

Introduction

The main aim of this book is to confer upon Edward Jerman the recognition he deserves as the designer of a group of the most prestigious secular buildings in the City of London following the Great Fire of 1666. Considered “the City’s most able known artist”,¹ in 1667 Edward Jerman was invited by a committee composed of the Corporation of the City and the Mercers’ Company to make designs for the new Royal Exchange. Forty-four halls of the Livery Companies had been destroyed by the Fire, but so crucial was their renaissance for the business life of the City that forty-one were speedily rebuilt. Of these, Edward Jerman designed eight, while of the thirty-three remaining, only four had designers whose names have been recorded. Among those forty-four, nine halls of the “Great Twelve Companies” were damaged beyond repair. These companies were the wealthiest and most superior, whose members included the most eminent citizens. Four of the replacements were designed by Edward Jerman and one by his brother Roger. Thus Edward Jerman was chosen as architect by many of the rulers of the City, an august body of men of authority and privilege who controlled its affairs both politically and commercially. Together with Sir Christopher Wren, whose City work was mainly confined to ecclesiastical architecture, Jerman was responsible for the most important City buildings of the post-Fire period.

Most books on the subject of the City Livery Companies contain only one chapter on the company hall and its contents, and in many cases the contents rather than the hall building seem to have attracted the attention of authors. This may be partly due to the fact that the problem of terminology is ever present in any discussion of the building industry in Britain up till the late seventeenth century. The word “architect” was not in general use, and as we shall see, some other titles can be misleading. Of the authors who do discuss post-Fire rebuilding, only Priscilla Metcalf, Jean Imray and Ann Saunders have provided a detailed account of Edward Jerman’s contribution.²

Because Edward Jerman worked, in various capacities, for both the City of London and the City companies, more documentation of his employment and undertakings exists than for comparable craftsmen-designers of that time who were working for other patrons. Indeed, one can go as far as to say that Edward Jerman is unique in this respect, for the City archives abound with details of his commissions, and with images of those commissions that were brought to fruition. Yet, no scholarly study has been undertaken to assess Jerman’s contribution to seventeenth-century City architecture.

This book celebrates that contribution. Jerman’s major designs – the Royal

Exchange, eight Livery Company halls and St Paul's School – received acclaim from contemporary critics. His town planning for the Goldsmiths' Company was innovative and his pageants exemplified his versatility and ingenuity. His palette was wide and the City of London in the third quarter of the seventeenth century proved fertile ground wherein Jerman's artistic talent could take root and flourish.

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