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Robert Hooke and An Attempt to Prove the Motion of the Earth from Observations

After the Great London Fire of 1666, Robert Hooke was appointed to work in the office of the City Surveyor of London. With that appointment, a scientist best known as the Curator of Experiments for the Royal Society whose research encompassed both the microscopic (Micrographia) and the astronomical, embarked on a second career as an architect and surveyor. For the next several decades the massive effort to reconstruct London was lead by Hooke and his long-time friend, fellow scientist and co-founder of the Royal Society, Christopher Wren.

Hooke was involved extensively in all aspects of the rebuilding of London, both the mundane (widening streets and establishing property boundaries) and the creative (designing churches and civic buildings). One of Hooke's few surviving buildings is the column that is the Monument to the Great Fire. This ingenious building is an excellent example of the intersection between Hooke's architectural and scientific work.

At the time of the Monument to the Great Fire's design, Hooke was conducting experiments on both the motion of the earth which he describes in An Attempt to Prove the Motion of the Earth from Observations. Hooke was particularly interested in using the measurement of the parallax to prove that earth revolved around the sun and the Monument was designed to be a zenith telescope to further that research. This talk will discuss Hooke's paper, the history of attempts to measure the parallax and how this scientific work influenced the design and construction of the Monument.