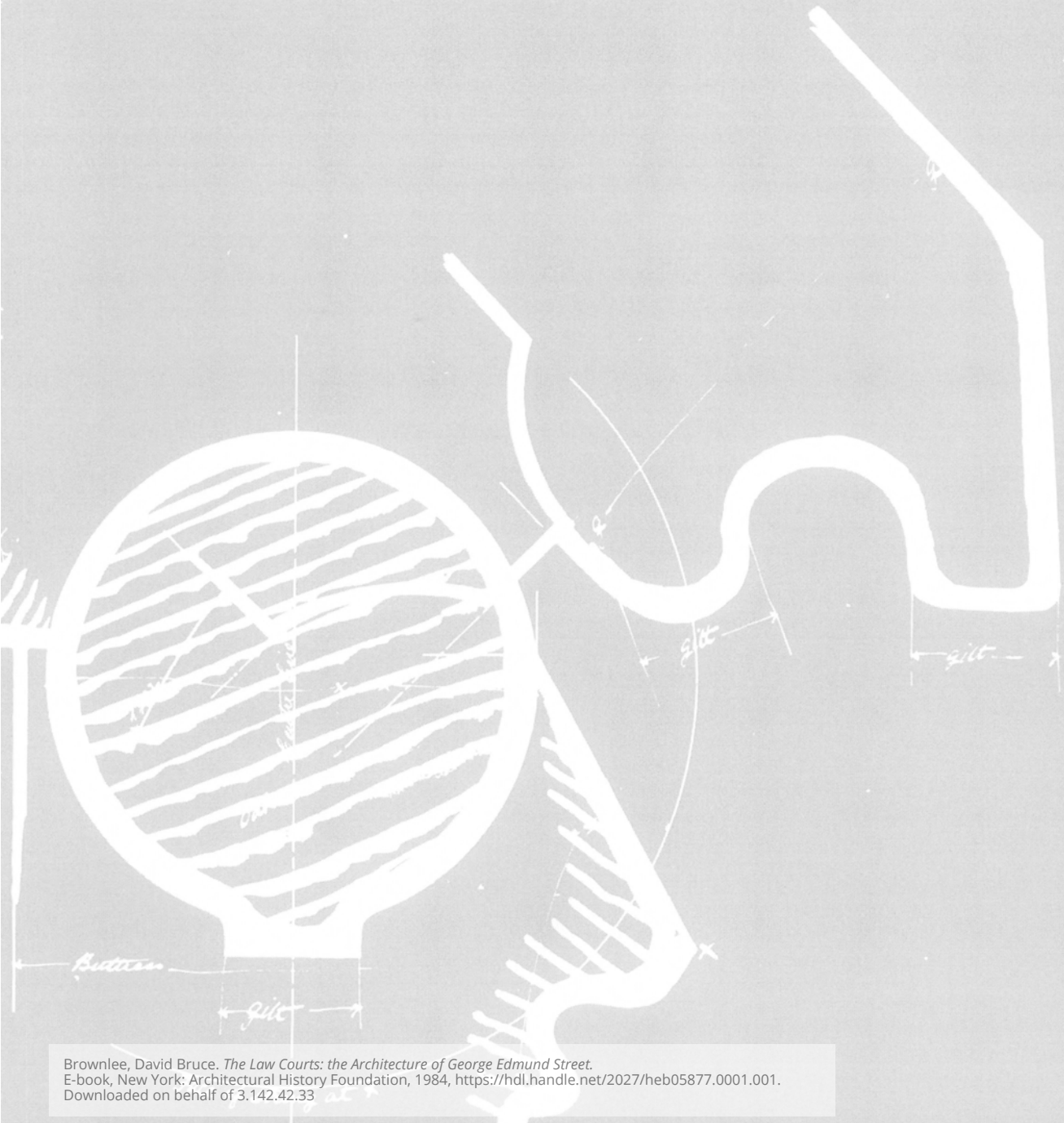
Chapter 8

Epilogue



"Within Sight of the Port."
—Westminster *Guardian*, December 21, 1881

IN 1881, before all the scaffolding was removed from the law courts, George Edmund Street died. He was only fifty-seven, but in the last year of life all the high honors of his profession had come to him; at his death he was the president of the R.I.B.A., professor of architecture, and the treasurer of the Royal Academy. New tastes were now in favor, but in a special sense his friend Arthur Blomfield was correct when he asserted that Street was "universally admitted to be the first architect of the day."[1] His final year was also touched with personal happiness, for his much beloved son was engaged to be married, and this promised to revivify the household which still mourned the deaths of Street's two wives.

Throughout that last year Street had grown increasingly tired. However, the pace of his private practice, slowed by long years of commitment to the law courts, started to accelerate again, with new churches for the American congregations in Paris and Rome as symbols of his international reputation. In June he felt the first effects of serious illness, and he invited his son to join him on a Continental holiday.[2] They visited a score of German cities in a few weeks, but Street began to complain of the gout, and so they cut short their tour and returned home to Holmdale. During the summer he began to suffer from chronic headaches, and on August 6 this was diagnosed as a symptom of overwork and he was again ordered abroad, this time to take the waters. Fortunately, he was able to arrange to travel with the architect John L. Pearson, and, setting off in late August, the two spent about a month at the French Alpine spas of St. Gervais, Chamonix, and Aix-les-Bains. They were joined briefly by another architect friend, Ewan Christian, and Street was able to arrange a side trip to inspect his own churches at Vevey and Lausanne in Switzerland. But the headaches persisted.

Back in England, Street seemed to improve, and by October the headaches had disappeared. In the first week of November he went on a sketching trip with his son Arthur in Suffolk, and on the seventh he opened the winter session of the R.I.B.A. with the traditional presidential address. He was in York on the ninth, and the seventeenth found him at the law courts for what was to be the last time. The next day he was again joined by his son in surveying an old building in Salisbury. On November 19 they set off early in the day to return to Holmbury St. Mary. Street drowsed on the train, and while making the three-mile walk from the station to the house his steps faltered, and he began to speak to Arthur of his mother, Mariquita, as though she were still alive. He had suffered a stroke.

Two days later Street was brought up to London where once more he seemed to recuperate. He did no work, and plans began to be made for a long trip to Egypt in the company of his friend Frank Walton, the painter. December 16 was set as the departure date. But on the fifteenth, while having dinner with Walton, he had a second stroke, this time with paralytic effects.[3] Street was carried to bed, and the

next morning he spoke his undramatic last words to Arthur: "I am glad to hear your voice." Unconscious, he died quietly at 10:15 P.M. on Sunday, December 18. Never seen by him, the great hall of the law courts had been cleared of scaffolding only ten days earlier. As the Westminster *Guardian* observed, "It is as when the ship founders within sight of the port—as when the racer drops within reach of the goal."[4]

The churchyard at Holmbury St. Mary was the obvious place for interment, and a funeral was arranged for December 23. But the nation wished nobler treatment for the architect of the greatest public building of his generation, and, at the request of the R.I.B.A. Council and Sir Frederick Leighton, president of the Royal Academy, burial in Westminster Abbey was approved. The funeral on December 29 began with a cortege at two o'clock to bring the body from 14 Cavendish Place to Westminster, passing Big Ben as the towering clock struck three.[5] The plain oak coffin, bearing a brass Gothic name plate made by Holland and Sons, was followed by seven coaches of family and private friends, four coaches for the Council of the Royal Academy, nine coaches for the past and present officers of the R.I.B.A., a single carriage for the officers of the Architectural Association, and many private vehicles.[6] Among the private carriages was that of the Prince of Wales.

In the abbey, Street was borne to the crossing, where the first part of the service was read by Canon Duckworth. His pallbearers, who reflected the varied achievements of his career, were A. J. Beresford-Hope, M.P. (past president of the R.I.B.A. and representative of the Architectural Museum), Sir Frederick Leighton (president of the Royal Academy), G. J. Shaw-Lefevre (first commissioner), Edwin Freshfield (representing the Society of Antiquaries), Professor T. Hayter Lewis (acting president of the R.I.B.A.), the bishop of Winchester (Dr. Harold Browne), Mr. Justice Kay (representing the lord chancellor), and W. H. Gladstone, M.P. (representing his father, the prime minister). The presence of the last was a reminder of the continued cordial relations between Street and the great Liberal politician. He had taken breakfast with Gladstone as recently as 1879, and later that year he returned the hospitality, entertaining him at Holmbury St. Mary shortly after the dedication of his new church.[7] Fittingly, Gladstone was again premier now that the law courts were nearing completion and as their architect had reached his final rest.

The congregation at the abbey was a large one, filling the crossing and transepts and overflowing into the rest of the church. The *Architect* observed that a larger and more varied group of artists had never assembled in memory of one of their fellows. Among those in attendance were a number of former assistants and several men from the present office, including Augustus Tanner and James Gandy. The foremen from the law courts were also present.

After the first part of the service the choir sang "How Blessed Are the Departed," and the body was moved to the grave. Street was to lie in the nave of the abbey, just to the east of Sir George Gilbert Scott, whom, with visible emotion, he had served as a pallbearer three and a half years before. Sir Charles Barry lay just beyond Scott, and so the creators of the great national monuments of the Victorian age—the Houses of Parliament, the Albert Memorial, and the Royal Courts of Justice—were brought together in death. It was widely assumed that Street would have joined his neighbors in receiving the distinction of knighthood had he lived to see the completion of his largest work.

Dr. Bradley, the dean of Westminster, read the final part of the service, the choir sang "His Body is Buried in Peace," and, as the friends of George Edmund Street pressed forward for a final glimpse of the coffin, now nearly covered with flowers, the organ of the abbey thundered the "Dead March" from Handel's *Saul.* George Frederick Bodley, a friend of Street since their days together in Scott's office, later designed a brass monument to cover the grave.

Arthur Edmund Street (1855–1938) was his father's sole heir. In that role he inherited not only an estate valued at £55,136, making him a millionaire in modern terms, but also the responsibility for completing the unfinished architectural commissions.[8] His association with some of his father's buildings continued until the end of the century, and at the law courts the final work lasted for a few years after the new building was opened on December 4, 1882.

Arthur Street took up the duty of finishing his father's work with passionate intensity. On the day after the death he wrote to the first commissioner to claim the right to carry on in his place:

> It is my sad duty to inform you of the death of my father. . . . In his untimely death I have the consolation of knowing that he was happy in having virtually completed the Courts of Justice which will stand as the great work of his life. During the last three weeks, when he had to rest quietly in his room, he alluded several times with great satisfaction that every essential drawing had already been prepared by himself and that over 3000 had been made with his own hand. There remains now really only the carrying out what he had designed and fully explained to myself and his trusted assistants.
>
> And I beg very respectfully to assure you that every sentiment will impel me to see that the great work is finished as my father had intended. With regard to the many works that are not completed in design as are the Law Courts I may at a time like this perhaps be permitted to say that my father in view of a prolonged absence from England [the planned trip to Egypt] had considered how he was to be aided by an architect somewhat younger than himself, but of acknowledged reputation and ability. I have now of course to take that step, seeing that my father's absence is indeed for ever.[9]

Arthur was only twenty-six, and despite several years of experience in his father's office, he was largely the product of an education of Eton and Oxford and little prepared for the harsher realities of architectural practice. His letter alludes to the fact that his father had counseled him, in the event of his death, to obtain the assistance of Arthur W. Blomfield (1829–99), a family friend and a careful, conservative architect. On December 23, Arthur Street asked the Office of Works that he and Blomfield receive a joint commission to complete the law courts.[10] This was granted.

The bulk of the responsibility assumed by Street's successors was for the execution of works that were already designed and contracted for. Only with respect to furnishing and lighting did they possess any substantial artistic freedom. Blomfield was apparently the designer of the additional furniture, the courtroom clocks, and the lighting fixtures which had to be ordered in the course of 1882. Arthur Street was given the job of designing a large number of additional doors which were ordered

156 The Strand façade from the roof of St. Clement Danes, showing the western railing under construction. c. 1884. (Fine Arts Library, University of Pennsylvania.)

in 1883, after experience with the working of the building indicated the desirability of partitioning some of the stairways and corridors.[11] He also planned the great stone and iron railing that enclosed the open land west of the building, for which his father had left no drawings (Fig. 156).[12]

Blomfield and A. E. Street also made the first provisions to circumvent the careful separation of circulation patterns which had played so large a role in the architect's instructions. The first evidence of a more pragmatic approach to the use of the building came in 1885 when they inserted a small stair at the north end of the great hall to facilitate direct north–south circulation between the front and back doors, which were separated by a floor level. Street had originally been instructed to frustrate such circulation lest the hall become a thoroughfare.[13]

In later years, the exclusion of the public from the central hall came to seem less and less appropriate. As early as 1883 a questioner in the House of Commons complained of its inaccessibility and recounted that even the prime minister had had difficulty getting past the guards.[14] In 1893 *Punch* ridiculed the vast space in which only a solitary figure could be seen:

That thing of beauty was meant to be
For ever a joy,
Just built to accommodate, as we see,
One messenger boy.[15]

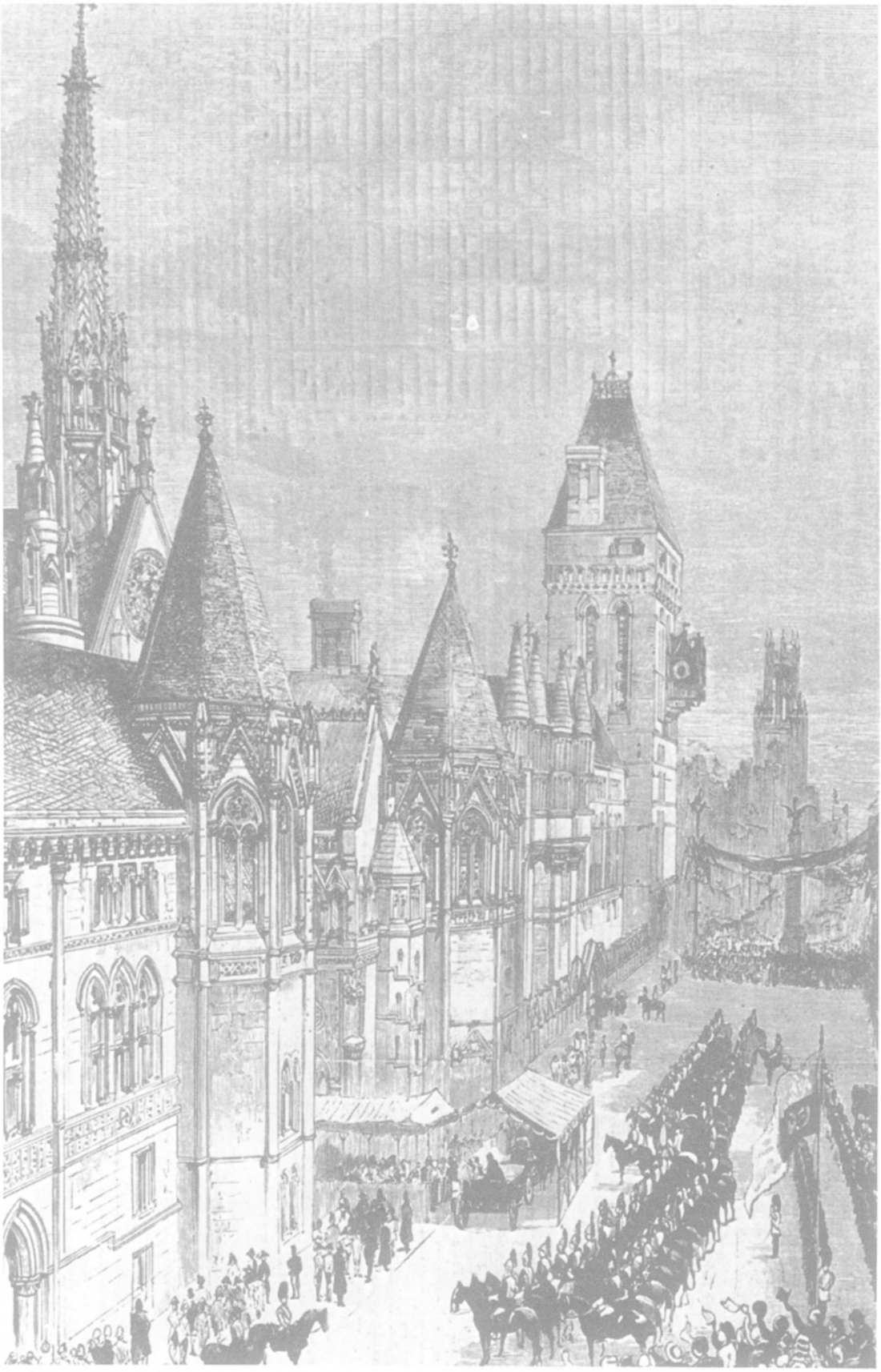
In this century the hall has been opened to the public. Indeed, present-day security provisions have required the closing off of all the stairs, corridors, and galleries which were designed as separate accommodation for spectators. Many of the other features of the separate circulation systems have also been abandoned, although the judges' corridor remains a private preserve.

Street and Blomfield were responsible for finally settling the several disputes which were still unresolved at the time of the architect's death. Street's pay continued to be an issue of contention with the Office of Works, and it was only in 1884 that Arthur was forced to give up the claim for an additional commission for the design of the heating system. He protested at last: "I am too weak to put myself in opposition to your office and must accordingly yield the point."[16] They also had to reply to the charges made by Bull and Sons in defending themselves against their creditors. In this, ignorant of the complexities of the case, they were at a disadvantage, and Arthur admitted that he was sure that the contractor would not have made his allegations at all if his father had lived.[17] Henry Hunt took a characteristically more bitter view of the situation, observing, "Mr. Arthur Street is young and inexperienced. Mr. Arthur Blomfield, though a most able, judicious and upright Man, has only been connected with the work since Mr. Street's death."[18] But in the end the Bulls' case was shown to be the weaker one.

By 1885 most of the construction was complete, the last annual appropriation had been made, and, indeed, the building had been in use for two years. In a later statistical summary, the Office of Works used 1885 as the cutoff date when calculating overall construction costs.[19] That study reported a total expenditure of £1,973,221, an increase of only 32 percent over the ceiling of £1.5 million which was first proposed 25 years before. Of that sum, £934,818 had been spent on the site and miscellaneous preliminary expenses, and £5005 had been paid to reimburse Lincoln's Inn for the removal of the Court of Chancery. A further £29,510 had been expended for rates, taxes, and caretaking, and £2023 was spent for the opening ceremony. A total of £1,003,888 was thus devoted to design and construction, including £39,464 paid in architect's and surveyors' fees. Street and his successors received a commission of slightly more than £35,000.

The Royal Courts of Justice were officially opened on December 4, 1882, amid pageantry that shamed the humble foundation-laying ceremony. Even the weather cooperated, providing "one of the brightest and fairest of December days that can shine in England."[20] It was a happy occasion of public pomp and display, even though the ceremony took place less than seven months after the horrific murder of Lord Frederick Cavendish in Ireland and was conducted under the threat of further Fenian terrorism. Secretary of Works Algernon Mitford kept in constant communication with the chief commissioner of police while planning the event, and very tight security was provided for the Queen's visit to the new building.[21] On the eve of the ceremony, Mitford and a detachment of police searched the building and

157 Queen Victoria arriving at the main entrance for the opening ceremony, 4 December 1882. (Graphic, 9 December 1882.)



158 Queen Victoria departing from the quadrangle after the ceremony, 4 December 1882. (Illustrated London News, *9 December 1882.*)

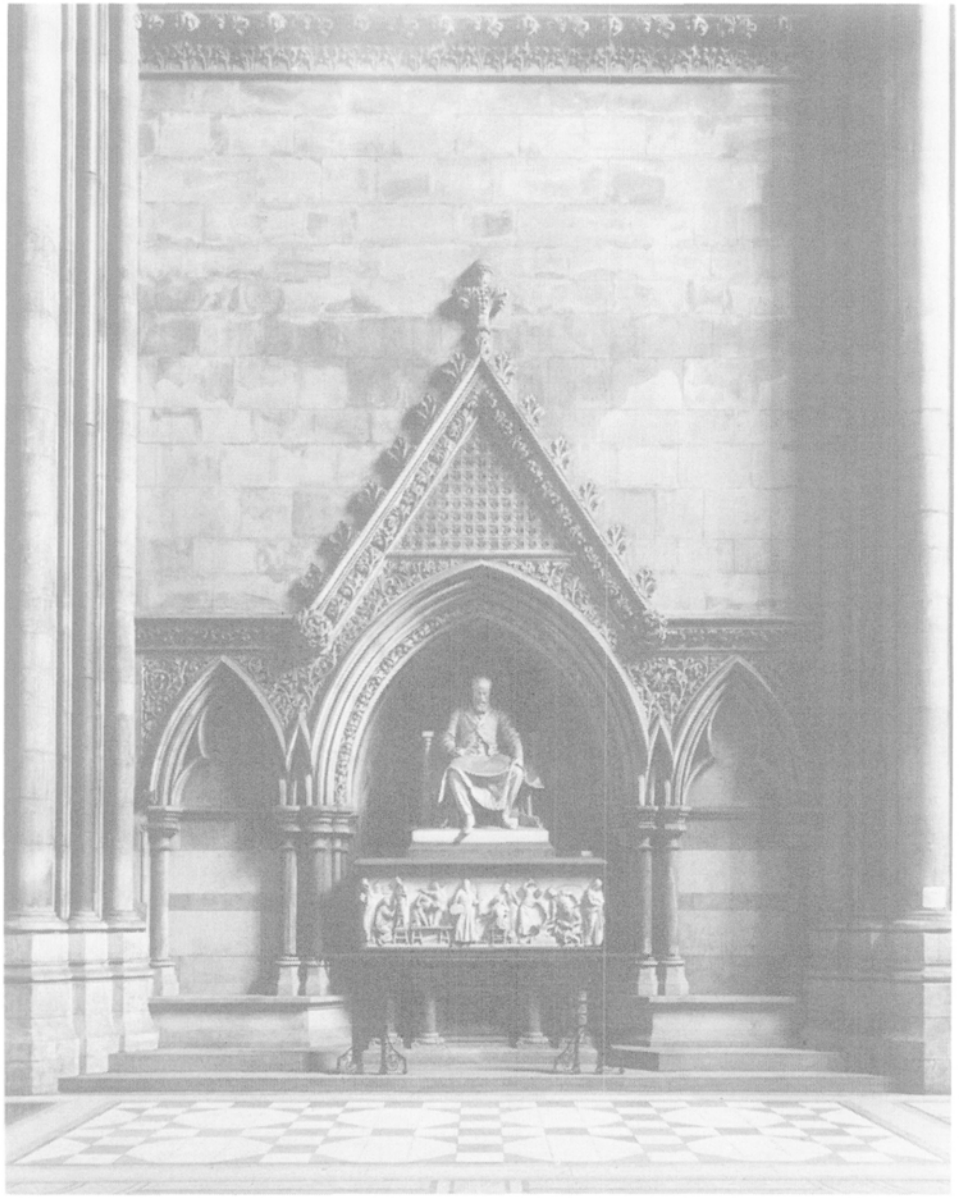
discovered a mysterious box in the crypt, beneath the place where Her Majesty was to stand, but it was found to contain only some broken pieces of tile. More ominously, it was learned after the Queen's visit that a known Fenian, using impeccable letters of reference, had been able to enlist in the regiment of volunteers who provided the honor guard at the entrance to the courts. This man had, in fact, stood with the honor guard, but for some unknown reason he failed to act against the Queen.

Nothing of this was apparent to the public, however. Victoria arrived from Windsor aboard a special train, then passed in her carriage through crowds gathered for the occasion from Paddington Station by way of Pall Mall and the Strand to the law courts. Near the courts the streets were lined with banner-draped masts, and a grandstand was erected around St. Clement Danes (Fig. 157). Her Majesty arrived at the southern door at noon, preceded an hour earlier by the judges, who had paraded to their new home from Westminster Hall. Before her arrival the prime minister, the Cabinet, and other royalty had also come to take their places, and the Lord Mayor, aldermen, and Common Council of the City of London had arrived in a procession heralded by trumpeters and led by mounted police. At the entrance she was met by G. J. Shaw-Lefevre, the first commissioner, who conducted her to the dais at the north end of the hall. He then presented the key of the building on a velvet cushion. She touched it, signifying her acceptance, and it was passed by the home secretary to Lord Selborne, the lord chancellor. Selborne, the author of the Judicature Act, had been made an earl on the occasion of the opening, and after receiving the key he addressed the Queen: "These Royal Courts of Justice, stately enough to satisfy even those who are most accustomed to Westminster Hall, will not, like Westminster Hall, recall the memories of Norman or Plantagenet, of Tudor or Stuart Kings; but they will be for ever associated with the name of your Majesty." An enduring symbol of Victorian law and art, the law courts have fulfilled his prediction.

The Royal Courts of Justice were declared open forever, a fanfare was sounded from the north balcony of the hall, and the royal procession departed into the courtyard (Fig. 158). There Henry W. Bull and Edward C. Bull were presented, and Arthur Street was also introduced. But Blomfield, mourning the recent death of his wife, was absent. The Queen left by carriage, and many of the other guests proceeded to luncheons at Gray's Inn, Lincoln's Inn, the Middle Temple, and the Inner Temple. Each of the Inns of Court was host to at least one royal prince. Before Her Majesty regained her coach, an address from the workmen, signed by their foremen, was read. It concluded, "Our one regret is that the great master whose designs we have carried out should not have been spared to see this day." Queen Victoria responded, "I join with you in the expression of sincere regret that the designer of this noble edifice should not have lived to see the completion of his work."

The great building was itself all the monument that Street required, but his friends and admirers saw to it that his memory was honored more specifically. The meeting of the R.I.B.A. on December 19, 1881, was given over to a eulogy, and the same occurred at the Architectural Association on January 1.[22] On the day of the funeral the dean of York eulogized the architect in opening the Deanery library, which Street had restored.[23] Street was also the subject of an afternoon sermon at Westminster Abbey on New Year's Day.[24]

His friends arranged for two tangible memorials which linked Street's memory directly to the law courts. The first was a monument placed in the second bay of the great hall (Fig. 159). A group of those close to him gathered at the R.I.B.A. on February 3, 1882, to plan for such a memorial, and they adopted a long list of members, the most active of whom were A. J. Beresford-Hope, Arthur Blomfield, and Alfred Waterhouse, but also including the Prince of Wales, the lord chancellor,



159 Henry Hugh Armstead, sculptor, and Arthur W. Blomfield, architect. The Street memorial in the central hall. 1882–86. (NMR)

past and present first commissioners, and several bishops and lawyers.[25] On April 4 they met again in the hall of the law courts and unanimously chose Henry Hugh Armstead to be the sculptor of the monument.[26] A personal friend of Street, he had studied Gothic art more thoroughly than most other academic sculptors. It was also agreed that Blomfield should design the architectural setting for the work, and the meeting concluded with a tour of the building for the Prince of Wales.

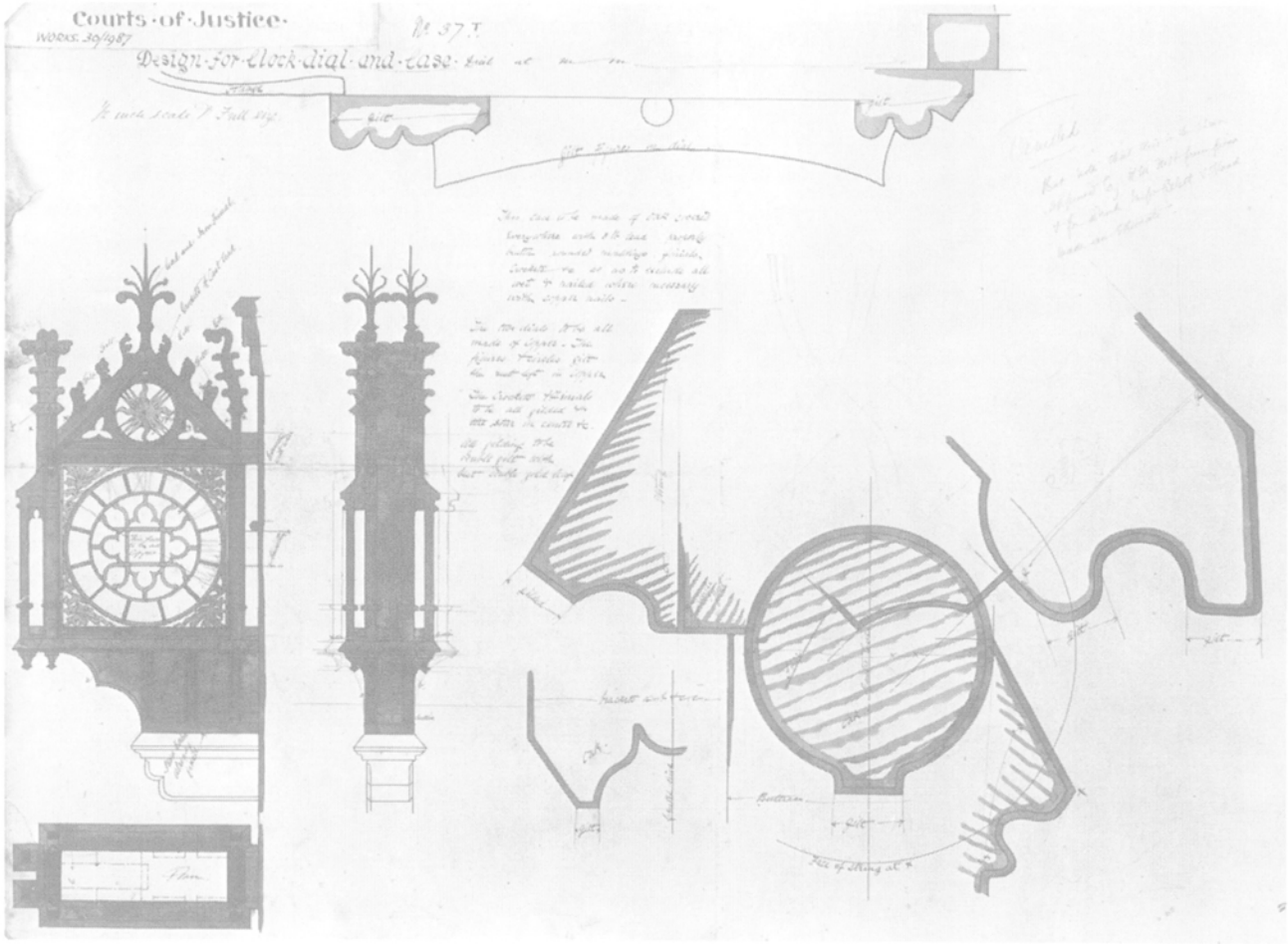
The ambitious plans of the memorial committee, which hoped to erect a full-length statue, were delayed at first by shortness of funds. By June only £1600 had been subscribed, and in July the Treasury rejected Shaw-Lefevre's request of £420 for the architectural part of the monument.[27] Only in December 1884 could the work begin, the deficit having been made up by Arthur Street.[28]

On March 24, 1886, the monument was unveiled by Lord Herschell, the new

lord chancellor.[29] G. E. Street was shown seated within a niche, with dividers in hand and a plan spread out across his knees. Wrapping the pedestal on three sides was a marble frieze which portrayed the various arts and trades of architectural construction, and in it Street himself was represented several times as a supervisor. A small death mask was also incorporated in the front panel. A separate portrait bust carved by Armstead at the same time was acquired by the R.I.B.A.

The second monument to Street at the law courts, the great clock in the southeast tower, was a less formal but more poignant reminder of his achievement. It was set in motion on December 18, 1883, the second anniversary of his death. Street himself had designed the clock case in 1877, which was built by Thomas Potter and Sons, the plumbing and ironwork contractors (Fig. 160).[30] However, the construction of the clockworks was postponed that time and again in 1881.[31] Not until 1882, after Street's death, did the Office of Works obtain permission from the Treasury to complete the mechanism. Following the advice of the astronomer royal, W.H.M. Christie, the job went to Gillett and Bland of Croydon without full specifications. A contract was signed for approximately £1700.[32]

The clockworks designed by Gillett and Bland were of a new type, like those which they had installed in the Manchester Town Hall four years earlier. The hands



160 Clock case. Plan, elevations, and molding profiles, July 1877. (PRO Works 30/1987.)

advanced by leaps every thirty seconds rather than moving continuously, recording the passage of time very legibly. However, the system required special clock faces with clearly readable thirty-second markings, and it was necessary to replace the elaborate and already deteriorating dials that Street had designed in 1877 with a baldly functional design made by Charles Bland.[33] The clock was lit from within by gas, for nighttime visibility, and it announced the time by night and day with six bells, sounding the St. Mary of Cambridge chimes. The hour bell weighed 6800 pounds. Accuracy within one second per week was guaranteed.[34]

The idea of starting the clock on the anniversary of Street's death may have developed only after Gillett and Bland reported that the clock might be put into service any time after December 8, 1883.[35] A lack of premeditation seems to be reflected in the fact that both Blomfield and Arthur Street were unavoidably absent from the ceremony, and the ritual of cutting the cord to release the pendulum had to be performed by James Gandy, the surveyor. Nevertheless, the clock was a most effective memorial, its mechanical heartbeat taking up the cadence at the place where Street's own vitality had been slowly drained away.

Those who memorialized George Edmund Street were honoring a man who stood at the head of his profession. He held its highest offices, and he had spent the last fifteen years of his life designing and overseeing the construction of the greatest public building of the second half of the nineteenth century. But Street's eminence at the time of his death was peculiarly tenuous. His art was quite remote from the interests of most younger architects, and the law courts were not widely admired. For some time Street had forcibly detached himself from the day-to-day activities of the architectural profession, and his acceptance of important official positions in his last year did not entirely return him to the fold.

Street's separate and independent position was apparent in his attitude toward competitions during his last years. He entered only two contests after winning the commission for the law courts, and he was pleased with the results of neither. The first was the competition for the new Examination Schools at Oxford, which Street entered in 1868.[36] The entry of Thomas N. Deane was preferred, but university authorities overturned the award and called for a new competition. Street refused to compete again, arguing that the job properly belonged to Deane, and the results of the second contest were thrown out in turn themselves. The problem was only resolved when Thomas Graham Jackson won a third competition in 1875–76.

Anticipating a more honorable contest, Street also submitted a design for Edinburgh cathedral in 1872. In this G. G. Scott was victorious, and although Street felt no personal hostility for his old employer, he was incensed again at the manner in which the affair was conducted.[37] Of the six competitors, only Street and William Burges had observed the stated budget ceiling, and Ewan Christian, the professional assessor, wrote a report which favored Street's entry. However, the cathedral building fund trustees awarded the palm to Scott.[38] Street protested bitterly, "If I had supposed that the trustees . . . were to be the judges, as I am not a madman, I should not have thought twice before refusing to compete," and he vowed, "I have been tempted for the last time."[39] G. E. Street, who had won his own greatest commission in a controversial competition, never did compete again.[40]

Street's independence also shaped his relationship with the Royal Academy and the R.I.B.A. An artist and a Goth, he felt ill at ease with the changing taste and temperament of his colleagues in those organizations, among whom professionalism and classicism were on the rise. Nevertheless, he was elected to the highest offices in both organizations by the time of his death.

Street was voted an associate of the Royal Academy in 1866, but because the tide had turned very quickly against medievalists, he made slow progress up the Academy's *cursus honorum.* At almost every turning his advance was blocked by his young nemesis, E. M. Barry, whose classical preferences accorded better with the tastes of the dominant figural artists of the academy. Barry had already been elected an associate in 1861, at the astonishingly young age of thirty-one. When both were nominated for full membership in 1869, a symbolic rematch of the law courts competition was staged, and Barry emerged the victor by a margin of three votes.[41] Street was again defeated in December 1870, and it was only in the spring of 1871 that he became a full academician.[42]

In the year of his election, Street and Barry both substituted for the ailing G. G. Scott and gave the Royal Academy architecture lectures.[43] Then, when Scott formally retired, Barry bested Street once more by winning the permanent position of professor in 1873. The classical eclecticism which he espoused in half a dozen years of dull lectures may have suited the tastes of the Queen Anne decade, but they inspired little enthusiasm.[44] The *Architect* attributed the selection of Barry to his seniority as an academician, observing that Street could have composed lectures with "a certain authority which may be wanting in those that are now being delivered."[45]

However, Street was yet again defeated by Barry, by a vote of fourteen to eight, in the 1879 election for the professorship, and it was only in 1880, after Barry's death, that he at last attained that office.[46] Street lived to give only one course of lectures, in February and March 1881, and he made them an unswerving reaffirmation of the ideals which he had possessed since the earliest days of his career. Almost proudly aloof from contemporary issues, he made few concessions to the changing interests of younger architects, even though his own work had reflected a sometimes sympathetic interest in their activities. Where his own opinions had altered over the years, as on the issues of foreign precedent and the picturesque, he minimized the differences between his early and recent statements and took a middle approach. In an age of contradiction and change, Street sought to identify permanent guideposts.[47]

Street's relationship with the R.I.B.A. tells a similar story of individualism. As early as 1860 he had "had some fun" with the classicists who then governed that body by joining with other Goths in attempting to upset the official slate of candidates.[48] Their attempt failed, but over the next few years their strength grew, and in 1865 Beresford-Hope, a Goth, won the presidency. By then Street was himself a vice president, and his rapprochement with the establishment was signaled by his willingness to accept the institute gold medal in 1874, after John Ruskin turned it down. Ruskin had rejected the honor in order to scold the architectural profession for their restoration work, and Street, as his son recalled, "loyally" picked up the medal "with its gilt rubbed off."[49]

However, Street's relationship with the R.I.B.A. soon deteriorated, and a Barry

again participated in the story. This time it was Charles, the older brother of E. M. Barry, who was president of the institute from 1876 to 1879 and the first representative of the younger generation to hold that post. In his first year of office he inaugurated a reform of the bylaws which established a nearly automatic line of succession: council members would rise inexorably to be vice-presidents and vice-presidents would climb in seniority until reaching the presidency itself. The professionalists, who sought a more rigidly organized profession, complete with formal education requirements and qualifying examinations, saw this as a positive reform. However, like most artist architects, Street disliked the new procedure even though his own position as second vice-president was advantageous.[50] He made a dramatic protest in 1879, when Barry retired and was automatically succeeded by John Whichcord. According to the new bylaws, Street was now in line to be senior vice-president himself, and thus sure to be elected president in 1881, following Whichcord's expected two-year term. But he resigned rather than accept this automatic promotion, citing his large responsibilities as a member of the Council of the Royal Academy, but also recommending that "any chance of getting new blood . . . ought to be seized." The *Architect* reported that many felt that Street and not Whichcord should be the new president anyway and approved this gesture. It argued that the head of the institute should be "the best man for the moment who can be got."[51]

This set the stage for even more drama at the next election in the spring of 1881. Street's resignation had left Professor T. Hayter Lewis in line for the presidency, but Lewis retired in favor of Horace Jones, the City architect and the designer of the ungainly Temple Bar monument which stood beside the law courts. What was quickly identified as a contest between the council nominee, Jones, and the favorite of the nonprofessionalists, Street, was thus also spiced with personal rivalry. The *Architect* launched Street's campaign with an editorial on March 12 which was very personal in tone, condemning the system whereby "the presidential chair is to be usurped by haphazard nobodies in succession for ever and ever."[52] Referring specifically to Street, the article concluded, "What we affirm is that an important artistic society ought to have at its head, not merely the casual representative of nothing in particular, but some one if possible who can stand upright before a censorious world as a recognised leader of his generation."

What ensued was the first contested presidential election in twenty years, and many were tempted to liken it to the "Battle of the Styles" of that earlier time. But while Street's supporters included many Goths, there were classicists among them as well, united in the battle of art against professionalism. For example, a circular letter on behalf of his candidacy was published by Robert W. Edis, the well-known Queen Anne specialist, and Richard Phené Spiers, the fervent admirer of French academic classicism.[53] This joined many supportive statements from medievalists. William Burges wrote less than a month before his death to call for a return to the "old mode of election," and Street's friend Arthur Blomfield warned, "I think that the Institute would make a very grave mistake were it any longer to pass over Mr. Street, who is universally admitted to be the first architect of the day."[54] William White, a colleague from the years in Scott's office, wrote to say that Street had "influenced for good the development of all art in the present generation, far more than . . . any other individual member of the Institute."[55] Street's formal nomination papers were filed by James Brooks.

Opposition to his election from the professionalists was strong. Two former members of the R.I.B.A. Council predictably wrote to the journals to protest any deviation from the rules.[56] The *Builder* remained very cool toward Street supporters, in contrast with the receptive neutrality of the *Building News* and the open endorsement of the *Architect*.[57] T. Roger Smith raised the loudest single voice in opposition, correctly complaining that Street was unlikely to support architectural registration examinations of the type that the professionalists favored.[58] In a long memo published before the election, he recited the legal bases for the selection of Jones and argued that Street had taken himself out of the running by resigning in 1879.[59]

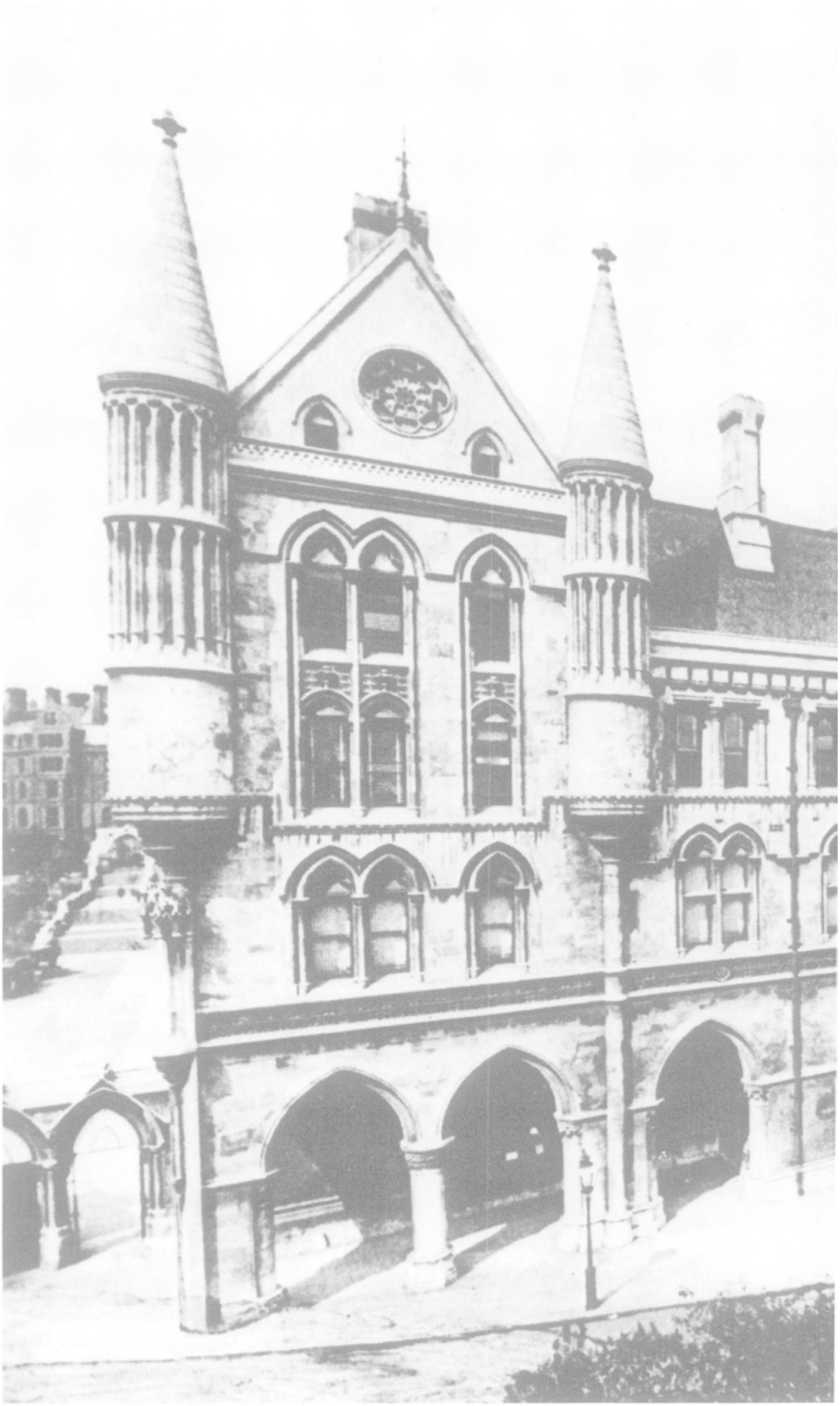
It was apparent that Street stood a good chance of being elected, and fears that this would create a rift in the institute led Horace Jones himself and Charles F. Hayward, F.R.I.B.A., to propose compromises which would insure Street the presidency at a later date. Street rejected these, explaining in his reply to Hayward that he could not leave his friends "in the lurch."[60]

The dispute climaxed at the tense and heavily attended annual meeting of the R.I.B.A. on May 9, when the presidential election was held.[61] While the vote was being counted, what the *Building News* called "a smart passage of arms" erupted, but this was halted by the announcement that Jones had been defeated by a margin of eighty-three to eighty-seven. The *Architect* jubilantly celebrated the demise of the policy of "inelastic *succession* instead of special *selection*." It also correctly interpreted this as a defeat for professionalism in the "battle of Art with No-Art," rather than the victory of Gothic over classical. This new line of battle would be drawn more clearly a decade later when the "Profession or Art" controversy reached its stormiest moments.[62]

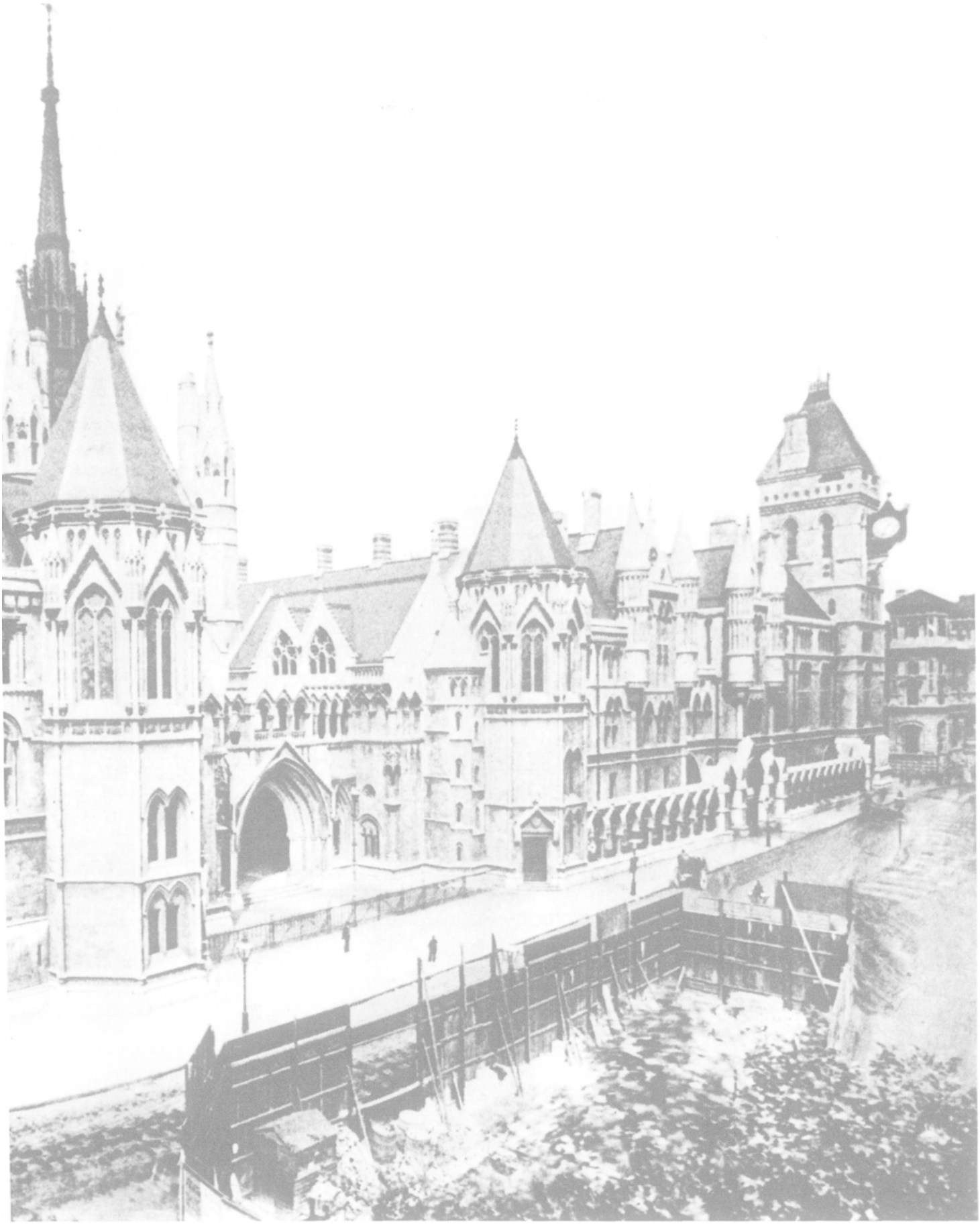
In victory, Street sought to be conciliatory. He studiously avoided controversy in his inaugural address, delivered on November 7 when he was less than six weeks from death, by devoting most of his discussion to what he called contemporary "vernacular architecture"—the work of ordinary builders. Street stressed the need to improve the quality of construction, and he even argued that "the best artist is the most practical man."[63] But many were deaf to his effort to reunite artists and professionalists, hearing only what they expected to hear. For example, the *Building News* reported that "for the first time during a long series of presidential addresses, we have heard art placed first and spoken of as the real object of the Royal Institute of British Architects."[64] That was what Street stood for, but it was not the gist of what he said on that occasion.

Street's final election to high office was not accompanied by the wide acceptance of his Gothic architecture, and that is evident from the criticism which the law courts received as they neared completion. As they had from the start, the bold and picturesque aspects of the design disappointed observers whose tastes were classical, and the numbers of such observers continued to grow. The harsh reality was that the law courts were the "grave of the [Gothic] Revival," as Goodhart-Rendel remembered that they had been called.[65]

As the building rose amid its scaffolding, those who had made a career of criticizing Street redoubled their efforts. George Cavendish Bentinck, M.P., complained in 1877 that the architect "threw away his opportunity, and from sheer ignorance of the principles of his art has broken this great space into at least fourteen



161 *The law courts from the roof of St. Clement Danes, c. 1890. (Guildhall Library, City of London.)*



compartments, pierced them with irregular and deformed windows, and intends to add a lopsided tower which . . . will not be worth the cost of its foundations."[66] But in addition to this expected opposition, even heretofore friendly voices turned critical as the shape of the law courts became visible. The negative tone of this criticism was intensified by the fact that it was the east wing, with its polychromy and multiple towers, which was first unveiled. The *Building News*, although initially Street's ally, became increasingly skeptical about his work. Upon seeing the eastern block in 1876, the editors lamented, "While we admire the details *per se*, the composition would have been vastly more impressive and significant as the seat of English justice if more continuity and balance had been preserved in them and less of the picturesque elements introduced."[67] Even John P. Seddon, whose competiton design was like Street's in its picturesque muscularity, admitted at the memorial meeting of the Architectural Association that Street's secular designs were "too monastic" and broken up.[68]

There was very little appreciation in the last quarter of the nineteenth century for a large public building that was adapted to a crowded, urban environment, in which only a rooftop vantage afforded a view of the entire design (Fig. 161). None admired how the scale of the law courts complemented the domestic character of the surrounding Inns of Court, or how its short lengths of self-contained façade were adjusted to actual points of view. Amid the bathos of late Victorian imperial classicism, the strengths of Street's design were perceived as weaknesses. Its bold gestures were seen as licentiousness, while its flexibility was interpreted as disunity.

Only a waggish writer of the next generation, P. G. Wodehouse, could properly evaluate the manner in which the building came to grips with its extraordinarily difficult site. In 1925 he recounted the advice that his hero Bertie Wooster had received from his Uncle Henry:

> Never forget, my boy, . . . that if you stand outside Romano's in the Strand, you can see the clock on the wall of the Law Courts down in Fleet Street. Most people who don't know don't believe it's possible, because there are a couple of churches in the middle of the road, and you would think they would be in the way. But you can, and it's worth knowing. You can win a lot of money, betting on it with fellows who haven't found it out (Fig. 162).[69]

Uncle Henry's great wisdom was lost to most of Street's contemporaries, and the architect's final honors were due more to admiration for his character than to respect for his art. This was a reflection of the new temper of the times, in which it was not only unfashionable to emulate Gothic architecture, but impossible to argue with conviction about the supremacy of any historical style. In the void of the resulting artistic pluralism, personal values became the only standard for evaluation. Fortunately, Street's character withstood easily the most searching examination, and personal admiration abounded in the reminiscences of him. The admiring obituary notice in the *Architect* employed the jingoistic vocabulary of the late Victorian Empire:

> Street was, every inch of him, a downright Englishman; and this work of his had been done in that thoroughly robust English spirit which all over the world confronts difficulties and dangers as incentives only to greater effort,

162 The clock of the law courts, visible beyond the spires of St. Mary-le-Strand and St. Clement Danes.

> greater self-confidence, and greater endurance. A more courageous man in his way never lived in England or out of it. If we provoke a smile, no matter: but every line of his pencil was a blow. His work was fighting work from his boyhood till his death. He was the perfect embodiment of the Romanticism militant of his generation. In a Gothic age he was wholly Gothic, the most Gothic of all Goths.[70]

A. J. Beresford-Hope was of Street's own High Victorian generation, but he, too, emphasized the personal: "I feel there is very little for me to add as to his honesty, his boldness, the way he conquered people by the conviction that about him there was no trickery, no diplomacy in a bad sense, his fearless, earnest advocacy of what was right, and true, and beautiful—beautiful in the moral and in the material world."[71] Personal traits do explain how George Edmund Street molded both men and things—without guile or pretense. They explain why the letter files of the Office of Works are filled with heated correspondence, and also why the design of the Royal Courts of Justice is infused with confidence and strength.

Notes

Notes to the Preface

1. John Summerson, *Victorian Architecture: Four Studies in Evaluation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 115.

2. Nikolaus Pevsner, *London I: The Cities of London and Westminster*, 3d ed. rev. (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 321.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Lincolniensis [letter], "The New Law Courts," *Times*, 18 November 1867, p. 11.

2. Webb was employed by GES from May 1854 until May 1858, latterly as his chief assistant. Shaw headed the office from 1859 until 1862. Morris was a pupil, signing articles on 21 January 1856, but he left before the end of the year. See: William R. Lethaby, *Philip Webb and His Work* (1935; reprint ed., London: Raven Oak, 1979), pp. 13–26, 235; Andrew Saint, *Richard Norman Shaw* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 15–18; and John William Mackail, *The Life of William Morris* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1899) 1:85–112.

3. Robert Kerr, "English Architecture Thirty Years Hence," *Builder*, 17 May 1884, p. 729.

4. The standard biographical study of GES is by Street's son, Arthur Edmund Street, *Memoir of George Edmund Street, R.A., 1824–1881* (1888; reprint ed., New York: Benjamin Blom, 1972). See also the article in the *Dictionary of National Biography* by Paul Waterhouse and the introductory essay in Georgina G. King, ed., *George Edmund Street: Unpublished Notes and Reprinted Papers* (New York: Hispanic Society of America, 1916). The obituaries include: "The Late Mr. G. E. Street, R.A.," *Architect*, 24 December 1881, pp. 413–14; "Fine Arts: Mr. George Edmund Street, R.A.," *Athenaeum*, 24 December 1881, pp. 857–58; "The Late G. E. Street, R.A.," *Builder*, 24 December 1881, pp. 777–79; "George Edmund Street, R.A.," *Building News*, 23 December 1881, pp. 813–15; "Mr. George Edmund Street, R.A.," *The Guardian* [Westminster], 21 December 1881, pp. 1821–22; and "Obituary," *Times*, 19 December 1881, p. 9. Consult the bibliography for recent studies of individual buildings.

5. GES [letter], "The Use of Lychnoscopes Suggested by the Paintings in Eton College Chapel," *Ecclesiologist* 8 (1847–48): 288–90.

6. "The Royal Palace of Justice," *Architect*, 9 December 1882, p. 355.

7. GES [letter], "On the Proper Characteristics of a Town Church," *Ecclesiologist* 11 (1850): 227–33; GES, "The True Principles of Architecture, and the Possibility of Developement," *Ecclesiologist* 13 (1852): 247–62; GES, "On the Revival of the Ancient Style of Domestic Architecture," *Ecclesiologist* 14 (1853): 70–80; and GES, *An Urgent Plea for the Revival of True Principles of Architecture in the Public Buildings of the University of Oxford* (Oxford and London: John Henry Parker, 1853).

8. GES [letter], "Naumburg Cathedral," *Ecclesiologist* 15 (1854): 381–86; GES, "The Churches of Lübeck," *Ecclesiologist* 16 (1855): 21–36; GES [letter dated 8 March 1855], "Erfurt and Marburg," *Ecclesiologist* 16 (1855): 73–82; GES [letter], "An Architect's Tour to Munster and Soest," *Ecclesiologist* 16 (1855): 361–72; GES, "Mr. Street on German Pointed Architecture," *Ecclesiologist* 18 (1857): 162–72; GES, *Brick and Marble in the Middle Ages: Notes on Tours in the North of Italy*