis to inform the revised proposals for repair.

The request for advice, while focusing on the east window glass and the painted decoration within the apse also drew attention to the floor levels within the east end. In response, this report identifies significant stages in the development of the building's east end and illustrates them in reconstruction drawings. It draws on Susie Barson's complementary report, Historical Analysis & Research Team, *Reports and Papers* 49, on the decoration of the east end and east window, wherein the documentary evidence for the development of the church is presented, the maker of the present east window is identified and the recent paint discoveries in the apse are rehearsed.

Most of the sources and illustrations for this report are reproduced in *Reports and Papers* 49: references to page and figure numbers are cited here as footnotes. The sketch reconstruction drawings in this report are based on a photograph by AF Kersting from 1950. Panelling, pewing and monuments are omitted from the sketches in order to illustrate the structural developments and changes in floor levels more clearly.

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2. Thomas Archer's First Design Drawing, 1712

Thomas Archer's first design drawing, dated 1712, shows the general plan of the church as built except for the design of the west front and tower and the absence of doors in the north and south walls.¹

The windows that pierced the apse wall, however, are larger than those eventually built. The centre window would have been comparable in size with the standard windows in the aisles. The tripartite plan of a large window flanked by two smaller windows suggests that a Venetian window was intended at this stage. The reconstruction shown here is based on Archer's other Commissioner church at St John Smith Square. The general detailing of the windows throughout the church appears to be plain both internally and externally.

The three steps across the main vessel of the church between the inner two columns flanking the angled walls show that, at this stage, the area around the altar was to be differentiated from that of the main vessel by a change of floor level of c 450mm (18").

The plan does not show the proposed locations of any of the major liturgical furnishings, altar, pulpit, or font. The details of the liturgical use of the building might not have been resolved at this stage.

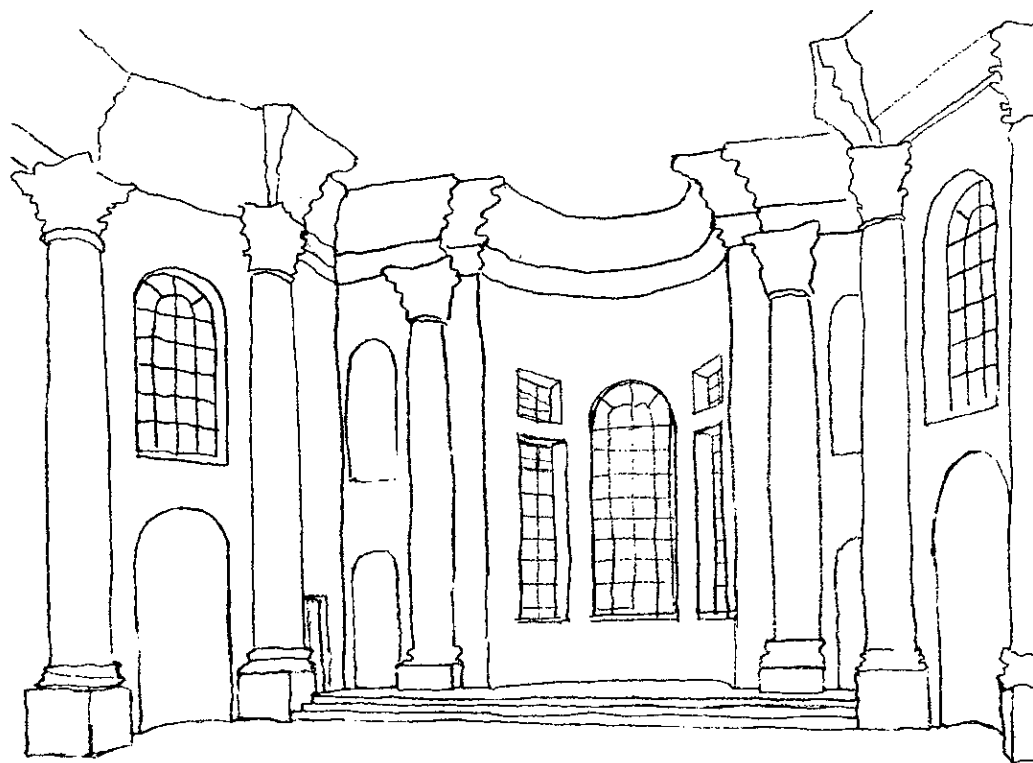


Figure 1, a reconstruction of Thomas Archer's proposed treatment of the east end

¹ Barson 2001, fig 5

3. *Thomas Archer's Second Design Drawing, after 1712*

Archer's second plan is undated but it appears to follow the first because it shows major changes that were adopted in the building.² The changes include the circular tower and portico at the west end, the north and south doors, the articulation of the external wall surface with pilasters, and the reduction in size of the east window.

However, not all of the proposed revisions were adopted. The plan shows that the aisle windows were to have architraves set within curved recesses but they were built with architraves set on the main wall face. The circular line that appears in the plan, tangential to the two columns in front of the apse, probably denotes a baldacchino, supported by the columns, with a cornice and, perhaps, incorporating a shallow coffered dome above the altar. We have neither physical nor documentary evidence, to suggest that the baldacchino and columns were ever built.

The two parallel lines that form a rectangle in front of the apse appear to represent an altar rail, rather than steps, since the width of the implied rail is approximately half that of the steps shown in the earlier drawing. The revised plan therefore appears to show a single floor level throughout the church. This clearly represents a change in thinking with respect to the liturgical use of the space. It suggests that, at this stage in the design, less significance was attached to the altar. Although the altar is not shown, Archer must have intended it to be placed within the altar rail, and most probably against the east wall. Interestingly, the pulpit is shown, set in one of the niches in one of the angle walls. The font appears to be shown on the diametrically opposed wall at the west end of the nave.

However, because we know that some of the proposed revisions included in this plan, were not executed, we cannot rely on this plan of the east end as a record of what was built.

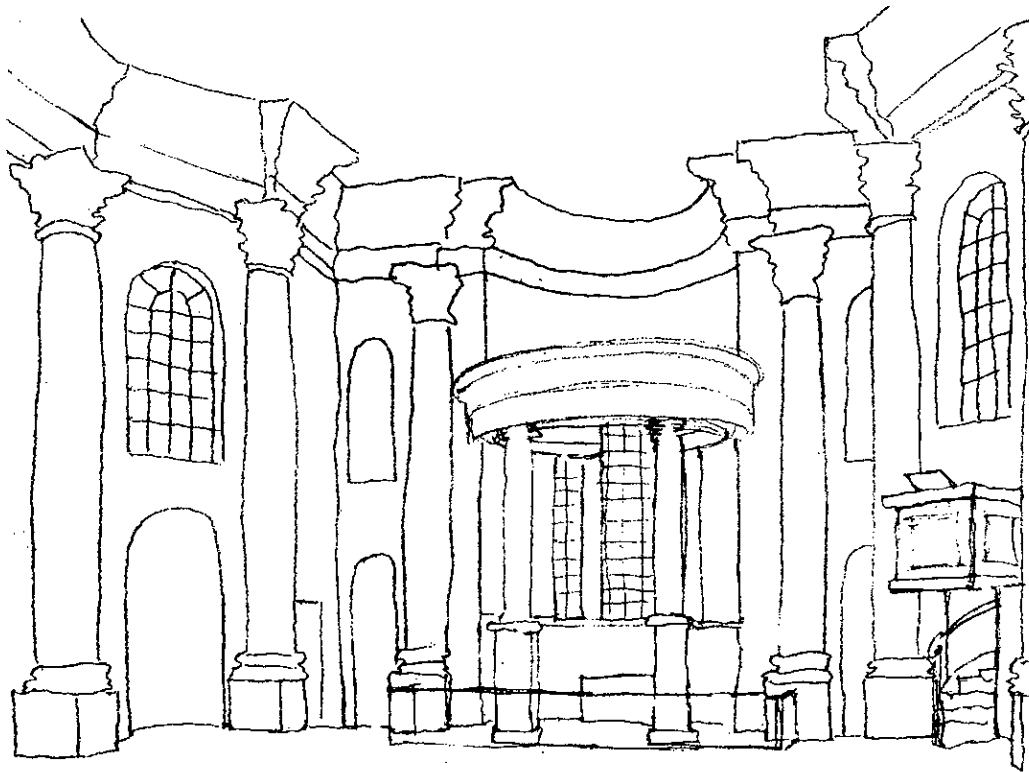


Figure 2, a reconstruction of Archer's revised proposals for the east end

² Barson 2001, fig 6

4. *The East End as Executed, c 1717*

From the building accounts, we know that by 1717 the church was sufficiently advanced to be glazed throughout by Thomas Cummins³ and that the glazing in the east window appears from the watercolour of c 1800 to have been uniform with the other windows.⁴ The recent fire damage has made abundantly clear which architectural elements in the apse are joinery as opposed to masonry. This distinction, taken in conjunction with the joiner's accounts of 1722,⁵ make it clear that the treatment of the apse evolved in two stages during its construction and before its consecration in 1730.

The Venetian east window was originally built in stone with the entablature terminating above the outer pilasters of the flanking windows. Below the window, the wall face of the apse was left finished in brick and was probably intended to be panelled or plastered.

The original floor level of the church, executed between 1712 and 1730, was probably either uniform throughout or incorporated a single step around the altar. This step may or may not be that shown in the plan accompanying the Faculty of 1895 which shows the east end as existing at that time.⁶ That the chancel floor was not more than one step higher than the rest of the floor is apparent in the low level of the altar in the later views by Scharf and Cox.⁷ In both these views, it must be remembered that the pews are shown as originally built, approximately 300mm (12") taller than they are now. The pews were reduced in height by the removal of the top set of panels in 1895–6 by AW West.⁸

Although Archer's revised plan appears to show no step at the east end,⁹ his intention to segregate the altar from the body of the church is revealed by his inclusion of an altar rail. That the altar rail probably was executed at this time is revealed by its inclusion in the list of outstanding items remaining to be completed in 1723.¹⁰ Since the Faculty plan of 1895¹¹ shows an altar rail in this position with a step, it is suggested here that Archer's plan was revised and that the rail was supplemented by a step at this stage in the construction of the church.

John Gilham installed the pews in the church in 1717, but they are omitted from the reconstruction drawing shown here (Figure 3) so that the floor arrangements can be seen more clearly. We have no evidence for where Archer intended to locate the altar at this stage but it seems most likely that it was to be placed against the east wall.

³ Barson 2001, 27
⁴ Barson 2001, fig 4
⁵ Barson 2001, 28
⁶ Barson 2001, fig 36
⁷ Barson 2001, figs 9 and 10
⁸ Barson 2001, 13, 17
⁹ Barson 2001, fig 6
¹⁰ Barson 2001, 29
¹¹ Barson 2001, fig 36

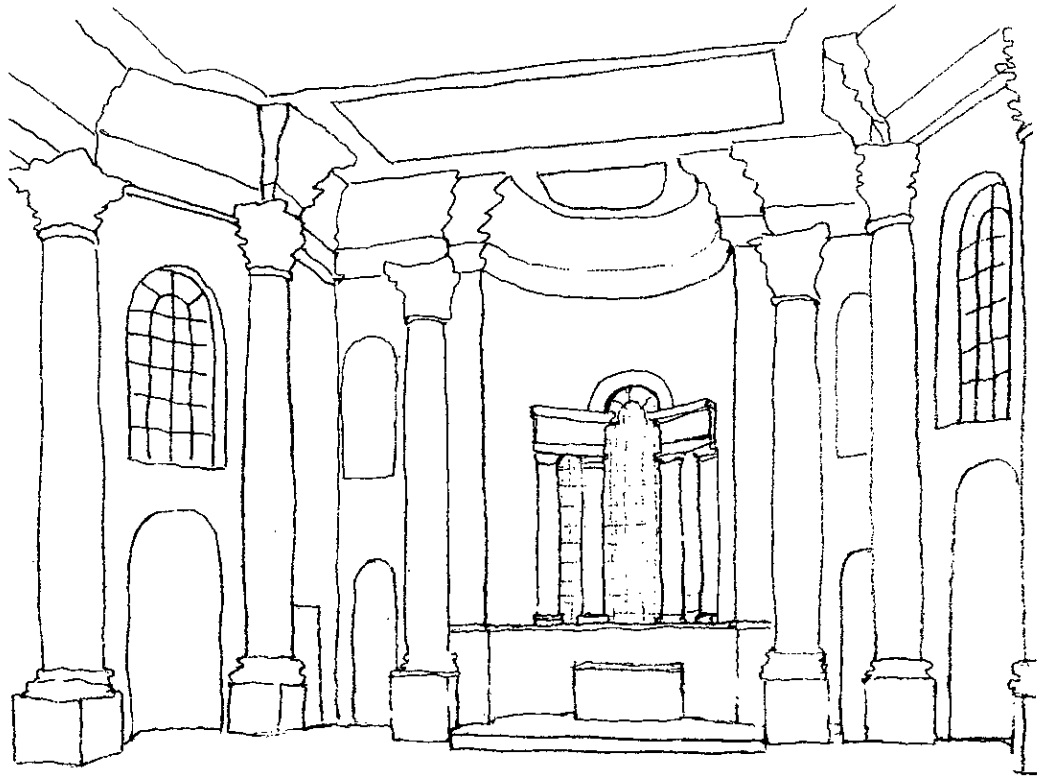


Figure 3, a reconstruction of the east end as built c 1717

5. *The East End as Altered and Decorated, 1724*

By 1724, a scheme had been settled upon which amplified the architectural detail and decoration of the east end. Archer's proposal for two columns and a circular baldacchino¹² was not adopted. Instead, additional timber three-quarter columns and half-pilasters were applied to the wall of the apse to extend the architrave above the Venetian window. These items are documented in the accounts for 1722.¹³ The three-quarter columns and architrave survive and outlines of the half-pilasters were uncovered in the recent paint analysis.¹⁴

The complete scheme included the Glory above the east window by Henry Turner and his *trompe l'oeil* embellishments of the architectural detail of the window mouldings.¹⁵ It is perhaps worth noting here that the florets painted on the necks of the Doric columns - and recorded by Richard Ireland¹⁶ - are paralleled in stone in the exterior detailing of Archer's other London church, St John, Smith Square.

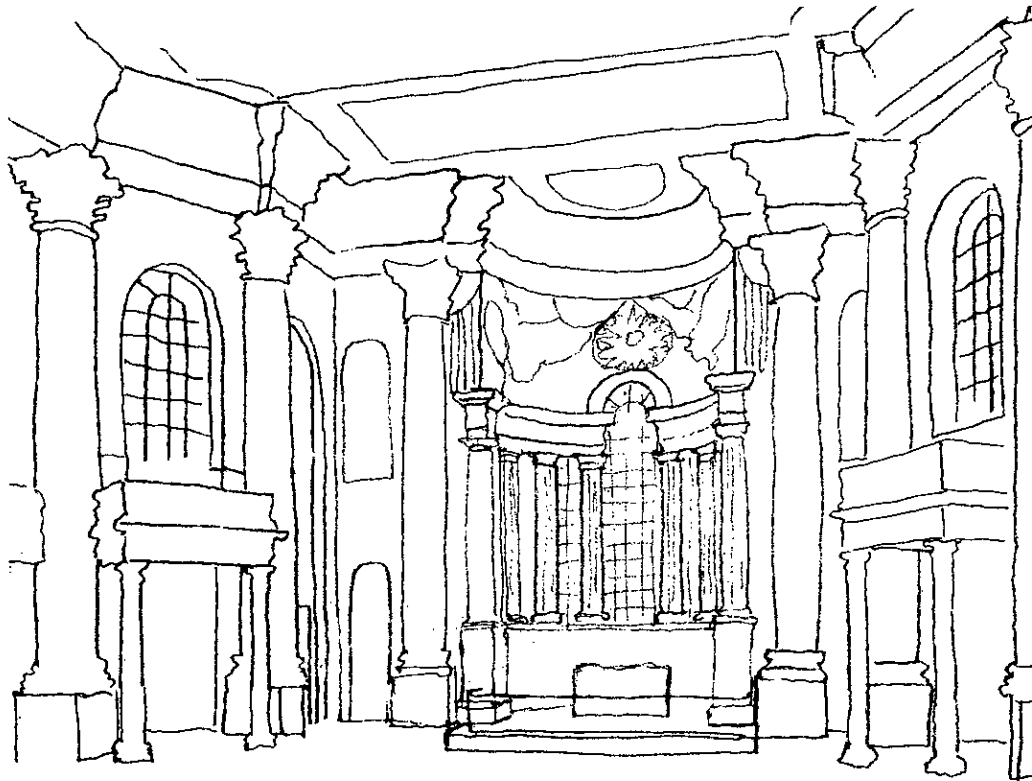


Figure 4, a reconstruction of the east end as altered and decorated by Henry Turner, 1724

- ¹² Barson 2001, fig 6
- ¹³ Barson 2001, 28
- ¹⁴ Ireland 2001, 7, figs 21-7
- ¹⁵ Barson 2001, 26
- ¹⁶ Ireland 2001, 6, figs 17-20

6. *The east end altered and decorated, c 1813*

In 1813 the original glazing by Cummins in the east window was replaced by a stained glass image of St Paul by William Collins.¹⁷ This appears to constitute a major reworking of the east end when taken in conjunction with the thematically linked painting of the Conversion of St Paul above the same window. We do not know the date of the grisaille painting although it is shown in JW Cox's view of 1841.¹⁸ It has been attributed to Benjamin West who was active from 1770–1820. His designs for a stained glass window on the same theme at St Paul, Birmingham, suggest the period 1790–1800. Whether or not the glass and the wall painting at Deptford were exactly contemporary remains unresolved but it would seem likely that they were both installed in the church by 1813.

The timber half pilasters between the three-quarter columns and the Venetian windows were probably removed at about this time. It seems that round headed boards probably painted with the Decalogue and Creed or Lord's Prayer set up in their place. They appear in the views by Cox and Scharf¹⁹ and survived at least until 1922.²⁰

It seems no major alterations were made to the original layout of pulpit and pews occurred before this date. The complete scheme with the pulpit in the centre of the church and obscuring sight lines of the altar was pictured by Cox and Scharf.²¹ The Cox view is dated 1841 but the Scharf view could be closer to the date of 1813. George Scharf, the elder, 1788–1860, first arrived in London 1816 and exhibited at the Royal Academy from then until 1850. He is known for introducing lithography into the country so, perhaps this image of St Paul, Deptford, known only through a copy is possibly a lithograph not a watercolour.²²

The introduction of an altar step would not be unreasonable at this time. If the floor was originally level throughout, according to Archer's revised plan²³ then perhaps the step and altar rail arrangement shown in the Faculty plan of 1895²⁴ dates from the alterations of c 1813. That this arrangement was in existence by this date is perhaps suggested by the historian Dews' note in 1884 that the two armchairs in the sanctuary were presented by Dr Burney at the same time as the Collins window.²⁵

In 1856, John Whichcord installed a low-pressure hot water heating system.²⁶ This may have resulted in the raising of the floor in the central area. According to the text of the Faculty of 1895,²⁷ the general floor level was not the same as that of the side aisles although no such difference appears in the plan accompanying the Faculty.²⁸ The drawing shows the arrangements as existing in 1895 with one step and an altar rail at the entrance to the apse. By this date, however, the pulpit had lost its central position and had been moved to one side north of the central axis and the font brought forward from the west end of the church.

¹⁷ Barson 2001, 7
¹⁸ Barson 2001, fig 10
¹⁹ Barson 2001, figs 9 and 10
²⁰ Barson 2001, fig 14
²¹ Barson 2001, figs 9 and 10
²² Benezit 1999, 379
²³ Barson 2001, fig 6
²⁴ Barson 2001, fig 36
²⁵ Barson 2001, 13
²⁶ Barson 2001, 12 and 17
²⁷ Barson 2001, 30
²⁸ Barson 2001, fig 36

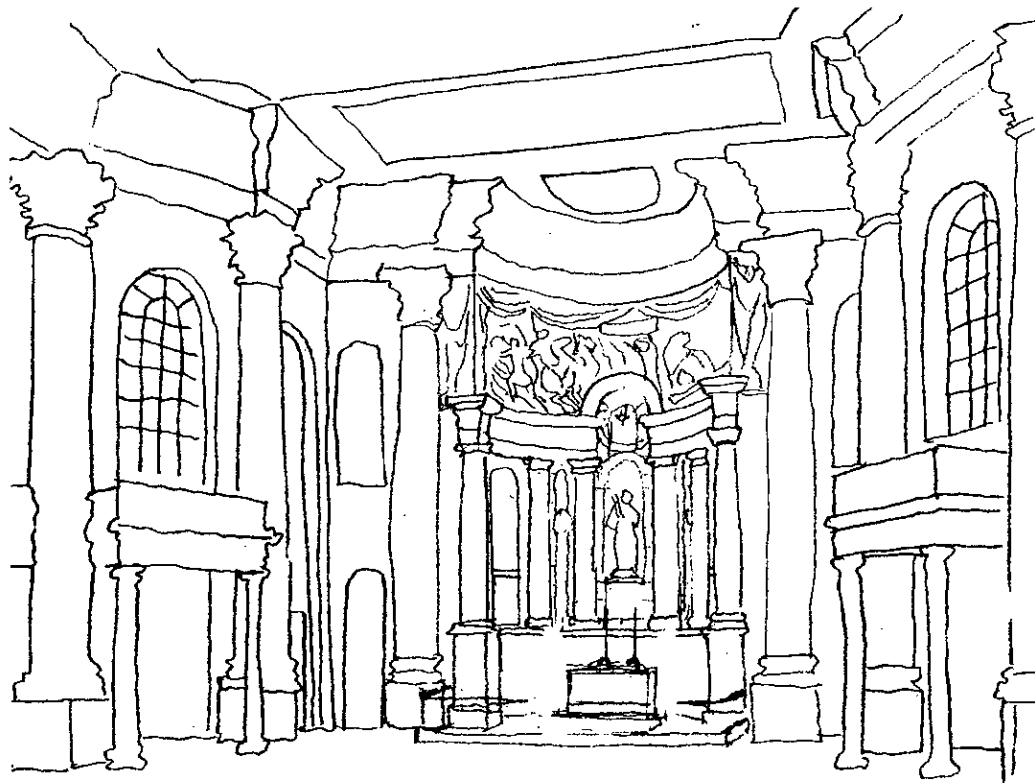


Figure 5, a reconstruction of the east end, with painted scene of the conversion of St Paul and the window by Collins, 1813

7. Alterations to the East End, 1895–6, and the East Window, 1913

Under the direction of AW West, alterations were carried out to the floor in accordance with the proposal drawing and text of the Faculty of 1895 now preserved in the Centre for Kentish Studies.²⁹ The proposed changes are consistent with the present black and white marble floor which had the effect of lifting the altar *c* 600mm (3') above the main floor of the church. His designs for reredos and wrought iron railings,³⁰ however, do not appear to have been executed.

The raising of the floor in the area below the small angled galleries required a reduction in the height of the supporting oak Corinthian columns. The absence of terminations to the fluting at the bases of the columns indicates that the columns have been shortened.

That a reredos was still considered essential in 1814 is apparent from the design of the Powell glass installed in the east window at that time. The figured areas occupy the upper two-thirds of the window. The lower part was left blank, pictured in 1922³¹ and presumably filled with stained glass by 1936³² only after the decision to do without a reredos was taken. This may well have formed part of the works undertaken between 1933 and 1936 by FC Eden.

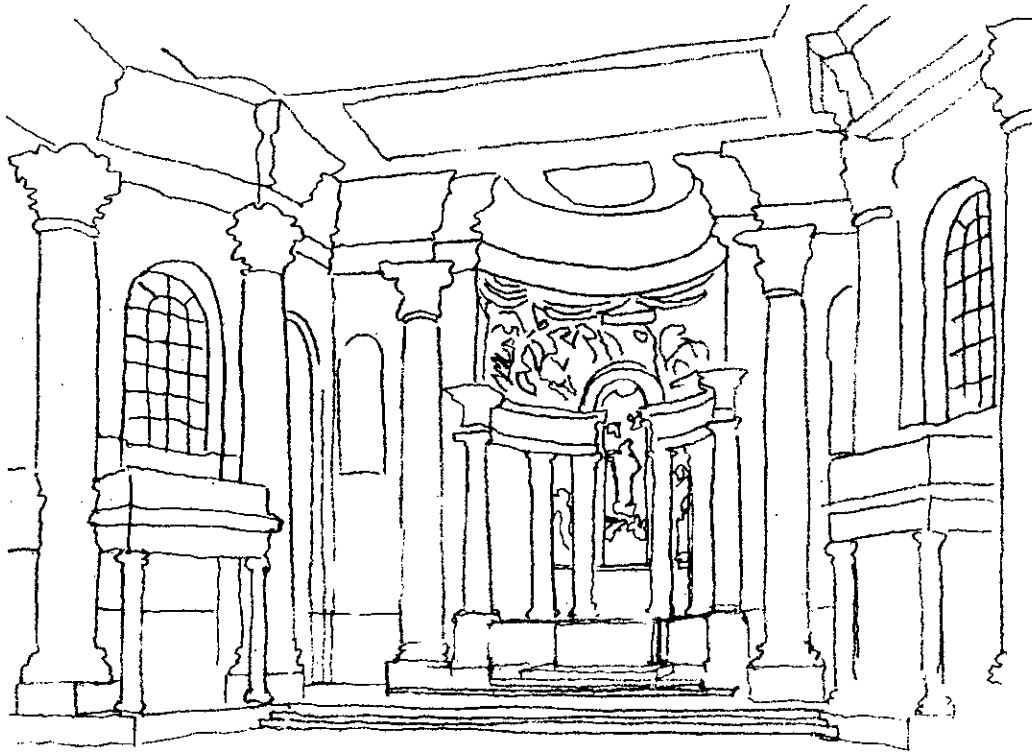


Figure 6, a reconstruction of the east end, showing the steps introduced in 1895 and the Powell glass installed in 1913

²⁹ Barson 2001, 30
³⁰ Barson 2001, fig 38
³¹ Barson 2001, fig 14
³² Barson 2001, fig 15

8. Further Modifications to the Floor Levels within the East End of the Church in the Twentieth-Century

Since the substantial changes to the floor levels within the east end were made at the end of the nineteenth-century minor adjustments have been made to the steps around the altar by the addition of timber staging. The changes have also allowed the altar to be brought forward from the east wall of the apse to allow priest to conduct parts of the service from behind the altar while facing the congregation. These changes can be charted in the photographic record of the church.

Despite the reference in 1973 to alterations to the steps by Sissons 'as may be finally designed', the steps appear to have reverted to their 1895 configuration although the position of the altar was changed.

In the following sketch plans, the altar is marked with cross-hatching and the timber staged steps are shown shaded grey. The steps are numbered .

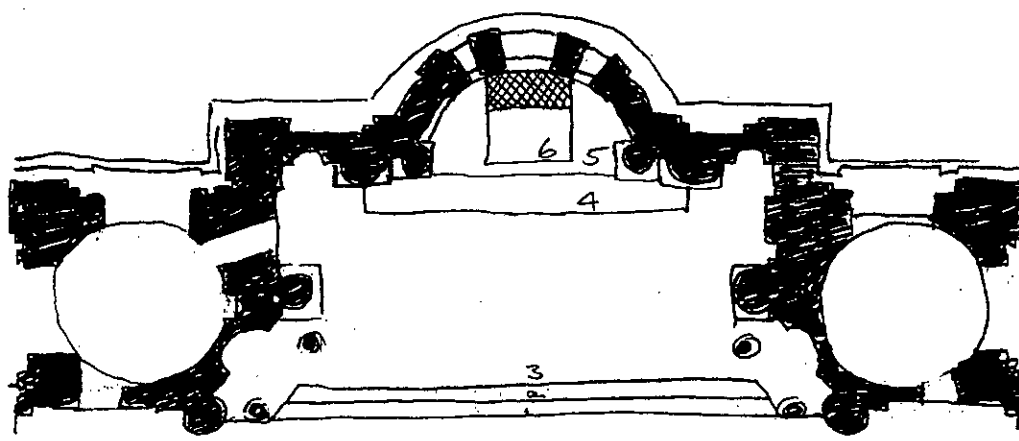


Figure 7, a sketch plan of the east end as altered in 1895–6. This arrangement was photographed in use in 1922.³³

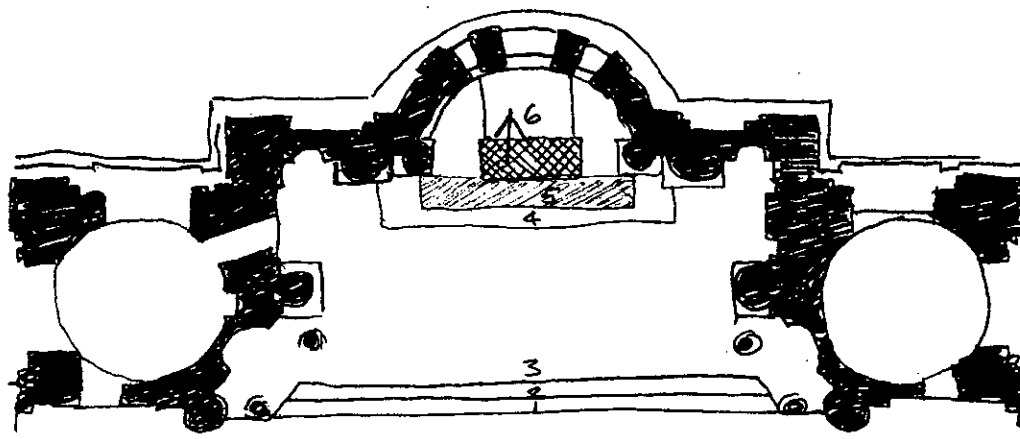


Figure 8, a sketch plan of the east end with timber staging, used to increase the size of the fifth step, as photographed between 1950 and 1960³⁴

³³ Barson 2001, fig 14

³⁴ Barson 2001, figs 19-22

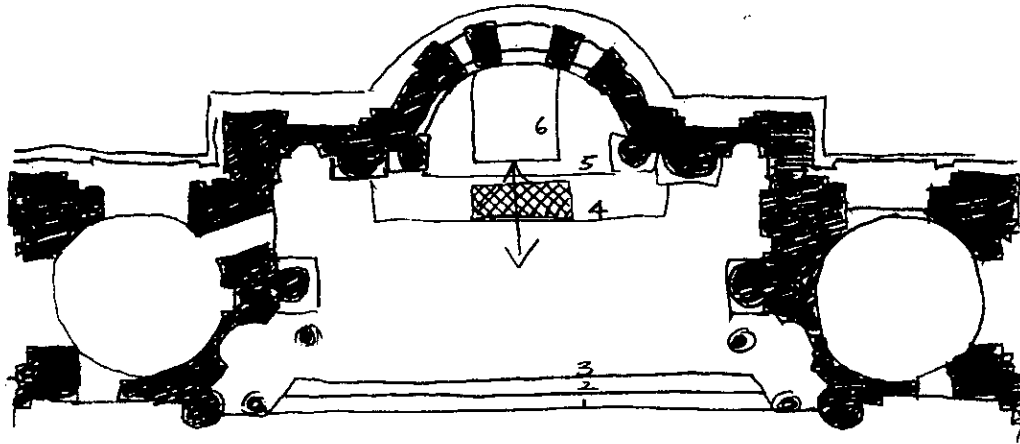


Figure 9, the east end as photographed in 1976 and 1986³⁵.

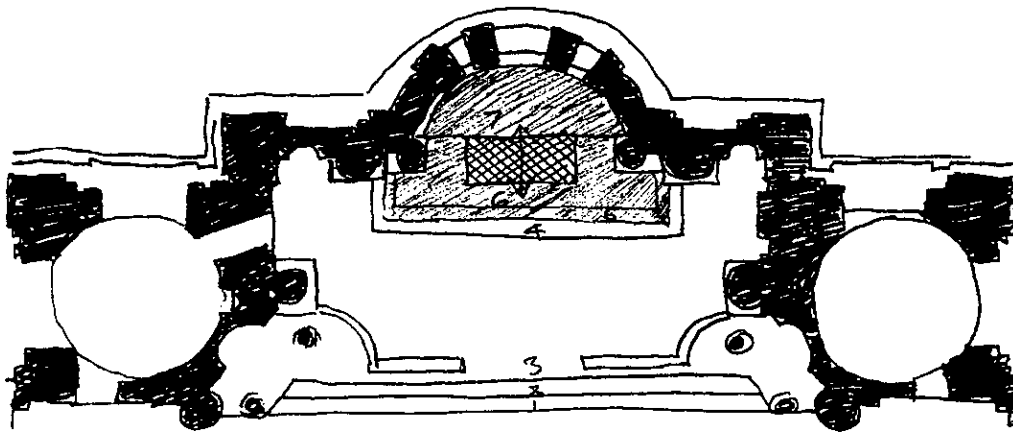


Figure 10, the east end as photographed in 1997 with communion rail and timber staged steps filling out the area around the altar.³⁶

³⁵ Barson 2001, fig 28 and 29
³⁶ Barson 2001, fig 30

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