

THE ARCHITECTS OF LINCOLN CATHEDRAL

The following are brief notes on the architects who had a significant influence on the design and restoration/conservation of Lincoln Cathedral. Some of the early dates, where stated, are the best estimate from reliable sources. The sources used are listed at the end of the notes. We have only included those architects who held a patent/contract with the Cathedral for a reasonable period of time. This excludes some very eminent architects who did 'one off' reports such as Hayward, Sir Robert Smirke, Ewen Christian, Sir G G Scott and W H Barlow who was called in to confirm Pearson's costing and justification for the repairs in October 1875. We have not included Robert Godfrey as despite him being our hero he was the clerk of works and the supreme facilitator of the instructions of Nicholson and Fox.

NOIERS, Geoffrey de [du Noyers] (fl. c. 1189-1200) ?? Mason

Probably came from a Norman family which had settled in Lincolnshire. He has been claimed as a French architect brought to England by Saint Hugh though Viollet Le Duc was unable to accept the design or detail of the Lincoln work as French. He is described as "builder of the noble fabric" of St Hugh's choir in Lincoln Cathedral built between 1192 and 1200. It is clear that his work formed part of a single plan for the cathedral conceived at this time but Geoffrey's precise function is uncertain and it seems more probable that his contemporary Richard the Mason was architect of the cathedral.

RICHARD the Mason I (fl. c. 1195-)

Mason of Lincoln named as Magister when holding land near the Close of Lincoln at the end of the 12th century. He was probably St Hugh's Master Mason and responsible for the original design of the gothic cathedral. A head in the southeast transept of Lincoln Cathedral is clearly intended for the master and maybe a portrait of Richard the Mason.

MICHAEL (fl. c. 1210-1234) Mason

Master of the work (magister operis) of Lincoln Cathedral when in about 1230 he was holding land of Newhouse Abbey in the parish of Saint Michael on the Mount, Lincoln of which had already been in his possession before the Barons' War. In or soon after 1235 his land near the Eastgate was sold by Peter his son and heir.

BURGO, Gilbert de (fl. c. 1230-1235) Mason

Apparently master of Lincoln Cathedral for a short period between Master Michael and Master Alexander. He held land in the parish of St Clement in the Bail round about 1232.

ALEXANDER the Mason II [Cementarius] (fl. c. 1224-1240) Mason

Mentioned in several undated documents of about 1215 to 1240 as master Mason of the Church of Saint Mary, the Cathedral, at Worcester. His work there must have comprised the new choir begun in 1224. Certain stylistic resemblances and the transfer from Worcester to Lincoln at this time of the polygonal Chapter House plan make it probable that he was the same individual as Master Alexander III.

ALEXANDER the Mason III [Cementarius] (fl. c. 1235-1257) Mason

Mason of Lincoln was granted by the Dean and Chapter around 1245-48 in Lincoln a messuage and houses in Pottergate with a rent of 24s a year. He was from about 1240 Master of the Work at Lincoln Cathedral and he appears as a witness to several deeds conveying land at Fillingham to the Cathedral Fabric.

He is described as (*cementarius magister operis*). He was still living in 1257 but certainly had died by 1270. His wife Thecia survived him but eventually his house was sold to Richard de Stow II in June 1295.

Alexander was presumably in charge of the building of the nave, the chapter house, the Galilee porch, together with the upper parts of the West front and the rebuilding of the central tower's lower stage after its collapse in 1237. All of these works are clearly by the same hand and are of outstanding originality of design. Alexander's innovations in several fields had permanent significance in the development of English Gothic notably his polygonal chapter house with its many ribbed vault his development of the screen front under the tower with polygonal buttresses and above all his insertion of Lierne ribs in the vault of the nave. This last, leading as it did to the whole development of patterned vaulting in England and abroad was one of the fateful achievements in the history of Gothic art. One mark of master Alexander style at Lincoln is a trellis pattern on the central tower and also on the upper part of the West front. This occurs also on the lowest stages of the towers of Newark and Grantham churches which he may have designed as we've already said it seems probable that the Lincoln Alexander was identical with Alexander II.

TRESK, Simon de [Tresco] (fl. c.1255-1291)

Presumably from Thirsk, he was living in Lincoln from a date between 1251 and 1263, and may have been warden of the Masons at Lincoln Cathedral under Alexander the Mason III until the latter's death in about 1258. In documents of 1263 and later he is described as master and in 1274 to 75 specifically as master of the work of the cathedral. (*tunc magister operis matricis ecclesie*). He was certainly in office until early 1291 when he seems to have been succeeded by Richard de Stow II who had probably been his warden.

It is clear that Master Simon de Tresk was in charge of the building of the Angel choir throughout, from its inception soon after 1256 until its completion in 1280. He thus takes his place as one of the most significant designers of his time. I

t was his style, moreover, that his warden Simon de Pabenham (Simon de Warwick – project officer) took to York for the new Church of Saint Mary's Abbey, described by Brieger, 1957, as the most grandiose representation of the style of the Angel Choir in the North. The work of Lincoln Cathedral was certainly one of the vital nerve centres of architecture.

STOW, Richard de, II (fl. c. 1270-1307) Mason

He appears as a witness to deeds concerning the Cathedral roundabout 1275 to 1300 being subordinate to Master Simon de Tresk until 1291 and he was master Mason at the erection of the Eleanor cross at Lincoln. In June 1295, as Master of the fabric of Lincoln Cathedral he acquired property in Pottergate which had previously belonged to Alexander the Mason. In 1306 he contracted to build the upper stage of the Cathedral central tower. The work was begun under an order from the chapter dated in March 1306 and was completed about 1311. Stow's work on the cross is lost, but his belfry stage of the tower is one of the glories of the greatest age of Gothic art.

GAINSBOROUGH, Richard of [Gaynsborough] (fl. c. 1300- c. 1350) Mason

Mason of Lincoln Cathedral in the first half of the 14C. His tomb slab is in the cloister, and appears to date from about 1325 to 1350. It shows him clothed in a belted tunic and with a square beside him. The day of his death is given as the 21st May, but the year is partly obliterated. The description (*olym cementarius istus ecclesie*) suggests that he was the master in charge, and he may have been identical with Richard of Stow.

The only Lincoln citizen of this name discoverable in documentary sources is Richard de Gaynsburgh, 'poyntour', whose will was proved at the Burwarmote Court on the 14th of March 1350/1, in so far as concerned a free messuage in the parish of Saint Margaret Wigford; this refers to Richard's widow Sarah as one of his executors. It is possible that poyntour is a variant of painter and the word was used in its occasional mediaeval sense of sculptor or imager.

This raises the issue of did he sculpt the Pulpitum or oversee its sculpting? Did he build the cloister? Was burial in the cloister recognition of that work? Before this no other Magister had been buried on Cathedral grounds.

The Period 1350 to 1700

It has not been possible to identify any specific architects during this period. During the majority of this time the Cathedral was at its structural zenith and day to day care was probably a function of the clerk of works. This may well explain why the Cathedral had to turn to James Gibbs in the early 1700s. This idea has been discussed with Jonathan Clark, Cathedral archaeologist, and he agrees it is a reasonable explanation.

James Gibbs (1682-1754)

He became a pupil of Carlo Fontana, then a leading Roman architect.

When in 1709 he returned to Britain, he had a professional training at the fountainhead of Italian Baroque that was unique among contemporary English architects.

In early Georgian England Gibbs was the Tory architect par excellence.

In March 1724 he was asked to report on the Western Towers and the Cathedral in General.

I don't think the content of his report will surprise any of us and therefore we only intend to quote his recommendation regarding the western towers?



James Gibbs

“The small Spires are loose and have loosened the stones to which they are fixed and will always be so where there is timber fixed to stone especially so much exposed being almost impracticable to join these two materials and render them firm and solid. So I think the better and cheaper way will be to raise small cupelettes of stone covered with lead with fains upon them both upon the two western towers and likewise upon the corners of the great tower. The roof is so bad in general that there is no walking in the church when it rains without being wet.”

The Dean and Chapter asked John James (who had replaced Gibbs at the Commission for Fifty Churches) to do a report in April 1726 – which fully agreed with Gibbs but there is one interesting comment:

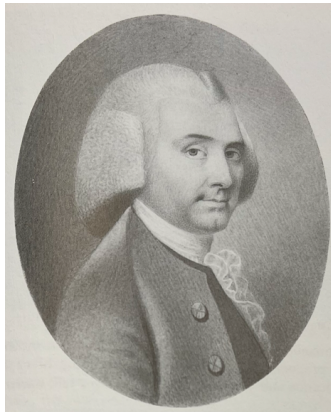
“I should deviate nothing from what Mr Gibbs has designed unless that I should be for making the heads of all the apertures in the five walls with the pointed angular arch (if I may so call it this after the gothic manner) in which the whole church is built rather than the semicircular arch as drawn by Mr Gibbs.”

Note Gibbs was a Baroque architect and even James says (if I may so call it this after the gothic manner) – Gothic was just not popular at that time.

Gibbs' west wall was built without Gothic adornment and the spires remained a while longer.

The stone used was from the old bishop's palace under a self-denying ordinance.

James Essex (1722-1784)



James Essex

It is as a gothic architect that he is chiefly remarkable, for unlike his contemporaries who regarded gothic merely as a decorative style a kind of indigenous faux rococo with romantic associations, Essex fully appreciated its structural character and had an archaeologist's knowledge of its detail.

He was in fact the first practising architect to take an antiquarian interest in mediaeval architecture and his knowledge of gothic construction remained unique until the ecclesiological movement of the early 19th century.

At Lincoln he was well served by an excellent carpenter, William Lumby, mason John Hayward and the non-conformist stone carver James Pink. His repairs were effective and his own additions to the fabric have a scholarly character that sets them apart from other contemporary essays in the gothic style.

The roofs over the two south transepts and over the south aisle had only been repaired 10 years before but so badly that they had to be redone by Essex.

The West Front had lost many small pillars and other ornaments, more seriously later gothic work had settled away from the Romanesque, a problem not entirely solved by Gibbs screen walls of 1726. He did extensive work on the West Front but its detail is not documented.

He recommended the reconstruction of the chapter house roof in a domestic three pitched form like a flat bottom bowl instead of the original cone in order to save timber and lead. This was the negative side of 18th century concern for utility and economy.

In St Hugh's Choir Essex remodelled the outer faces of the return walls of the screen with blind arcading, which he continued on the wings of the reredos; for the central part he surmounted the altar with a triple Gable based on Bishop Luda's tomb at Ely.

The decorated tracery in the back and much of the carving was added by Buckler in 1857 but even the 19th century felt that Essex had succeeded well enough for the reredos to stand until one could be sure of getting a better.

Essex's other important contribution to the choir was the Bishop's throne, erected in 1778. The general form fits very well with the other choir stalls, although Pearson in the late 19th century added enrichments. Possibly its success owes much to the quality of the carving by Lumby.

Essex was also fortunate in his other chief craftsman, James Pink the mason. Pink's most elaborate work was the restoration of the mediaeval pulpitum.

The two other works he did was to restore the previous St Hugh's Chapel to its original size (now the vergers' office) and to lay a new marble black and white floor in the Sanctuary.



In recognition of his services, he was voted a silver salver by the Chapter.

To sum him up – Essex had a distaste for the superfluity of Gothic ornament. He specifically denied that everything built in the past was good architecture and it was no sin against the Holy Ghost

to remove a medieval feature for good reason. What set Essex apart from his contemporaries was his appreciation of Gothic and his understanding of the construction of medieval buildings.

John Chessell Buckler (1793-1894)

Buckler had been honorary architect to Lincoln Cathedral since at least 1857. He was appointed by the precentor Richard Pretyman Tomline (1793-1866).



John Buckler

It was standard practice at Lincoln that the surveyor-architect supervised repairs from a distance and that the workmen used their discretion on fabric repair in their absence, a matter of considerable significance to Buckler's story. As Buckler claimed, his 'honorary' position meant he had 'no power to interfere with the established custom of carrying on the repairs', apart from 'readily giving sanction to the system adopted'.

In 1859, Lincoln Cathedral was largely as it is today, although its condition was fast deteriorating.

What remains of this Romanesque building are the three central portals of the west front, which was widened during the thirteenth century in the Early English style. The treatment of this great façade in the early nineteenth century was to be a central element in the Buckler controversy.

Already by the eighteenth century, west front had been the subject of much-needed restoration. James Essex was the superintendent of work conducted between 1761-84, which included adding tall pinnacles to the central tower, as well as substantial interventions on the west front from 1778 onwards. Much of this work was documented by Buckler.

Essex renewed the parapets and gables and replaced various decorative details. In addition, he substituted the carved pillars that flanked the portals with plain ones, refaced the lower parts of the piers between them, and replaced some beakhead carvings and moulded column bases. Buckler's sketchbooks include two measured sketches from 1860 detailing Essex's interventions to the 'pronaos', or west front.

Buckler was keen to stress that the Cathedral had a complex history of repairs, which in many places was hard to discern, and he worried that casual or ill-informed viewers might mistake earlier, heavy-handed interventions for his own. He attributed most of the previous repair work to Essex, using his name, 'as a catch-all for any post-medieval interventions'.

Essex had in fact rarely visited the Cathedral, and many decisions from his time would have been made by his clerk of works Thomas Lumby and mason James Pink, who died after the restoration to the west front was begun. Yet the survival of much of this eighteenth-century repair work at Lincoln is testament to Buckler's own light-handed approach to restoration.

By 1859, Buckler had completed a long-term programme of external restoration on the Cathedral's south-east corner (possibly including the south porch). Efforts were now to be focused on the west front. Over centuries, the build-up of 'scum' or surface patina, which Buckler characterised as 'an inimitable hue, permanent, indurated, and lustrous', had left the thirteenth-century masonry of the front's towers grey and that of the Norman pronaos between them black.

To remedy the disfigurement, it was standard practice to carry out a process of 'scraping'. The process generally meant removing the outer layer of stone to achieve a new, smooth surface, but eradicating the marks of tooling and the patina of age in the process or, worse, exposing the softer centre of the stone and hastening decay. Complaints about such work were already emerging in the 1840s and 1850s. To John Ruskin, this was 'the most dreadful fate which could befall any building'.

It was precisely what Buckler was attacked for doing. Accusations against him, as well as the dean and chapter, also involved speculations about the removal of carved-stone mouldings and sculptures, in particular the beak head and chevron mouldings and other ornaments on the jambs of the Norman portal, as well as images and figures, including the gallery of kings above the great west door.

Exactly what Buckler did and where is hard to establish, as the records of the Cathedral fabric fund, including the audits from 1856 to 1859, offer remarkably little precise information. This ambiguity also existed during the scandal, which was exacerbated by speculation about the precise nature of Buckler's involvement with the work.

The catalyst for the scraping attacks appears to have been a letter of the 1st of July 1859 to the Cathedral's Dean, which Butler subsequently published. In his letter Scott mentioned that he'd been made aware of apparent scraping at the Cathedral several years before but had been reluctant to interfere, confident that the practice would cease in line with the changing culture of restoration. When he heard that the destructive process was continuing, however, he decided to intervene, alarmed by the approach being adopted on that gem of English art, the Southeastern Judgement Portal, which dated from 1260.

Scott's 1859 missive, as he had hinted in his letter, was in tune with broad changes in the perception of restoration at the time. For many early Victorian architects, the authenticity of an ancient artefact was a function of the design carved into the stone, not of the substance of the stone itself. However, from around 1860, wholesale extensive and reconstruction with moderated by a growing appreciation of the intrinsic value of the original fabric and its pertinax (the historic deterioration of a very old building). A decisive change of emphasis from form to materiality.

It is hard for us to imagine the furore that arose and went on for several years with various sections of the press accusing the Dean and Chapter of vandalism.

Ultimately this led Buckler to write a book in 1866 – *A Description and defence of the Restorations of the Exterior of Lincoln Cathedral*. The costs were met by Lincoln Chapter. It was described by one critic as a most virulent, blind and furious attack upon ecclesiologists in general and Gilbert Scott in particular.

The arguments were to continue for a long time yet. The publication of the book possibly did Buckler more harm than the original allegations.

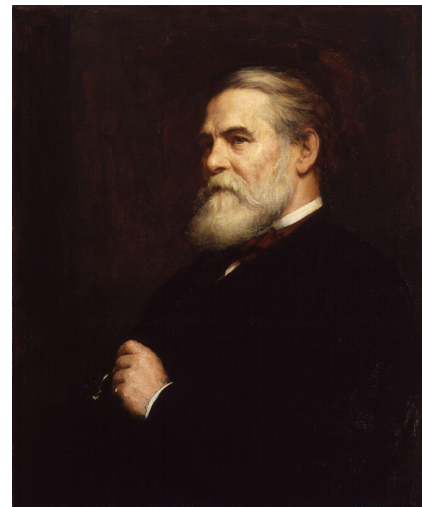
Ironically, following the formation of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), Scott was to find himself criticised for his possibly questionable restorative work.

As for Buckler he was replaced as Honorary Cathedral Architect in 1870 by Pearson. Buckler expressed his disappointment at not remaining in post and we are forced to conclude, therefore, as the Ecclesiologist put it ironically in Dec 1866 that '*poor Mr Buckler is the innocent victim of malice and envy*'.

John Loughborough Pearson (1817-1897)

Pearson's work in the City of Lincoln comprised the restoration of various parts of the Cathedral (1870-1893), additions to the houses in the Cathedral Close (1870-3), the restoration of the Stonebow (1885-90), and, in the suburbs, the restoration and extension of All Saints, Bracebridge (1874-5).

He began work in the county of Lincoln early in his career thanks to the patronage of Sir Charles Anderson of Lea Hall who first commissioned him to restore Lea church in 1847. The important and skilled restoration of Saint Mary, Stow, followed from 1850. Twenty years later the Dean and chapter of Lincoln appointed Pearson to take care of the Cathedral. It was his first appointment as a cathedral architect.



John Pearson

His work was to be the restoration of the West Front, but there was other work too, including a general repair of the north transept. Pearson recorded in December 1874 that, *'Lincoln now stands alone amongst the cathedrals in that as yet nothing has been done towards a thorough restoration, the work being in every way so worthy of our most careful and conservative restoration'*.

Pearson quickly discovered that the main problems at Lincoln lay in the west towers and the significant deterioration in their structure. The architect James Gibbs had endeavoured to solve the problem by adding classical stone vestibules to the bases of the towers in the 1720s and in the 1760s James Essex attempted to reinforce this work with the gothic arch. Nevertheless 100 years later there were severe fractures indicating movement, and the West screen was imperilled. The Dean and Chapter were unsure what to do, and Pearson soon expressed his willingness to let them ask for a second opinion from a civil engineer. They chose William Barlow, the celebrated designer of the overall station layout, track design and railway shed of Saint Pancras railway station, and currently vice president of the Institute of Civil Engineers. Following a detailed inspection he endorsed Pearson's proposals, noting that it was inadvisable to attempt to restore the West fronts verticality by rebuilding it, but he was emphatic that the tower had to be secured. This work was immediately put in hand and completed in 1880.

Pearson's 1875 report listed the various restorations that he felt were needed together with their likely cost. These included works to the towers £8-10,000 then about to start; the North Transept and chapels £3,600, which were then in hand; the Choir and Retro-Choir require £11,200; the Chapter House £6,920; on the Cloisters £4,700; the Northeast Transept £3,150; and both of the transepts £4,700; and the Nave and Aisles at £16,700.

The restoration of the Chapter House was begun in 1880, with repair to the tracery and new glass partly executed to a scheme by Clayton & Bell.

In 1888-92, Pearson restored the Cloister. This was a more drastic work and involved the rebuilding of the eastern, southern and western arms. The prominent antiquary and SPAB architect Somers Clarke condemned the work outright:

Pearson's other works at Lincoln Cathedral were uncontroversial. They include: the addition of tracery to James Essex's Angel Choir reredos; the direction of the 'restoration' of Queen Eleanor's tomb (for Joseph Ruston - Building News vol. 60, 1891, p. 58) in the retro-choir, in fact a copy of the late thirteenth-century tomb, based on a drawing of the original made by William Dugdale in the 1640s, with an effigy copied from William Torel's in Westminster Abbey; and the restoration of Bishop Fleming's chantry (d. 1431) in the Angel Choir as a memorial to Sir Charles Anderson (Builder vol. 62, 1892, p. 312).

Pearson's other works in Lincoln were secular. In June 1870 he was working on plans for what his ledger describes simply as 'Lincoln Cath House', and during the following year he described this variously as 'Organist's house', 'Archdeacon & Precentors Houses & Dr West's House', and 'Archdeaconry, Precentory and Mr West's House'.

Pearson's restoration of the fifteenth-century Stonebow was executed in 1885-7 for the City Council and included the partial rebuilding of the western side of the north face, and alterations to the ground floor so as to form a new archway.

Sir Charles Archibald Nicholson, 2nd Baronet (27 April 1867 – 4 March 1949)



Sir Charles Nicholson

Charles Nicholson wrote annual reports on the condition of the Cathedral from 1912 and they culminate in a final report on the NW tower.

In addition to designing churches, Nicholson conducted the refurbishments of many medieval churches. In addition to his ecclesiastical commissions, he was also a prolific designer of public war memorials, including one at his former school in Rugby. Nicholson's Anglican cathedral work included a new east chapel in Norwich, the west front of St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast (where he was the cathedral's architect between 1924–48) various additions to Chelmsford Cathedral, and the reconstruction of Portsmouth Cathedral.

His internal restorations were carried out at Brecon, Carlisle, Exeter, Leicester, Lichfield,

Lincoln, Llandaff, Manchester, Salisbury, Wakefield, Wells, and Winchester. His works abroad include the ministerial buildings for the Jamaican Government in Kingston. The reports by Sir Charles lead to an invitation to Sir Francis Fox to visit and inspect the Cathedral.

Sir Francis Fox (29 June 1844 – 7 January 1927)

Fox tends to get a quick mention by roof guides as part of the Godfrey repair story, but this understates what a prodigious engineer he really was.

He was an English civil engineer, who was responsible for the bridges over the Victoria Falls of the Zambesi and Sydney Harbour, the Mersey Railway Tunnel and the Liverpool Overhead Railway, and extending the London Underground. He was awarded a knighthood by the King on 25 July 1912.

In 1871 he designed the Telescopic Bridge in Bridgwater. Fox was also a consultant for the Simplon Tunnel and in 1878 constructed the replacement train shed at Bristol Temple Meads railway station. He became an engineer for the Great Central Railway and, in 1889, collaborated with his brother Douglas and H.W. Braddock in the construction of Marylebone Station, London.



Sir Francis Fox

Fox also assisted in the shoring-up of several great cathedrals including St Paul's Cathedral and Winchester Cathedral in 1905, where he employed tie-rods and grouting to bind the walls together. The work on Winchester was remarkable because of the need to use a diver, using the old-fashioned brass helmet diving suit to repair the foundations which were underwater as the Cathedral had been built on a marsh.

Sources

We have unashamedly pillaged the works of Nicholas Orme, Sir Francis Hill, John Harvey, J W F Hill, Peter Draper and *Getting into a Scrape: The Buckler Dynasty, Lincoln Cathedral and Mid-Victorian Architectural Politics* by Joshua Mardell.