

# St Joseph's

## The History



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# The Beginnings

## Christian Roots in the North

**L**ancaster has long been associated with the Catholic history of this nation largely due to the part it played during the times of persecution following the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century; but the Christian roots of this northern part of Lancashire are particularly ancient.

It is thought that the Lune Valley had been granted to St Wilfrid of Ripon towards the end of the Seventh Century and that in the following century minster sites were established at Hornby, Gressingham, Halton, Lancaster and Heysham.

Indeed the ruins of St Patrick's Chapel in Heysham are remnants of the oldest surviving Christian site in the district with Anglo-Saxon details dating from around this time. The oldest church in the city of Lancaster is the Priory of St Mary located next to Lancaster Castle. Although largely built in the Fifteenth Century this former Benedictine Priory was originally established by the Norman nobleman and first Lord of Lancaster, Roger de Poitou in the late Eleventh Century. The earliest known Christian artefact to be found at the site is a stone cross dating from the Seventh Century known as 'Cynibald's Cross', now on display in the British Museum in London. Roger de Poitou granted possession of the Priory to the Abbey of St Martin of Sees in Normandy, France in 1094 but it was subsequently handed over to the Bridgettine Convent of Syon in Middlesex in 1428 following a law suppressing

foreign ownership of religious houses in England. It was at this time that the Priory became the parish church of Lancaster. The Priory, together with other local abbeys including the Premonstratensian Priory of Hornby, the Abbey and Hospital of St Mary on the Marsh at Cockersand, Beaumont Grange (in the present parish of St Joseph's) and Wyresdale Abbey, both run by the Cistercian monks of Furness Abbey, and the Greyfriars (Franciscan) and Blackfriars (Dominican) houses were all suppressed as Religious houses in 1539 following King Henry VIII's break with Rome.

A beautiful processional cross from the Cockersand Abbey was smuggled from the monastery before its dissolution and was kept safe and now remains in the possession of the Catholic Church in Thurnham.

Whilst all the other Religious Houses closed, the priory church then went on to serve as the principal place of Anglican worship in Lancaster, which it remains today.



Cynibald's Cross

Cynibald's Cross

St Patrick's Chapel





# Catholic Resistance

## The Pilgrimage of Grace



**In the north of England in 1536–37 a revolt known as the ‘Pilgrimage of Grace’ was established in opposition to the suppression and dissolution of the monasteries by King Henry VIII.**

A force of around six thousand adherents gathered in Lancaster in 1536 where a large number of the townspeople in support of the uprising took the Pilgrim oath. Although much of the local lands were under the influence of this resistant assembly the Pilgrimage collapsed the following year and many of its leaders and members were rounded up and executed. Here in Lancaster, John Paslew, the last Abbot of Whalley, and, William Trafford, the last Abbot of Sawley, and several monks from the Augustinian Monastery at Cartmel, were tried and executed for their parts in the Pilgrimage.

Following the turmoil of the Reformation Lancashire remained the heartland of Catholic resistance in England due to the determination of the faithful as well as the remote nature of much of the lands in the county. The Penal Laws introduced in the later half of the Sixteenth and early Seventeenth Centuries restricted all form of practice of the Catholic faith even to the point of torture and execution.

Lancaster, as the seat of local judicial power through the Assize Court, became a centre for the enforcement of strict legal penalties on the faithful. From 1584 to 1646 there were 11 priests and 4 laymen imprisoned and executed at Lancaster for adhering to the Catholic faith; they became known as the Lancaster Martyrs. The site of execution was close to the present day Williamson Park at what is known locally as ‘Gallows Hill’.



Williamson Park

Gallows Hill

The Priory

The Priory



# The Lancaster Martyrs

**Bl. James Bell**  
(Marian Priest)  
10th April 1584

**Bl. John Finch**  
(Yeoman Farmer)  
10th April 1584

**Bl. Robert Nutter**  
(Dominican)  
26th July 1600

**Bl. Edward Thwing**  
(Seminary Priest)  
26th July 1600

**Bl. Thurstan Hunt**  
(Seminary Priest)  
3rd April 1601

**Bl. Robert Middleton**  
(Seminary Priest)  
3rd April 1601

**Ven. Lawrence Baily**  
(Yeoman)  
16th September 1604

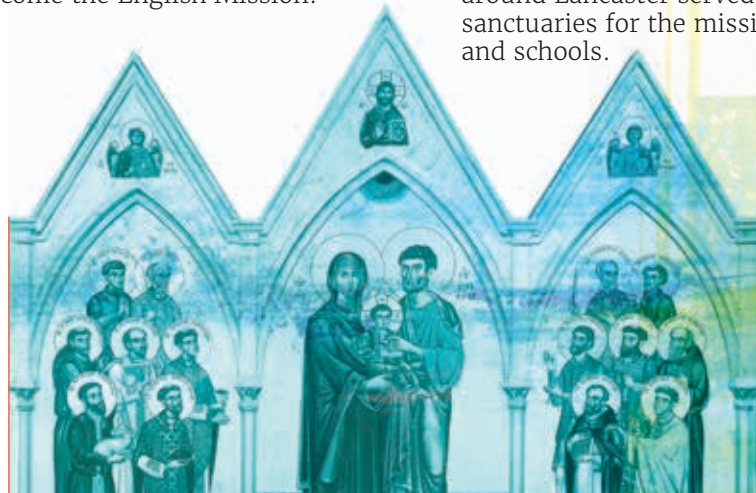
**Bl. John Thules**  
(Seminary Priest)  
18th March 1616

**The criminalisation of the practice of the Catholic faith and the refusal to attend Church of England services (known as Recusancy), led to the emergence of a resistant 'Recusant' Catholic community. Courageous missionary priests including those martyred here in Lancaster ministered to this community in an attempt to maintain and re-establish the Catholic faith through what became known as the 'Counter Reformation'.**

A key figure in this movement was Cardinal William Allen who was born in 1532 at Rossall Hall near what is today Fleetwood. Allen had been a Professor at Oxford and had served in the North West as an un-ordained missionary. He was forced to retreat to the Low Countries in 1565 for fear of capture and, while on the continent, he was ordained a priest. The recent Council of Trent had called for the establishing of seminaries and in 1568 Allen established the first seminary at Douai with the intention of training priests for what had become the English Mission.

He subsequently went on to establish the English colleges in Rome and Rheims as well as helping to establish that at Valladolid; he was made a Cardinal in 1587. Priests who were ordained in this country before or during the reign of the Catholic Queen Mary between 1553-58 were known as 'Marian Priests' whereas those ordained in the English seminaries on the continent at Douai, Rheims, Rome, Seville, and Valladolid were known as 'Seminary Priests' unless they trained under the various Religious Orders. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth there were around 650 priests ministering in England; of these 377 were imprisoned and 133 were executed.

The ability of Lancashire to remain a county of strong Catholic resistance was helped in a large part through a number of local noble families who remained steadfast to the faith, providing shelter for the riding priests and secret chapels in their homes where Mass could be celebrated. Numerous houses in and around Lancaster served as such sanctuaries for the missionary priests and schools.



**Bl. Roger Wrenno**  
(Weaver)  
18th March 1616

**St Edmund  
Arrowsmith**  
(Jesuit)  
28th August 1628

**Bl. Richard Hayhurst**  
(Farmer)  
29th August 1628

**St. Ambrose Barlow**  
(Benedictine)  
10th September 1641

**Bl. Edward Bamber**  
(Seminary Priest)  
7th August 1646

**Bl. John Woodcock**  
(Franciscan Order  
of Friars Minor)  
7th August 1646

**Bl. Thomas  
Whitaker**  
(Seminary Priest)  
7th August 1646

These Mass centres included:

**Aldcliffe Hall & Thurnham  
Hall, owned by the Dalton  
family.**

**Dolphinlea at Bulk, home  
of the Copeland and  
Balls families.**

**Quernmore Park, owned by  
the Prestons of Furness and  
the Clifford family.**

**Scale Hall, Skerton owned  
by the Singleton and  
Bradshaw families.**

**Halton Hall, owned by the  
Carus family.**

**Leighton Hall, owned by  
the Middleton and then  
the Hodgson families.**

**Heaton Hall, owned by  
the Brockhole family of  
Claughton Hall.**

**Robert Hall, owned by  
the Cantsfield family.**

The secret provision of the sacraments was reinforced by the development of a devotional life which bound everyday life to the faith. Books of prayers, and devotional and apologetic tracts were circulated by a clandestine book trade, and the faithful continued to make undercover pilgrimages to the shrines and holywells which arrayed Lancashire's land, notably St Patrick's Well in Heysham (whose waters were famed for treating sore eyes), St Nicholas's Well at Bolton-le-Sands (where those crossing the tidal flats of Morecambe Bay or setting out for sea would ask for this patron's intercession), St Wilfrid's Well at Halton and the shrine of Our Lady of Fernyhalgh (Ladyewell) on the outskirts of Preston. The feasts and fasts were kept, and the Church's seasons and hours were marked.

The Jesuit poet and writer, Fr Robert Southwell, encouraged the faithful to dedicate each room in their house to a different saint, and to earth the people's faith in everyday life. The wood of a table for example could be a reminder of the wood of the cross, and handling a rope, a nail, a hammer, were reminders of Christ's passion. In a world where possession of a set of rosary beads or a sacred medal could invite suspicion and denunciation, the Catholics of Recusant England dug deep to sustain the practice of the faith.



# Re-emergence of Catholicism

**The practice of the faith begins to become less dangerous**

**The earliest known reference to a public Mass being held in Lancaster after the Reformation was in 1687 when Mass was held in a school house; a Catholic judge, Richard Allibone, who sat at the Assizes that year was in attendance. Although the legal restrictions on Catholics remained in place the practice of the faith was beginning to become less dangerous and to some extent more common.**

Fr Rigby



Around 1712 Fr. William Winckley was known to have heard confessions in Lancaster but the first priest understood to have resided in the town was Fr. Nicholas Skelton who had begun to dwell at a house at St Leonardgate by 1740. Fr. Skelton was imprisoned for a brief period following the Jacobite Rising of 1745 but later continued his ministry until his death in 1766. Fr. James Tyrer took on responsibility for the Mission that same year and celebrated Mass in a recently established chapel on Mason Street behind the priest's house at St Leonardgate. Due to the legal restrictions still in place on Catholic places of worship, the location of the chapel had to be outside the town boundary and for this reason the Mason Street site was chosen. Upon Fr. Tyrer's death in 1784 Rev. Dr. John Rigby was appointed to the Mission; in that same year the number of Catholics worshipping at the chapel was recorded as 400.

The last serious Catholic claim to the English throne was finally extinguished with the defeat of the

Jacobites at the Battle of Culloden in 1746 and so the threat to the established Church and the Crown by the Catholic community was diminished considerably. As a result legal restrictions on Catholics began to be lifted. One of the first significant indications of a change in the political climate occurred in 1772 when a Catholic woman, Ann Fenwick of Hornby, won a case before the House of Lords to safeguard her inheritance. The injustice that this case laid out led to the Catholic Relief Acts of 1778 (which permitted Catholics to own land) and 1791 (permitting Catholic clergy to exercise their ministry and Catholic places of worship to be built, though without steeples and bells).

Following these hard won freedoms, Fr. Rigby, through the financial assistance of Richard Gillow (Grandson of Robert Gillow I) in 1797, purchased a plot of land in Dalton Square for the purposes of a new chapel and priest's house.

The chapel was opened on 1 March 1799. Resembling a typical Georgian townhouse the building was without external religious decoration due to the legal restrictions; an adjoining school was opened in 1805. Fr. Rigby died in 1818 and was buried beneath the altar of the chapel; his body was interred in St Peter's cemetery in 1860. Dalton Square takes its name from the Dalton family of Thurnham Hall, the principal Catholic family around Lancaster at that time; they were responsible for the development of the square in 1784.



Dalton Square

Perceptions of the Catholic Community began to change. The violent effects of the French Revolution and the stories of immigrants transformed people's attitudes towards the Church, and Parliament began to advocate freedom of religion and freedom of conscience. It was time to revise the country's understanding of its past.

Writing from his church at Hornby, Fr John Lingard's History of England presented a refreshing view of English Catholicism and challenged the anti-Catholic narrative that was prevalent at the time. In 1829 the Act of Catholic Emancipation was passed, lifting the final legal restrictions on the free practising of the Catholic Faith. Besides the thawing of attitudes towards the past, religious liberty was in part a response too of the increasing number of Catholic migrants settling throughout the country at a time of rapid industrialisation. The catastrophic effects of the Great Famine in Ireland forced thousands of Irish to migrate to Great Britain and this resulted in a dramatic increase in the size of Catholic communities throughout the country but especially in the North West. As a result of these changing circumstances Pope Pius IX restored the Catholic Hierarchy of Bishops and Dioceses in England and Wales in 1850.

In 1847 Fr. Richard Brown, the Dean of the Dalton Square chapel, purchased a large plot of land at Greenfield, east of the city centre. A cemetery dedicated to St Peter was opened in 1849-50, followed by a school in 1851, and then a convent for the Sisters of Mercy, dedicated to St Walburga in 1853. Fundraising continued for the building of a substantial new church on the site to replace the Dalton Square chapel that was now inadequate for the growing congregation. In 1856 £2,000 was donated to the appeal through the will of Mr Thomas Coulston and the following year the foundation stone of the new church was laid. The construction took two years and the church of St Peter was opened on 4 October 1859; the architect was Edward Paley of the Lancaster firm, Paley and Austin. The church was raised to a Cathedral in 1924 when the Diocese of Lancaster was created out of the Archdiocese of Liverpool and the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.

Between 1861 and 1911 the population of Lancaster doubled in size. To meet the need of this fast-growing number of the faithful, many new churches were constructed. In Lancaster the Catholic community was served primarily by St Peter's but as the town and its surrounding settlements grew further churches began to be established in some cases through the benevolence of wealthy Catholic families. One such area where a new church was constructed was Skerton.

The Great Famine



Margaret Coulston,  
her journal and the  
Memorial Cross that  
marks her grave  
outside the entrance  
to the church of  
St Joseph



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# The Building of St Joseph's

**The church of St Joseph was formally opened on 7 July 1901**

**I**n 1899 the Poor Sisters of Nazareth opened a convent in Lancaster; a local woman, Miss Margaret Coulston provided her former home in Dalton Square as the house in which the convent could be established.

The Coulstons were a local Catholic family who had made their money in leather goods manufacturing in the town and latterly in astute investments in the new railways. In turn the family gave much of their wealth to the Church. One of Miss Coulston's brothers, John, had been a Mission priest in Wilmslow. The year the Poor Sisters of Nazareth arrived, Miss Coulston moved into a large house that she had had constructed in Skerton. The house was located beside a Catholic mission chapel with its own school that Miss Coulston had already paid for and which had opened in 1896. The intention was that a new fine church be constructed for the local Catholic community in Skerton and that after her death Miss Coulston's house would serve as the presbytery. The Poor Sisters of Nazareth only remained at Dalton Square for three years as in 1902 the council required the site for the construction of the new town hall. Miss Coulston was able to negotiate the acquisition of a plot of land on Ashton Road for the construction of Nazareth House, which was opened in 1902.

<sup>40</sup> See correspondence between Pugin and Fr O'Bryen, first rector of St Joseph's mission, in the Lancashire Archives (Preston), RCLV/ACC 12549.

On 6 May 1900 the Rt. Rev. Dr. Whiteside, Bishop of Liverpool and himself a Lancaster man, laid the foundation stone for the new church at Skerton; construction was rapid and the building was completed in little over one year.

Wanting the church to be a fine edifice the architect chosen for the design was Peter Paul Pugin <sup>40</sup>, the youngest son of the illustrious Augustus Pugin, architect of some of the finest Catholic churches of the Nineteenth Century, and much of the interior furnishings were created by the Gillow family.

For a fuller treatment of the Coulston Family, the Pugin connection, and the Gillow family, please see Appendix 1.

The church of St Joseph was formally opened on 7 July 1901. Miss Coulston financed the entire building costs. With there being no outstanding debt the church had the unusual distinction of being consecrated four days before the opening on 3 July 1901.

Miss Coulston died in 1909 and was buried outside the entrance to the church where a memorial cross marks her grave.



Miss Coulston  
Miss Coulston with  
Mrs Smith and Fr Murphy

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**Appendix 1**  
**Biographies**





# Gillows of Lancaster

**The great legacy  
of Gillows  
craftsmanship  
lives on today**

**Robert Gillow I (c.1703–72) was the son of Richard (1660–1717), a yeoman from Great Singleton (near Kirkham on the Fylde) and his wife, Alice Swarbrick. As devout Roman Catholics the family included a number of priests and the family had suffered considerable hardship during Penal Times as a result of their faith.**

In January 1717 Richard was convicted of harbouring a priest, his brother-in-law, Fr. Swarbrick. Fr. Swarbrick was incarcerated at Lancaster Castle; he died later that same year, his death most certainly hastened by the squalid conditions in the jail. He is buried at Kirkham church and his chalice is in the possession of the Ss Thomas & Elizabeth Church in Thurnham.

In 1720–21 Robert, through the efforts of his mother, was apprenticed to a Catholic joiner based in Lancaster called John Robinson. Following his apprenticeship Robert became a freeman of Lancaster in 1728 and established his own company in the town, working as a joiner, builder, furniture maker, house carpenter, and overseas merchant. With the abolition of tax on imported hardwoods in 1720–21 there was a great increase in the availability of hardwoods. This meant that woodworkers based in the port towns of the Western seaboard including Lancaster were the first to see these exotic materials. Seizing

this opportunity Robert was one of the first woodworkers to use these unusual new woods; he developed links with foreign ports to help secure a steady and diverse supply. Through his connections to the Satterthwaite family, who sailed ships to the West Indies, Robert was able to source and use mahogany; he is believed to be one of the first businessmen to import mahogany into Britain. By the mid-Eighteenth Century Robert had opened offices in London from where he could keep abreast of the changing fashions in furniture and thus produce work that was distinctive and en vogue. Two of Robert I's sons would go on to continue the family business, Richard I (1733–1811) who trained under the London architect William Jones and became key in the further development of the company, and Robert II (1747–95).

It was Richard I who financed the building of the Dalton Square chapel in Lancaster in 1797–99. The family mausoleum can be visited in the grounds of the Church in Thurnham.

While Gillows never quite achieved the same status as the big three cabinetmakers of the Eighteenth Century (Chippendale, Sheraton, and Hepplewhite), the company, nevertheless, came to be regarded as one that produced furniture of the highest quality and the business outlasted all its contemporaries. The great legacy of Gillows craftsmanship lives on today in the fine woodwork seen here in St Joseph's.

GILLOWS

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Appendix 1  
Biographies





# Margaret Coulston (1823-1909)

**Regarded as a kindly woman with an astute mind when it came to business matters**

**Miss Margaret Coulston was born in Lancaster on 16 September 1823 to John and Margaret Coulston. The Coulstons were a historic Catholic family who resided in the district for many generations.**

Known to have been recusants, who provided support to the priests operating in the locality during the Penal Times, one John Coulston was registered in the recusant rolls of 1717, which recorded the fines and punishments for those who refused to conform to the Anglican doctrine. Another relative, Thomas Coulston, established the family chantry chapel at the site of St Peter's Cathedral and bequeathed some £2,000 towards the building of St Peter's Church. In 1882-84 a Miss Anne Coulston, likely a cousin of Margaret, co-founded the beautiful church of St Mary of the Angels at Bolton-le-Sands approximately four miles north of Lancaster, designed by Simpson of Bradford. Anne also paid for the land, school and presbytery.

The family of Miss Coulston's father, John, had lived in Roeburndale amongst the hills of the Forest of Bowland, around Clougha Pike, until 1790 when they moved to Lancaster. John, and two of his brothers, Thomas and Gabriel, established themselves in the leather trade as curriers and shoemakers with premises on Market Street and Great John Street. With the growth of Lancaster the businesses were highly successful and the family became very wealthy, acquiring lands around Lancaster and investing in banking

and railway shares. Margaret's cousin, another John, was manager of Lancaster Banking Company (1842-66) in the present NatWest Bank, and treasurer of the Lancaster & Preston Junction Railway Company. Indeed, Gabriel in turn became a Director of this same Company. Margaret was the third of eight siblings: Alice, Joseph and Jane died in their younger years; Henry died serving in the Austrian army; Elizabeth never married; Mary became a Carmelite nun at Darlington; and John served as a mission priest in Wilmslow in Cheshire. Since Margaret outlived all her brothers and sisters, the family's wealth fell to her. Never marrying herself, Margaret was tremendously generous especially towards the Church, donating most of her estate to the support of faithful. Not only did she finance the construction of the mission school and church here at Skerton but she also gave her previous home in Dalton Square to the Sisters of Nazareth before helping them to establish Nazareth House on Ashton Road. Regarded as a kindly woman with an astute mind when it came to business matters, she was highly regarded by many who recognised the key part she and her family played in the Catholic development of the district in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Miss Coulston died on 13 April 1909 and was buried in the grounds of St Joseph's in front of the entrance. A dignified stone cross marks her grave and the inscription is a reminder to every generation that this church stands thanks to her kindness.



Coulston

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## Appendix 1 Biographies



**P**eter Paul Pugin was born in 1851 and was the youngest son of Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812-52) and his third wife Jane Knill (1825-1909).

Augustus was one of the most important and influential British architects of the Nineteenth Century; he was a leading figure of the Gothic Revival and designed some of the most beautiful churches in the country as well as the interior and much of the detailing of the Houses of Parliament. Peter Paul was only one year old when his father died suddenly in 1852, aged just 40; he had two half brothers, Edward (1834-75) and Cuthbert (1840-1928) who would also follow their father into architecture. At the time of their father's death Edward had already begun to work with his father and when Augustus died he continued the architectural practice despite being only 18. In 1860 Edward established the South East Furniture Company in Ramsgate and it was principally engaged in producing furnishings he had designed. The main responsibility of the company was given to Cuthbert. Later in the 1860s Edward named the architectural firm Pugin and Pugin and kept offices in London and Liverpool; it was around this time that Peter Paul began to work alongside Edward, becoming involved in the construction of numerous Catholic churches including those at Warrington, Cleator, and Workington.



# Peter Paul Pugin (1851-1904)

**A talented designer and architect, Peter Paul was also an accomplished watercolourist and exhibited at the Royal Academy**



A talented designer and architect, Peter Paul was also an accomplished watercolourist and exhibited at the Royal Academy.

Following the sudden death of Edward in 1875 Peter Paul took over the main responsibility for the architectural practice with Cuthbert focussing on the furnishings work. Almost exclusively a Catholic church architect Peter Paul undertook commissions throughout the UK but especially in Scotland. There, his most significant patron was Rev Charles Eyre, the Archbishop of Glasgow, who had been the parish priest of St Mary's church in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, a church designed by Augustus Pugin.

Peter Paul would now become in effect the official architect to the newly established Archdiocese of Glasgow. During his career Peter Paul developed his own particular manner of the curvilinear Gothic style; this is defined by the type shape of the tracery (stone window frame decoration) in his churches, which is typically flamboyant with 'flame-like' curves. Typically his churches are constructed as a single vessel with a large apsed (rounded or angled) sanctuary under the same roofline as the nave (main body of the church) although neither of these are employed at St Joseph's.

One feature that is typical of his work is the incorporation of a large high altar also known as a Benediction altar. These comprise a prominent

tabernacle and a throne or ledge on which a monstrance can be placed for Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament; they are a unique feature of Catholic churches of this period and were employed in almost all of the Catholic churches designed by Edward, Peter Paul and Cuthbert. Peter Paul's work is seen as being a development of Edward's style and has been defined as 'Second Generation Catholic High Victorianism'. Peter Paul had particular artists and craftsmen that he preferred to work with on his churches including R. L. Boulton & Son of Cheltenham (later Wall of Cheltenham) for sculpture; Hardman of Birmingham for stained glass, metalwork and decoration; and, Elphege Pippet (who for a time worked for Hardman) for decorative wall painting and stencilling.

Of the three Pugin brothers Peter Paul was the only one to marry; he and his wife Agnes Bird had five children, though none followed their father into the practice. Peter Paul died in Bournemouth in 1904 in his fifty-third year; he was buried in the family vault at the Church of St Augustine in Ramsgate, which his father had designed.