

About fifty years ago Frank T. Smallwood published notes on "The Hill-Peak Engravings of Surrey Churches".<sup>1</sup> He concluded that the publication of the series by Evans in 1819 had been the first, despite the fact that one of the engravings was dated 1758.<sup>2</sup> But a date of around 1760 for the first production of the series was consistent with the dates of Henry Hill (1730-1774), and of James Peak, the engraver (1729-1782); and documentary evidence was conclusive that the series had been first engraved in a small run for the private use of Arthur Onslow (1691-1768).

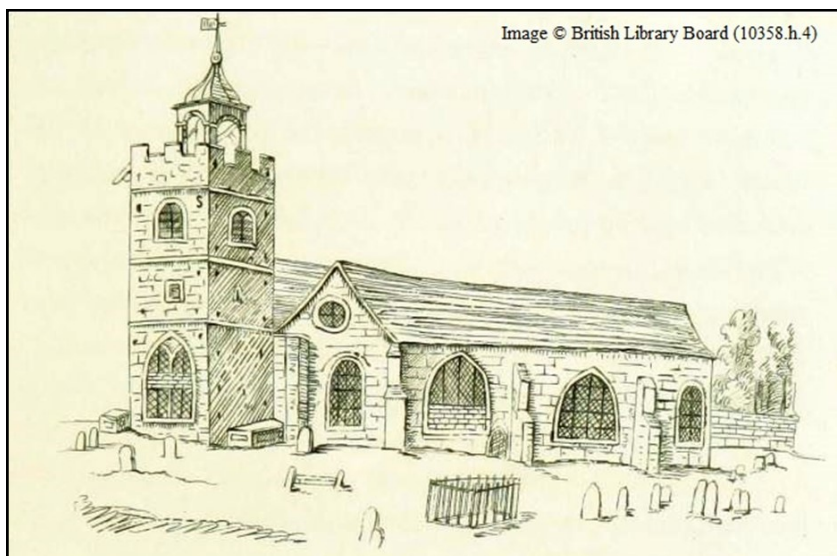
In his discussion, Smallwood raised a question that seems to remain unanswered. He wrote,

The print of Holy Trinity, Guildford, shows the tower with pointed spire that collapsed in April 1740, destroying much of the building. In 1740 Henry Hill, Windsor Herald, was ten. Did Manning and Bray confuse the Herald with his father, the Rev. Henry Hill, or is the phrase 'drawn by Hill' as applied to the Windsor Herald only partially true?<sup>3</sup>

In more general terms, why would an engraving produced about 1760 show a view that was at least twenty years old, dating to a time when the supposed draughtsman was a young boy?

Some help in answering this question may be given by another engraving in the series, that of the old church of St Giles in Camberwell, a building that burned down in 1841. There are many extant images of St Giles. Before considering the Hill-Peak example it is helpful to discuss two others of those extant images.

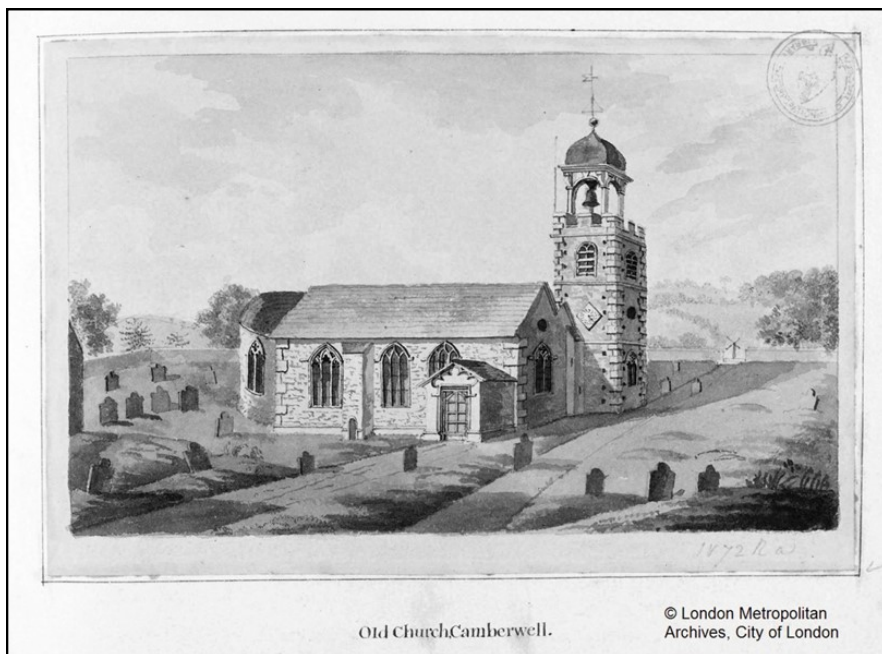
The first is a view of the church from the south-west, published by Allport.<sup>4</sup>



The draughtsmanship leaves something to be desired, but the sketch includes details that suggest that the artist conscientiously tried to depict what he saw. In the upper part of the tower there is an S-shaped iron tie; the west window of the tower is divided horizontally by what appears to be a band of brickwork; there is a small round, or roundish, window in the

west end of the south aisle; and there is a railed vault slab in the foreground. All these elements appear in later images, starting with one securely dated to 1750. But that 1750 engraving shows large trees immediately to the south of the church, whereas the Allport picture shows none. It is possible of course that the artist simply omitted them, wishing nothing to get in the way of his detailed portrayal of the church building. Otherwise, their absence argues for a date considerably before 1750.

The question of trees arises again with a second early portrayal of the Camberwell church, this one from the north or north-west, a wash drawing held by the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA).<sup>5</sup>



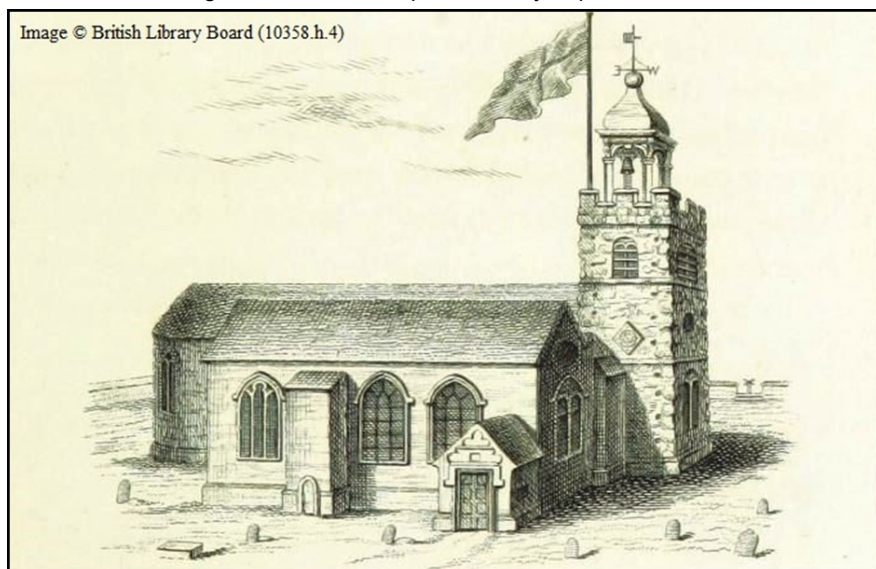
The picture is of unknown authorship. The LMA offers “c1750” as its date of execution, but the internal evidence of the picture suggests an earlier date. The small roundish window at the west end of the north aisle was installed, or at least ordered, in 1725, at the same time as the corresponding window in the south aisle, which puts an upper bound on the execution date.<sup>6</sup> We do not however see the S-shaped iron tie in the tower, nor the horizontal band across the west window of the tower, nor the railed tomb, all of which suggest that this image is earlier than the Allport sketch. On the other hand, as with that sketch, elements in the picture suggest that the artist was trying quite hard to put in what he saw: the details of the church, the hills and trees in the background (topographically correct) and the curious stile in wall at the end of the churchyard. Again the draughtsmanship is poor – he contrives to give the impression that the wall, which in fact enclosed quite a small churchyard, was a considerable distance away; and he had great difficulty with the apse. In his rendering it looks semi-circular, whereas all later drawings show it as being semi-octagonal, and there is no mention in the vestry minutes or churchwardens’ accounts of work on the apse in the 18th century.

As to the railed vault slab, which appears in the Allport sketch but not in this one, a man called Thomas Bourne bought space for a vault in the churchyard in 1725.<sup>7</sup> He died in 1729.<sup>8</sup> His vault is one of the very few whose slab survives to this day, and it is

surrounded by iron railings. It is reasonable to believe that this vault, identified by its position and the railings, is the one that appears in the Allport sketch and later views of the churchyard from the south or west. As far as can be judged it lay on a north-south line clear of the tower, and six metres or so to the south of the south aisle. Accordingly it should have been visible in the LMA view. Its absence thus suggests a date for the view of before 1729.

The presence of the roundish window and the absence of the Bourne tomb together thus point to a date for this image of some time between 1725 and 1729; and the absence of visible trees in the churchyard here, as in the Allport sketch, is entirely consistent with such a dating.

Arguments from what is not portrayed must of course be treated with caution. The more general case here is that the assumption, on the basis of the details included in the two depictions, that both artists were trying accurately to represent what they saw, leads to no inconsistencies. The alternative, not impossible, but certainly less parsimonious, is to assume that the artists were not conscientious recorders and omitted, by chance, just those elements whose absence could be interpreted as putting both images well before 1750 and the LMA image earlier than that published by Allport.



It is now time to look at the engraving in the Hill-Peak series, and the notes on the series by Frank Smallwood.<sup>9</sup> One is immediately struck, on looking at the Hill-Peak view of the Camberwell church, how much it resembles the LMA sketch. It has the details of the tower; the churchyard sparsely populated with gravestones; an apparently rather distant churchyard wall with its curious stile; and, as with the LMA sketch, it lacks the S-shaped iron tie, the Bourne tomb, and the horizontal band across the middle of the west window of the tower. It also lacks any trees in the churchyard. There are other interesting differences. There are no hills and trees in the background, indeed no background at all; the apse is unambiguously semi-circular; and we see the roof line of the nave.

None of the differences between the two images is inconsistent with the Hill-Peak view's having been completed at the same time as that in the LMA. But this is even more implausible than Hill's having produced a drawing of Holy Trinity when he was ten, since in 1729 he hadn't yet been born, and Peak, if he had been born, was just a baby.

The obvious alternative is that the Hill image is basically a copy of the earlier LMA sketch. It would have seemed necessary to tidy up the draughtsmanship; and omitting the background might have seemed desirable in order to make the actual age of the view less obvious. On this hypothesis, while Hill may have seen other engravings of the Camberwell church, he had never laid eyes on the building itself.

We have here then an immediate answer to Smallwood's question quoted at the beginning of this note. There was no confusion or half-truth – the drawing of Holy Trinity, Guildford was indeed by Henry Hill, and executed in 1758 or thereabouts; but it was a copy of an older image of the church from a period before the collapse of its steeple in 1740.

The question is then raised as to the general method behind the Hill-Peak series of engravings. Smallwood quoted a comment which seems to be relevant:

...In 1780 Gough published his two-volume *British Topography*, in which he recorded "Henry Hill esq., Windsor Herald, had collected church-notes, and had most of the churches engraved, but not faithfully, at the expense of the late speaker Onslow." (In addition Manning and Bray repeated this statement.) ...<sup>10</sup>

The statement by Gough could now very reasonably be interpreted as meaning that the method which Hill apparently adopted for St Giles, Camberwell and Holy Trinity, Guildford was in fact his general method. He "collected church notes", and these included existing images. They were engraved "but not faithfully" – the engraving may have been faithful enough, but they were not true to the church buildings as they existed in 1758 because they were engraved from amended versions of old views.

If this rather long logical train is accepted, and its final conclusion, it suggests that any Hill-Peak engraving should be regarded with suspicion as historical evidence until its origin, and in particular pre-existing images on which it may be based, have been identified.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sy.A.C., LXII (1965), 127-28; LXV (1968), 150-51; LXVI (1969), 131-32.

<sup>2</sup> Evans published the series twice in 1819 under very similar titles, each starting *The Ecclesiastical Topography of the County of Surrey containing ...*

<sup>3</sup> Sy.A.C., LXII (1965), 127.

<sup>4</sup> Allport, Douglas, *Collections, illustrative of the geology, history, antiquities, and associations, of Camberwell, and the neighbourhood* (1841), Pl.I, Fig.2, facing p.112. I know of no other occurrence of this image.

<sup>5</sup> <https://collage.cityoflondon.gov.uk>, Record No. 23813, Catalogue No. p5352695. It is taken from the grangerized version of Lysons, Daniel, *The environs of London: being an historical account of the towns, villages, and hamlets, within twelve miles of that capital: interspersed with biographical anecdotes* (1796), Vol.1, Part 1, facing p.72 (LMA ref. SC/GL/LYS/001/001).

<sup>6</sup> Southwark Local History Library, St Giles Vestry Minutes, 10 September 1725. The window was ordered to be "ovell" and appears from later drawings to have been possibly elliptical or possibly what we would now call "running-track shaped".

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 March 1725.

<sup>8</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/gqhxng5>. Bourne is remembered as the benefactor of the Bourne School in Berkhamsted, now part of Berkhamsted School.

<sup>9</sup> The image is from the second Evans publication of 1819, *The Ecclesiastical Topography of the County of Surrey containing Forty-Seven Views of Churches &c. in that County*.

<sup>10</sup> Sy.A.C., LXVI (1969), 131, referring to Gough, Richard, *British Topography* (1780), II, 263 and Manning, Owen, and William Bray, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey...* (1804 - 1814), III, 687.