CHAPTER TWENTY

‘PAUL’S WORK’: REPAIR AND RENOVATION OF
ST PAUL’S CATHEDRAL, 1561–1625

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In the late 16th century, the phrase ‘to make Paul's work’ of something became colloquial for a botched or an always unfinished project. The phrase has its origins in the sustained yet unsuccessful efforts to repair and renovate London's St Paul's Cathedral after the 1561 fire that destroyed the spire and damaged the roof. The church fell into disrepair in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and was the subject of several reconstruction attempts, none of which came to fruition. It was not until Charles I took the throne that a complete restoration of the church, led by Inigo Jones, was planned. This essay is an attempt to weave together the sometimes competing narratives surrounding the renovation efforts in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. I use those royal qualifiers deliberately, as the monarchs were generally involved in attempts at refurbishing. The question I attempt to answer is this: why, given the participation of

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2 William Boghurst, ‘Londinologia, sive, Londini encomium’ (1666), BL Sloane MS 904, fols. 53–68.

3 The OED notes that ‘The origin of Paul’s work ... is unclear; it is perhaps connected with the phrase work of (St) Paul’s occurring in some wills ... , referring to building works at the cathedral.’ ‘Paul’s, n.’ OED Online, Oxford University Press. <http://o-www.oed.com.catal og.library.colostate.edu/view/Entry/139022?> (accessed July 2012).
the state, would such efforts fail? I argue that in the Elizabethan period, renovation was unsuccessful because the efforts towards reconstruction and the rhetoric surrounding these attempts were not consistently presented as a crucial civic project with national implications. While the early years of renovation had tepid support of the queen, the church fabric was not regarded by the crown, clergy, and city as a significant priority. Squabbles over where financial responsibility lay further delayed efforts. There was no consensus over who owned Paul's, nor was there a consistent narrative about what Paul's meant to the church of England, the city of London, and the nation as a whole.

In the early years of James's reign, public interest in the condition of the church fabric gained ground. Secular writers, principally Henry Farley, demonstrate the cultural interest in the renovation, even as their concern for the church did little to enact improvements. By 1620, the restoration effort took hold and James became intensely involved with the project. He appeared at Paul's to hear a sermon preached by Bishop John King arguing for its repair. This sermon served a crucial purpose: it expressed James's arguments to a large audience of civic and religious officials with the dilapidated church as its backdrop. Soon after, he set up a commission to carry out the planning for and work of renovation. James understood that St Paul's Cathedral must be regarded as a collective responsibility—and glorious symbol—of the church, city, and state.

While the rebuilding of Paul's was central to his efforts to present London as a Stuart city, James's failure to follow through and stay connected to the project resulted in its further delay. Both contemporary writers and historians of Paul's fabric have cast the Jacobean episode in the renovation efforts as another sad chapter in its long story. The letters of John Chamberlain, in particular, give us insight into how the renovations were viewed in this vein in the period. It is crucial to see, however, that James's participation in the efforts laid the important groundwork for Charles I, which ultimately led to Jones's massive reconstruction project. Revisiting the history of repair endeavors in the Jacobean period allows us to understand the important symbolic role material structures have in shaping civic identity in general, and in particular, the crucial role St Paul's played in the early modern understanding of London.

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4 As Vaughan Hart explains, part of the Stuart interest in Paul's stemmed from a desire to 'restore the Cathedral's eminence over that of Westminster Abbey and became the central symbol for 'the celebration in classical terms of the king's central Protestant role as Defender of the Faith.' Inigo Jones: The Architect of Kings (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 80.