



# HISTORIES OF BRITISH ART

## 1660-1735 RECONSTRUCTION AND TRANSFORMATION

### ABSTRACT: ELEONORA PISTIS

**Eleonora Pistis** (University of Oxford)

‘Oxford 1708-1714: Nicholas Hawksmoor and the *renovatio urbis*’

This conference paper concerns the *renovatio urbis* of Oxford planned in the last years of Queen Anne’s reign. Promoted by the amateur architect George Clarke (1661-1736) together with eminent members of the University of Oxford, this was a programme of architectural and urban transformation that changed the face of the city forever. In addition to local craftsmen, it involved some of the most eminent architects and artists of the period.

The aim is to see the various architectural activities, so far studied mainly through drawings, within the historical, political and cultural context of Oxford, maintaining at the same time a constant reference to the broader debates under way in Europe at the time.

The paper mainly focuses on the contribution of Nicholas Hawksmoor, who was architect of, or sometimes advisor on, the majority of the new buildings planned. It links Hawksmoor’s projects to a world made by people, with their alliances and enmities, their ambition and their political plots, and also by the books, prints and drawings that they collected. With this approach, every individual project not only belongs to a huge *corpus* of drawings, but also achieves a new, and particular, significance within this period of Oxford’s and the nation’s history.

This study is based on 4 years’ worth of research on architectural activities in Oxford and their patronage at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Combining fresh analysis of the drawings and new archival investigations, it brings to light an extraordinary and complex chapter of the history of British Architecture, still today mostly unknown.