



WOODCUT VIEW OF CHRIST CHURCH, BOSTON, 1817
Charles Shaw's *Topographical and Historical Description of Boston*.

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Christ Church, Boston

By SUZANNE FOLEY

THE brick church with its lofty spire in Boston's north end arouses a sense of patriotism in Americans who recall its important contribution to the cause of colonial independence. How significant it is then that the Georgian architecture of the building and the Church of England liturgy followed therein were an integral part of the English tradition. Christ Church, Boston, begun in 1723, was the first great Georgian church in America.

An evaluation of the architecture of this church in terms of the inspirations and influences from which it grew and the personalities and tastes by which it was shaped is important in defining its significance in the development of American architecture. The most complete architectural study of Christ Church, Boston, was made by Norman Morrison Isham in "Trinity Church, Newport, Rhode Island."¹ By external evidence he establishes its relation to English prototypes and develops an hypothesis for the origin of the design. This method is valuable in defining the stylistic character of the building. An analysis of the surviving docu-

ments: deeds, letters, vestry records, bills and receipts for construction,² in the light of the personalities and circumstances involved, more specifically creates the form and fabric of the building, as well as defining it as an architectural expression of its day.

Boston, at the time Christ Church was begun in 1723, was a town of more than 12,000 people.³ It was completing its third decade under the Province Charter and was back on its feet after the losses of men and goods from the Indian wars at the end of the seventeenth century. Under the new charter the old order of things had changed. Church and State were separated; all religious sects, excepting "papists," were enfranchised. The Church of England was an accepted institution. The advent of the royal governors brought life and color to the drab Puritan town.⁴ Of the two main parts of town the older sec-

EDITOR'S NOTE: This study was undertaken in connection with a seminar in eighteenth-century American architecture under John Coolidge of the Fogg Museum at Harvard University. Miss Foley was then completing her graduate work towards a Master's degree.

tion, centering around the town house opposite the main wharf, conceded in fashion to the north end, more densely built up and the attraction of many wealthy and prosperous citizens.

The great fire of 1711 took its toll in the older part of town and was followed by a widespread building boom, lasting until the 1740's. In 1722 there were eleven churches in Boston, most of which were built after the 1711 fire. The seven in the older part of the city included the fabrics of the Church of England, built in 1688, the Quakers and the French Huguenots which were on back streets, while the four Congregational meeting-houses occupied sites on the main intersections in the town. Of the four churches in the north end the Baptist meetinghouse was obscurely placed on the Mill Pond while the three Congregational meeting-houses were situated on the main streets in the center of the north end's activity. One of these, the Old North, was led by the colorful Mathers.

With the shift in the type of Englishmen coming to Boston under the regime of the royal governors, the Church of England ministry necessarily expanded; and it did so in all freedom, not without ostentation and pride. The north end was the desirable section in which to build the second Anglican church in Boston. The site purchased on Salem Street at the foot of Hull Street was, however, several blocks from the hub of the north end.

The move toward building the church originated within the congregation of King's Chapel in a proclamation and subscription paper:

Laus Deo: Boston, New England

The second day of September, 1722. At the request of Severall Gentlemen, who had purchased a piece of Ground at the North End of Boston to build a church on, The Reverend Mr.

Samuel Myles ordered his Clerk to give Notice to his Congregation That all those who were willing to Contribute towards Erecting another Church at the North end of Boston were desired to meet at King's Chappel the Wednesday following.

Agreeable to which Notification Several Persons assembled, and Chose Mr. John Barnes Treasurer; Thomas Graves, Esqr., Messrs George Cradock, Anthony Blount, John Gibbons, Thomas Selbey, and George Monk a Committee to receive subscriptions and build a Church on Said Ground at the North end of Boston.

The Preamble to the Subscription

Whereas, the Church of England at the South part of Boston is not large enough to contain all the people that would come to it; and Severall well disposed Persons having already bought a piece of ground at the North part of said Town to build a Church on . . .⁵

While this paper mentions that "Severall Gentlemen . . . had purchased a piece of Ground at the North End of Boston to build a church on . . .," the deed, which was not recorded until ten days later on September 12, shows that Anthony Blount alone purchased the land.⁶ It is assumed that he and the "Severall Gentlemen" had arranged previously with Nathaniel Henchman for the purchase.

Thirteen years earlier Nathaniel Henchman had bought this lot, which was in the block on Salem Street between Love's Lane and Charter Street, together with a larger lot on Salem Street, extending from Love's Lane to Bennet Street, from the widow of Edward Peggy.⁷ Blount bought the smaller lot in 1722, which measured 59½ feet on Salem Street, 121 feet on the north side, 58 feet in the rear and 111 feet on the south, for £100. Two factors would contribute to the selection of this site for the new church. Land was apparently less expensive back on Salem Street than near the docks, as well as being out of the way

of the three Congregational meeting-houses. The predetermined size of the lot purchased set a limitation on the dimensions of the building. It is interesting to note that the church structure built (over-all dimensions: 96½ feet by 51½ feet) just fits the lot.

The direct source of the plans for Christ Church, as is often the case with eighteenth-century American architecture, has been unknown and, therefore, has offered opportunity for speculation. A popular solution has been that the plans were obtained from England, especially because of the acknowledged debt of the design to the architecture of Sir Christopher Wren.⁸ There is no documentation in the extensive records of the church of any negotiation, payment or receipt of plans from England. Correspondence with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, of which Christ Church was a missionary parish, in no way indicates that the Society supplied a set of plans of any sort to Christ Church.⁹ If a set of plans of English origin had been acquired by the Building Committee from a local source, such as the print dealer, William Price, the expenditure would have been recorded in the detailed account of the building expenses kept by the Treasurer.¹⁰

In the planning of eighteenth-century New England churches one of two practices was followed: (1) The Building Committee of laymen engaged an outside "architect" in the colonies to furnish plans, as was the case with the second King's Chapel of 1749 designed by Peter Harrison and Trinity Church, Newport, Rhode Island, 1726, by Richard Munday, or (2) the Building Committee had on it one man who determined the architectural form of the building and worked out with the builder the application of his

ideas in the construction. The latter situation is more difficult to crystallize, as the dilettante's influence can only be inferred from the documents, and the result of his influence is dependent in the finished product on the skill of the builders. Such a situation existed in the building of the First Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1774, where Joseph Brown was on the building committee, and probably in St. Michael's in Marblehead, 1714, which was constructed under the auspices of the building committee alone. There is no reference in the Christ Church documents to commissioning an outside architect.¹¹ The situation at Christ Church does, however, suggest that one of the laymen on the Building Committee was the advisor on architectural matters.

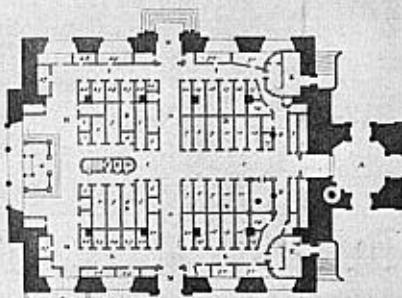
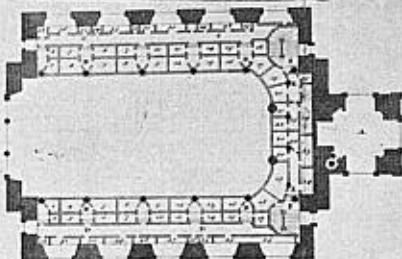
Anthony Blount, a tallow chandler by profession, appears to be the most active layman concerned with the construction of the church. This point is strengthened by an entry in the Committee Treasurer's accounts of April 22, 1723, for 3 sh/5 to Blount for "2 Lett to & from Mr. Caner," indicating that Blount had been in touch with master carpenter, Henry Caner, in New Haven, a week after the cornerstone of the church was laid. Blount must have known Caner when he handled the building accounts of the 1712 enlargement of King's Chapel, which Caner supervised. No further reference to Caner is found in the Christ Church documents.

Blount died in September of 1726, and the only documentary reference to plans of any sort for the initial church construction occurs prior to this time in a "Carpenters' Agreement" of early 1724. This mentions "Ribbing the Cealing according to the Draught sett for plastering." As the architectural advisor on the church

To the Reverend Samuel Clarke D.D. Rector of
the Parish Church of St. James Westm. And the rest
of the Rec'd Board of Vestry of the S. Parish
That Heath Front of the said Church & Tower & spire
Plans are most humbly Dedicated

by their most Obedient

Nomine Servant
Antt. Griffin.



An Explanation of the Ground Plan.

- A. The Nave.
- B. The South aisle.
- C. The Tower.
- D. The Middle aisle.
- E. The Clerks' Dais.
- F. The Readers' Dais.
- G. The Pulpit.
- H. The Communion-table.
- I. The Prie-dieu.
- J. The Plan of the Cellar.
- K. The Gallery stairs.
- L. The Library.
- M. The Organ-Door.
- N. The Choral-Door.
- O. The Crypt.
- P. The Vestry.

The Gallery Plan.

- A. The Chapel.
- B. The Porch.
- C. The Central gallery.
- D. The North gallery.
- E. The West gallery.
- F. The South gallery.



ENGRAVING OF ST. JAMES (PICCADILLY), WESTMINSTER, 1709-1727

Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

building committee, Anthony Blount probably supplied the carpenters and masons with a published view of a London church of fashionable taste as a prototype for the new church in Boston, filling in the more detailed aspects, such as the vaulting, with specific plans drawn perhaps by him with Caner's advice or direction. The technical aspects of the construction were left to the masons, Ebenezer Clough and James Varney, while one of many meetings between Blount and the carpenters, Thomas Tippin and Thomas Bennett, no doubt resulted in the specifications listed in the "Carpenters' Agreement."

The most established fashion in London church architecture by 1722 was set by the many churches designed by Sir Christopher Wren after the great fire of 1666. As the form of Christ Church suggests a knowledge of Wren's churches, Anthony Blount must have acquired a visual record, such as an engraving, of a Wren church to guide the builders of Christ Church.

An engraving of Wren's St. James's, Piccadilly, is the most likely source print for Christ Church.¹² This engraving, dedicated to The Reverend Samuel Clarke, rector from 1709-1729, shows a north elevation of the church with ground-floor and gallery plans. It is signed by Anthony Griffin as draughtsman and Henry Hulsbergh as engraver, and may be dated between 1709 and 1727, the termination of Hulsbergh's activity as an engraver. Views prior to 1722 of other Wren churches are limited to elevations or perspective views, either singly or in a panoramic view or map of a part of the city. With a print such as the one of St. James's, showing plans and an elevation, Anthony Blount would be well able to convey to the builders of

Christ Church what he wanted the new church to look like.

Specific features on the ground-floor plan of St. James's which Blount incorporated in Christ Church might be noted in the centrally located pulpit and the two gallery staircases near the doors in the west wall. The west doors at Christ Church were not exclusively for the galleries, as at St. James's, for Christ Church did not have doors in the north and south wall, in addition to the central west door, to accommodate the occupants of the ground-floor pews.

In three and a half years, from September 1722 to May 1726, the brick church and tower (without the wooden spire) were constructed, and the interior was provided with the essential furnishings. The Building Committee accounts carefully kept by the Treasurer, John Barnes, show that the winter of 1722-1723 was spent in gathering subscriptions to finance the construction, in arranging for the timber from York, Maine, and in purchasing the foundation stones. The digging of the cellar was begun in early April 1723, and "ye first stone" was laid April 15 by the rector of King's Chapel, the Reverend Samuel Myles. The bricks were purchased from Samuel Came in Medford and are laid in English bond. In the spring, summer and fall months of this first year the masons and carpenters raised the four walls and the roof and completed the tower up to the eaves.

The basic ground plan of the building may be determined from the dimensions of the stone foundations enumerated in the bill submitted by the masons, Ebenezer Clough and James Varney, on June 3, 1723. This plan is that of the present building; the exterior length is 71 feet and width 51½ feet. There is a semicircular apse at the east end and a tower at

the west end approximately 20 feet by 23½ feet, exterior dimensions. The Clough and Varney measurements indicate that there were openings in the east and west foundation walls. The one in the east wall was south of the apse, opening to the outside; the other, in the west wall, opened into the tower cellar. The foundation for the tower was thicker than the foundation for the other walls.¹³ A brick wall, 1 foot 10 inches thick and 54 feet long, was laid down the length of the nave in the middle of the cellar to support the oak floor joists. It is at this point that the joists are spliced.

The construction progressed steadily. The gallery framework was raised by July of 1723, the ten pillars supporting the galleries resting on floor joists which were supported from below by pillars on stone foundations in the cellar.¹⁴ In August glass for the windows was bought from Sandford and Lowe in London. This is the only item in the records which was purchased directly from England. The roof was raised before December and later slated.

The church invited to be their rector the Reverend Timothy Cutler, who had left the presidency of Yale College in September 1722 because he advocated the episcopacy. He accepted the call to Christ Church and was sent immediately to England by his new church for Anglican ordination. His return to Boston on September 24, 1723, expedited the construction work. A rough floor was laid, a planed one not put down until a few months later, and temporary pews were put in the body of the church, so that the first service could be held on the last Sunday in December 1723. On January 4, 1724, Dr. Cutler reported to the Secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel,

and on the last Sunday I preached in our New Church, that being the first time of our assembling in it. It is not yet finished but workmen are daily employed upon it and we put it into as good a posture as we could to receive an audience.¹⁵

From the masons' estimate dated June 1723 of brick work to be done and the carpenters' bill of a year later the number of doors and windows in the church may be determined. Their placement appears to be the same as that of the present building with several modifications. The first-floor windows at the west end were originally doors, and the niche at the south side of the east end, which contains the bust of Washington, was originally a window. The inside central door at the west end, which is now a beveled opening, may have been of post and lintel construction.¹⁶ Built at this same time on the east end north of the apse was a wooden vestry room with a door in the east wall, as at present, giving access to the room from the church.

The interior furnishings and exterior trim received an increasing amount of attention, as the extensive carpenters' bill of March 24, 1724, indicates. All the doorcases, doors (the three outside doors having ogee molding and raised paneling) and sash window cases were in. The vaulted ceiling was ribbed according to drawings provided; seats were put in the north and south galleries, and a pair of staircases raised to them. A two-decker pulpit-desk was placed at the east end of the center aisle in front of the altar,¹⁷ and temporary altar rails were made.

A Doric cornice was put on the north and south sides of the church at the eaves and around the apse. The tower was up to the level of the eaves with two rough floors in it. In May and June 1724 the upper two stages of the tower were com-

pleted with the aid of an "Ingin to hoist up bricks and mortor." A wooden pyramidal-shaped roof was put on the tower. The church appears in a Burgis Map or View of Boston drawn in 1729 in this form.¹⁸

The two brass branches were received as a gift from Captain William Maxwell in June 1724 and hung by ropes in the body of the church. By September of 1724 a staircase was raised in the tower. The ceiling of the church was plastered and then whitewashed in October, and the canopy for the pulpit hung in November 1724. Iron fretwork collars were put on the ceiling where the branches hung. This same month the insides of the galleries were paneled. A modillion cornice was put around the top of the tower, and a cornice was put along the raking pediment at the west end.

After the ceiling was plastered the finishing of the woodwork trim proceeded from top to bottom. In January 1725 the galleries were wainscoted and the gallery columns and pilasters cased. The walls of the church were plastered by September 1725, and the ten arches of the aisle bays whitened. By the fall of 1725 the temporary pews could be replaced by permanent box pews. The fifty-eight pews constructed in October 1725 perhaps necessitated the raising of the floor at the altar. Twenty-four pews were put in the north and south galleries in May 1726.

This terminates the initial construction period of the church. The near complete structure relates closely to Wren prototypes. The striking difference between Christ Church and Wren's St. James's, Piccadilly, is in the effect of the proportions. At St. James's all parts relate mathematically to each other according to a module: the ratio of length to width

to height being 4:3:2. Christ Church almost approximates the ratio of length to width: length—66 feet, width—46 feet, but with its 42-foot nave height is considerably higher than half its length. The ratio here is 4:3:2.5. The effect of the interior of Christ Church is dominated by the rising height of the nave. The feeling created by a Wren interior of one large open space into which the galleries project is not present in Christ Church, where the galleries seem to divide up the interior space and the bays appear as independent spatial units. Because the nave is higher in proportion than at St. James's, the gallery columns and front are proportionally larger. This contributes a great deal to the effect of space divided up.

Even if Anthony Blount had the Griffin-Hulsbergh print of St. James's, Piccadilly, as a guide in planning Christ Church, he must have had a more comprehensive knowledge of Wren's architectural theories and his churches, for the plans on the print do not conform to the dimension ratios of the actual church, and Christ Church reflects Wren interiors. The manner of gallery support at Christ Church relates directly to St. James's, Piccadilly, and St. Andrew's, Wardrobe. These are the only two churches of Wren's which have two stages of gallery support, piers below and columns, which begin at the top of the gallery front, above.¹⁹

Under an architectural advisor like Blount, who knew enough to be able to choose the proper elements that went into a Wren-styled edifice but not enough to sit down and integrate these elements into a unified whole under Wren's precepts, Christ Church just grew. Having large windows on the ground floor, unlike St. James's, necessitated high steep galleries, which in turn determined the

height of the nave. The vaulting at Christ Church, for which plans are mentioned in the documents, is a simplification of the Wren vaulting at St. James's, necessitated probably by both the skill of the designer

and the vertical effect of the interior. The colonial craftsmen topped their church with a steeply pitched gable roof, more in keeping with their own practice and much easier than the Wren roof on St. James's which is a gabled roof over the nave vault and a flat roof over the north and south galleries. The steeply pitched roof at Christ Church causes the third stage of the tower to be considerably higher in proportion than at St. James's.

While Christ Church intended to exemplify the more formal architecture of the Baroque, it was put together in a rather Gothic way. The combination of these two elements gives it a certain provinciality, yet it is indeed a proud statement of a new spirit that was growing in the colonies. Except for Trinity Church, Newport, 1726, Christ Church was not a prototype for American churches, for the colonies were quick to keep up with English taste, and James Gibbs's architectural publications in a few years made Christ Church old-fashioned.

An active building program continued at Christ Church until 1740. In the time from May 1726 until 1740 three large undertakings were realized in the construction of a three-decker pulpit, an organ and a spire. New chancel fittings and a more permanent vestry room were also provided. William Price drew plans for the organ and the spire, and most probably designed the pulpit. The records preserve his bills for the first two items. Although Price contributed funds in the initial subscription drive of the Building Committee in 1722, his name is not actively linked with the church until his election to the vestry in April 1726. Anthony Blount was elected senior warden of this same vestry, having served as junior warden since the formation of the



ENGRAVING OF CHRIST
CHURCH, BOSTON, 1742-3
Detail of Burges-Price view.

and that of the colonial craftsmen. At St. James's the semicircular nave vault springs from the cornice of the entablature block of the gallery columns and is intersected by the transverse barrel vaults of the gallery bays. At Christ Church the elliptical nave vault springs from the crown of the transverse barrel vaults. The additive method of constructing this sys-

group in 1724. Blount, however, died in September of 1726. Price apparently replaced Blount as advisor on architectural matters, which by this time involved projects in scale with Price's interest and skill as a cabinetmaker. In contrast to the anonymity of Blount in offering his services to the church, Price was paid fees for his drawings. Perhaps an early influence of Price's taste was in the vestry vote of May 17, 1726, to rusticate the plinths of the aisle side of the columns supporting the galleries. Price's active connection with Christ Church continued until 1743, and he is noted throughout as working on committees involving the ornamentation or furnishing of the church.

The embellishment of the interior of the church continued: a large green "cheney" curtain trimmed with scarlet and white lace was hung in the east window in September 1726. Beginning in 1724 Governor Nicholson of South Carolina, a great benefactor of the church, gave several loads of cedar plank which were used for making an altarpiece. The design of this structure is undetermined, but most likely consisted of two panels of the Decalogue in an architectural framework. This altarpiece was painted with cherubs and festoons in December 1727 by John Gibbs. Gibbs also painted the exterior wood trim on the church. Inside, the gallery fronts and the great doors were painted imitation cedar. In November 1728, temporary long seats were put in the west gallery until an organ could be acquired. In the next year and a half it was necessary to support this gallery with two round fluted columns, later marbleized, and more seats were then added. In June 1729 a new wooden vestry room with a brick cellar was built in place of the first one and furnished with a fireplace and

a cupboard. The walls were plastered and wainscoted.

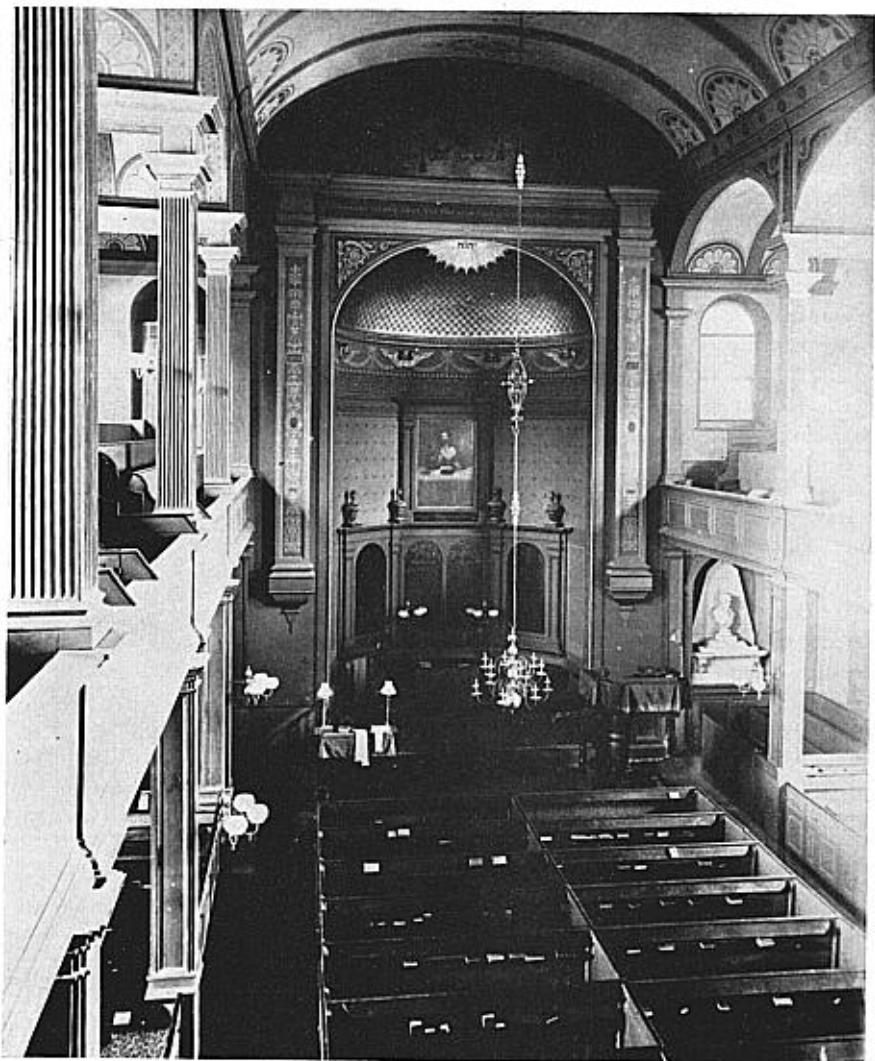
In February 1730 the new three-decker pulpit and canopy, constructed from drawings provided, altar rails, communion table and more embellishments for the altarpiece were begun.²⁰ This pulpit, replacing the 1724 "pulpit & Desk,"



SPIRE OF CHRIST CHURCH, BOSTON
ABOUT 1762

Detail of Paul Revere's engraved view
of the North Battery.

which may have been located at the east end of the center aisle, was placed at the north side of the east end of the nave.²¹ In November 1730 the outside window frames were painted, as was the new vestry room and the new constructions inside the church, including the pulpit, altar rails, table and altarpiece. The canopy for the new pulpit was hung in December 1730 by an oak timber laid across the tie beams of the roof. Plots for



INTERIOR OF CHRIST CHURCH, BOSTON, ABOUT 1880

Photograph by Wilfred A. French.

the tombs under the church were laid out in 1732. The walls of the tombs were to be built up to the floor beams to support them.²² In November 1732 irons replaced the ropes which held the brass branches, and the irons were painted Prussian blue and accented with vermillion.

The church had long expected to acquire an organ. In fact, the vision of the church complete is reflected in a letter of May 13, 1725, from the vestry to Governor Nicholson thanking him for the cedar plank and advising him of the progress of the construction:

The Finishing of these [the galleries] with the Painting and Ornaments, the Spire of the Steeple, the Purchase of a Bell or Bells and an Organ, are what we shall have great difficulty in going through with. . . .

On the encouragement of William Price, himself an organist, an organ of mediocre quality was purchased from William Clagget in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1736-1737. The west gallery was extended by an organ loft, which was decorated with a frieze of cutwork panels. The nature of the organ case which Price designed may be generally determined from the bills.²³ A giant order of four pilasters framed the console and pipes. The carved capitals of the pilasters were to hold carved "images," that were never made. The panels between the pilasters were either of cutwork or painted with cherubs' heads and festoons of music. The case was painted black with touches of blue, vermillion and gold. The design appears to be in the English Baroque tradition of organ cases, yet not as three-dimensional (i.e. cutwork panels and painted panels rather than carved wood-work). A newly purchased King's Arms completed the ornamentation of the west gallery.

Work on erecting a spire on the tower according to William Price's designs was begun in April 1740, and the wooden spire, with rectangular Doric and Ionic stages topped by a pinnacle surmounted by Shem Drowne's weathervane, was raised in August 1740. The peal of bells acquired four years later completed the colonial church.

The work of William Price at Christ Church reflects a change of taste from that of Anthony Blount. As a book and print dealer as well as cabinetmaker, Price kept in close touch with the current tastes and styles in London. No doubt James Gibbs's St. Martin-in-the-Fields, built in 1725 and published in 1726, influenced the placing of the 1729 pulpit at the side of the east end of the nave at Christ Church. However, at Christ Church the pulpit is on the north side, while the pulpit at St. Martin's is on the south side. Price's spire design can be determined from eighteenth-century views of the church and the documents. The design does not relate to an obvious prototype, but appears to be a simplified form of the Wren spires of superimposed orders topped by a pinnacle. Several factors might have contributed to the simplified form of Price's design. On the early eighteenth-century prints showing views of cities, if a church spire was drawn in profile, the round or curved stages might appear as rectangular. In this form the spire displayed orders and ornamentations and was infinitely easier for the colonial craftsman to construct. Or perhaps there is a provincial prototype of this simplified, rectangular form.

The spire built in 1740 remained intact, with minor repair work and painting done in 1756 and 1786, until 1804 when it was blown over, necessitating a rebuilding. It is almost impossible to find

two eighteenth-century views of the spire that agree in detail. The earliest view of the spire is on the Burgis-Price view of Boston harbor, dated 1723, seventeen years before the Christ Church spire was constructed. On the hypothesis that Anthony Blount had selected a print of

only the indication of windows in the top stage similar to St. James's. Burgis shows the octagonal pinnacle of St. James's as an obelisk on a truncated roof. Such extreme simplification or distortion of architecture occurs often in eighteenth-century prints, and would be understandable in



INTERIOR OF CHRIST CHURCH, BOSTON, ABOUT 1880

Photograph by Wilfred A. French.

St. James's, Piccadilly, to serve as a model for the new church, William Price could have instructed Burgis to record the proposed new church on the engraving to resemble St. James's. Burgis' spire is a great simplification of the St. James' spire shown on the Griffin-Hulsbergh print. Burgis preserves the balustrade around the tower top and the obelisks on each corner, but transcribes the three stages of the spire as three rectangles with

the Burgis print of 1723, if he were copying from another print.

The 1743 edition of the Burgis-Price view of Boston harbor shows a different spire on Christ Church, prominently displaying the weathervane. The engraving plate was apparently changed to show the spire which was raised three years earlier. While this spire cannot be reconciled with the documents on ornamentation, the lower stage with a solid base and double

windows on each side and the lantern stage with one window on each side agree more closely with later views. There is a sketchy view of the spire in the background of a painting by John Greenwood, around 1749.²⁴ The Paul Revere engraving of c.1762, "North Battery," shows a view of the spire, and two churches have

the documentation of the eighteenth-century Christ Church spire. From these sources the spire designed by William Price may be reconstructed as follows: The balustrade around the top of the tower, of twisted balusters, had a pedestal at each corner surmounted by an obelisk with a gilded ball and cross on top. The



RESTORED INTERIOR OF CHRIST CHURCH, BOSTON, 1913

Halliday Historic Photograph.

spires that are documented as copies of the Christ Church spire: Trinity Church, Newport, Rhode Island (1768, replacement of the first spire) and the First Church of Christ, Congregational, Wethersfield, Connecticut (1761).²⁵ A description of the ornamentation of the spire in the "Geographical Gazeteer of the Towns in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts," 1784,²⁶ and the several bills in the Christ Church records relating to the spire construction in 1740 complete

rectangular lower stage, above the base, had two windows on each side covered by wooden blinds framed by Doric pilasters and entablature. The rectangular lantern stage had one window on each side and was of the Ionic order with carved capitals and a carved keystone over each window. Each corner of the lower stage and lantern stage finished in an urn, and there was an urn over the central pilaster of the belfry stage on each side. A pinnacle surmounted the lantern stage.

The replacement spire of 1806 "preserved the proportions of the former steeple," except that its pinnacle was 15 feet shorter than that of the first spire, which reached 190 feet from the ground. The fenestration remained the same, but

around 1840, shows the pinnacle as a cone which flares out at the bottom, and a balustrade around the top of the lantern stage. This print probably dates after the 1847 strengthening of the spire, done according to plans drawn up by Arthur



RESTORED INTERIOR OF CHRIST CHURCH, BOSTON, 1913
Halliday Historic Photograph.

the ornamentation was distinctly changed. A woodcut of the church in the publication of the rector's Centennial Address in 1823 shows the new spire.²⁷ This address also states that the spire was constructed "conformable to a model furnished by Charles Bulfinch, Esq.," a fact that the church records neglect to mention. The urns on the corners of the lower stage were replaced by obelisks, and the new pinnacle was a cone on a drum. An engraving of the church by J. H. Bufford and Company, allegedly dating

Gilman, when the pinnacle was lowered to the ground to be worked on, and the upper story was rebuilt.

A clock was placed in the belfry stage of the spire in 1870, and the spire remained in that form until 1954, when it was blown over by a hurricane. Charles R. Strickland designed the restored spire after the eighteenth-century spire of William Price.²⁸

The interior of the church has a more checkered history than the spire, having been significantly remodeled to suit the

changing tastes and needs of the times. In 1746 Captain James Grunchy, master of a privateer, donated his spoils from a French ship en route to Canada, and Christ Church received four carved winged angels and two glass branches. By vestry vote the four wooden statuettes were placed on "ye top of the Organ," probably in the places designed for the four images which were never made. By the 1750's the organ was in need of replacement, and a new organ and case were built by Thomas Johnston. Perhaps at this time the statuettes were placed on pedestals on the organ loft, where they are today. The remodeling and enlarging of the Christ Church organ has continued, but the case of the 1750's essentially remains.

In 1806 a complete alteration of the main floor and south gallery pew plan was made. The staircases at the west end were removed and entrance to the galleries was provided from the tower. The box pews were replaced by slip pews; there were two side aisles along the inside line of the pillars and a block of pews in the nave, eliminating the center aisle. The pulpit and desk were moved to a spot in front of the altar, as a pew plan in the 1806 *Proprietors' Records* indicates. The large east window was closed, and the semidome ceiling lowered. In 1812 an elaborate altarpiece was placed in the chancel. The pulpit and sounding board were removed to the north side of the east end at that time; so that the painting of "The Last Supper" by John Penniman and the Creed and Lord's Prayer might be seen.

In 1829-1830 an extensive amount of work was done to restore "the edifice to its pristine beauty." This may have been prompted by a need to supplement the one stove, given in 1806, with two more. These were installed in recesses on

either side of the central west door (visible in pre-1912 interior photographs), while the original stove remained at the east end. Ducts from this stove were disguised by a massive pilaster order flanking the chancel. Repairs involved scraping and clearing away all unsound wall and putting on new plastering where necessary, whitewashing the ceilings and chancel, painting the interior white, except for two coats of varnish on the painted (cedar color presumably) fronts of the galleries. A new and probably smaller pulpit replaced the three-decker one, which was given to St. Paul's Church, Otis, Massachusetts, along with a glass chandelier.²⁹ The new pulpit had many placements during the nineteenth century: on the right or left in front of the chancel, and even in the chancel at one time. In 1831 a second balcony was built at the west end for the members of the Sunday School. A new vestry was built in 1834.

Before the 150th anniversary of the opening of the church in 1873 the interior was painted and colored and minor repairs made to the building. In 1876 a robing room was built in the southeast corner of the church; this was removed in 1884. In 1877 there is a record of frescoeing and coloring the walls, among other repairs. Extensive work was done in 1884, including interior decoration designed by Henry van Brunt and executed by W. J. McPherson. New carpeting was laid and the pews were relined in a shade of red to harmonize with the wall tone. (This decoration appears in the pre-1912 photographs.)

The twentieth century brought a radical change to the interior of the church. In 1912 a major restoration program brought back the eighteenth-century character of the building. The architects, R. Clipston Sturgis and Henry Lee Ross,

were able to determine a great deal about the early church when the nineteenth-century alterations were removed.³⁰ The box pew plan was reconstructed from nail marks on the old floor, and several strips of the pew paneling were found to be of eighteenth-century craftsmanship. The false ceiling and large altarpiece in the chancel were removed, exposing the high semidomed ceiling of the apse and the great east window. The restored wall paneling in the chancel is patterned after paneling the architects found behind the false semidomed ceiling. Perhaps the eighteenth-century paneling was planed down when the nineteenth-century chancel wall was furred out from it, giving it the flat character which the architects copied. The restorers removed the two pilasters at the east end under the galleries, which are visible in the pre-1912 photographs and are accounted for in the eighteenth-century building records. As the documentary evidence is not sufficient to reconstruct the 1729-1730 three-decker pulpit, the one at Trinity Church, Newport, Rhode Island, of eighteenth-century style, was used as a model for the restored pulpit in Christ Church. The restored pulpit does not maintain the proportions of a three-decker pulpit, as there is no clerk's desk and the reading desk is not connected to the pulpit.

At the west end the restorers retained two decorative arches with consoles under the west gallery for which there is no eighteenth-century documentation. The restored staircases to the galleries seem to be characteristic of a later style than those of 1724 which can be reconstructed from the documents.³¹ To regain the eighteenth-century form of the building, as the documents indicate, the two windows in the west wall should be doors and the beveled wall around the

central west door to the tower restored to a rectangular opening.

In the eighteenth century the interior of the church was very colorful. The irons that held the brass branches were painted blue and touched with vermillion; the organ case was charcoal color, and its ornamentation painted blue, red and gold. The pews were lined according to the tastes of the proprietors. The large green curtain with scarlet and white lace hung in the east window, and red curtains were along the top of the organ loft. The gallery fronts and great doors were painted in imitation of cedar, quite fashionable in the eighteenth century. The austerity of the present all-white woodwork does not truly recapture the eighteenth-century atmosphere.

Since 1912 the entrance to the tower has been restored, as have been the panels of the altarpiece.

The growing social consciousness in the beginning of the eighteenth century in Boston was most apparent among the aristocracy and merchant class, most of whom were members of the Church of England. Christ Church exemplifies their demands and how they were met in the third decade of the century. A study of the documents and their relation to the building indicates that the aspirations of the society formulated by the fashion in England were met in the colony at this time by means which could fulfill them only in compromise. The lack of a skilled architect and complete technical plans caused the architecture of Wren to be translated into provincial language. Christ Church's importance lies in the fact that it successfully met the demand of fashion in architecture, regardless of compromise, and was an architectural stepping stone for Georgian church building in America.

NOTES

¹ Norman Morrison Isham, *Trinity Church in Newport, Rhode Island* (Boston, 1936). Mrs. Mary Kent Davey Babcock published in 1947, *Christ Church, Salem Street, Boston* (Thomas Todd Printers: Boston), which is a group of historical sketches from the colonial period of the church. This book resulted from her discovery of an old chest containing papers covering the two centuries of the church. Many of the important bills related to the church construction are listed in the Appendix of the book. Mrs. Babcock's interpretation of these and her conclusions, in many cases, do not agree with my own.

² The Christ Church documents are deposited in both the church and the Boston Athenaeum. At the church are the earliest documents, primarily bound pages of account books, three of which concern the building of the church. "Pamphlet E" is entitled "Treasurer and Committee Accounts John Barnes building of Christ Church 1722-1730," which is a listing of the sums disbursed according to numbered vouchers. These vouchers, most of which are small scraps of paper, are each in a folded paper numbering from 1 to 352, March 3, 1723, to May 26, 1732, with only a few omissions. "Pamphlet A" is entitled "Document No 1 For History of Christ Church Boston" and appears to be a summary listing of the accounts of the merchants and workmen who dealt with the church. "Pamphlet D" contains separate bunches of account sheets which were probably the financial accounts kept by several of the early Church Wardens during their terms of service. There are also bundles of assorted vouchers, and copies of letters among the church records. At the Boston Athenaeum are the volumes of Vestry Records and Proprietors' Records, as well as a large account ledger.

³ Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness* (Ronald Press: New York 1938), p. 303.

⁴ Edwin M. Bacon, *The Book of Boston* (Boston, 1916), pp. 36-37.

⁵ Pamphlet A; Babcock, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁶ Suffolk County Deeds, Liber 36, Folio 105; Babcock, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-29.

⁷ Suffolk County Deeds, Liber 26, Folio 39, 28.

⁸ Isham, *op. cit.*, p. 40; Babcock, *op. cit.*, p. 39 ff.

⁹ Babcock, *op. cit.*, p. 223; Letter from Rector and Vestry of King's Chapel to the Secret-

tary of the Society, November 1, 1722, announces that "we have been under the necessity of Building at ye North end of this Town a New (church)" and that a sufficient sum for the building has been collected and requests ordination of Timothy Cutler; William Stevens Perry, *Historical Collections Relating to the American Colonial Church*, III (Massachusetts, Hartford, Conn., 1873), 229: Report of Dr. Cutler to Secretary of the S. P. G., October 10, 1727, extract: "My church was begun in the beginning of ye year 1723, and was first preached in the Sunday after Christmas following: but our Building, being very chargeable, we are the more retarded in our work, which continues to this time, & after all we are considerable in debt, and need some hundred pounds to complete our church, and to furnish it with an Organ, Bells, Communion Plate, &c. . . . This church is 70 feet long, 50 wide, 35 high, the walls 2 feet 8½ thick, the Steeple's Area is 29 ft. square, 80 feet high, the walls of it 3 feet & ½ thick. The old [sic] Building is of Brick, saving that the Spire (not yet begun for want of money) will be of wood."

¹⁰ Pamphlet E, cf. note 2.

¹¹ There is a strong tradition that the church may have been built from designs by William Price, the print dealer and cabinetmaker (Isham, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39). This tradition probably grew out of the fact that Price designed the organ case and spire for the church, as bills of April 1, 1737, and March 26, 1746, attest. He was also a central figure in the establishment of Trinity Church, the third Anglican church in Boston, in the mid-1730's. William Price's active connection with Christ Church did not begin until April 1726, when he was first elected to the Vestry. He appears quite often in the documents from this time until 1743, serving on committees relating to the ornamentation of the church, and his subscription contributions and fees for services rendered, in connection with the organ and the spire, are carefully recorded. The fact that his active connection with the church began in 1726 and is amply recorded discounts a possibility of Price drawing plans for the church in 1722, as such an important contribution would scarcely go unrecorded!

¹² Engraving of St. James's, Piccadilly, King's Library, British Museum.

¹³ Babcock, *op. cit.*, p. 234; it is difficult to

determine by comparison with the dimensions of the present structure whether the masons' measurements are interior or exterior. Allowing for doorways in the east wall and the west wall, the measurements of the foundation walls, excluding the tower, appear to be exterior measurements, thereby counting the surface area rather than the volume of the stone work. The tower measurements appear to measure the exterior surface on the sides and the interior surface of the end wall. The tower dimensions are computed separately from the other foundation walls at a higher rate (11 shillings per perch compared to 8 shillings per perch) indicating a thicker foundation wall for the tower.

¹⁴ When tombs were built in the cellar, beginning in 1732, they were required to be "as high as the floor in order to Support it." The tombs were laid out on approximately the same plan as the pews, the center aisle area filled by the middle wall. The pillars that supported the gallery columns, being in the middle of the north and south aisles, must have been removed, as their support was no longer necessary. Today the only indication of their existence is the area on the floor joists directly under the gallery columns where the beam is not chamfered.

¹⁵ Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

¹⁶ In Clough and Varney's estimate of brick work to be done, June 1723 (Babcock, *op. cit.*, p. 233) there is mention of "rubbing and setting 2 straight Arches." These might have been over the inside central door in the west end and the door to the vestry room. The carpenters' bill of March 24, 1724 (Babcock, *op. cit.*, p. 232), also lists "for Making a pair of Inner Doors for the Church with Jamms and supotors architrevre Cornish &c." Interpreting "Jamms and supotors" as consoles carrying a lintel, the evidence for a flat arch at the main west door is strengthened.

The beveled wall now around the inside central door appears to be a later enlargement of the doorway. Tradition claims that the two doors in the west wall were closed in 1730 when pews were built against the west wall. Besides the fact that closing up doors to build pews is an impractical way of accommodating an increasing congregation, the wall space would be sufficient between the side doors and a rectangular central door to allow for the new pews. The side doors were most likely closed in 1806 and the central doorway beveled when

the access to the galleries was gained by stairs in the tower.

¹⁷ The carpenters' bill mentions fitting up a pulpit and Desk, which was probably a combination pulpit-desk, as it had a canopy over it. The nature or placement of this pulpit is not known, but it must have been temporary and not so elegant, as it was replaced in 1729/30 by another pulpit and canopy. This would perhaps indicate that the second pulpit was placed in another position. The second pulpit placement is determined by the place where the canopy was hung, from an oak beam laid across the tie beams of the roof. Since a timber is not specified for the hanging of the canopy for the first pulpit, this may indicate that it was hung from an already existing beam, most logically, the one along the ridge of the nave vault. Also, the print of St. James's, Piccadilly, shows the pulpit at the east end of the center aisle.

¹⁸ Bacon, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

¹⁹ Isham, *op. cit.*, discusses quite thoroughly Christ Church, Trinity Church, and the Wren London churches in this regard.

²⁰ Babcock, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

²¹ Cf. note 17 and H. C. Ross, "The Restoration of Christ Church, Boston," *Bulletin of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities*, III, No. 3, February 1913, p. 6.

²² Cf. note 14.

²³ Babcock, *op. cit.*, p. 244; Account Book (No. 3 Christ Church Documents, Boston Athenaeum), p. 82:

1736 Accot of Organ	Dr	
To Clagget for the Organ		320.
To Indicott & Vintine for		
Carpenter's work and		
Stuff as pr Accot		169. 16. 5
To Wm Coffin & Campbell		
for Nails as pr accot		30. 6. 3
To Brocas & Bridge for Carv-		
ing Capitals and other		
cutt-work as pr bill		30.
To John Gibbs for painting		
and gilding as pr		
Accot		161. 19.
To Robert Jenkins & Linds		
Wallis for making the		
Curtains & damask to		
Compleat		
them 25: 5: 10		
Curtain		
rods 2: 10: —		27. 15. 10
To Wm Price for Sundry		

draughts and his Journey to Newport about ye Organ	30. 10.	
To Sundry petit Expences in the Time of fixing the Organ as pr Accot	19. 2. 11	
To Stephen Deblois for Tuneing the Organ	5.	
To Willm Burbank for four Images 30 — — painting & Gilding them 2 10 —	32. 10.	
To Willm Bant for the King's Arms	15.	
	<u>842. 0. 5</u>	
1737 To Ballance due to the foltg Persons Viz		
To John Gibbs's ballance 75: 9: 8 for ye		
Images 30: cutting rodes 2: 10:		
To Stepn De Blois 5:		
	<u>112: 19: 8</u>	
Pr Contra Cr		
1736 By the Amount of the Subscription at F ^o 81	660. 5.	
By Church Stock for Cash taken out of the box	40. 8. 4	
By Ditto	<u>28. 7. 5</u>	
Ballance due to the following Persons	729. 0. 9	
Carrd to New Accot	<u>112. 19. 8</u>	
	<u>842. 0. 5</u>	
1737 Feby 27 by Mr. Robert Jenkins's Accot pd. Mr. De Blois		
Mar 27 by Ditto . . . paid Mr. John Gibbs in part	5.	
1738 Xber 18 by Mr. Edwd	30.	

Lutwych paid Ditto 45.
By the Images They
being Never Made 30.
110.

²⁴ Owned by the Society for the Preservation
of New England Antiquities. (See Christ
Church Guidebook, 1952 edition, p. 4.)

²⁵ Isham, *op. cit.*, p. 49; J. Frederick Kelly,
Early Connecticut Meetinghouses, II (New
York, 1948), 286-295.

²⁶ Henry W. Foote, *Annals of King's
Chapel*, II (Boston, 1882), 341.

²⁷ Asa Eaton, *Historical Account of Christ
Church, a Discourse*. (Joseph W. Ingraham:
Boston, 1824.)

²⁸ In May 1784 the north side of the church
was clapboarded to serve as weatherboarding.
This necessitated painting the remaining brick
walls of the building grey to blend with the
painted wooden covering. The church remained
in this state until the restorations of 1912,
when the grey paint was sandblasted off.

²⁹ Photographs of the present pulpit in Otis
show no visible evidence of 18th-century
paneling. Mrs. Babcock states (p. 198-199)
there is no record in Otis of any change to the
pulpit and concludes that this is the pulpit
built in 1729-1730.

³⁰ Ross, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-8.

³¹ In the article on the 1912 restoration
(Ross, *op. cit.*) the architects indicate that they
were able to determine "more or less the ar-
rangement of the former stairway" and the
tread, rise and nosing of almost half of the steps
from wall and plaster markings. The recon-
structed staircases have three turns to them,
the first stage parallel to and built against a
pew back, and carry a total of six posts, two
pilasters and 160 balusters. From the docu-
mentary listings of 10 stairposts and 58
balusters made in 1724 and the fact that there
were no box pews at this time, the staircases
built in 1724 were probably simpler than the
reconstructed ones, however, following the same
general placement in relation to the round
windows and west doors.