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THE ARCHITECT OF FOOTS CRAY PLACE

HOWARD COLVIN AND JOHN HARRIS

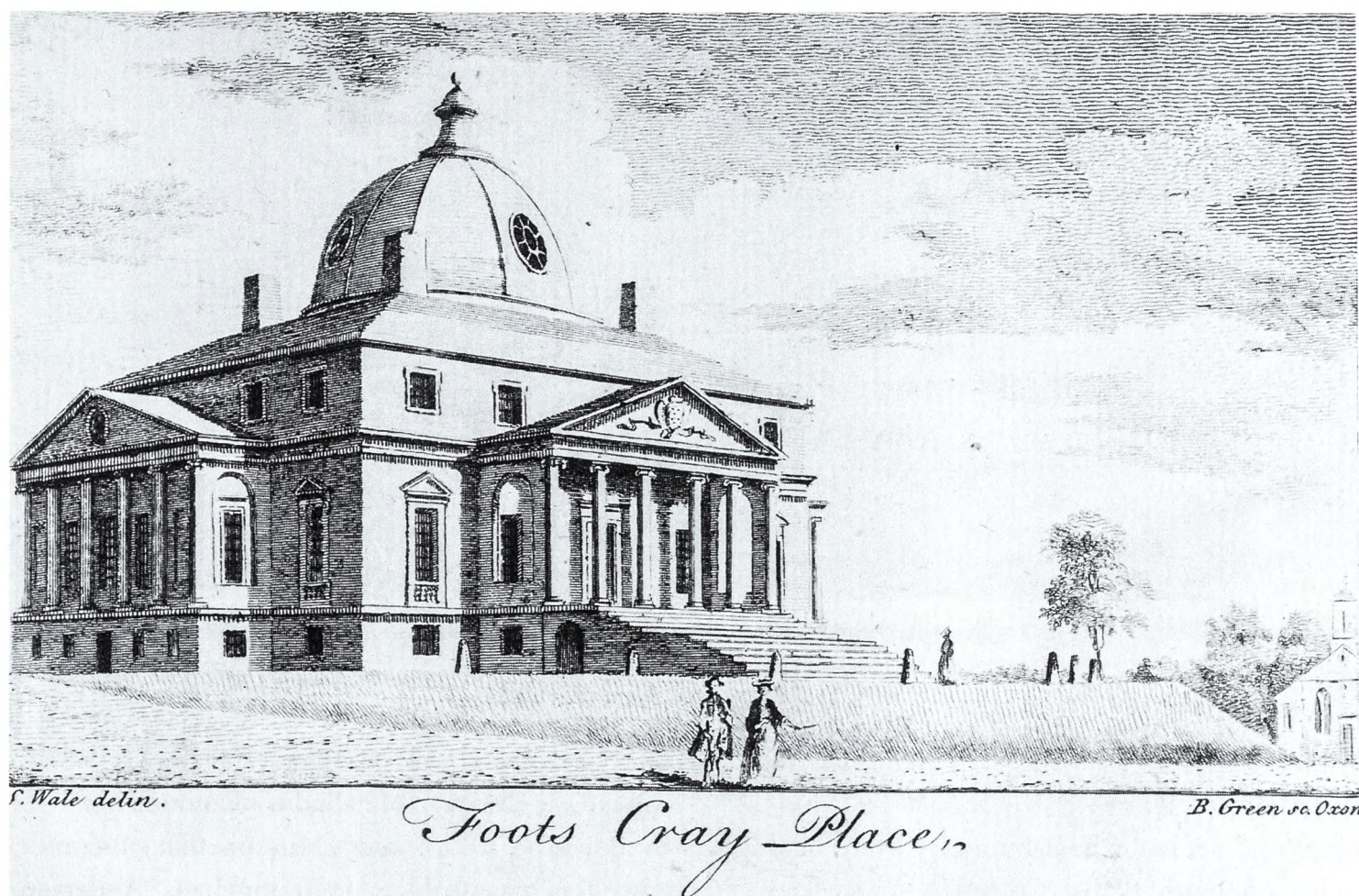


Figure 1. Foots Cray Place, Kent. Engraving after Samuel Wale in Dodsley's *London & its Environs Described*, 1761.

Foots Cray Place, Kent (Fig. 1), was one of four English eighteenth-century villas whose design was based on Palladio's Villa Rotonda near Vicenza. It was built for a rich City of London pewterer, Bouchier Cleeve (d. 1760), and its architect has never satisfactorily been identified.¹ Woolfe and Gandon provided engravings of the house in the first of their supplementary volumes of *Vitruvius Britannicus*, published in 1767, but mentioned neither architect nor date of erection. The latter

was stated to be 1752 by J. P. Neale in one of his volumes of *Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen*, published in 1828, the former as Isaac Ware by W. H. Leeds in a list of British architects and their works, published in 1840.² Although this attribution is acceptable on stylistic grounds, it is unsupported by any documentary evidence. In 1994 Dr. Stanford Anderson offered an alternative attribution: to Matthew Brettingham the younger.³

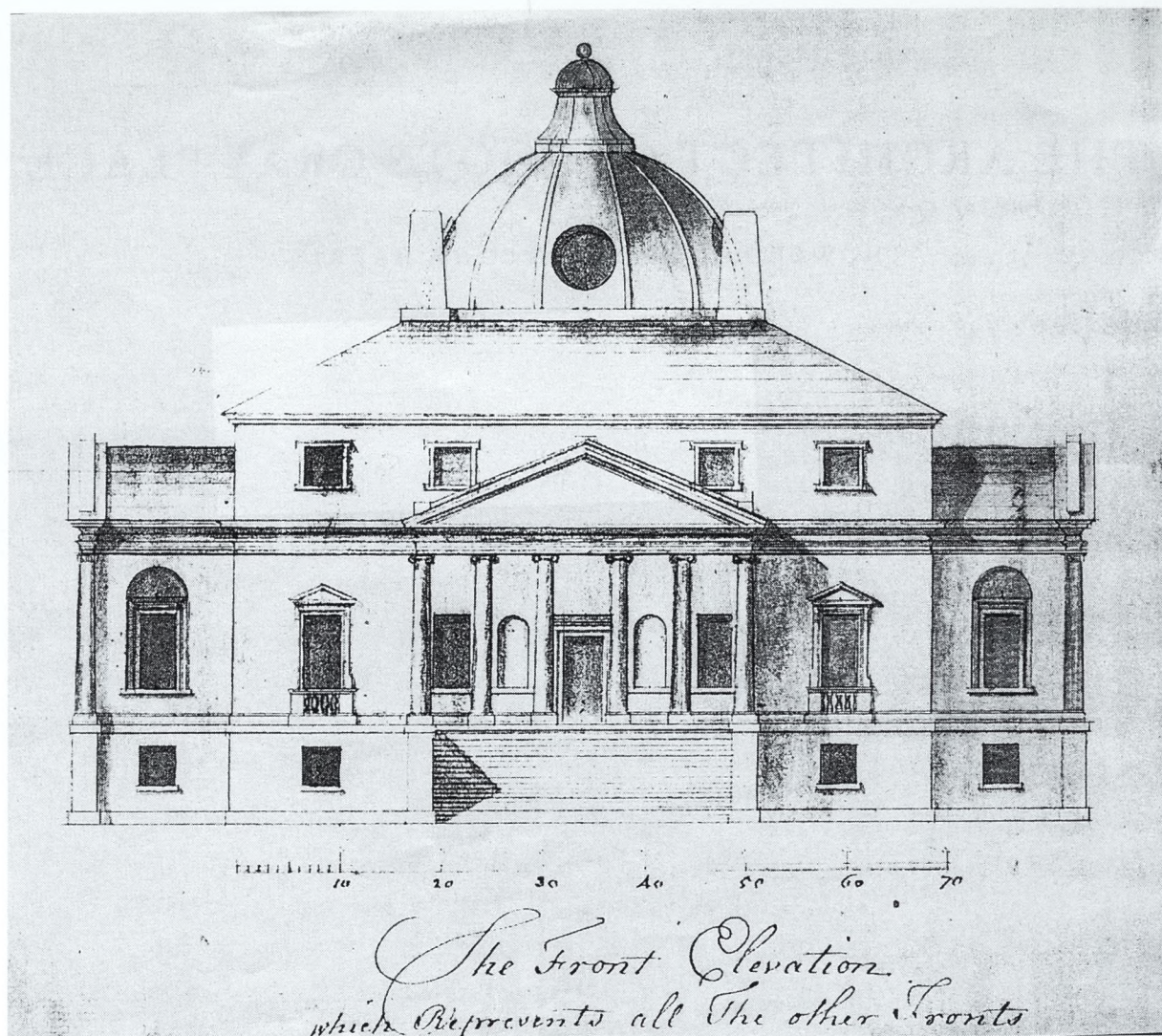


Figure 2. Proposed elevation of Foots Cray Place, Kent. *British Library.*

Dr. Anderson's case is based on his discovery that a copy of Ware's 1738 edition of Palladio's *Quattro Libri* in the British Library which belonged to Joseph Smith, British Consul in Venice from 1740 to 1760, has bound into it three drawn plans and an elevation of Foots Cray Place⁴ (Figs. 2–5). Small discrepancies between the building as represented in these drawings and as shown in Woolfe and Gandon's engravings suggest (as Anderson points out) that the drawings must be designs rather than a mere record of the house as erected. Anderson thinks that these drawings are in the hand of Matthew Brettingham the younger (1725–1783), a letter from whom to Consul Smith, dated from Vicenza on 8 August 1754, is also to be found inserted in the book.⁵ To support his argu-

ment he claims that Brettingham also drew a free copy of the elevation of Palladio's Rotonda in a volume in Sir John Soane's Museum that contains other drawings attributed to Brettingham.⁶ Anderson believes the copy of the Rotonda to be in the same hand as a design in the same volume signed and dated 'M Brettingham Roma 1752'. This is an elevation of an ornamental structure of uncertain purpose. As further evidence in support of his case Anderson refers to the 'Italian sketchbook of Matthew Brettingham the Younger' and to the designs for Lord Leicester's town house, both in the RIBA Drawings Collection.⁷ All these, he says, 'make a convincing group by context, style and technique'.

Alas, they do not. The RIBA's so-called Brettingham Italian sketchbook is a suspect

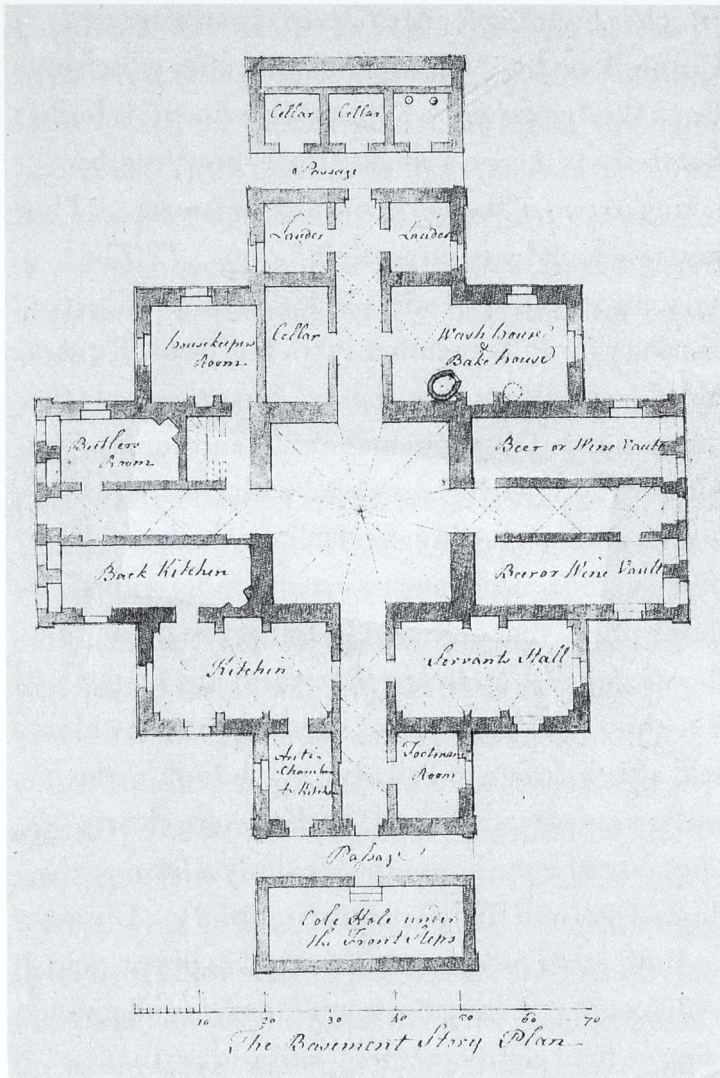


Figure 3. Proposed basement plan of Foots Cray Place. British Library.

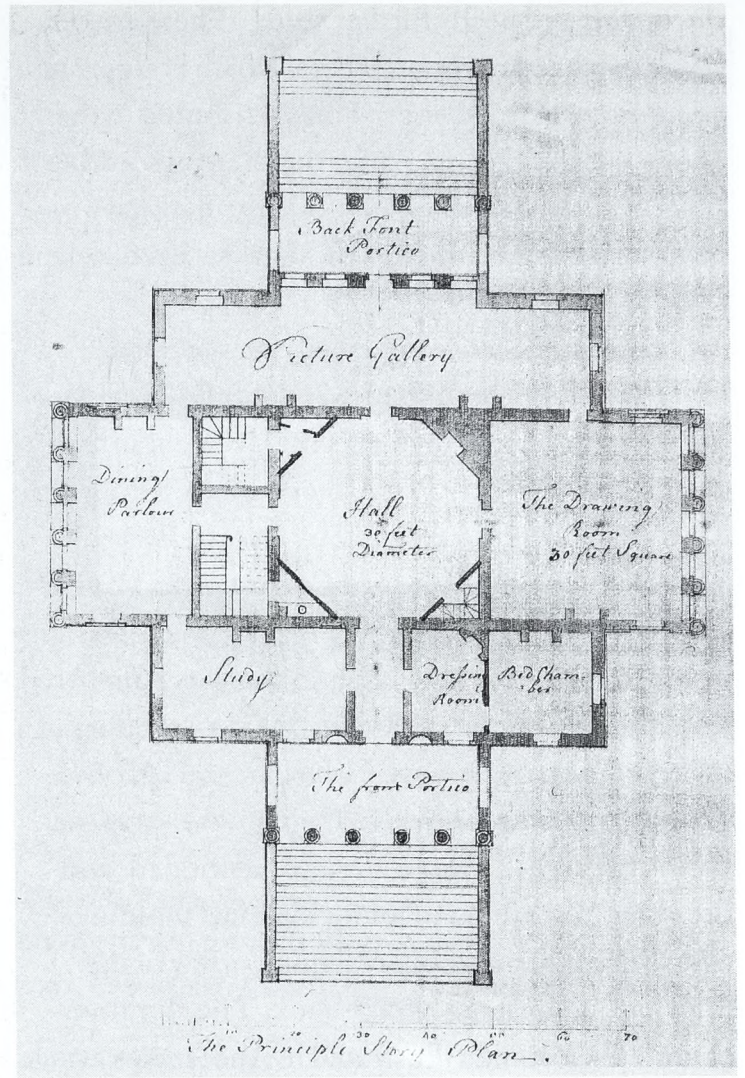


Figure 4. Proposed *piano nobile* plan of Foots Cray Place. British Library.

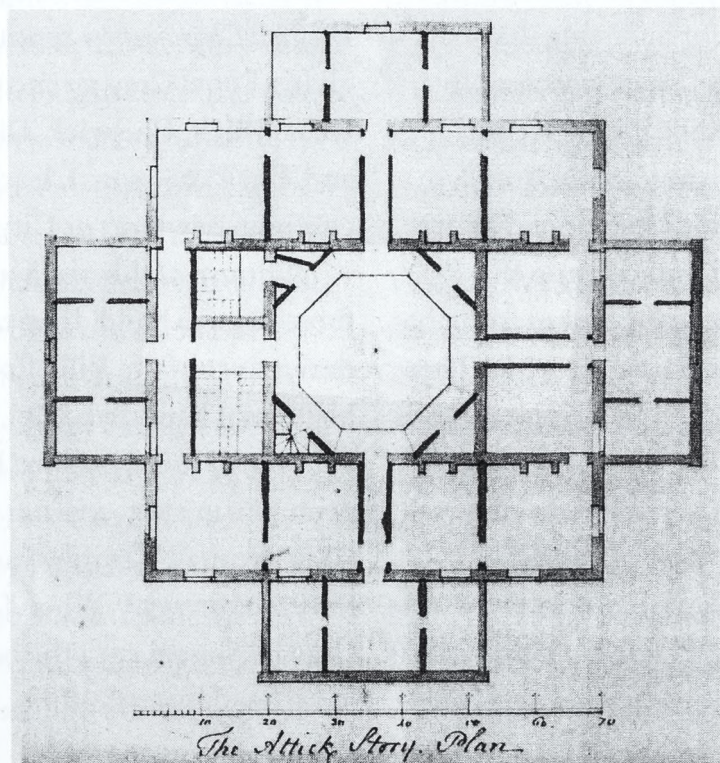


Figure 5. Proposed attic plan of Foots Cray Place. British Library.

document and needs further study. There are certainly two hands present, one of which is vigorous and quite unlike other drawings attributed to the younger Brettingham. As for the drawings for Lord Leicester's house in Berkeley Square, they have now been correctly identified as by Matthew Brettingham the elder (d. 1769).⁸

Anderson's case rests chiefly on the Soane Museum album. Yet this also is doubtful as evidence of the younger Brettingham's involvement in the design of Foot's Cray Place. It contains 66 drawings in all, of which 41 were listed by George Bailey, Soane's secretary and the first Curator of his Museum, as 'Miscellaneous Sketches of Architectural Designs by Mr. Brettingham and others, unknown, Numbered from 1 to 41'. These 41 drawings are in a number of different eighteenth-century hands, and only five of them appear to be by Brettingham the younger. One is the signed design already mentioned, and the other four are sketches for classical buildings whose draughtsmanship resembles a few of the drawings in the RIBA sketchbook. The elevation of the Villa Rotonda illustrated in Anderson's article is one of the 41 drawings, but is in a hand quite different from the signed Roman drawing and any others attributed to Brettingham. It therefore does nothing to support his case for believing that Brettingham designed Foot's Cray Place. Finally, there is no obvious resemblance between the draughtsmanship of the drawings in the British Library and any of the drawings mentioned above. In particular, the notation of the scales on the British Library drawings is quite different from that on the Rotonda drawing in the Soane Museum. There is no scale on the drawing signed by Brettingham in 1752, but the signature and the date are manifestly not in the same hand as the inscriptions on the drawings in Consul Smith's copy of Palladio.

The earliest account we have of Foot's Cray Place is given by Dr. Richard Pococke, who was there on 20 August 1754. He describes it as 'a house

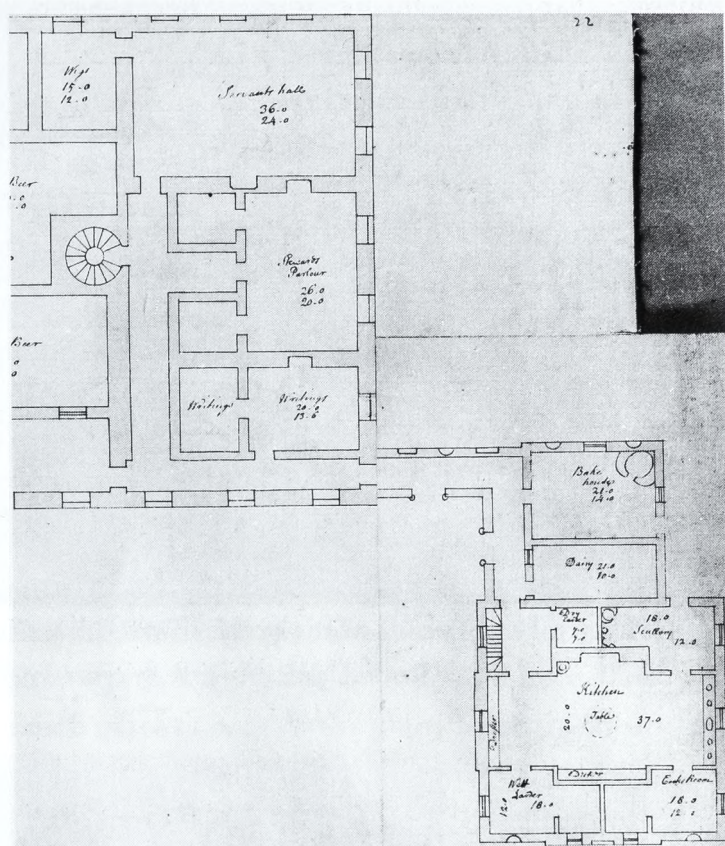
which is building for Mr. Cleves, a pewterer on Cornhill, on the design of Palladio, after which my Lord Westmoreland's house [Mereworth] is built; but they say it is on a smaller scale, however, by taking in two of the porticos into the house ... This house is built by contract for £8,000 ...'.⁹ The amateur architect Sanderson Miller adds little in his diary for 19 September 1756. He 'went all over his [Cleeve's] House with him', but noted only the dimensions of the principal rooms and some of the pictures and that he conversed with Cleeve (who was an authority on finance) 'about funds etc'.¹⁰ Then in 1761 comes an important topographical description, that of R. and J. Dodsley in their *London and its Environs Described*: 'the seat of Bouchier [*sic*] Cleeve, Esq.; and was built by himself, after a design of Palladio, of the Ionic order, and is very elegant'. The Dodsleys were clearly impressed by the house, particularly admiring the domed hall and the 'perfectly beautiful ... Chinese bed and other furniture of this kind in the principal bedchamber', listing the very extensive collection of more than eighty pictures, and adding that 'Admittance to see the house is by tickets from Mr. Cleeve, and the days are every Thursday during the summer season'.¹¹ In 1767 Thomas Martyn in *The English Connoisseur* repeats most of this description, giving Foot's Cray an entry alongside Blenheim, Chatsworth, Chiswick, Ditchley, Hagley, Houghton and The Leasowes. Clearly Mr. Cleeve was no common pewterer or City merchant.

A house of this size would have taken at least three years to build. If we take the other three English derivatives of the Villa Rotonda: Mereworth Castle, begun not later than 1720, 'was covered in 1723';¹² Chiswick House, started by Lord Burlington probably in 1725, was not completed until 1729;¹³ while Nuthall Temple was begun in 1754 and finished in 1757.¹⁴ When Dr. Pococke was at Foot's Cray in August 1754 the building was probably enveloped in scaffolding, or he would not need to

have been told that the two side-porticos were not to be freestanding, but it was evidently finished and furnished by the time of Sanderson Miller's visit in September 1756. Neale's date of 1752 may therefore be correct for the start of a building process which could have been completed in 1755. So the design is likely to have been made in 1751 or 1752, at the latest early in 1753.

Matthew Brettingham had gone to Italy in 1747, and returned to London via the Veneto in August 1754.¹⁵ His letter to Consul Smith is dated at Vicenza on 8 August of that year. In it he makes it clear that this was his first visit to Vicenza and writes enthusiastically about the buildings by Palladio that he had seen, including the Villa Rotonda. If a house based on the Rotonda was already under construction in England to his designs it is extraordinary that he should not have mentioned the fact, especially as he wrote that Lord Charlemont was reported 'to have a mind to build it [the Rotonda] in Ireland'. Nor is there necessarily any association (as Anderson assumes) between the drawings and the letter, for (as he himself points out) an examination of the volume makes it almost certain that the former were incorporated in the volume when it was bound for Consul Smith, whereas the latter is secured in place by early nineteenth-century slips, evidently added by the British Museum after the acquisition of Smith's library: it was probably found loose in the book and may therefore have been slipped in by Smith at some later date. Both drawings and letter could have been inserted, not because of any connection between them but because they both ministered to Smith's well-attested enthusiasm for all things Palladian.¹⁶

The Dodsleys' statement that Foots Cray Place 'is the seat of Bouchier Cleeve, Esq; and was built by himself, after a design by Palladio', could be taken to mean that he was to some extent his own architect, but may mean no more than that the house 'was built by its present owner, Bouchier



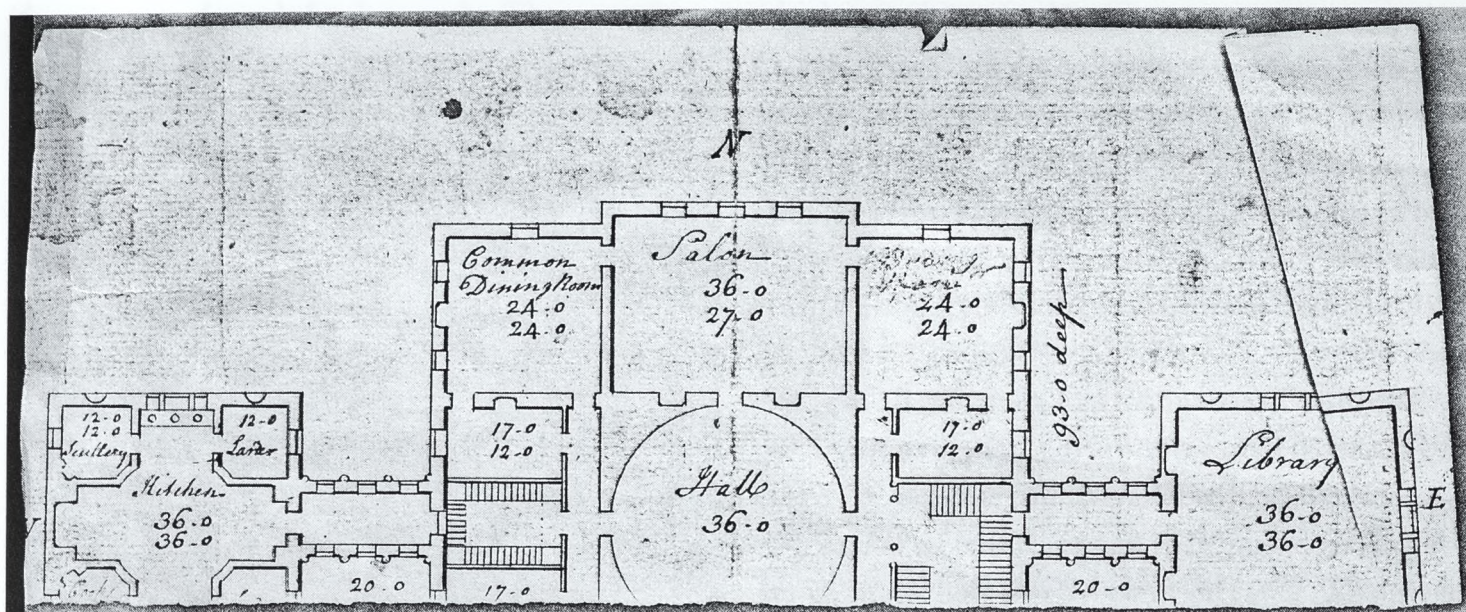


Figure 7. Plan of a house with circular central hall attributed to Daniel Garret, from the Bowes of Gibside papers at Glamis Castle, Angus. *By courtesy of the Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne.*

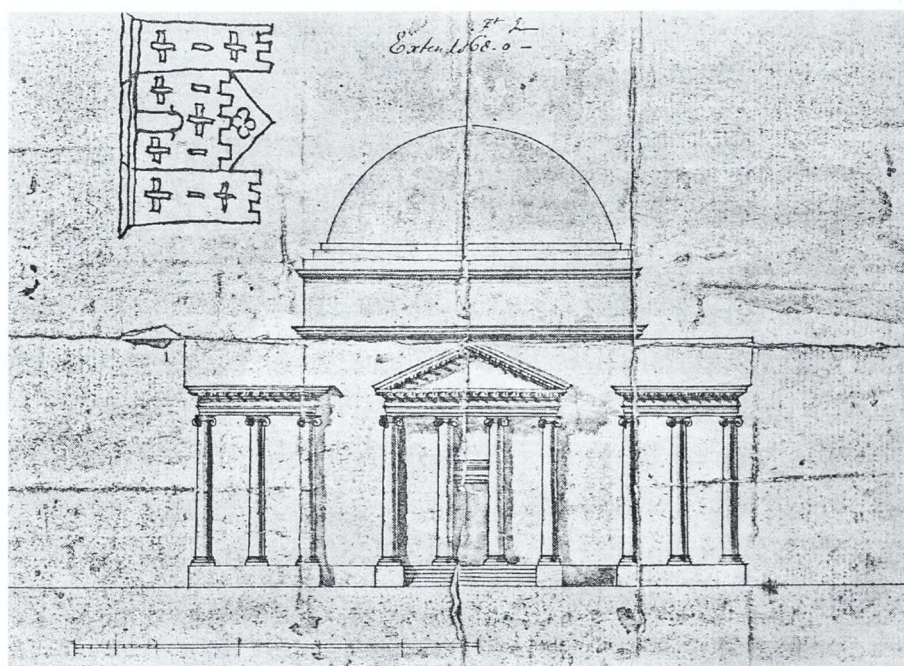


Figure 8. Elevation of a circular domed building with four porticos attributed to Daniel Garret, from the Bowes of Gibside papers at Glamis Castle, Angus. *By courtesy of the Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne.*

of the drawings? A careful survey of drawings by contemporary English architects has revealed only one whose handwriting resembles that of the person who wrote the names of the rooms on the plans of Foots Cray Place: Daniel Garrett (d. 1753). Eighteenth-century English architectural drawings tend to have a family likeness that makes attribution

hazardous, but such of Garrett's drawings as are available for comparison do match those in Consul Smith's *Palladio* very closely, and if one of his designs for Kirtlington **Park**, Oxfordshire, of 1741 is laid beside one of those for Foots Cray Place, the names of the rooms are seen to be almost identical¹⁸ (Fig. 6). Although certainty in the attribution of

drawings such as these is elusive, it is therefore to Daniel Garrett rather than to Matthew Brettingham that we think they should be ascribed. We are grateful to Dr. Peter Leach, who has made a special study of Garrett and his work, for concurring in this conclusion.

Was Daniel Garrett a likely architect for Bouchier Cleeve to employ for the rather special task of building in England a habitable version of the Villa Rotonda? By 1750 he had a number of country houses and other commissions to his credit, all for the aristocracy or gentry, and as a protégé of Lord Burlington his credentials as a Palladian architect were impeccable.¹⁹ Among his drawings for Gibside (County Durham) among the Bowes family papers there are two, dating probably from the 1740s, that are significant in connection with Foots Cray Place. One is a plan for a symmetrical villa-like house with a circular central hall which must have been intended to be domed (Fig. 7), the other an elevation of a domed garden building with four Ionic porticos that is obviously related to the Villa Rotonda, though departing from it in many respects (Fig. 8). Finally

it may be noted that in 1740 Garrett had assisted the amateur architect Sir Hugh Smithson in making designs for various buildings in the grounds of his seat at Stanwick in north Yorkshire. That Garrett was on familiar terms with the Smithson family is apparent from the diary of Lady Elizabeth Smithson, who, besides recording his architectural activities, mentions his participation in angling and shooting with bows and arrows and on one occasion being 'appointed to be Master of the Revels' at a family party.²⁰ Well-versed both in Palladian architecture and in gentlemanly behaviour, Garrett would clearly have been a very suitable person to help Bouchier Cleeve to realise his desire for a Villa Rotonda in Kent. But if so he cannot have done much more than draw the plans before his death early in 1753. We may suppose that Cleeve then found it necessary to find another architect to supervise the building of his house. Could that architect have been Isaac Ware, so accounting for the attribution of the house to him by W. H. Leeds?

NOTES

- 1 For Cleeve, see *The Dictionary of National Biography*, iv, Oxford, 1885–6, 479.
- 2 J. P. Neale, *Views of the Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen*, 2nd ser., iv, 1828; W. H. Leeds, 'Chronological Lists of Architects who died in the 18th and 19th centuries', *Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal*, III, 1840, 113.
- 3 Stanford Anderson, 'Matthew Brettingham the Younger, Foots Cray Place, and the Secularisation of the Palladian Villa Rotonda in England', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, LIII(4), Dec. 1994, 428–47.
- 4 London, British Library, shelf-mark 60g. 1: Isaac Ware, *The Four Books of Andrea Palladio's Architecture*, London, 1738.
- 5 It is printed in full by Anderson, 429–30.
- 6 London, Sir John Soane's Museum, Drawings, Volume 9.
- 7 *Catalogue of the Drawings Collection of the Royal Institute of British Architects: B*, Farnborough, 1972, 103–06.
- 8 In 1972 they were catalogued in the RIBA as by the younger Brettingham, but comparison with the signed drawings for Lowther Castle by his father [Howard Colvin, J. Mordaunt Crook and Terry Friedman (eds.), *Architectural Drawings for Lowther Castle*, Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain, 1980, 28–32] has made clear that they are in fact by the latter.
- 9 J. J. Cartwright (ed.), 'The Travels through England of Dr. Richard Pococke', *Camden Society*, 1889, 11, 69.
- 10 Warwick, Warwickshire County Record Office, CRO 1382/32, p. 29.
- 11 The brothers Robert and James Dodsley were the publishers of this work, but the authorship of the text

- (evidently written before Cleeve's death in 1760) is apparently not known.
- 12 Colen Campbell, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, III, London, 1725, 8.
 - 13 R. T. Spence, 'Chiswick House and Gardens, 1726-1732', *Burlington Magazine*, CXXXV, August 1993, 525-31.
 - 14 Christopher Hussey, 'Nuthall Temple - I. Nottingham', *Country Life*, LIII, April 28th 1923, 573-5.
 - 15 John Kenworthy-Brown, 'Matthew Brettingham's Rome Account Book 1747-1754', *Walpole Society*, XLIX, 1983, 38.
 - 16 The most recent literature on this is Frances Vivian, *The Consul Smith Collections*, exhibition catalogue (Munich 1989), and John Harris, 'The Neo-Palladian and MidCentury Landscape', in *The Glory of Venice*, Royal Academy of Arts, 1994.
 - 17 See the list of paintings given by Dodsley, *op. cit.*. Cleeve's collection was sold by Mr. White as Sir George Yonge's, 24-25 March 1806 [Malibu (Ca.), Getty Museum, Provenance Index].
 - 18 Photographs of the Kirtlington drawings, now the property of Mr. Christopher Buxton, are in the possession of Howard Colvin, together with a photocopy of the building accounts. These show that 'Mr Garrett, Architect' was paid £26.6s. in September 1741, evidently for unexecuted designs. His drawings are readily distinguishable from those, both executed and unexecuted, of the two architects, William Smith and John Sanderson, to whose designs the house was built in 1742-8. Other drawings by Garrett which we have studied are those for Gibside, Co. Durham, at Glamis Castle in Scotland, for Raby Castle, Co. Durham, [Alistair Rowan, 'Gothick restoration at Raby Castle', *Architectural History*, xv, 1972, 38] and for Kippax Park, Yorkshire, in the West Yorkshire Archives at Leeds.
 - 19 For his career and works see Peter Leach, 'The Architecture of Daniel Garrett', *Country Life*, CLVI, September 12, 19 and 26, 1974, and Howard Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*, New Haven and London, 1995, 393-95.
 - 20 For extracts from Lady Elizabeth Smithson's diary among the Duke of Northumberland's archives at Alnwick Castle, we are indebted to Mr. Peter Meadows of Cambridge University Library.