

Wenceslas Hollar, the Antiquarians' Illustrator

GRAHAM PARRY

THE antiquarian writers of the latter half of the seventeenth century were particularly fortunate in the matter of illustration in having at their disposal the talents of Wenceslas Hollar, the outstanding etcher who had settled in England after the disruptions of the Thirty Years War had forced him out of his native Bohemia. Dugdale, Ashmole, Thoroton, and Sandford all relied on Hollar to provide a visual authenticity that would match the verbal integrity of their works, and all must have shared Evelyn's opinion that Hollar was an artist who could be counted upon to work 'to the immense refreshment of the curious'.

Hollar's career in England had been one that had kept him in close contact with connoisseurs and patrons of learning. He had been engaged in Cologne by the Earl of Arundel, who, in 1636, was on an Embassy from Charles I to the Emperor Ferdinand II, in an unsuccessful attempt to secure the Protestant succession to Bohemia. Arundel wished him to record the scenes they passed on the way to Prague, which he did with exquisite grace and consummate skill; the Earl's satisfaction was such that he invited Hollar back to England as his caelator, or resident draughtsman. His principal occupation was to record the riches of the Arundel Collection, undoubtedly one of the finest art collections in Northern Europe, and in England rivalled only by the King's. This splendid assemblage had been built up by Thomas and Aletheia, Earl and Countess of Arundel, by inheritance and indefatigable acquisition on their journeys around Europe as well as by judicious purchases by their agents placed strategically on the continent. According to the inventory of 1655, Arundel had amassed some six-hundred paintings, amongst which Titian, Giorgione, Veronese, Tintoretto, Raphael, Dürer, Holbein, and Van Dyck were extraordinarily well represented. There was also the celebrated collection of statuary, the glories of which were the

antique marbles purchased, bribed and stolen from Greece and the Levant by his enterprising minions who had ransacked the ancient sites with a mixture of guile and gusto that was typical of the early collectors. Further down this great chain of art works there was a descending scale of antique inscriptions, coins, medals, stones, corals and curios, and all the knick-knacks so dear to the heart of the seventeenth-century antiquarian. The fame of these treasures was already widespread, and in particular the details of the marbles and classical inscriptions had been communicated to the world of learning by the scholar John Selden in his *Marmora Arundelliana* (1628).

The Earl was eager to publish descriptions of his masterpieces for the delight and edification of the cognoscenti, and to this end Hollar began to produce etchings of selected works for public circulation. In many ways, this process of copying has had more durable results beyond the gratification of intelligent curiosity in the seventeenth century, for a number of subjects have since been lost or destroyed, and only survive to present knowledge in Hollar's etchings.

Besides the dissemination of such learned material, essential to connoisseurship as the main means of making works of art extensively known, Hollar began to etch views of the English countryside, towns and monuments that provide us with such an unexampled record of the England of the seventeenth century. There is no systematic intention in his work, except fidelity to his craft, but the cumulative effect of his hundreds of etchings of English scenes fills us with a sense of vicarious participation in the life of the times. Yet what we see is not just a direct transcription of the scene, but rather a presentation of what the cultivated seventeenth-century man wished to see. Hollar looks about him with the eye of a gentleman: he sees noble prospects everywhere, stately cities lying by great rivers or in spacious plains. If a lord has built the mansion of his dreams, Hollar will etch it for him, free from the circumambient squalor of the age. The figures who populate these prospects, discoursing with grave faces of *ragion del stato*, or transfixed in eternal gossip, are all of dignified bearing and clad with becoming decency, if not more finely arrayed. Even the ploughmen have a Virgilian poise, and the watermen are worthy of better work. The swarm of people who

fill the courtyard of the Royal Exchange mix business with fine apparel, and there is no doubt that we witness a world of gentlemanly commerce decorously conducted in a palatial setting. Hollar shows us a world where men are proud of their surroundings, admiring of the works of their forefathers and confident of their own dignity and power. It is a world we are familiar with from the complimentary poetry of the age, and could be illustrated with ease from Jonson, or Carew, or Marvell. Indeed, the refined and atmospheric scenes of his patron's seat at Albury in Surrey take us instantly into the world of cavalier elegance and élan; they project the courtly aspirations of a period, and to us they have the nostalgic qualities of an idyll (Pls 2 & 1A).

Hollar was effectively the first landscapist of note to work in England, and his extensive work in this field did much to establish the art of landscape in this country. The portrait had been the dominant and almost exclusive English form before Hollar's arrival, varied only by the occasional architectural painting. What landscapes there were occurred generally in subordinate positions, as the background to a sitter, or as scenes glimpsed between the horse's legs in equestrian portraits. Topographical landscapes, however, had long been established on the continent, particularly in Germany and the Netherlands, and it was this Northern manner that Hollar introduced here, with its combination of spaciousness and fine detail, and its sensitivity to atmosphere. His ability to retain this delicacy on the copperplate is one of Hollar's remarkable achievements as an etcher. In a plate such as the large view of Greenwich (1637), the interest and pleasure lie essentially in the handling of landscape, and the work marks a significant point in the history of English aesthetics. Hollar's presence here and his superlative topographical etchings undoubtedly helped to form the English taste for landscape drawing during this period, a circumstance confirmed by the way in which the later generation of artists in this genre, such as Francis Place, David Loggan, Johannes Kip and Leonard Knyff, show clearly Hollar's influence in their own styles.

The growing delight in landscape art during the 1630s and 1640s is paralleled in poetry by the development of topographical verse; here too there is a similar pattern, as the specific landscape

scene enters seventeenth-century verse as the background to such localized poems as Jonson's 'Penshurst' or Carew's verses on the same subject, and later emerges as a subject of primary and independent interest, as in Denham's 'Coopers Hill' of 1642, from which the Augustan tradition of topographical verse is derived.

Hollar's primacy in English landscape engraving is stressed by John Evelyn the diarist, who in his day was more celebrated as a virtuoso, a man of wide and elaborate learning and varied talents. In his *Sculptura* or *The History of Chalcography* (1662), the first book on engraving published in England, he puts forward the hope that 'such as exceed in the talent [engraving] would entertain us with more landskips and views of the environs, approaches, and prospects of our nobly situated metropolis, Greenwich, Windsor, and other parts upon the goodly Thames; and in which (as we said) Mr. Hollar has so worthily merited' (Chapter IV).

Hollar prospered during these early years in this country. His reception in court circles must have been very cordial, for in about 1640 he was appointed drawing master to the Prince of Wales, the future Charles II. Such an appointment by the most artistically discriminating of English monarchs is a fair measure of Hollar's progress in his first years in this country. It is not difficult to understand why the king borrowed Arundel's draughtsman to instruct his heir. Hollar's manner of drawing was at its finest during the 1630s, with an exquisite delicacy of touch matched with a Flemish precision of detail. His intimate acquaintance with the best masters that came from his close study of the Arundel Collection, as well as his own native freshness of style in drawing, must have recommended him as a mentor for the young prince.

In 1642, however, disaster struck Hollar's domestic economy. Arundel, recognizing the danger of civil war, left England for Antwerp, and Hollar, bereft of his patron, had to sell himself to the London publishers, and became the chief draughtsman of Peter Stent, the most substantial figure in the printselling trade at the time. About 1644 Hollar too moved to Antwerp, which was then full of Royalist sympathizers, and remained there until 1652, issuing there a number of English prospects, including the magnificent and vast panorama of London by which he is most generally known, and which remains the most complete and fascinating delineation of old London before the Fire.

He stayed in Antwerp for about seven years, before being tempted back to England again in 1652. It would appear that the much-reputed antiquarian William Dugdale was the moving force behind his return, for Dugdale was contemplating the publication of several large works that needed illustration by an accurate and sensitive hand, so Hollar with his long experience was a natural choice. Dugdale must have been Hollar's steadiest patron after his return, providing him with a series of important commissions that involved the cutting of some 302 plates for him over the years up to 1673, for *The Antiquities of Warwickshire*, *The History of St. Pauls*, and *Monasticon Anglicanum*. The first of these, which is a meticulous model of local history, came out in 1656, and contains nearly two hundred designs by Hollar, but the two latter works are of much greater significance for the antiquarian.

The History of St. Pauls is an outstanding piece of antiquarian research, a work of industry and sustained enquiry into rolls and records that evolved into a lucid exposition of the cathedral's growth and development, as well as providing a superb *catalogue raisonné* of its contents. Hollar's etchings for the book have the same quality of fidelity to the fact and reverence for the idea of history that Dugdale communicates so well. The combination of accuracy and the invariable neatness of design, as well as the atmospheric charm of the interiors, place these illustrations among the most evocative of the architectural prints of the seventeenth century. The subsequent destruction of St Pauls in the Great Fire has made Hollar the sole preserver of its ancient fabric, for Dugdale himself made no attempt to present the visual aspect of the church in his description. For those who now gaze at the forlorn charred stumps of Elizabethan effigies in the crypt of Wren's church that are all that remain of the old St Pauls, these engravings serve to depict something of the gothic grandeur of the original, and the magnificence of its monuments (Pl. 1B).

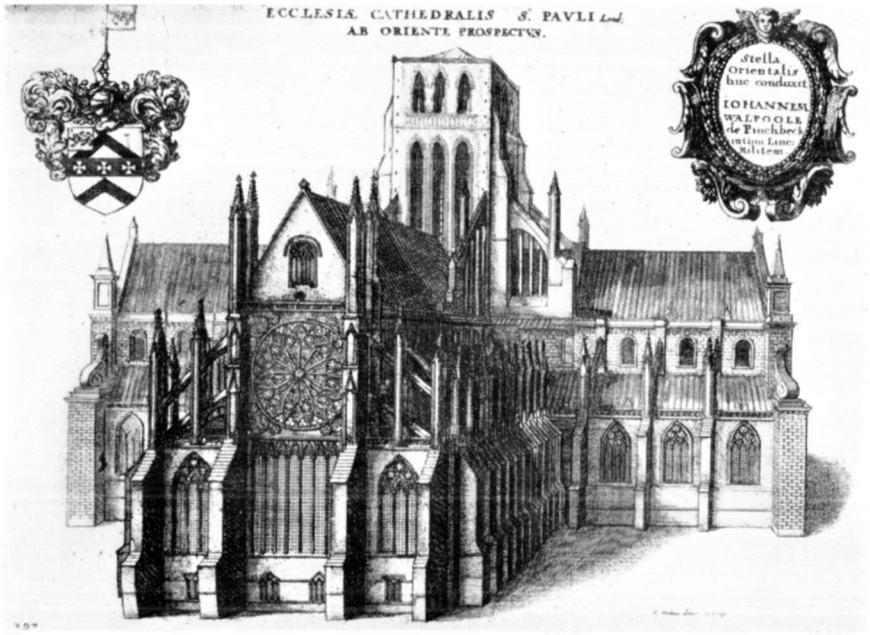
Admirable and historically invaluable as these plates are, however, they are not without their shortcomings. When compared to the scenes of London that Hollar did in the 1640s, they reveal the growth of a certain frigidity of line and atmosphere. The indefinable sense of presence that permeates his earlier work has evaporated. The same strictures may be made against many of his etchings for the *Monasticon*: they are masterly archi-

PLATE I

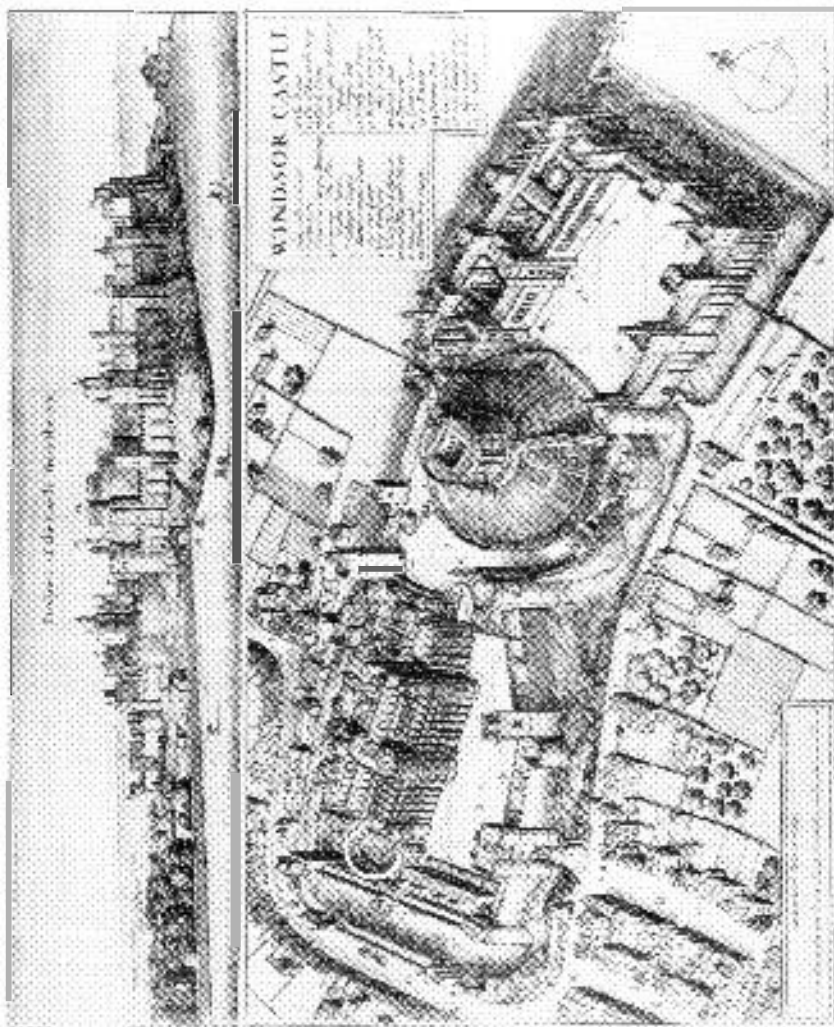


Alburgum in Comitatu Surria, vulgo Albury, olim mansio frequentis Illustrissimi D.D. Thomae Howardi Comitis Arundellae et Surria, a. Architecturae vestrae. 1668. Jussu fecit.

A. Albury Manor, a residence of Hollar's patron Thomas, Earl of Arundel



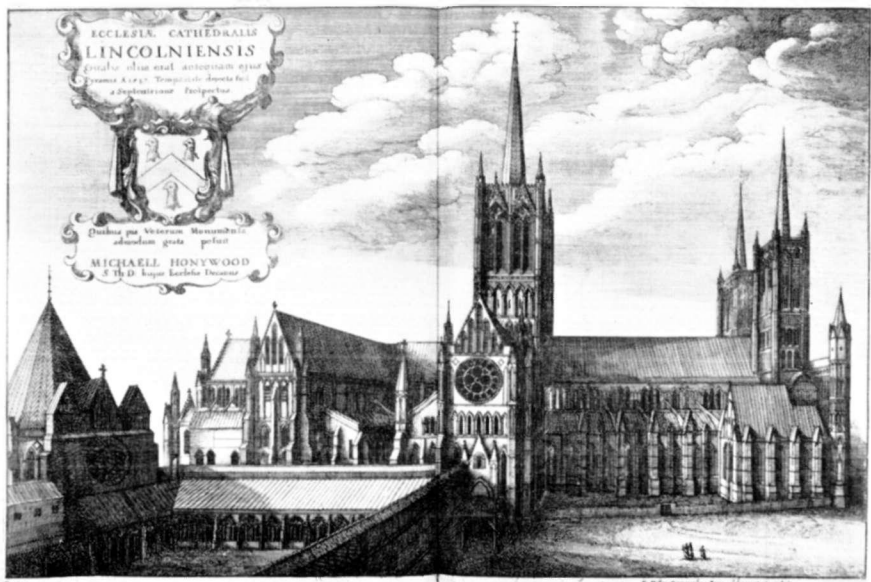
B. Old St Paul's



The remarkable 17th-century view of Windsor Castle, from Adinolfi's *History of the Castle*



A. Salisbury Cathedral, from Dugdale's *Monasticon*



B. Lincoln Cathedral, from Dugdale's *Monasticon*

tectural designs, but the warmth and delicacy of line that filled his earlier views are no longer as noticeable. One of the reasons for the decline in atmospheric pressure, as it were, may be the absence of human figures from these designs; without them, Hollar cannot convey the feeling of these buildings belonging to and forming the background of a society. Unique and fascinating they often are, but some of them approach the fascination of the museum piece, devoid of an affecting humanity. From Hollar's point of view, there was the disadvantage that for the *Monasticon* he had often to work from designs submitted to him, and therefore lacked the vital knowledge of the way a building was united with its environment. Furthermore, Hollar's finest work is usually related to his talent as a miniaturist, and often in the etchings for Dugdale the folio-sized plates are too large for an optimum approach to the subject; also, when he was working from submitted designs, there was probably inadequate detail shown on them, and he would be reluctant to improvise decoration in illustrations to books dedicated to historical accuracy — hence the occasional vacancy of some of these productions.¹

Notwithstanding these aesthetic deficiencies, both *St. Pauls* and the *Monasticon* are triumphs of the preservationist spirit of the antiquarians. Men like Dugdale, Dodsworth, Evelyn, Ashmole, Browne and Aubrey were activated by a natural delight and curiosity in their historical antecedents; but what gave cogency to their enquiries and precipitated an unprecedented antiquarian activity, was the depredations of the Puritans after their seizure of power in the forties. Their zealous destruction of anything smacking of popery — and after all, virtually all the contents of an Anglican church had such a taint — made it extremely clear that a whole world of antiquity was on the edge of extinction. The ruthless modernism of the Puritans stimulated a powerful literary counter-reaction, for even if the Puritans could not be prevented from defacing monuments and smashing stained glass, mementoes could be made and oblivion thwarted by intelligent records. Apart from the deliberate spoliation of churches by the men of plain religion, the incidental furies of the Civil Wars had

¹ In the engravings of the monuments in *St Pauls* it is likely that Hollar worked partly from drawings provided by William Sedgwick who had originally aided Dugdale with his research in the 1640s.

caused much additional damage, particularly in the ripping up of church brasses and lead roofs for use in the manufacture of armaments. By the 1650s, there was a great deal of mouldering ecclesiastical architecture in England that had been in good shape under Charles. The quartering of troops in cathedrals, churches and Royalist mansions had not improved the interiors of those places. St Pauls itself had been used for the stalling of the horses of the London militia during the time that Dugdale was making his observations. Inigo Jones's new Corinthian portico, built at Charles's own expense, was let out for shops, and badly mutilated as a result. In January 1653, according to a contemporary record, 'A part of St. Paul's fell down', and it was unlikely to be restored under the Commonwealth, and who knew when the Commonwealth might end? Outside the capital, the castles of the country were being pulled down, as Cromwell acted on the advice of Machiavelli's *Art of War*. When to all this was added the memory of the havoc caused by the dissolution of the monasteries a century before, and when one viewed the scarce-remaining heaps of stone into which so many of those vast edifices had melted in three generations, one understood how greatly the ancient land was changing. The realization of how much could be lost in so short a time provided a powerful incentive to those who cared for their past, and who recognized how inadequately it was recorded. Hollar, with his accuracy, his lifelong involvement with the art of sensitive recording, and his association with connoisseurs and amateurs, was a natural ally of the preservationists, and the body of his etchings have made him one of the chief restorers of the world we have lost.¹

¹ John Aubrey, the archetypal reader of books such as *St. Pauls*, well expresses the gratitude with which they were received, and dreams of bringing out a similar book himself, to be called *Draughts of the Seetes and Prospects*. 'If these views were well donn, they would make a glorious volume by itselpe, and like enough it might take well in the world. It were an inconsiderable expence to those persons of qualitic, and it would remain to posterity when their families are gonn and their buildings ruined by time or fire, as we have seen with that stupendous fabric of Paul's Church, nor a stone left on stone, and lives now only in Mr Hollar's Etchings in Sir William Dugdale's History of St. Paul's. I am not displeas'd with this thought as a desideratum but I do never expect to see it donn; so few men have the heart to do public good to give 4 or 5 pounds for a copper plate.' (Quoted by Anthony Powell, *John Aubrey and His Friends*, 1948, p. 273.) Aubrey lived up to his own standards by contributing to the third volume of the *Monasticon* a plate of Osney Abbey, copied from a drawing he had presciently commissioned when he realized that the abbey might be knocked down.

The *Monasticon Anglicanum*, begun by Dugdale and Dodsworth, and carried on alone by the former after Dodsworth died in 1654, is one of the greatest undertakings of seventeenth-century scholarship, and it dragged its enormous length through the presses for eighteen years. This vast compilation of all the histories of all the monastic foundations in England and Wales, with all its elaborate documentation and description, remains unrivalled, and is still an indispensable source for information concerning the monasteries. The three folio volumes came out in 1655, 1661, and 1673, with Hollar contributing fifty-six illustrations to the whole. The rest of the prints were mainly carried out by W. King and R. Hall, whose productions only serve to emphasize the superiority of Hollar's work, and to point out how dismal was the state of architectural engraving amongst English artists. The awkwardness, the heavy line drawing, the insensitivity to subtlety of light, add up to a general inelegance. Amongst Hollar's representations, those of Lincoln, York and Canterbury, are outstanding in their compositional power. They convey a strong impression of having been done *in situ*, whereas others, such as Winchester, have a quality of isolation about them that suggests they were done from drawings supplied by other artists.¹ As a whole, however, there is no doubt that Hollar's work in the *Monasticon* constitutes the finest description of our major churches and cathedrals in the seventeenth century. His best designs set standards of truth and beauty that were not approached again until the nineteenth century, and in the quality of their etching they remain unrivalled (Pls 4A & 4B).

At the Restoration Hollar was amongst the legion of the meritorious who hoped for recognition and place under the new King, but was disappointed. His participation in the general rejoicing was limited to cutting the plates for John Ogilby's opportune Coronation souvenir programme, *The Entertainment of His Most Excellent Majestie Charles II*, a folio panegyric published in 1661. Hollar's connection with Ogilby dated back at least to 1654, when he provided the majority of the plates for Ogilby's

¹ Dugdale's Diary confirmed that this was often the case. For example, '1 June 1665: Paid Mr Hollar for etching 3 more plates. (Delivered to Mr Hollar 7 draughts more.)'. Designers who supplied Hollar with sketches included Richard Newcourt, Thomas Johnson, Edward Mascal, and Richard Hall.

fine edition of Virgil, published in that year. The illustrations are done in the fashionable baroque manner of the time, a style that Hollar tended to adopt for the illustration of classical texts. Ogilby was a versatile literary entrepreneur who gratified the desire for curious and topical information of his contemporaries, as well as their aesthetic sensibilities, with a number of sumptuously produced books, to which Hollar frequently contributed the large copper-cuts. Their collaboration continued with *The Fables of Aesop* (1665), *The Ephesian Matron* (1666), *An Embassy from the East India Company to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperor of China* (1669), which Ogilby translated from the Dutch of John Nieuhoff, *Africa* (1670), and *Britannia* (1675).

From 1659 Hollar had been associated with Dugdale's fellow antiquarian, Elias Ashmole, gathering illustrations for that solemn and definitive work, *The Institution, Laws and Ceremonies of the Most Noble Order of the Garter*. This long maturing design finally emerged from the press in 1672, but its inception dated as far back as 1655, when Ashmole feared that the Order might perish under Republicanism, so he undertook it, as he says in the preface, 'in case the Eclipse, it then waded under in our Horizon, should prove of so long Continuance, as that many occurrences, worthy of knowledge, might come to be in a manner forgotten'. Hence Ashmole indefatigably compiled its history, ceremonies, rites, and their signification, yet over such a period of time that what began as an act of preservation ended as a celebration of new growth, and the final plates show the feast of the Order in full Restoration splendour. Hollar's plates for the book constitute a magnificent record of the home of the Order. (It may be that Ashmole initially feared that Windsor Castle might be pulled down by the Protector, in keeping with the general practice of defortification.) Amongst the most outstanding of these etchings is the aerial view of Windsor with its imaginative approach and masterly handling of perspective. The grasp of the whole complex of buildings is quite remarkable for its period. The complete sequence of scenes from varied viewpoints in this book makes up a comprehensive picture of mid seventeenth-century Windsor, particularly if to these we add the large plate which Hollar did for Ashmole's posthumous *Antiquities of Berkshire* (1719) (Pl. 3).

Hollar was evidently regarded as a figure indispensable to county histories, as Robert Thoroton commissioned him to etch the plates for his *Antiquities of Nottinghamshire* (1677), a lavishly produced volume containing many scenes of fascinating local detail. That same year Hollar died, but not before he lived to see the publication of Francis Sandford's *Genealogical History of the Kings of England*. Appropriately enough, his contributions to this were of a funereal nature: an elegiac series of royal tombs that have a sombre glory in their etching.

Hollar's abilities were greatly esteemed by the cultivated and learned of the age, and many a gentleman noted in letter or diary the satisfaction that Hollar's work gave him. Several of his associates were members of the new Royal Society — Evelyn, Ashmole, Aubrey, Wren, Hooke — and it is a fitting sign of his standing that he should have etched the frontispiece to Sprat's *History of the Royal Society*. Of these acquaintances, John Evelyn seems to have been the most appreciative, and indeed, in many ways, Evelyn is an ideal specimen of the audience for which Hollar worked: wealthy, cultivated and intelligently curious; a passionate lover of antiquities, both domestic and foreign; a great reader and admirer of fine books, as ready to enjoy a sumptuously illustrated translation of the classics as to wonder at the Great Wall of China in one of Ogilby's encyclopaedic books — indeed, wonderment and amazement at matters unusual or bizarre, especially if they had some grain of truth in them, were the overworked emotions of this age. He was an ardent connoisseur of painting, having seen many of the masterpieces of Europe in his travels, and he held that the next best thing to having a gallery of masterpieces oneself was to possess them in reproduction. He was fascinated by great men, collecting the portraits of the outstanding men of the age in large numbers; the very wealthy, like Clarendon, might make such a collection in oil paintings, but Evelyn was typical of his class in acquiring engravings of the figures who made history. He bought prints of notable events as a record of the remarkable times in which he lived. His collection had, as he frequently observed, the Horatian virtue of delighting and instructing, for he felt that his prints were of great use in the education of a gentleman. Evelyn regarded Hollar as an artist who contributed a great deal to the advancement of knowledge in

his time, a disseminator of intelligence, a man who furthered understanding of the visible world, whilst being a supreme master of one of the fine arts. Thus, writing in praise of him, and after complimenting him on his Arundelian successes, and his etchings after the great masters, he lists his other accomplishments: 'books of Landskips, Townes, Solemnities, Histories, Heads, Beasts, Fouls, Insects, Vessels, and other signal pieces . . . with other innumerable frontispieces, and things by him published and done after the life, and to be (*eo nomine*) more valued and esteemed than where there has been more curiosity about Chimaeras and things which are not in nature; so that of Mr. Hollars works we may justly pronounce, there is not a more useful and instructive collection to be made'.

Eternal Mycenae

(After Pompeius the Younger)

I am great Mycenae. All that I was lies deep in earth,
To those who seek me out inseparable from the stones.
Yet mark what grandeur stays with me; if you would
 judge my worth
Search for the shattered walls of Troy and dig for
 Priam's bones.
I ravaged Troy; Time's puny threats cannot dispel this
 glory,
Though dead, I stride eternally alive through Homer's
 story.

J. E. MORPURGO