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# SOME DISPUTATIOUS THOUGHTS UPON CHISWICK

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The attentions paid by Lord Burlington to his beloved Chiswick have encouraged much scrutiny and more than just a small spice of speculation.<sup>1</sup> Exactly what James Gibbs did, or Colen Campbell, or indeed William Kent to the interior of the Villa, is unclear. Burlington never committed himself to any statement of intent, probably because as his own architect, with a professional team earning board and wages, much was determined conversationally.

In all modern accounts Gibbs is assumed to have been employed from 1715 to execute under Burlington's direction what in modern parlance has been called the *patte d'oie*. But why 1715? In that year Burlington came of age and returned from the Grand Tour in May, as yet unfitted because of a dearth of observations upon architecture, to be an architect. He is surely unlikely to have launched into laying out new gardens hardly had his bags been unpacked. The summer and autumn are quite likely to have been taken up by estate matters at Chiswick, Burlington House and Londesborough, not to omit the acute problems of his Irish estates. The spring of 1716 is more reasonable as a start, and that in any case when gardens are generally begun.

The employment of Gibbs after the Grand Tour must be seen as a continuation of work upon the interiors and offices of Burlington House. For him to turn up at Chiswick is a demonstration that Burlington was not yet educated to recognize the real import of the first volume of Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus* published in May 1715, and the first book of Leoni's *Palladio*. So Gibbs provided him with a thoroughly Gibbsian temple terminating the central avenue of the *patte d'oie*, or at least, *what became* the *patte d'oie*. As the focal point of a single alley this is no more advanced than Thomas Archer's pavilion at the end of the long canal at Wrest in 1709.

The *patte d'oie* as completed can be seen in the paintings by P. A. Rysbrack of about 1730 and the accurate ground plan by John Rocque published in 1736 (Fig. 1). It has always been assumed that Burlington, aided by Gibbs, laid out the trio of avenues from 1715. Some historians have made extravagant claims as to its scenographic origins, even suggesting that there was a semi-circular "stage" or *frons scenae* and relating this to Burlington's memory of the Teatro Olimpico,<sup>2</sup> despite the fact that during his visit to Vicenza he might as well have been blind for all his observations on the shrine of Palladio. It is even assumed that Burlington acquired stage designs during this visit to Italy, whereas there is not a scrap of evidence that he did. Alas, as Rysbrack and Rocque show there was no semi-circular stage, only a widened space at the intersection of alleys, grotesquely exaggerated in the view by J. F. Rigaud 1733–34.<sup>3</sup> However, this is not to deny Burlington an interest in stage design and gardening in 1716. It is significant that in 1714, whereas J. Macky could describe the "good Taste in Architecture, Painting and Gardening" of the Earl of Ranelagh, of Burlington it was of "Painting and Gardening" only.<sup>4</sup> As for the *patte d'oie* a quite different scenario is possible, if one may make this stagey allusion.

The begging question is: if Burlington intended to make a proper theatric plan with vistas radiating from a semi-circle, as existed at Hampton Court (as neither Lang nor Sicca have observed) why did he not do it properly when the ground was unrestricted except for

the old formal avenue across an empty paddock. Given the opportunity it is inexplicable that Burlington produced an unbalanced and asymmetrical plan, with the right hand alley to the Rustic Arch making a wider arc to the centre one, than that to the left. As a study of the ground today would show a proper stage arrangement was possible, but was not done. It is all *ad hoc*, as is so much at Chiswick for which there never was an overall plan. The culprit that has encouraged much speculation is J. F. Rigaud, whose mischievous, partly fictionalised, views are in a theatric style, in the mode of his equally mischievous views of gardens in France (Fig. 2).

The new scenario, that will no doubt prove just as disputatious as earlier ones, is that Gibbs did not begin work at Chiswick until 1716, and that even perhaps within the year had been replaced by Campbell. Thus the leading of a roof of a temple in 1719 need not involve Dr Sicca<sup>5</sup> in a brave but convoluted attempt to date the Orange Tree Garden temple this early, but rather reflects prolonged building work upon Gibbs's temple, and perhaps some violent objections by Campbell, who would no doubt have wished to see it demolished! Burlington was maturing fast as a student of architecture, and this progress is marked by the watershed of the termination of the left hand alley: the Bagnio, sometimes called the Casina, published by Campbell in the third, 1725, volume of *Vitruvius Britannicus* as "the first Essay of his Lordship's happy Invention Anno 1717". So Campbellian is this, derivative from the Whitehall designs published by Campbell in *Vitruvius Britannicus* 1717, that Campbell's hand must have been guiding Burlington's on the drawing board. It is significant that the earliest surviving architectural drawings by Burlington do not occur until 1720, when he made some clumsy ones for Tottenham Park, to be immediately followed by a group under Henry Flitcroft's efficient tutelage.

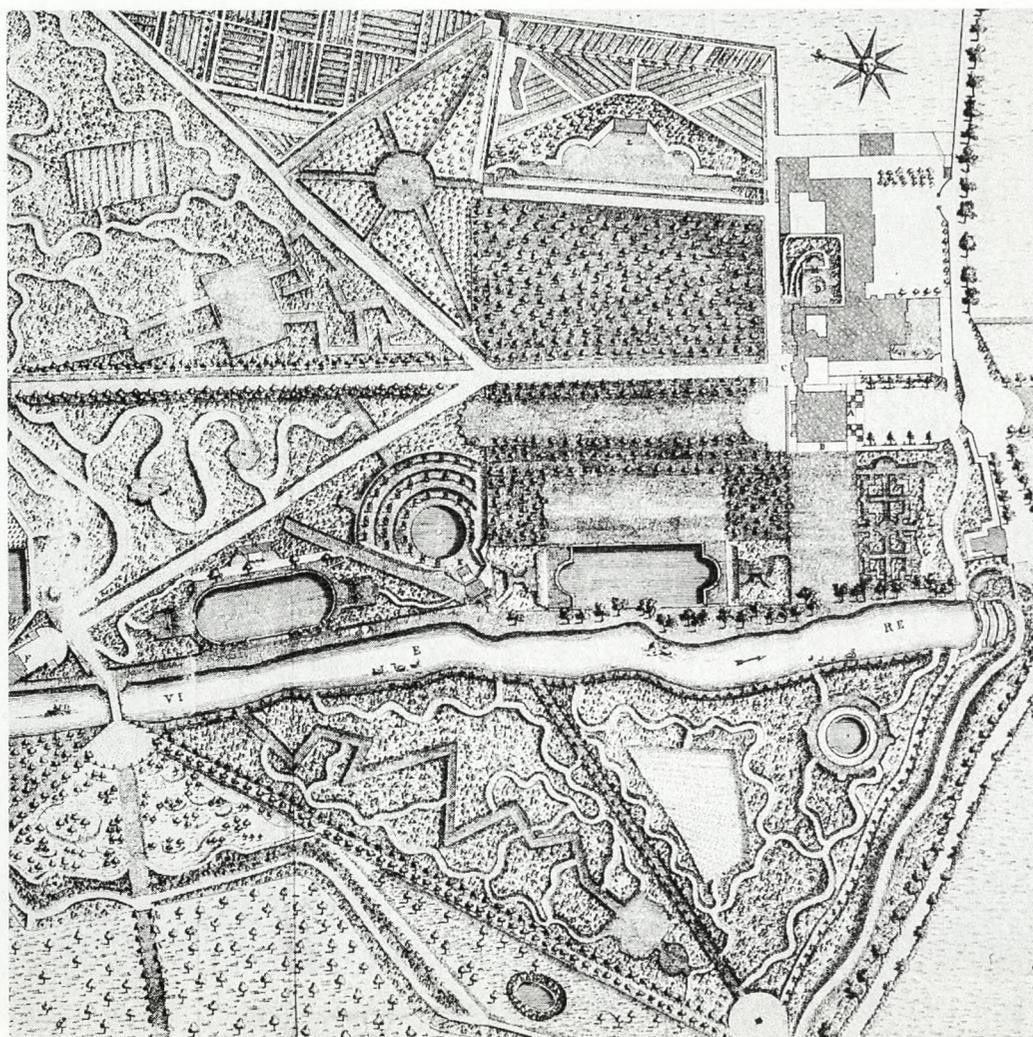


Fig. 1. Badeslade and Rocque, plan of the gardens of Chiswick House, 1736.

It has never been observed that the respective styles of the three terminations represent stages in Burlington's education: Baroque for the Gibbsian temple, Jonesian revival for the Bagnio, and Italianate Serlianism for the Rustic Arch. Indeed, the Arch may be embarrassingly late. The bifurcation of this square of ground relates it rather to the Doric Column and the Deer House which seem to fit in better with the post-Campbell period, for both Arch and Deer House belong to a maturer paper archaeology. If the spectrum of dates of terminations extends from 1716 to about 1720, it is odd that the whole *patte d'oie* should have been conceived in 1716. Nevertheless, the final effect of a visual sequence of temple terminations is still a unique episode of theatre in European garden design. Dr Sicca can take comfort!

Yet despite Campbell's initial success with Burlington, marked by his design for Burlington House in 1717, his tenure of Burlington's affections was likewise short-lived. At Chiswick he seems only to have supervised the building of the Bagnio. However, there is the matter of the Garden Room, sometimes called the Summer Parlour (Fig. 3). It is certainly in elevation Campbellian. Modern historians either ignore it with discomfort, or give it unequivocally to Burlington.<sup>6</sup>

It came into prominence when internally fitted up for Lady Burlington as her garden Room adjacent to her Flower Garden, from about 1737. The presence of the room in plan and elevation on a composite drawing by Burlington,<sup>7</sup> has invited the attribution to him, but in this he was modifying the heavy parapetted roof. Although the general elevational treatment is Campbellian, neither Campbell nor Burlington would have tolerated the perverse curlicues at the base of the window architraves. Yet such curlicues cannot be identified in the work of Gibbs.

Knowing of Campbell's immodesty when it came to the main chance it is surprising that with the capture of Burlington House he should not have tried Burlington on with a design for Chiswick. The evidence that he did has been lying in the Campbell boxes at the RIBA since being ignorantly catalogued by this author in 1973 (Fig. 4).<sup>8</sup>

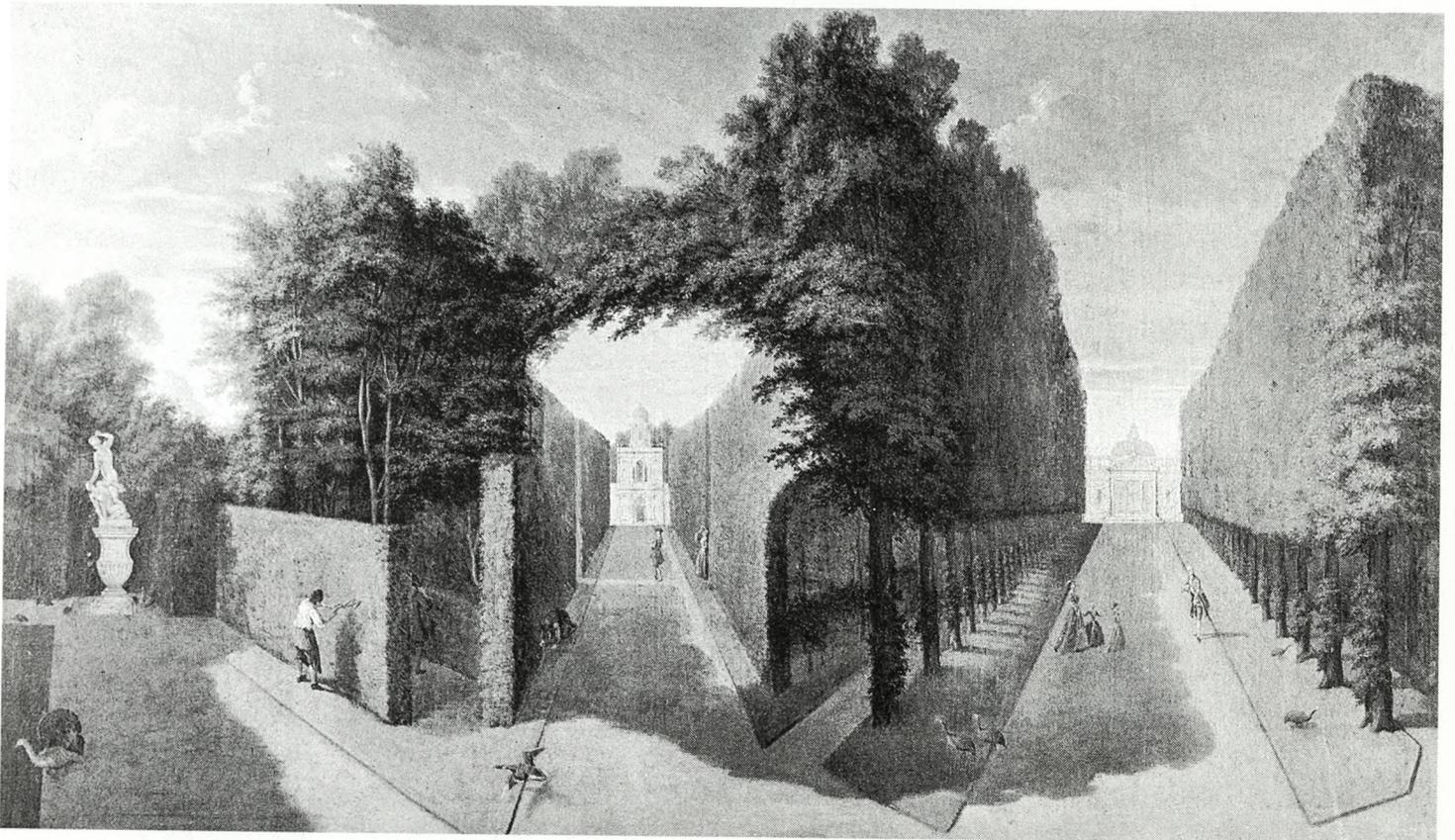


Fig. 2. J. F. Rigaud, composite view of the *patte d'oie*, Chiswick House.

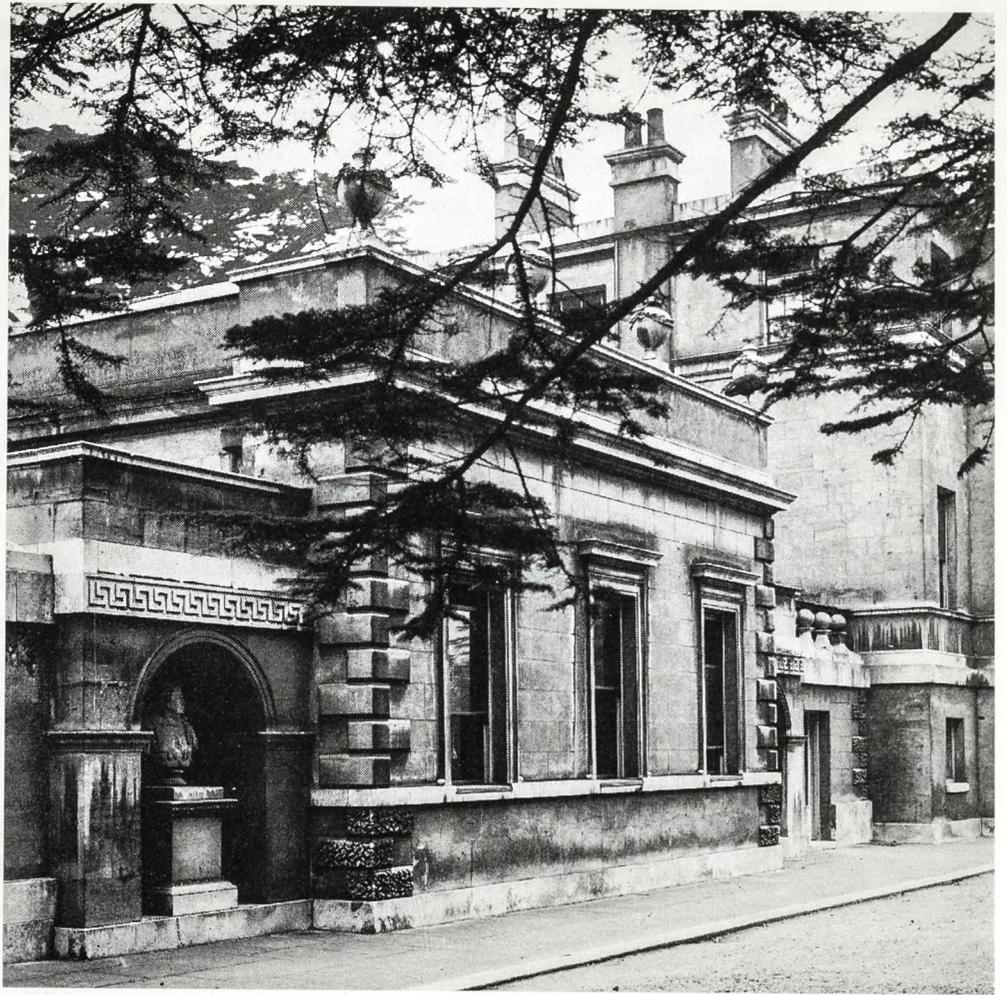
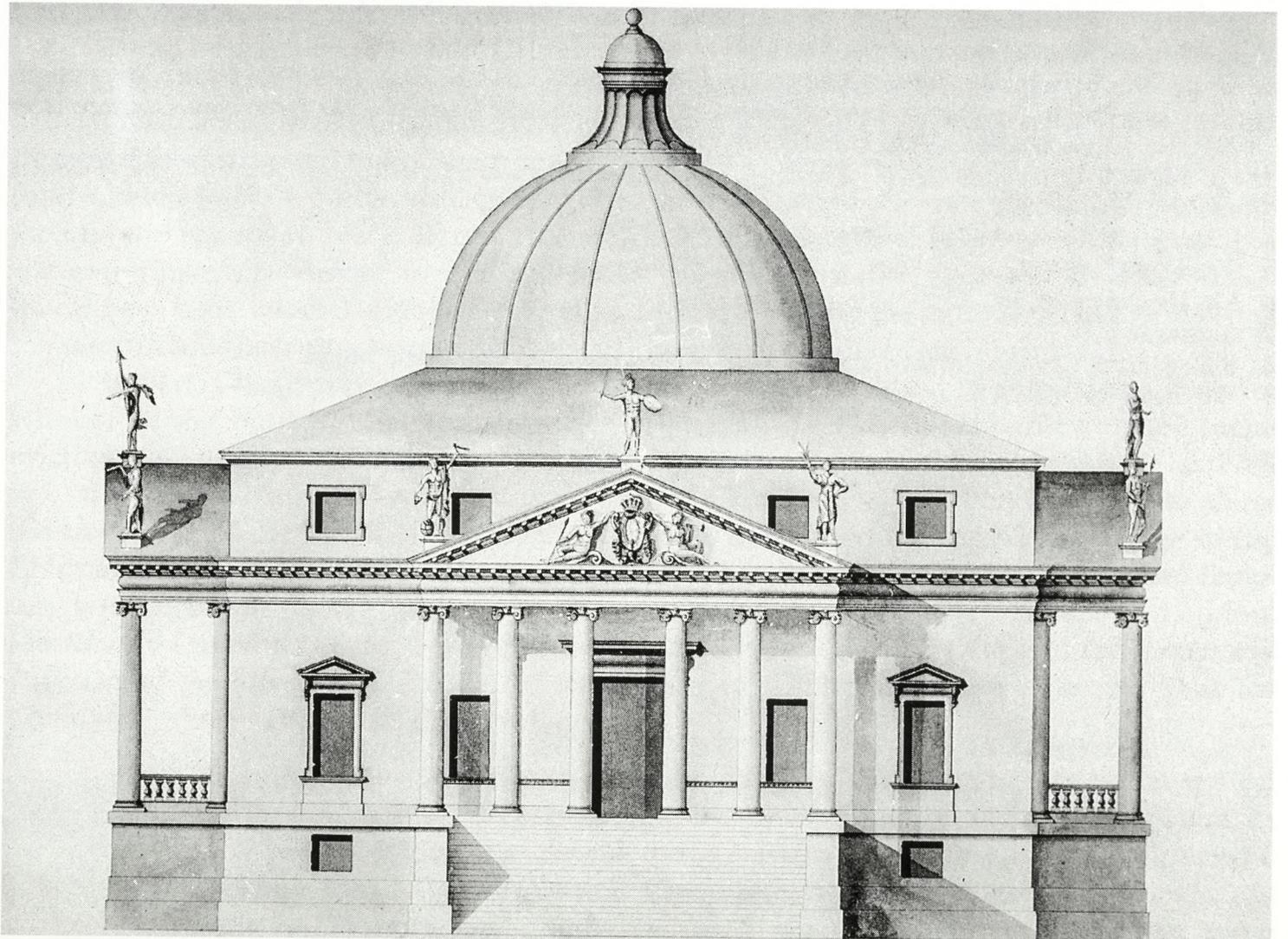


Fig. 3. Colen Campbell, the Garden Room at Chiswick House.

Fig. 4. Colen Campbell, unexecuted design for a villa rotunda, perhaps for Chiswick House (British Architectural Library).



It was Dr Tim Connor who made the verbal observation that he thought the inscription “vicentine feet” on one of the designs for Mereworth to be Burlington’s. He is correct, but this does not portend Burlington’s involvement with that admired rotunda villa.

The scale measures out the 90 Vicentine feet of Palladio’s Rotonda. In the pediment an heraldic cartouche carries a coronet, and another occurs on a similar elevational design.<sup>9</sup> Yet, the Hon. John Fane did not merit a coronet, as he was not created Baron Castletlough until 1733 and did not succeed to the earldom of Westmorland until 1736. Other Mereworth designs carry only a cartouche in the pediment. If we can associate this with Burlington, that association can only have occurred in 1717–1718 when Campbell was high in his lordship’s estimation, and certainly before Burlington’s return from Italy in November 1719. The repercussions of 1719 were great, for this was the real turning point in Burlington’s education, when he examined Palladio’s Rotonda with care, as he did the Villa Malcontenta, and as this author believes, Scamozzi’s Villas Pisan and Molini. From the spring of 1720 Campbell was withdrawing from Burlington House. His rotonda designs had been returned to the portfolio, to be taken out again in 1720 when Fane offered him the opportunity of his career. Burlington’s Villa Rotonda would be a very different affair, as will be related when the Royal Academy of Arts celebrates the tri-centenary of Burlington’s birth in *Lord Burlington: His Building and Gardens at Chiswick* in 1994.

## NOTES

1. In particular Dr Cinzia Sicca in her deeply-explored, but contentious “Lord Burlington at Chiswick: Architecture and Landscape” in *Garden History* 10, no. 1, Spring 1982; and more recently in Richard Hewlings, *Chiswick House and Gardens*, 1989.
2. Sicca, “Burlington and Garden Design” in *Lord Burlington and his circle*, Georgian Group Symposium 1982, quoting in support S. Lang, “Genius of the Landscape Garden”, *The Picturesque Garden and its influence outside the British Isles*, Dumbarton Oaks, 1974.
3. For Rigaud, cf. Jacques Carré, “Through French Eyes: Rigaud’s Drawings of Chiswick”, *Jnl of Garden History* 2, no. 2, 1982.
4. J. Macky, *A Journey through England*, I, 1714, 37.
5. Sicca, 1982, 42–43.
6. e.g. Hewlings, *op. cit.*, 37.
7. Chatsworth.
8. John Harris, *Catalogue of the drawings collection (RIBA)*, Colen Campbell, no. 8.
9. Harris, *op. cit.*, no. 7.