



THE
GEORGIAN
GROUP

Howard Colvin, 'A Roman Mausoleum in Gloucestershire: The Guise Monument at Elmore', *The Georgian Group Journal*, Vol. I, 1991, pp. 41-44

A ROMAN MAUSOLEUM IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE: THE GUISE MONUMENT AT ELMORE

Howard Colvin

In both France and England one of the characteristic features of neo-Classical taste was a fascination with funerary architecture: one need only mention the names of Boullée and Soane to make the point.¹ Nor is it difficult to see why funerary buildings made so strong an appeal to architects imbued with neo-Classical ideals. For the tomb was one of the most authentically Antique of building types, one moreover in whose design no compromise with the practical necessities of daily life was required. It needed neither windows nor chimneys, and it invited the 18th-century architect to think in terms of those simple, elementary forms which appealed particularly to a neo-Classical taste in revolt against the arbitrary complexity of the Baroque and the frivolous decor of the Rococo.

Although it was during the latter part of the 18th century that this enthusiasm for funerary architecture was at its height, in Britain at least its beginnings can be traced much further back, to mausolea such as those at Penicuik, Midlothian (1684), the Greyfriars Cemetery, Edinburgh (1691), Castle Howard, Yorkshire (1729-36), Kirkleatham, Yorkshire (1740), and Fawley, Buckinghamshire (1750). Much less well known, but no less interesting to the architectural historian, is the ruined Guise mausoleum at Elmore in Gloucestershire, whose preservation has recently been a matter of concern to the Georgian Group (Fig. 1). It stands in the churchyard to the north-west of the parish church and has been in ruins since the upper part collapsed some time earlier this century. The exact date does not seem to have been recorded, only the memory of a Sunday morning service interrupted by the crash of falling masonry.

What remains is four piers with attached columns which (to those who are familiar with the literature of mausolea) immediately recall an engraving in Roland Fréart's *Parallèle de*



Fig. 1. The remains of the Guise mausoleum in the churchyard at Elmore, Glos., photographed in 1990.

l'Architecture antique et de la moderne, published in Paris in 1650, translated by John Evelyn for his English edition of 1664, and subsequently reissued in 1680, 1707 and 1722 (Fig. 2). The identification of the source is confirmed by reference to the will of Sir John Guise of Elmore, dated November 9, 1732, only a week before his death on November 16 of the same year. 'I order and appoint five hundred Pounds to be payd out in mine interment at Elmore and in a monument there to be erected in memory of me and my family according to a draught called Virgills Tomb in a Booke called the Parallell of Architecture under which myself have made a memorandum'.²

The memory of a dying man was slightly at fault. The engraving to which he referred was not of 'Virgil's Tomb' (a well-known Roman mausoleum on the outskirts of Naples whose

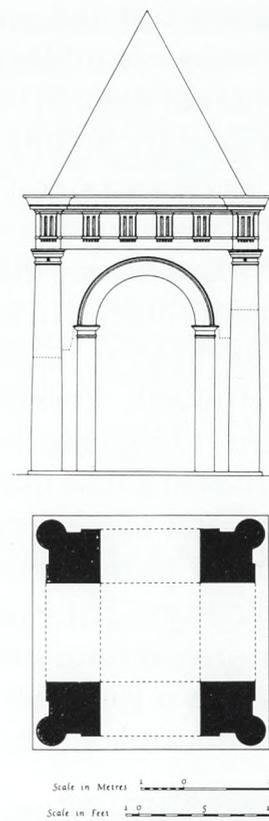


Fig. 2. Engraving of Roman mausoleum at Terracina in Italy, as illustrated in R. Fréart's *Parallel of the Ancient Architecture and the Modern* (1707).

Fig. 3. Plan and Elevation of the Guise mausoleum. The upper part above the broken line is reconstructed on the basis of surviving fragments. The burial vault is beneath the central square.

battered remains look rather like a limekiln), but another at Terracina, 90 km. south of Rome. Of this Fréart's engraving is apparently the only record, as nothing of the sort now remains standing there. Fréart states that his source was a drawing by the 16th-century Italian antiquary Pirro Ligorio (d.1583), but a search through the photocopies in the Warburg Institute's library of the numerous and scattered manuscripts of Ligorio's drawings of Roman antiquities has not revealed where Fréart found it. Roman mausolea were extremely varied and inventive in form, but with its pyramidal top supported by four arches the one at Terracina was of a type well-known in the first and second centuries A.D. Figure 4 shows the remains of another on the Via Appia near Rome photographed by the antiquary J. H. Parker in the 19th century, and further examples from the North African provinces of the Empire are illustrated by Cid Priego and Stucchi.³

Despite its ruined state, it is fortunately possible to reconstruct the Guise mausoleum on paper with a considerable degree of accuracy (Fig. 3). Not only are nearly all the component parts of the collapsed superstructure lying on the ground in the immediate vicinity, but a retrospective Faculty dated October 25, 1733 (authorising work already in progress at that date)

gives the dimensions of the structure as 18ft square and 35ft high.⁴ The first dimension agrees with the existing remains and there is therefore no reason to doubt the second. All the components found correspond closely to Fréart's engraving. The only element of conjecture concerns the exact angle of the pyramid, which cannot, however, deviate from the original by more than a few degrees.

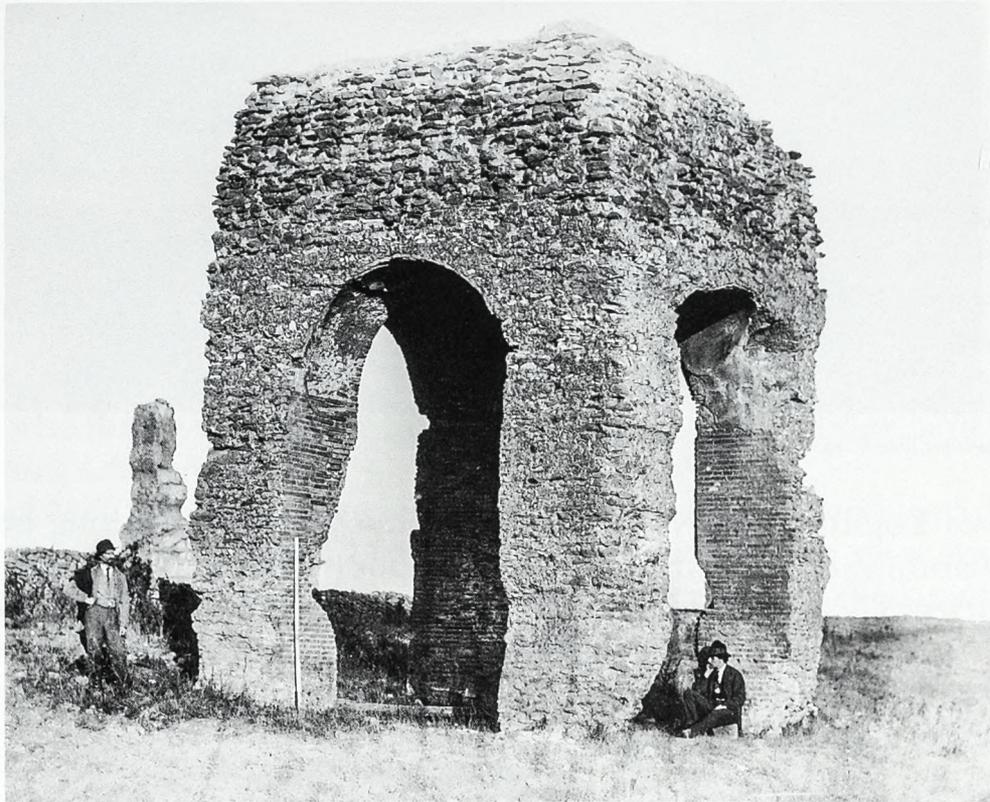


Fig. 4. Roman mausoleum on the Via Appia near Rome, photographed in c.1870 (Department of the History of Art, Oxford, Parker Collection XX, 2342).

One feature both of the original Roman mausoleum and of its English copy to which particular attention should be drawn is the use of Doric columns without bases (Fig. 5). Baseless Doric columns were of course a feature of Ancient Greek architecture which was taken up by the Greek Revivalists of the early 19th century. But baseless Doric columns were also to be found in Roman architecture, notably in the Theatre of Marcellus in Rome itself, and their existence was well known to 17th- and 18th-century authorities on Classical architecture, few of whom, however, actually employed them in their own buildings. When they do occur they are, as Giles Worsley has said, to be regarded as 'one of the most concrete examples of the birth of neo-Classicism'.⁵ The earliest so far identified are all in England. One of them, the Temple of Piety at Studley Royal, Yorkshire, may possibly date from the late 1730s, but most of them (e.g. Mereworth Church, Kent, and Hovingham Hall, Yorkshire) were built in the 1740s and 1750s. Securely dated to 1733, the Guise Mausoleum at Elmore is therefore the earliest building in Western Europe in which the baseless Doric order is at present known to have been used.⁶

In choosing a Roman prototype for his mausoleum Sir John Guise was not unique. At Penicuik the Clerk mausoleum approximates to another variation of the same type in which a pyramid crowns a cubical substructure without arches; in his letters to Lord Carlisle about the design of the Castle Howard mausoleum, Hawksmoor was profuse in his Classical allusions; and at Fawley John Freeman followed an engraving of a Roman mausoleum by another 16th-century Italian antiquary, G. B. Montano (1534-1621).

All these, however, were variations on an Antique theme rather than exact reproductions, as at Elmore, of a specific Roman monument. Was Sir John Guise a man of archaeological interests, should we see him perhaps as another of those English amateurs who, led by Lord



Fig. 5. One of the baseless Doric columns at the angles of the Guise mausoleum.

Burlington, turned English architecture in a neo-Classical direction long before the rest of Europe? There is nothing in his recorded career to support such an idea. Born in 1677, he was a member of an ancient Gloucestershire family whose ownership of Elmore Court went back at least to the 13th century. Like his father and grandfather he sat in the House of Commons as M.P. for the county, and although nominally a Whig, was sufficiently out of sympathy with most of his party to describe them as 'bad subjects and worse rulers'.⁷ His autobiographical 'Memoirs of the Family of Guise' reveal no special interest in art or architecture.⁸ Nevertheless, it is not without significance that in the reign of George II an ordinary English country squire should have chosen as his monument a literal copy of an authentic Roman mausoleum.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to my colleague Nicholas Purcell for help in examining the remains of the mausoleum at Elmore, and to Edward Impey for the reconstruction drawing.

NOTES

1. See Richard A. Etlin, *The Architecture of Death* (M.I.T. Press 1984) and Sir John Summerson, 'Sir John Soane and the furniture of death', *Architectural Review* March 1978.
2. Public Record Office, PROB 11/665, f.109 (PCC 109 OCKHAM).
3. In *Ampurias* 11 (1949) and *Quaderni di Archeologia della Libia* 12 (1987), respectively.
4. Gloucester County Library, Hockaday Abstracts of Diocesan Records.
5. Giles Worsley, 'The baseless Roman Doric column in mid-eighteenth-century English architecture: a study in neo-classicism', *Burlington Magazine* May 1986.
6. It should be noted that an even earlier use of the Tuscan order without bases is to be found on the west side of the stables at Dyrham Park, Gloucestershire, built in 1698 under the direction of William Talman, though not necessarily to his designs. However, here the columns (which are cylindrical, without entasis) have a pronounced *apophyge* or outward curve at the bottom, which differentiates them from the baseless Doric order used at Elmore and elsewhere, where the shafts of the columns rise abruptly from the podium without any transitional feature.
7. *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1715-1754*, ed. R. Sedgwick (1970). pp. 89-90.
8. 'Memoirs of the Family of Guise of Elmore, Gloucestershire', ed. G. Davies, *Camden Society* 3rd. series, 28 (1917). For alterations to Elmore Court possibly attributable to him, see Nicholas Kingsley, *The Country Houses of Gloucestershire* (1989), p.91.