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SHORTER NOTES:

WELFORD PARK – A NEW HOUSE FOR JOHN JACKSON

Timothy Mowl

Welford Park seems to relate to an interesting group of Berkshire houses designed in that emergent, subdued Classicism best described as neither Caroline nor Carolean but as Puritan Minimalist. In 1615 Inigo Jones had expressed a preference for “Greek”, as opposed to “Roman”,¹ Classicism, a response to the neo-Platonist quest for ideal forms, and these were houses stripped down to their ideal basic essentials but still well-proportioned and, therefore, Classical though with no show of the orders. But while the other houses in the Berkshire cluster are astylar, one elevation of Welford is articulated by a giant order of crude brick pilasters and these make it hard to describe the house as “minimalist”.

The other houses: West Woodhay (1635), Aldermaston Court (1636), Coleshill (1650 and 1659), and an undated elevation by Edward Carter for Easthampstead all appear to be influenced by those Late Presentation Designs that Inigo Jones was drawing in the 1630s. Coleshill indeed was designed by Jones himself, with Edmund Steward acting as surveyor in the first building period and Roger Pratt (who never claimed to have designed the house) acting as surveyor to fit up the shell in the late 1650s.² In all these designs the architects appear to have been responding to their patron’s desire for a decent unpretentious Classicism, well-proportioned and economical to build. Only Welford betrays signs of grandiosity and stress.

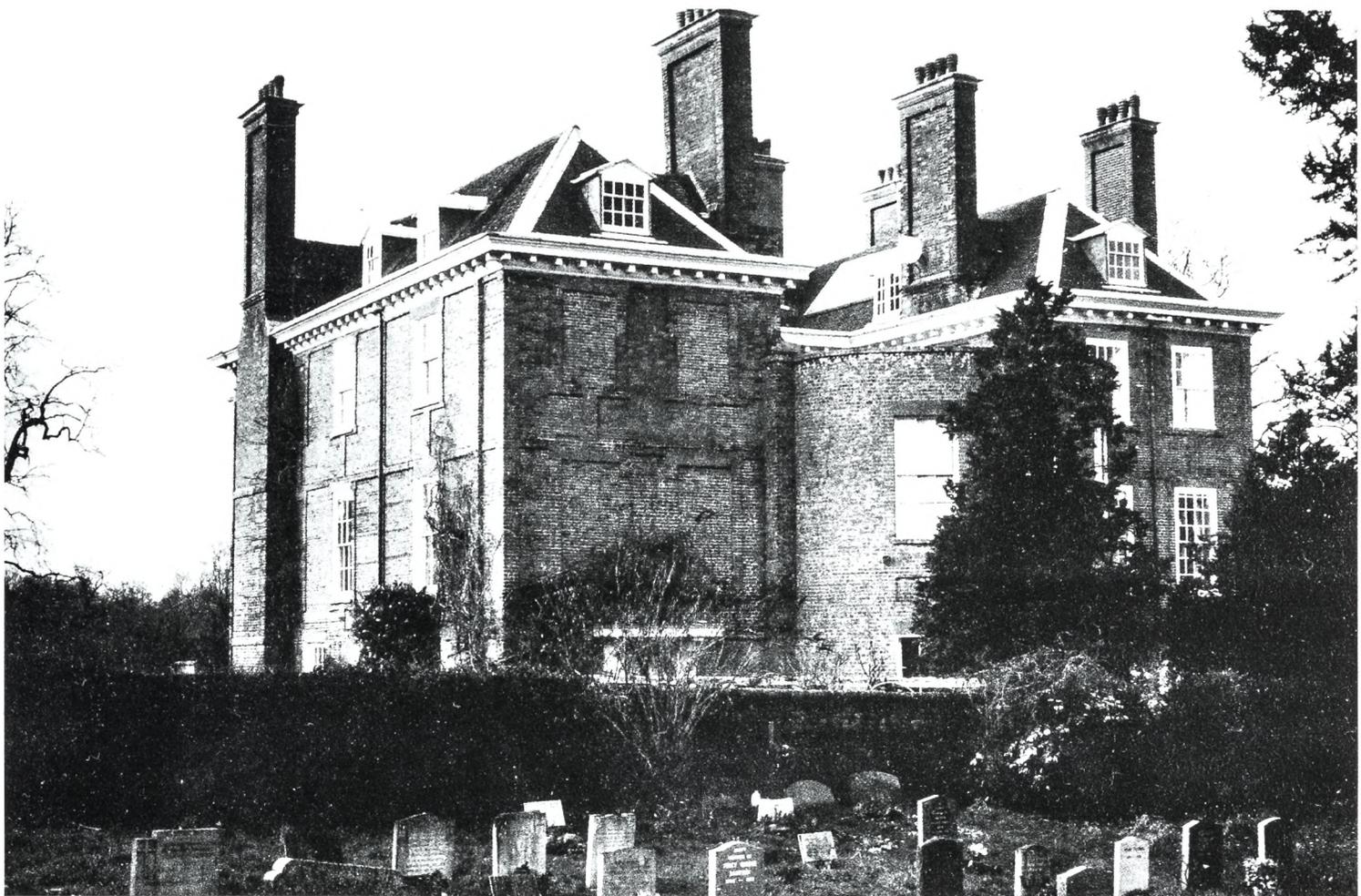


Fig. 1. The east front of Welford Park.

On its east elevation the house is relatively restrained. This was originally the entrance front cramped, perhaps embarrassingly, against the churchyard. In the early 18th century it was blocked by a lower, two-storey addition and the west or garden front turned into the principal approach. Behind its additions this east front still reads like a three-storey version of its near neighbour, West Woodhay, with two-bay wings projecting boldly one on either side of the hidden three-bay centre. Like West Woodhay, Welford has broad window architraves of raised brick; but while West Woodhay limits its raised brickwork to these architraves and to conventional quoins and a plat band, the architect of Welford has indulged in eccentric, vertical, connecting bands between the windows, features that invite the description “Artisan Mannerist”.

All this is curious enough but then on the west front facing the park Welford changes completely to a three-storey cliff of brick with eight gaunt pilasters rising uninterrupted, possibly the earliest example in Britain of a giant order used so confidently on such a large country house facade. The Ionic capitals and the pediments are later additions which suggest that the 18th century found the original treatment of the cornice unacceptably odd.³

With such an ill-assorted pair of elevations no one has come forward to suggest a possible architect, but a contract among the Welford papers in the Berkshire Record Office⁴ makes it certain that the designer was John Jackson (1602-63). Its discovery not only gives a new, though in a sense, predictable twist to what was known of Jackson’s career but a Berkshire link for the Oxford architect that makes other tentative attributions possible.

Jackson was brought to work on the Canterbury Quad at St John’s College in 1634 as “Master Mason” and a skilled stone carver.⁵ The quadrangle, Archbishop Laud’s gift to his old college, is an extraordinary eclectic mixture of Italian Quattrocento arcades, Louis XIII setpiece gateways and Cotswold vernacular ranges. After experiencing that rich confusion John Jackson was paid £272 for designing and building the exotic porch to St Mary’s Church on Oxford High Street in 1637. Part High Baroque and part Perpendicular Gothic, the distinctive features of the porch are its Salamonian columns. These are unlikely to have been references to Bernini’s baldacchino in St Peter’s, though they were in their time ritually tactless. There were 16 bulging barley sugar columns on the Raphael cartoon of Christ at the Gate Beautiful of the Temple, and Sir Francis Crane had brought these cartoons to England in 1623,⁶ producing 12 sets of tapestry from them at his Mortlake factory. Their reference, therefore, should have been safely Jewish rather than dangerously Catholic.

It was, nevertheless, bold of the conservative dons of Brasenose College to choose Jackson in 1655, a Presbyterian time, to design their new chapel and library. These ranges, not complete until 1664, make the eclecticism of Canterbury Quad look positively restrained. For £20 Jackson designed a wood and plaster version of a fan vault suspended from hammerbeams.⁷ On the exterior of the new additions pediments alternate with battlements and Vignolan volutes clasp a Gothic window set above a frieze of swags and cherubs in what may have been a conscious, sophisticated post-Modernism.⁸

And there, until Welford, Jackson’s career seemed to have ended. But in the contract, Richard Jhones of Welford binds his workers on the new house to follow “such drafte modell manner or forme and direction as John Jackson of the Cittie of Oxon gent hath drawn described directed or set forth”.

Richard Jhones was the third son of Abraham Jhones, a City alderman and a lawyer of the Middle Temple. Welford had been bought for the Jhones family in 1617-18 by Sir Francis Jhones, a City merchant, Sheriff in 1610-11 and Lord Mayor in 1620-21. Richard Jhones, Sir Francis’s grandson, had inherited Welford in 1652, Jackson was dead in 1663, so somewhere between those dates the undated contract for the building of a new Welford must have been drawn up, with the likelihood that it was nearer the first date, of a young man coming into his inheritance, than the second.

Richard Jhones's wife Anne was the daughter of the Recorder of London, Robert Mason, so the City connection remained strong in the family. Unexpectedly, in view of its Puritan profile, London's builders had continued during the Commonwealth, the fashion for a giant order of pilasters that had been established during the Caroline 1630s with Covent Garden's Piazza and the celebrated terrace in Great Queen Street. So when Jackson designed his stilt-like giant order on the west front of Welford he was following both his conditioning of the 1630s and the contemporary London examples of Thanet House in Bishopgate, Furnival's Inn on Holborn and that terrace of the 1650s which still survives on Newington Green.

Welford's east front was, from Jackson's hand, less predictable. Apart from its vertical bands of brick it could pass for a Caroline country house of the 1660s like Groombridge Court in Kent. Clearly Jackson and Richard Jhones had been sobered by the recent Berkshire manner of designing. Welford proves that a wild "post-Modernist" of the 1630s could become, by the mid 1650s, an almost conventional practitioner of Puritan Minimalism. This newly proven Berkshire connection does, however, suggest a reconsideration of Aldermaston Court and possibly also an architect for Milton Manor of c.1660.

Those Salamonian columns on the porch of St Mary may, in retrospect, seem innovatory, but a year before 1637, when Jackson built them, Aldermaston Court had been completed with not one but two such Salamonian porches. These were set on a recessed front of what was otherwise as chaste and Puritan Minimalist a house as West Woodhay of 1635.⁹ Aldermaston was built for Sir Humphrey Forster, later to be an ardent Royalist in the Civil War. West Woodhay was built for Sir Benjamin Rudyerd, a poet and silver-tongued orator in Parliament who was to follow, uneasily, his patron the 4th Earl of Pembroke into the Parliamentary camp in the war.¹⁰ This suggests that the minimalism of the two houses was not so much Puritan as neo-Platonic. But it does seem probable that Jackson was given his profitable High Church commission on St Mary's porch on the strength of his work for a Cavalier squire at Aldermaston.

Another interesting connection to note is that Sir Humphrey Forster's strong-minded daughter Margaret married the owner of Coleshill, Sir George Pratt, a gentle old man, just before the intensely sophisticated new Coleshill was designed by Inigo Jones. Lady Margaret Pratt, the Royalist, long outlived her old husband, a supporter of Parliament, and her connections go some way to explain Inigo Jones's involvement with the house of a Parliamentarian squire.¹¹ Though again the Pratts were, like the Jhones family, city merchants in quest of rural roots.

Somewhere between 1659 and 1662 another Berkshire gentry house, Milton Manor, was built by an unknown architect.¹² Milton has a giant order of six roughly executed brick pilasters, Ionic on a three-storey elevation. The links with Welford are obvious but no documentary proof has been found to indicate that Milton was John Jackson's last work. What these Berkshire houses do express so exactly is that debate over the propriety of a display of the orders that Sir Henry Wotton had initiated in his *Elements of Architecture* of 1624, when he wrote:

I need now say no more concerning Columnes & their Adiuncts, about which Architects make such a noyse in their Bookes, as if the very tearmes of Architraves, and Fries and Cornices, and the like, were enough to graduate a Master of this Art.¹³

That was a shaft aimed at the heart of the Classical Mannerists. Inigo Jones responded readily to the fastidious attack; John Jackson, on the evidence of Welford, only reluctantly and in part, with a house caught on the Artisan Mannerist/neo-Platonist cusp.

NOTES

1. In June 1615 Inigo Jones was in Rome with Lord Arundel. He had been sketching and measuring the monuments of Antiquity but jotted down the paradoxical conclusion "Greek architecture is fitter for ous than the Romain is, for their buildings were for youse and not so profuse." In another significant pointer to the future of English building style he wrote "in architecture ye outward ornaments oft [ought] to be sollid, proporsionable according to the ruelles, masculine and unaffected".

2. See the early pages, January 1, 1728 of Sir Mark Pleydell's commonplace book and Volume 3, no.123, dated 1655 in the Coleshill Court Rolls in the Berkshire Record Office.
3. The present Ionic capitals and pediment may be the work of Thomas Archer who was related to John Archer, the owner of Welford in the late 17th century. See V.C.H., Berkshire, IV, 118.
4. Berkshire Record Office, D/EAH/E13.
5. For details of Jackson's work at St John's and the porch of St Mary's see H.M. Colvin, *The Canterbury Quadrangle*, Oxford, 1988.
6. Sir Francis Crane commissioned the brilliant pavilions at Stoke Bruerne (c.1635), probably a rare exercise in Mannerism by Inigo Jones. Sir Francis died in Paris in 1636 and by the terms of his will the Crane Building was erected in 1658 in the Lower Ward of Windsor Castle. This terrace of houses for the Poor Knights was to an eccentric design with a giant order of pilasters and overall rustication. Nicholas Stone's name and the date of 1636 have been associated with its design. A strange house, architect-unknown, went up at Stoke Bruerne during the Commonwealth. This also featured a giant order and had curious window architraves. For the Crane Building see W.H. St John Hope, *Windsor Castle, an architectural history*, London, 1913, pls. XXII-XXXI. For Stoke Bruerne see *Vitruvius Britannicus*, London, III, 1725, pl.9.
7. See the four volume *Quarter Centenary Monograph* on the College published in 1909. E.W. Allfrey was responsible for the architectural history. The vault is based closely on the stone vault of Oxford Cathedral.
8. For a full account of this concept see A.A. Tait, "Post-Modernism in the 1650s", an essay in the 1986 Symposium of The Georgian Group, *Inigo Jones and the spread of Classicism*.
9. Only the exterior of Aldermaston was shaped in this ideal simplicity. Within was a staircase of riotous sophistication with auricular carving and newel figures of fragile Donatelline elegance. Much of this staircase was re-erected in the present 19th-century Court. Its mere existence is a reminder of the reverse side of "Puritan Minimalism".
10. Rudyerd was, like Inigo Jones, an Elizabethan by birth, already 63 years old when he built West Woodhay. He was a friend of John Donne and had in his youth shared the affections of his Pembroke patron with William Shakespeare. But Rudyerd's poetry inclines more to the end-stopped couplets of Dryden and a later generation, a parallel therefore to the design of his house.
11. When Inigo Jones came in 1649 to inspect the building site at Coleshill and propose a new design he was already in high favour with Parliament and living at the best address in London — an apartment in Somerset House near to one occupied by the Lord General Fairfax.
12. Giles Worsley "Milton Manor, Berkshire", *Country Life*, November 14, 1991.
13. Henry Wotton, *The Elements of Architecture*, London, 1624, 42.