

## Prelude to the Baroque: Isaac Fuller at Oxford

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### SUMMARY

*Following the Restoration in 1660 a revival of decorative painting occurred in England which inaugurated a new phase in the development of the baroque style in English art. In its early evolution Oxford features prominently, with Robert Streater's painted ceiling of the Sheldonian Theatre constituting the most important and ambitious surviving example of baroque painted decoration by an English artist from the period. During the 1660s another painter, Isaac Fuller, undertook major painting projects in the chapels of Magdalen and All Souls colleges which, together with another smaller scale religious work for Wadham, represent a significant contribution to English baroque decoration. Although fragments of only the All Souls scheme have survived, contemporary accounts and other records of all three provide sufficient visual and documentary evidence from which to reconstruct the general character of Fuller's work and indicate the importance of Oxford as one of the principal centres of patronage where the baroque style first reappeared in England. The scale and extent of Fuller's activity in Oxford can presumably be explained by the removal of earlier religious imagery from college chapels during the period which followed the Royalist surrender of Oxford at the end of the Civil War and by the revival after 1660 of ideas and attitudes favourable towards such embellishments previously encouraged in the 1630s by Archbishop William Laud. The new climate of opinion prevailing in Oxford, at any rate in the colleges where Fuller worked, created the conditions which produced some of the most interesting, if not the most artistically accomplished, early examples of baroque decorative painting by an English artist.*

Throughout the 17th century decorative painting in England was concentrated predominantly in the hands of foreign artists whose supremacy persisted until Sir James Thornhill became the first Englishman to acquire a national reputation as a leading exponent of the baroque style of illusionistic painting. Thornhill's success early in the 18th century in securing the commissions to decorate the Painted Hall at Greenwich and the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral against foreign competition effectively challenged the pre-eminence of the of the immigrant artists who had previously enjoyed a virtual monopoly in the field.<sup>1</sup>

Previously commissions for important royal and public projects had almost invariably gone to foreigners, despite the intermittent protests that were made by the Company of Painter-Stainers against the preferment of 'strangers' at the expense of its own

<sup>1</sup> For a general survey of decorative painting in England throughout the period, see: E.K. Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain 1530-1790* (4th edn. 1978); M. Whinney and O. Millar, *English Art 1625-1714* (1957), pp. 285-316; E. Croft Murray, 'Decorative Painting in England, I', *Country Life* (1962).

members.<sup>2</sup> The pattern was originally established by Charles I, whose patronage had attracted several decorative painters to England from the Continent, and whose agents abroad engaged the services of other foreign artists to supply paintings for the interiors at Whitehall and elsewhere. Following the Restoration the Crown had remained the principal source of patronage until in the 1680s and 1690s spectacularly luxuriant wall and ceiling paintings in the baroque fashion began to transform the interiors of the most opulent town houses and palatial country mansions, creating a taste for conspicuously lavish painted decoration which continued to provide employment for decorative painters for most of the first quarter of the 18th century. Antonio Verrio, who had collaborated with Hugh May and Grinling Gibbons in renovating the interior of Windsor Castle for Charles II, and later with another Italian painter, Benedetto Gennari, in Wren's new wing at Whitehall, subsequently worked at Burghley House and Chatsworth before embarking upon another major royal commission to decorate the newly completed state apartments at Hampton Court. Louis Laguerre, after beginning his career in England as Verrio's assistant, was extensively employed at Chatsworth and Devonshire House in London, and thereafter at Blenheim and Petworth, as well as in various town houses. The duke of Montagu introduced a number of French painters, including Charles de la Fosse and Louis Cheron, to decorate his houses in London and at Boughton, and in 1708 the earl (later duke) of Manchester returned from his embassy to Venice with the Italian artists Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini and Marco Ricci, the latter joined soon afterwards by his uncle, Sebastiano Ricci. Pellegrini worked for Manchester at Kimbolton before going on to Lord Carlisle's Castle Howard, while the Ricci worked amongst others for Lord Burlington and the duke of Portland. It was against this background of foreign domination that Thornhill first made his appearance.

Thornhill was the first English artist to make any significant impact as a decorative painter, but he was not completely without precursors. There had already been the beginnings of a native tradition which reached its climax at Wilton House in the 1650s, but even the comparative sophistication by English standards of the ceiling by Edward Pierce and Francis Cleyn in the Double Cube Room there is only a very pedestrian reflection of the contemporary Continental models it endeavours to emulate.

Immediately after the Restoration, however, there was a brief interlude lasting about ten years when it seemed that an English version of the international baroque current might become permanently established. The initial stimulus came from Oxford. The principal achievement from this period is the *Triumph of Truth and the Arts* painted on the ceiling of Wren's Sheldonian Theatre by Robert Streater in 1669: until Thornhill's work at Greenwich it remained the most accomplished essay in baroque decoration performed by an Englishman. Streater later collaborated with Verrio at Windsor, but he seems to have worked there in a relatively minor capacity under the Italian's direction.

Streater must have received his training as a decorator abroad. So certainly did Isaac Fuller, the second artist who enjoys some brief prominence as a decorative painter in Oxford in the 1660s. The principal source for Fuller's biography is the short account of his life written in 1706 by Bernard Buckeridge, which is worth quoting in full:

Mr Isaac Fuller,

Was an English history painter of good note. He had a great genius of drawing and designing history, which yet he did not always execute with due decency, nor after an historical manner; for he was too much addicted to modernise and burlesque his subjects, there being sometimes a

<sup>2</sup> Whinney and Millar, *op. cit.*, 81-2; W.A.D. Englefield, *History of the Painter-Stainers Company* (1923), containing extracts from the *Booke of Orders and Constitutions* of the Company.

rawness of colouring in them, besides other extravagancies suitable to the manners of the man: but notwithstanding all that a critic may find fault with in his works, there are many perfections in them, as may be seen by his Resurrection at All-souls college Chapel at Oxford, to which that at Magdalen college, though performed by the same hand, cannot in the least compare. There is also at Wadham college, in the same university, an history picture of his, in two colours only, admirably well performed; for whatever may be objected against this master, as one that wanted the regular improvements of travel to consider the antiques, and form a better judgement, he may be reckoned among the foremost in any account of English Painters. He studied many years in France under Perrier, and understood the anatomical part of Painting, perhaps equal to Michael Angelo, following it so close, that he was very apt to make the musculling too strong and prominent. Among his works, there are several fine pieces in many great taverns in London, which are not esteemed the worst of his performance. He died in London above thirty years ago.<sup>3</sup>

Modern scholarship has added little further information. The date of Fuller's birth is frequently given as 1606, but there is no evidence for this. The earliest published reference to Fuller occurs in 1658, when he was praised 'for story' by William Sanderson in *The Art of Painting*,<sup>4</sup> but he may have been active as a portrait painter since at least 1644, if the date on a label attached to the back of a portrait of an *Unknown Man* (Tate Gallery, London) which he had painted reputedly in Oxford is reliable.<sup>5</sup> The romantic introspection of this early work is repeated in the much later, enigmatically bohemian *Self-portrait* which exists in three versions, each slightly different, two of which are in Oxford collections (Fig. 1).<sup>6</sup> In both compositions Fuller achieves a remarkably original solution, although the portrait of the *Unknown Man* displays a measure of the diffidence only to be expected in an inexperienced painter. It suggests that the date of Fuller's birth should be brought forward towards the end of the second decade of the century, perhaps to around 1620 to judge from his apparent age in the *Self-portrait* of 1670.

The argument in favour of an earlier date arises from conflicting interpretations of Buckeridge's reference to Fuller having studied for a time in France under Francois Perrier. However, it seems unlikely that he was there before 1645, since Perrier himself only returned from a visit to Rome then, and the rather coarse quality of the 1644 portrait suggests that his previous training had been entirely local. Moreover, his known Royalist sympathies provide a perfectly logical explanation of his absence abroad for several years from around 1645<sup>7</sup> – precisely how long is uncertain, but he must have been in London again before 1650, when an etching he had made of various Jewish costumes was used as an illustration to Dr. T. Fuller's *Pisgah-sight of Palestine*. In England under the Commonwealth Fuller can have found few opportunities to establish a practice as a decorative painter, and the range of his activity probably never extended beyond tavern interiors and occasional private commissions for portraits. The opportunity to undertake anything more ambitious did not arise until after the Restoration when he participated in the redecoration of two of Oxford's college chapels, contri-

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Buckeridge, *An Essay towards an English School of Painters* (London, 1706: appended to an English translation by Richard Graham of *The Art of Painting* by Roger de Piles), 374. George Vertue's principal account of Fuller in his *Notebooks* (Walpole Society, XX (1932), 128) is copied exactly from Buckeridge's entry.

<sup>4</sup> William Sanderson, *Graphice: the use of Pen and Pencil, or, The Most excellent Art of Painting* (London, 1658), 20.

<sup>5</sup> Waterhouse, *op. cit.* note 1, 89, reproduced Plate 70. The painted inscription on the portrait identifies the sitter as the Royalist poet John Cleveland but this is purely fanciful.

<sup>6</sup> Bodleian Library (painted in 1670 for Daniel Rawlinson, licensee of the Mitre Tavern in Fenchurch Street where Fuller decorated one of the rooms); The Queen's College, Oxford; and the National Portrait Gallery, London.

<sup>7</sup> Other Royalist-inclined English artists who went abroad at the same time included two portrait painters, William Sheppard and Michael Wright, who became a member of the Roman Accademia di San Luca in 1648 and later produced at least one example of baroque decoration for a ceiling at Whitehall painted for Charles II.



Fig. 1. Isaac Fuller, *Self-portrait*, 1670. Oxford, Bodleian Library. (Courtesy of the Trustees of the Bodleian Library.)

buting the kind of religious imagery which was now permissible again in the more tolerant climate which replaced the Puritan iconoclasm that had prevailed during the Commonwealth and Protectorate.

During a visit to the University in 1664 the diarist John Evelyn recorded his impressions of the changes he found there:

October 24th.

Thence to see ye wall over ye altar at All Souls, being the largest piece of fresco painting (or rather in imitation of it, for it is oil of turpentine) in England, not ill designed by the hand of one Fuller; yet I feare it will not hold long. It seems too full of nakedes for a chapell.

Thence to New College, and the painting of Magdalen Chapel, which is on blew cloth in *chiaro oscuro*, by one Greenborow, being a Coena Domini, and a Last Judgement on the wall by Fuller, as is the other, but somewhat varied.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> John Evelyn, *Diaries*, 24 October 1664.

Evelyn had correctly assessed the defects of the unusual medium used by Fuller for the Last Judgement above the altar at All Souls, since already in 1677 its condition was described by Robert Plot as 'somewhat defaced',<sup>9</sup> and by 1714 it had deteriorated so badly that Thornhill was commissioned to paint a completely new version of the same subject to replace it.<sup>10</sup> This in turn was removed during restoration of the chapel in 1872,<sup>11</sup> some forty years after Fuller's mural at Magdalen had also fallen victim to the Gothic Revival and the present stone reredos was substituted in its place.<sup>12</sup>

Almost nothing now survives of Fuller's work in Oxford, but whereas the altar painting at All Souls has completely disappeared, it is at least possible to reconstruct the character of the *Resurrection* once in Magdalen Chapel from visual as well as literary evidence. In addition to an engraving by Burghers published in 1718 as an illustration to an edition of Joseph Addison's eulogy *Resurrectio delineata* (Fig. 2),<sup>13</sup> there is a watercolour drawing of 1811 by G.C. Cooper which shows the interior of the entire chapel (Fig. 3); supplementing these there are the descriptions of the fresco which occur in early guidebooks and histories of the University, as well as in some more general critical sources. By consulting all these together some idea of the appearance and aesthetic quality of Fuller's work can be formed. Characteristically Horace Walpole is the most denigrating in his assessment, considering that

In his historic composition Fuller is a wretched painter; his colouring was raw and unnatural, and not compensated by disposition or invention . . . His altar-pieces at Magdalen and All Souls colleges in Oxford are despicable.<sup>14</sup>

A slightly earlier account is found in the *New Oxford Guide* for 1759:

The altar-piece was performed by Isaac Fuller, about 90 years ago. It represents the resurrection, and, I suspect, never received the last finishing. It evidently wants grace and composition, and has too much of the Flemish colouring and expression. Many of the figures are however finely drawn. The painting is elegantly celebrated by Mr. Addison, formerly a student of this House, in a Latin poem, printed in the *Musae Anglicanae*.<sup>15</sup>

Anthony Wood<sup>16</sup> ignores the fresco except for a purely factual reference, and Chalmers,<sup>17</sup> writing in 1810, mostly follows other earlier authors, but includes a brief evaluation of its artistic merit and an anecdote which is probably apocryphal:

As an imitation of Michael Angelo, it falls far short of the sublime, although sometimes wild, imagination of that great artist; nor is the colouring harmonious or natural. Some of the figures,

<sup>9</sup> Robert Plot, *The Natural History of Oxfordshire* (1677), 276.

<sup>10</sup> The most usual technique employed for mural paintings in England since medieval times had been distemper applied to dry plaster until in the 17th century oil media become more popular, but usually on a canvas or panel support. For a fuller discussion of technique, Croft-Murray, *op. cit.* note 1.

<sup>11</sup> John Sparrow, 'An Oxford Altar-piece', *Burlington Magazine*, cii (1960), 4-9; H. Colvin and J.S.G. Simmons, *All Souls. An Oxford College and its Buildings* (1989), 58-63.

<sup>12</sup> T.S.R. Boase, *Christ bearing the Cross attributed to Valdes Leal at Magdalen College: A Study in Taste* (Charlton Lecture, Durham University, 1955), gives a full account of the changes that affected the Magdalen chapel from the 17th to the 19th centuries.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Addison, 'Resurrectio delineata ad Altare Col. Magdal Oxon', first published in *Examen Poeticus Duplex* (1698), 38-43.

<sup>14</sup> Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England* [1761], ed. Ralph N. Wornum (London, 1888), ii. 80.

<sup>15</sup> Anonymous, *The New Oxford Guide, or, Companion through the University* (1759), 21.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Wood, *History and Antiquities of the Colleges and Halls in the University of Oxford*, ed. John Gutch (1786), 351.

<sup>17</sup> A. Chalmers, *History of the Colleges, Halls and Public Buildings attached to the University of Oxford* (1810), 214.



Fig. 2. M. Burghers after Isaac Fuller, *Resurrection*, Magdalen College chapel, Oxford. Engraving, 1698, from Joseph Addison, *Examen Poeticus Duplex*.



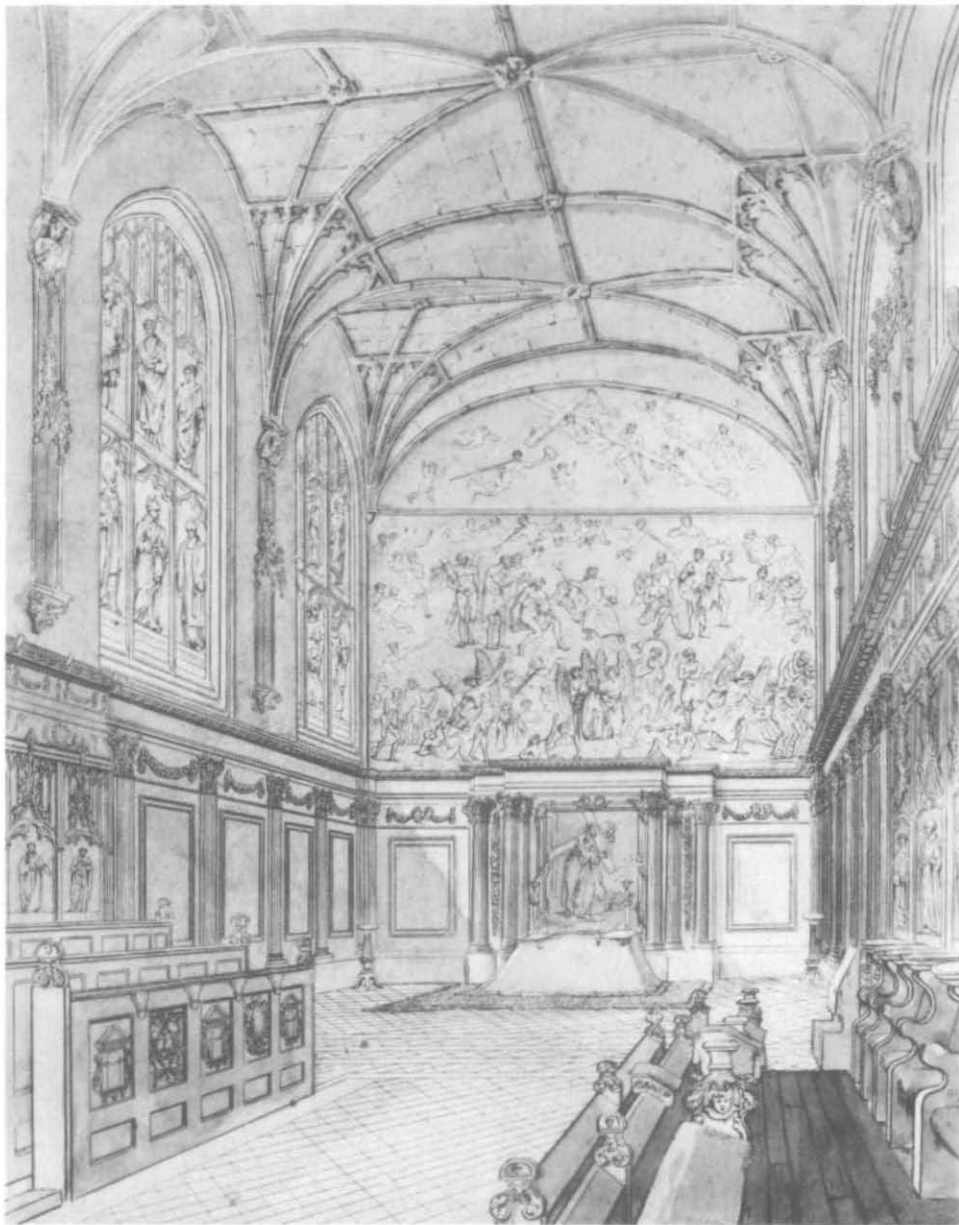


Fig. 3. G.C. Cooper, *Interior of Magdalen College Chapel, Oxford*. Watercolour, 1811. (Courtesy of the President and Fellows of Magdalen College, Oxford.)

however, are correctly drawn; and he has at least imitated the temper of Michael Angelo with success, in introducing among the damned the portrait of an hostler at the Greyhound Inn, near the College, who had offended him.

The strong colouring and exaggerated muscularity of Fuller's figures in the fresco at Magdalen are the defects most often criticised in his work, and were evidently characteristic of his style generally,<sup>18</sup> but the composition as a whole lacked coherence – in particular the main part of the decoration seems to have been conceived as two almost unrelated parallel registers, each arranged with unenterprising symmetry about the central figure of Christ and the college's founder, William of Waynflete, who is shown rising from his tomb assisted by two angels. A less imaginative interpretation of an apotheosis theme from the baroque period is difficult to envisage, and its deficiencies are such that even as a *pasticheur* of Michelangelo Fuller appears singularly inept. However, taking into consideration the date it is nonetheless a remarkable performance for an Englishman, as much in its scale as in its content. There can have been few, if any, religious paintings as large carried out in England since the Reformation, and without the benefit of any kind of local pictorial tradition on which he could draw Fuller at least managed a not altogether unworthy attempt.

Although the first payment to Fuller from Magdalen College only occurs in 1664, the fresco had almost certainly been completed some time before then. In the bursars' accounts there are entries for 1666 and 1667 which show that final settlement was delayed by a protracted legal dispute between the college authorities and the artist, who was however eventually successful in extracting the money due to him. The various entries relating to Fuller are as follows:

1664	Mag. Fuller, pictori, pro arrha,	100 li.
1665	Mro Fuller pictori	78:0:0
	Mro Taylor pictori	30:0:0
1666	Mro Holloway pro 2 Feodis in causa Fuller	2:0:0
	Mro Violet pro expensis in causa contra Fuller	1:7:11
	Mris Ward et White procuratoribus contra Fuller, per billas	2:3:10
	Mro Ellis pro expensis in causa contra Fuller per billam	6:19:4
	Mro Natton pro expensis Dris Exton in causa contra Fuller	0:2:10
	Fuller pictori 72 <sup>l</sup> et Taylor pictori 152 <sup>l</sup>	224:0:0
1667	Fuller pro debitis et damnis recuperatis a Collegio et patet per billam	63:10:00
	Mro Ellys pro expensis in eadem causa per billam	12:12:08

<sup>18</sup> In March 1722 George Vertue saw a room decorated by Fuller in the Mitre Tavern, Fenchurch Street, and commented of one particular figure of Saturnus that 'the muscles of this figure shows he had some intelligence in the knowledge of Anatomy but his fiery colours, & distinct marking of the muscles makes this appear like a body without a Skin . . . Such things now a days would not pass for a Masters work' (George Vertue, *Notebooks*, Walpole Society XVIII (1930), 101). A late 17th-cent. MS. of *Rules for Painting* (B.L. Harl. MS. 3227, published as Appendix V to C.H. Collins Baker, *Lely and the Stuart Portrait Painters*, II (1912), 234–41) refers to similar qualities in an easel painting: '... for what strange colours & in some shaddowed faces such as I saw in a M. Magdalen of Fullers painting . . .'



Vicepredisi pro expensis in eadem causa, et pro equo conducto ad Londinium	03:06:04
Mro Fairfax pro expensis in eadem causa per billam et pro equo conducto	02:16:4
Mris Keate and Taylour pro expensis in eadem causa per billam	02:11:03 <sup>19</sup>

Burghers' engraving clearly shows below the wall painting of the Resurrection the grisaille hanging of the Last Supper painted by Richard Greenbury which Evelyn mentions. Together they had replaced his earlier 'painted cloths' described by Peter Mundy in 1639:

At the upper end of the quire is the birth, passion, resurrection and ascension of our Saviour very largely and exquisitely sett Forth in collours.<sup>20</sup>

Greenbury was a specialist in decorative hangings who had patented an encaustic process for painting 'upon woollen cloth, kerseys, and stuffs, being prop. for hangings' in 1636<sup>21</sup> which Fuller later used for a very similar painting at Wadham College, also depicting the Last Supper. Since a poem which appeared in 1658 *On Christchurch windowe and Magdalen College wall* by Dr. James Smith only mentions the earlier set of subjects, the Last Supper hanging must have been installed after the Restoration, and quite possibly Fuller and Greenbury were working at the college simultaneously.<sup>22</sup>

The painted cloth Fuller executed for the altar in Wadham College is unique in his *oeuvre*, and after Greenbury's *Last Supper* at Magdalen had been taken down in 1745 to make room for the present 17th-century Spanish altarpiece it became the only example of its type visible in Oxford. It remained in position until the 19th century, when it was replaced by Blore's Perpendicular-style stone panelling in 1832.<sup>23</sup> The unusual encaustic wax technique aroused considerable interest in the 18th century, and it is accurately described in most of the guidebooks,<sup>24</sup> which differ very little in their discussion of the painting. Apart from the reference to it by Buckeridge in 1706, the earliest account is to be found in the *Pocket Companion* of 1753:

It is the only work of its kind at present in Oxford, but the altar of Magdalen College, before the new wainscoting of it, was done in the same manner. The Cloth itself, which is of an ash colour, is the Medium; the Lights and Shades are done with a brown crayon, and the lights with a white one; which being afterwards pressed with hot Irons, causing the sweat of the Cloth to incorporate with the Colours, has so fixed them, as to be rendered Proof against a Brush, or any such thing, made use of to cleanse it from Dust.

<sup>19</sup> Bursars' Accounts, Magdalen College, 1664-1667. The second artist to whom payments are recorded can be identified with John Taylor, a painter who worked exclusively in Oxford, mostly for colleges, where he restored and cleaned pictures and painted woodwork in chapels and libraries. He also continued the tradition of posthumous 'portraits' of college founders and benefactors and city dignitaries which had flourished in Oxford since Sampson Strong established a prosperous practice for fictitious likenesses at the end of the 16th century. Although Fuller and Taylor were working at Magdalen simultaneously, there is nothing to suggest that they were collaborators.

<sup>20</sup> Bodl. MS. Rawl. A315; *The Travels of Peter Mundy* (Hakluyt Soc. lv, 1924), 26. T.S.R. Boase, 'An English Copy of a Carracci Altarpiece', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, xv (1952), 235, discusses Greenbury's work at the College.

<sup>21</sup> W. Woodcroft, *Titles of the Patent Inventions, 1617-1852*, I (1854), 21.

<sup>22</sup> For Greenbury's career, see Mrs. R.L. Poole, *Catalogue of Portraits in the possession of the University, Colleges, City and County of Oxford*, II (1925), xv ff.

<sup>23</sup> T.G. Jackson, *Wadham College, Oxford* (1893), 157.

<sup>24</sup> *A Pocket Companion to Oxford* (1753), 88; *The New Oxford Guide* (1759), 41; A. Wood, *op. cit.* note 16, 604; Chalmers, *op. cit.* note 17, 413.

The subjects depicted by Fuller are identified by the author of *The New Oxford Guide* as a *Last Supper* between Abraham and Melchisedek and *The Israelites gathering Manna*. Apparently the central part occupied the whole width of the east end of the chapel, while the two Old Testament subjects were returned along the north and south walls of the choir respectively. It is particularly regrettable that nothing at all survives of Fuller's work at Wadham, since it alone received Horace Walpole's approval in 1761: 'At Wadham College is an altar-cloth in a singular manner, and of merit; it is just brushed over for the lights and shades, and the colours melted in with a hot iron.'

Although he refers specifically to Fuller's altar-piece at All Souls, Walpole cannot have seen the original, which had been concealed behind Thornhill's *Apotheosis of Archbishop Chichele* since 1716, but possibly a drawing or similar record existed which has subsequently disappeared. Like the fresco at Magdalen its subject was the *Resurrection and Last Judgement*, incorporating the figure of the Founder. When Evelyn saw it in the autumn of 1664 it can only have been very recently finished, and work on the general renovation of the whole chapel, including a new marble floor and classical screen, was still in progress.<sup>25</sup> In his biography of Fuller, Buckeridge emphasises the superior quality of the All Souls painting over that at Magdalen, which perhaps partly explains how it came to be mistakenly attributed to the more highly regarded Robert Streater later in the century. The ultimate source of the confusion over authorship, however, was probably Horace Walpole himself, who adds after his discussion of the Sheldonian ceiling that 'At Oxford, Streater painted too the chapel at All Souls, except the Resurrection, which is the work of Sir James Thornhill.'<sup>26</sup>

Walpole clearly implies here that the painted decoration in the chapel at All Souls was not confined to the *Resurrection* at the east end. Earlier printed sources do not mention anything else, but the existence of a painted ceiling was certainly known to Anthony Wood, whose *Antiquities* (edited by John Gutch) were published in 1786:

Rob Streater, Serjeant Painter to King Charles II, a very celebrated artist, painted the Ceiling, which is now covered over by painted canvass. If he painted any other part it is destroyed.<sup>27</sup>

An earlier manuscript reference, certainly known to Horace Walpole, occurs in George Vertue's *Notebooks* for 1745, where he recalls that

When at Oxford An. 1715 I was told then that the quire of New Coll was painted by Mr. Hen Cook history painter All Souls Chappel painted by Serg. Streeter - painter. Sr. John Thornhill - painted the resurrection.<sup>28</sup>

Thereafter different authorities give conflicting accounts of the work undertaken in the 17th century, although they agree in assigning it to the wrong painter - Chalmers is the most accurate,<sup>29</sup> but in 1837 James Ingram confused the two restorations begun in 1664 and 1714 respectively, reporting that

After the Restoration, about the year 1664, Robert Streater, serjeant painter to King Charles II, is said to have been employed in restoring and ornamenting the chapel. The principal innovations then introduced appear to have been, that the ceiling was made flat in the centre,

<sup>25</sup> *V.C.H. Oxon.* iii. 184 (All Souls College).

<sup>26</sup> Walpole, *op. cit.* note 14, ii. 85.

<sup>27</sup> A. Wood, *op. cit.* note 16, 289.

<sup>28</sup> G. Vertue, *Notebooks* (Walpole Society, XXVI), 48.

<sup>29</sup> Chalmers, *op. cit.* note 17, 182.

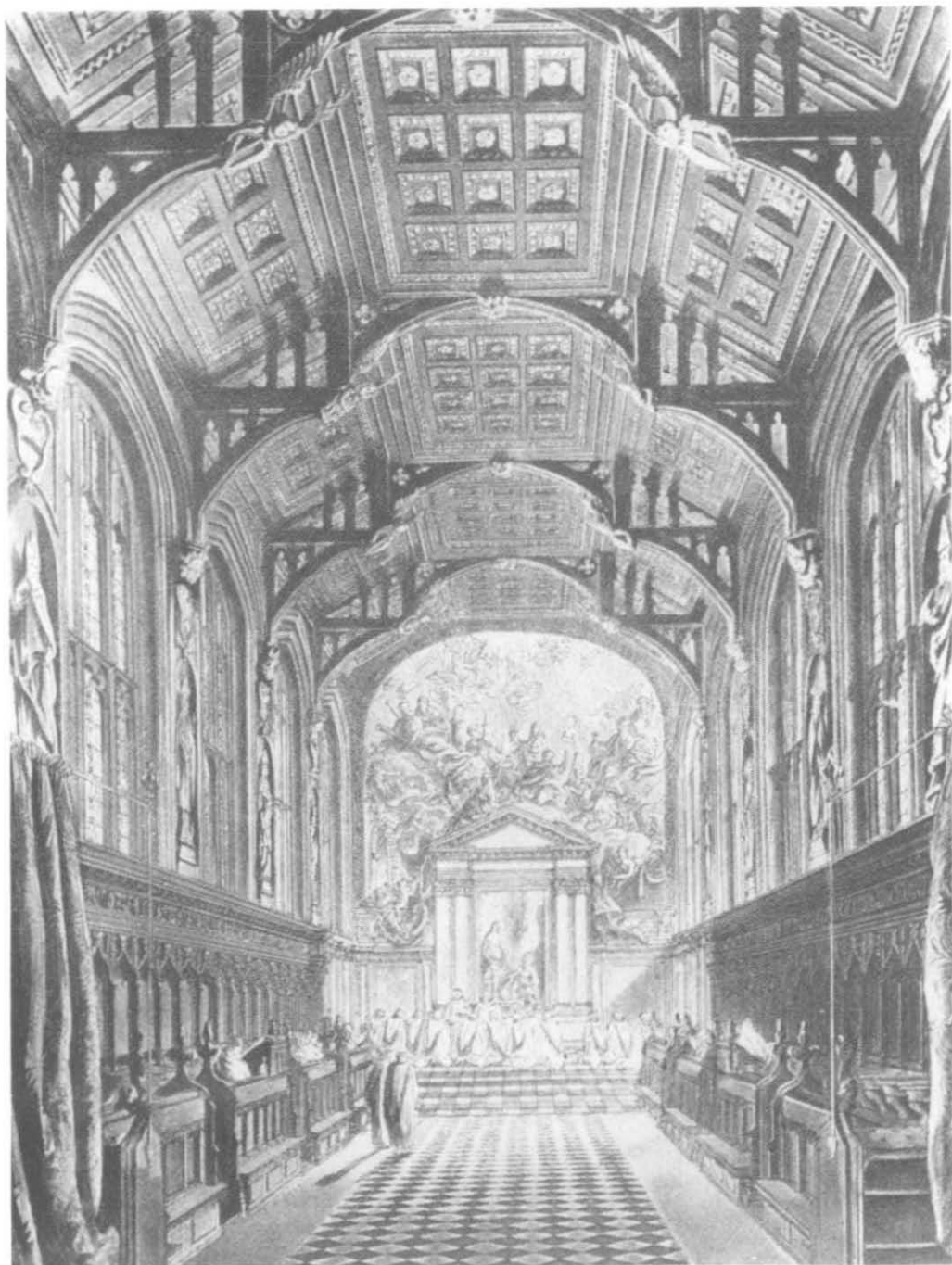


Fig. 4. R. Ackerman, *All Souls College Chapel, Oxford*. Coloured aquatint, 1814, from *The History of Oxford*.

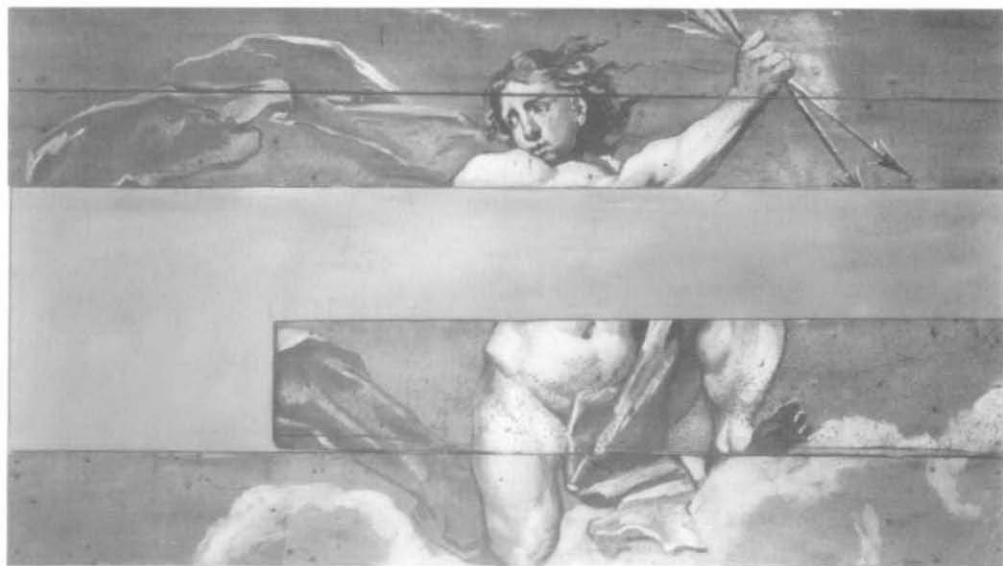
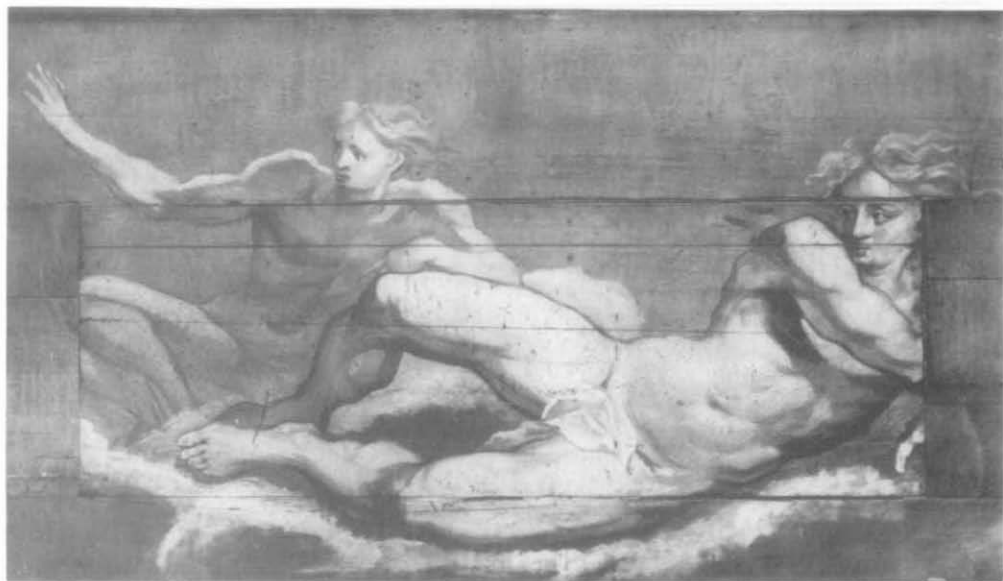


Fig. 5. Isaac Fuller, ceiling fragments: All Souls College chapel, Oxford. Oil on wooden boards. (Courtesy of the Warden and Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford.)

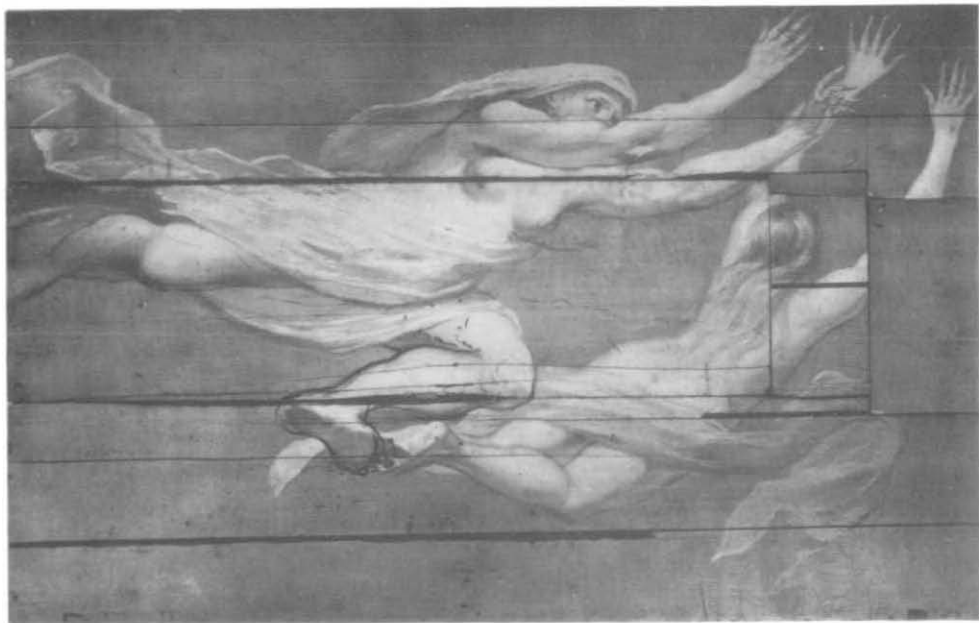


Fig. 6. Isaac Fuller, ceiling fragments: All Souls College chapel, Oxford. Oil on wooden boards. (Courtesy of the Warden and Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford.)

and covered, with painted canvas in square panels. The story of the Resurrection was also painted by Streater on the bare walls over the high altar, where Sir James Thornhill's assumption of the founder now is.<sup>30</sup>

In fact, the ceiling of 'Guided Roses and Network, being done upon Canvass sett in Frames' clearly visible in Ackerman's engraving of 1814<sup>31</sup> (Fig. 4) was part of Thornhill's 1714 programme, and it was only after it had been detached in 1871 that the earlier figurative painting of the previous ceiling concealed behind it was rediscovered. Fortunately the 19th-century restoration of the chapel is unusually well-documented. In 1870 the project was entrusted to Henry Clutton, the architect who had made an initial survey of the fabric the previous year, but on 13 April 1872 he was summarily dismissed following the discovery by the college that they had inadvertently employed a Roman Catholic, and Sir Gilbert Scott was appointed in his place. Shortly afterwards Clutton circulated a privately printed *Narrative and Correspondence relating to the Restoration of All Souls College Chapel*, in which he gives a detailed description of his rediscovery of the 17th-century ceiling:

I proceeded to take down the canvas ceilings of Thornhill, when instead of coming on the remainder of the original fifteenth-century roof, as I had expected, the work of the seventeenth-century restorer presented itself, and I found that the whole series of Streater's paintings were in existence, and had been merely covered by the canvas of Thornhill. They were, however, at once removed, and then it was that Chichele's roof stood out in all its integrity and beauty.<sup>32</sup>

The ceiling itself was painted in oil on oak boards which extended the entire length of the chapel and were divided into three sections, a horizontal centre part between sloping sides. After its removal by Clutton it was broken up and stored in the college cellars, where some years ago a few remaining fragments, comprising some complete and a number of partial figures, were recovered and recognised as Fuller's work by Kerry Downes.<sup>33</sup>

While it is obviously impossible to attempt a reconstruction of the whole design from the surviving fragments, it may reasonably be assumed that examples of the most extreme foreshortening are from the horizontal centre of the ceiling. The figures seem to have been separately conceived almost as independent elements in the total composition, although a consistently applied perspective would have imparted some sense of coherence to the ceiling as a whole. Iconographically the scheme represented an extension of the Resurrection theme above the altar, although the two areas of decoration were probably devised separately. Nonetheless, by carrying the subject of the altar wall over the whole ceiling area Fuller must have intended to create an effect that was unified visually as well as iconographically. All Souls chapel must therefore have been one of the first examples in England in which a whole interior was treated decoratively in the baroque idiom as a single spatial and thematic entity by continuing the scheme of the altar wall on to the ceiling, perhaps in emulation of something Fuller had seen when he was on the Continent in the late 1640s.

Fuller's authorship is confirmed by stylistic evidence supplied by the surviving

<sup>30</sup> James Ingram, *Memorials of Oxford* (1837), 23.

<sup>31</sup> Published as an illustration to *The History of Oxford* (1814).

<sup>32</sup> Henry Clutton, *Narrative and correspondence relating to the Restoration of All Souls College Chapel* (privately printed 1872), 10–11.

<sup>33</sup> Kerry Downes, 'Fuller's "Last Judgement"', *Burlington Magazine*, cii (1960), 451.



Fig. 7. Isaac Fuller, *Study for a figure for All Souls College, Oxford, chapel ceiling*. Red chalk heightened with white.  
(Courtesy of National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.)



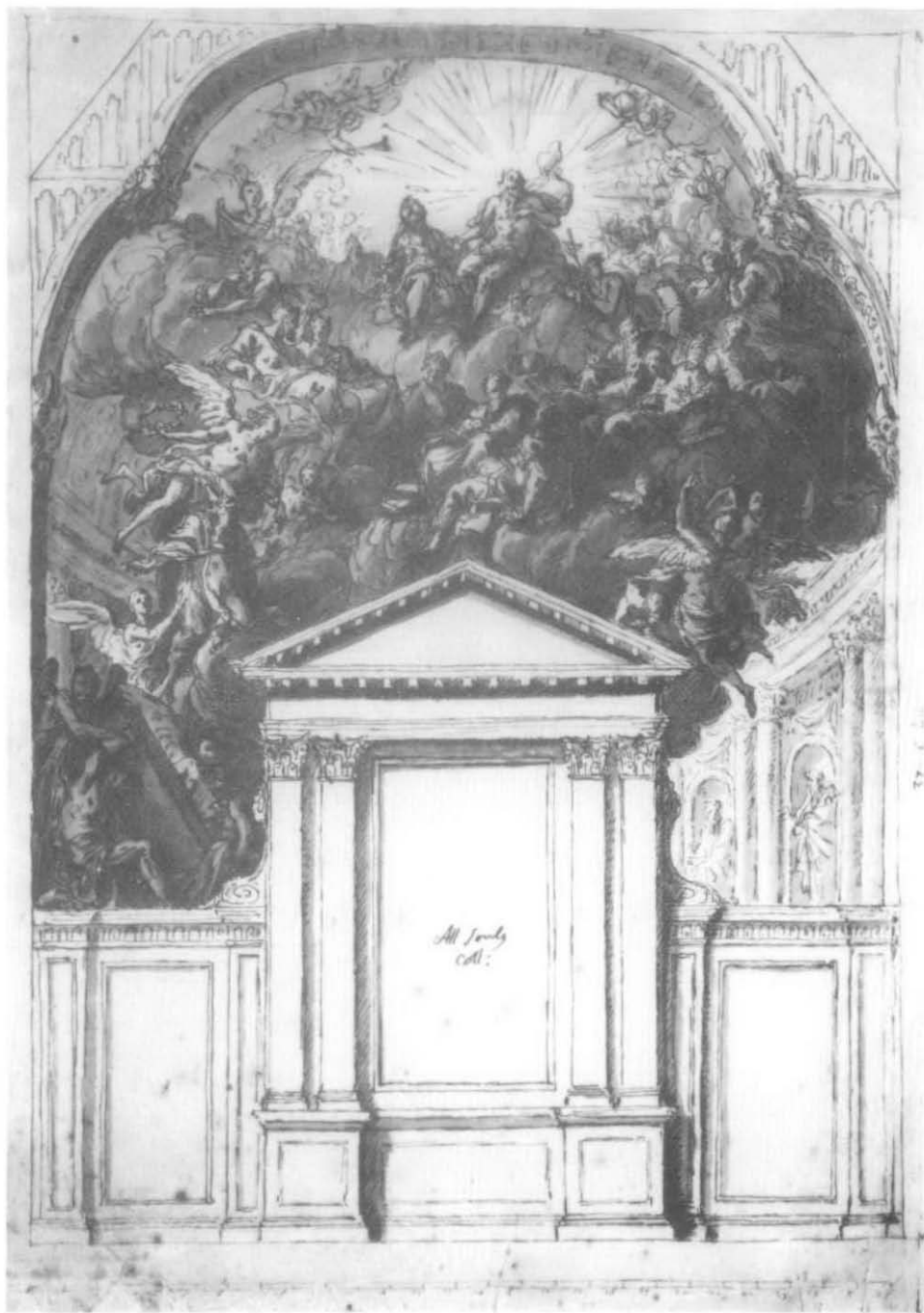


Fig. 8. Sir James Thornhill, *Study for Apotheosis of Archbishop Chichele*, altar wall, All Souls College chapel, Oxford, 1714. Pen and ink with grey wash. (Courtesy of the Warden and Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford.)

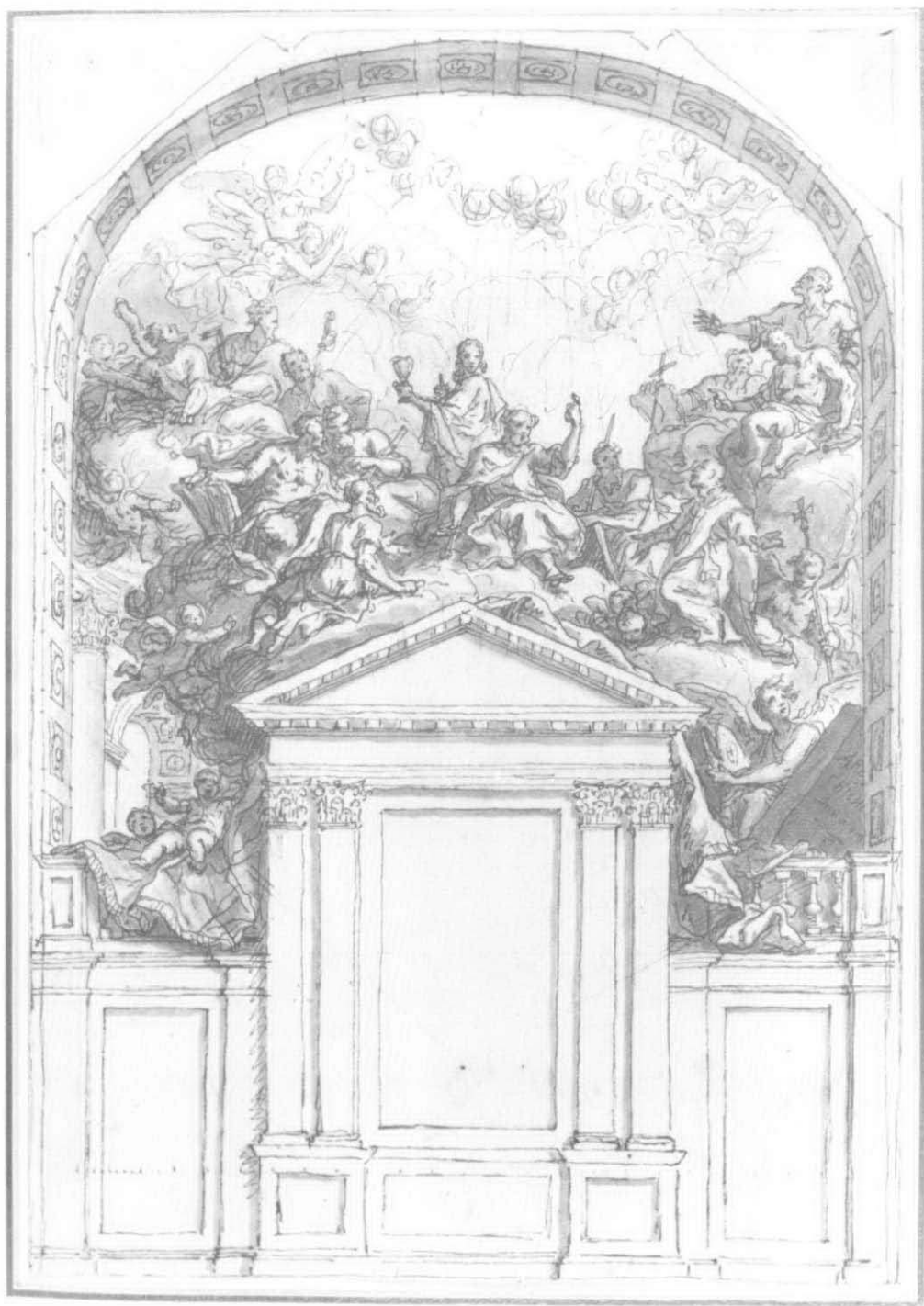


Fig. 9. Sir James Thornhill, *Study for Apotheosis of Archbishop Chichele*, altar wall, All Souls College chapel, Oxford, 1714. Pen and ink with grey wash. (Formerly collection Sir Bruce Ingram.)

fragments (Figs. 5–6).<sup>34</sup> The paint is applied loosely, almost impetuously, and despite a restricted palette the colouring is quite bold, especially in the flesh tones. Although individual figures are shown in attitudes of violent energy, they are drawn awkwardly with an almost exaggerated modelling. A single drawing from Fuller's hand exists in Dublin which can be connected with the All Souls ceiling (Fig. 7).<sup>35</sup> It is a preliminary study for a triumphant angel, and corresponds fairly closely to one of the figures that still partially survives. Previously it has been associated with the Magdalen *Resurrection* on account of an inscription identifying it as 'one of Fuller's mad figures in Mag. Coll: Ox', but no remotely comparable figures appear in the Burghers engraving of the Magdalen mural, and the perspective in the drawing establishes beyond doubt that it must have been intended for a ceiling.

Much less is known about the *Resurrection* which Fuller painted above the altar at All Souls. It appears that the east end had been plastered over to conceal the mutilated condition of the mediaeval stone reredos, and quite possibly Fuller's painting was executed directly on the unprepared surface, which would account for the rapid deterioration induced by the unsuitable medium described by Evelyn. Kerry Downes, who was the first to publish the fragments from Fuller's ceiling when they were rediscovered, has identified an estimate in Nicholas Hawksmoor's hand amounting to £49 for boards, plastering, priming and scaffolding on the reverse of one of Thornhill's preliminary drawings for the *Apotheosis of Chichele*, which clearly indicates that a special structure was erected in front of the existing altar wall in 1714 to receive the new decoration.<sup>36</sup> Although a similar arrangement might have been used earlier by Fuller, the discovery of residual remains of the 17th-century work reported to the college by the Chapel Committee on 2 April 1872 suggests otherwise:

Further investigations have resulted in bringing to light a most interesting portion of the original Chapel. All members of the College may not be aware of the existence of the original reredos of stone on the Eastern wall of the Chapel behind a fresco supposed to have been painted by Streater, Court painter to Charles II, which in its turn had been hidden by Thornhill's fresco . . . as well as by the present marble altar-piece and the 'Noli me tangere' of Raphael Mengs.<sup>37</sup>

The painting by Anton Raphael Mengs, which had been commissioned by the college in 1769, was originally inserted into the marble altar tabernacle which appears below the fresco in Ackerman's engraving and is also indicated by Thornhill in each of his designs for the project. Altogether four preparatory drawings exist,<sup>38</sup> illustrating the evolution of the scheme. The earliest, belonging to All Souls, retains the profile of the original roof, suggesting that Fuller's decoration may have been defined within the irregular field formed by the wooden structure (Fig. 8), but in all the later sketches the medieval

<sup>34</sup> Altogether the fragments cover thirteen figures, of which only three are complete. The best are exhibited in the Ante-chapel of All Souls College.

<sup>35</sup> *Study of a floating figure*, red and white chalk on cartridge paper. National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, No. 2114.

<sup>36</sup> All Souls College, Oxford. When the drawing was exhibited at the Royal Academy (Winter 1954–55, No. 608), the compiler of the catalogue asserted that the notes on the reverse referred to Thornhill's work in the Painted Hall at Greenwich, but Kerry Downes (op. cit. note 33) distinguished the estimate in Hawksmoor's hand from the painter's other notes.

<sup>37</sup> Colvin and Simmons, op. cit. note 11, 63, discuss the 1870s restoration of the chapel and reproduce a photograph of the mutilated stone reredos as it was rediscovered and reported in 1872.

<sup>38</sup> Three of Thornhill's drawings, those belonging to All Souls, the Ashmolean Museum and formerly to Sir Bruce Ingram, are illustrated by J. Sparrow (op. cit. note 11); the fourth, at the Institut de Istoria Artei, Bucharest, was published separately by G. Oprescu, *Burlington Magazine*, cii (1960), 455.

feature is replaced by an illusionistic depressed arch painted with coffers and rosettes corresponding to the canvas ceiling which was inserted to conceal Fuller's decoration (Fig. 9).

Finally, a chronology for Fuller's work in Oxford can be established from the evidence of the early sources. Since Evelyn includes no reference to either the ceiling in All Souls or to the paintings at Wadham it is reasonable to assume that work on neither had started in 1664. Very probably Fuller was not awarded the commission for the All Souls ceiling until he had successfully completed the fresco above the altar, and Buckeridge's statement that it was the more accomplished of the two *Resurrections* he had painted for college chapels justifies placing it after the Magdalen painting, which was evidently designed by an artist unused to working on such a large scale. Curiously enough Robert Plot does not mention Fuller's ceiling as late as 1677, but his *Natural History of Oxfordshire* is not an exhaustive survey, and other similar omissions can be found: it is less easy to explain how Buckeridge came to overlook it altogether thirty years later when he prepared his biographical note. Fuller had certainly left Oxford by 1669, when his presence in London is proven by a dispute with the Drury Lane Theatre, but he had probably been resident there for some time already, apparently finding employment as a scenery painter and tavern decorator.<sup>39</sup>

Although his paintings for Oxford college chapels do not constitute a major contribution to 17th-century English painting, they are nonetheless an interesting and innovative prelude to the development of the baroque idiom in decorative painting in England. Together with Robert Streater's more famous Sheldonian Theatre ceiling, the surviving fragments of Fuller's All Souls ceiling and the other records of his work there, in Magdalen College chapel and at Wadham, indicate that Oxford in the 1660s was an important and pioneering centre for the revival of the baroque style in Restoration England. Before his artistic abilities became clouded by alcohol Fuller must have achieved considerable professional recognition since one of his recorded works was the ceiling of the hall of the Company of Painter Stainers in Little Trinity Lane:

On the ceiling is painted, by *Fuller*, Pallas triumphant, while Art and Fame, attended by Mercury, suppress their enemies Sloth, Envy, Pride, &c.<sup>40</sup>

It was the work he did at Oxford which set him on the path to success, only to be thrown away by a fatal excess of sloth and "&c" induced by frequenting (and decorating) too many taverns. His work, it seems, was his downfall.

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<sup>39</sup> E. Croft-Murray (op. cit. note 1) lists four taverns in which decorations by Fuller were found, and very probably several others must have existed of which no record survives today.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Martyn, *The English Connoisseur* (London, 1766), II, i.