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CHANDOS HOUSE

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Although now squeezed between modern buildings and often unnoticed by the throng of traffic moving towards Portland Place and Regent Street, Chandos House, built by Robert and James Adam between 1769 and 1771, still creates an elegant vista from the north-east corner of Cavendish Square (Fig.1). Since the Royal Society of Medicine vacated the house in 1987, there has been concern over its condition, and as early as 1991 there were signs of water damage to the plasterwork in the stairwell.¹ The recent destruction of some of the fine marble chimney-pieces has made research into the history of this town house all the more urgent.²

Chandos House is often viewed as the least prominent of the series of town house commissions the Adam brothers undertook in the 1770s, exemplified by the majestic grandeur of No. 20 St James's Square (1771–5) and the sumptuous interiors of No. 20 Portman Square (1775–7). It has also been suggested that in this instance Robert and James were called in to complete a house already partially built, as was the case with many of their commissions.³ However, research has shown that the Adam brothers were indeed the builders of Chandos House from the outset, and that it was in fact a speculative venture, not a special commission. Furthermore, the plans were particularly important, forming the basis for the later town house commissions.

The story of Chandos House begins almost fifty years before the Adam brothers started construction, when the first (initially unsuccessful) attempts were made to develop the Marylebone estate of



Figure 1. Chandos House, exterior. *Tara Draper.*

Lady Margaret Cavendish-Holles and her husband, Edward Harley, later second Earl of Oxford.⁴ Plans drawn up in 1719 by their surveyor, John Prince, called for two avenues running northwards from Cavendish Square, present-day Harley Street on the west, and Chandos Street on the east. Chandos Street was named after James Brydges, the newly created first Duke of Chandos, who had already agreed to build in Cavendish Square. In 1724 he purchased the freehold of the entire north side of the square, stretching to Queen Anne Street, along with another narrow strip of land over 1,300 feet

long running north of that.⁵ He had planned to build a grand mansion with extensive gardens (a design, dated 1720, was published in *Vitruvius Britannicus* in 1725), but financial pressures forced him to abandon the idea. He did, however, have two houses built in the square from 1724: one at the corner of Harley Street, where he lived for a time, and one at the corner of Chandos Street, which was let.⁶

A further scheme in 1725 to lease the land north of Queen Anne Street to the York Buildings Company for a reservoir to supply the new houses on the Cavendish-Harley estate proved financially unsuccessful, although the reservoir, known as Marylebone basin, was built approximately where Mansfield Street is today.⁷ The second Duke of Chandos sold off parcels of land between Cavendish Square and Queen Anne Street to builders in 1747–8, and in 1748 the central portion fronting onto the square was sold to Sir Francis Dashwood for a building for the Society of Dilettanti.⁸ However, the existence of the basin, combined with the recession of the 1720s building boom that had initially fuelled development of the Cavendish-Harley estate, meant that little building was undertaken north of the square. The second Duke sold any remaining land back to the Earl and Countess of Oxford in 1749.⁹ The basin was not filled until the 1760s, and it was at this time that the Adam brothers turned their attention to these vacant fields of Marylebone.

In the summer of 1768 the Adam brothers began work on a mansion for General Robert Clerk and his wife-to-be, the dowager Countess of Warwick.¹⁰ Clerk had played an important role in Robert Adam's early success in London, praising his work to such important clients as Lord Shelburne and Lord Bute. However, the General did dissuade Lord Shelburne from building a mansion to Adam's designs at Hyde Park Corner in 1765, saying that such a site was too vulgar, and fit only for the likes of a Madame de Pompadour or Kitty Fisher.¹¹

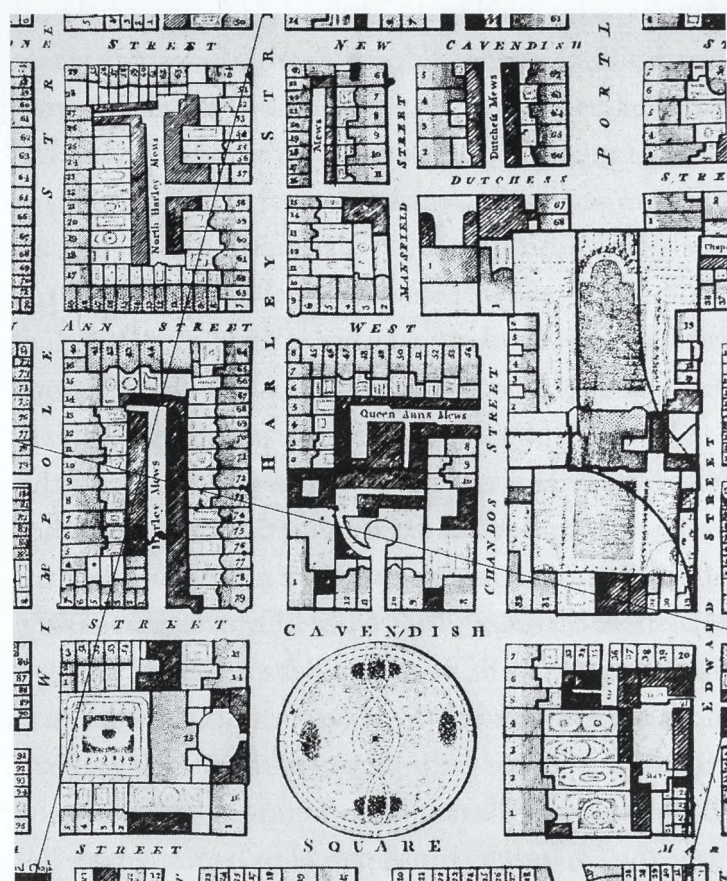


Figure 2. Cavendish Square area, showing Clerk House and Chandos House, detail from Horwood's map, 1813.

Instead he suggested Marylebone as a more appropriate area for the new house. Later that same year the General was to act as go-between in the sale to the Earl of Shelburne of an unfinished mansion in Berkeley Square, begun by Robert Adam for the Earl of Bute, and it was Clerk himself who would eventually go in search of a building plot in Marylebone.

The site chosen for Clerk's house was on the north side of Queen Anne Street (at the south-east corner of the soon to be built Mansfield Street), where gardens for the first Duke of Chandos had once been envisaged (Fig.2).¹² Despite the failure of Chandos's development plans, the area had still become one of the most fashionable in London. Lord Bingley had a large mansion in Cavendish Square, where his neighbours included the Earls of Bessborough, Gainsborough, and Winchelsea, Lord Delamere, Lord Harcourt, and HRH Princess

Amelia, who lived in the Duke's old house on the north side. Just to the north-east of the square was another great mansion, built for Thomas Foley in the late 1750s.¹³ The Adam brothers could not have failed to see the financial potential of building in such a neighbourhood. With the Adelphi off to a promising start, it seems that the brothers began to consider undertaking another grand speculative development beyond the gardens of Clerk's mansion.

By early 1769 the Adams were probably negotiating with the Duke of Portland (who had married the heiress of the Earl of Oxford and thus inherited the Marylebone estate) concerning the development of Mansfield Street, and were possibly even discussing the future layout of Portland Place. Such an agreement is mentioned in the lease for the Chandos House plot, dated February 1770, and the lease (June 1769) for Clerk House mentions plans to lease the Chandos House parcel to James Adam.¹⁴ However, these developments (and the requirement for mews streets) would have interfered with the 1720s layout of the estate, where Chandos Street was intended to continue northwards, parallel with Harley Street. If Mansfield Street and Portland Place were constructed, there would remain a lone plot of land, approximately 50 feet wide and 195 feet deep, nestled between Clerk's house on the west, and Foley House, at the eastern end of Queen Anne Street. The Portlands may have made it a condition of the agreements for both Clerk House and the street developments that the Adams had to do something with this odd parcel. Certainly the size of the plot, and its position, offering picturesque views of Foley House gardens and Cavendish Square, lent itself to something a cut above the average London town house. One can certainly imagine Robert Adam seeing the potential here to create an elegant announcement for the aristocratic enclave he planned to build behind it.

Documentary evidence to explain the full history of Chandos House is fragmentary. What is

certain is that the Portlands granted James Adam a 99-year lease of the plot from Michaelmas 1767 in February 1770, by which time construction would have already been under way.¹⁵ Within a month of signing the lease, James had taken out a mortgage with the banker Sir George Colebrooke against the property, described as a 'Double brick messuage . . . and other . . . Buildings then erecting or to be erected and built on the said ground'.¹⁶ It is difficult to chart the construction, since there was some confusion in the ratebooks for 1770 and 1771 between Clerk House and Chandos House, and also with regard to the streets in which these houses would be rated once complete. There is no mention in the surviving documentation of anyone else being involved in the building or future purchase of the house, and the fact that a mortgage was taken out indicates that this was a speculative venture.

The brothers were unable to find a tenant immediately, and put the house up for sale with the auctioneers Christie's in June 1772, a date that coincided with the Scottish banking crisis which would ultimately lead to their near bankruptcy and undermined the success of the Adelphi.¹⁷ The sale particulars, which appeared in the *Public Advertiser* on 28 May 1772, confirm that the house was by then complete, and that it was entirely 'from the Designs of Messrs Adams, of the Adelphi'. The property was described in detail:

a most capital and elegant leasehold mansion, with beautiful stone front . . . six noble spacious rooms on a floor, a grand staircase . . . and escalier de robe all of stone . . . and water closets to the different Apartments. The Ceilings are highly finished, with stucco and painted ornaments; the chimney pieces of Statuary marble, delicately enriched; the Offices all arched, ample and convenient. Also a compleat Court of Stable Offices, with standing for 11 horses, and 4 Carriages . . . Printed particulars may now be had; and the premises may be viewed by applying to Mr. Christie for a ticket, who has Plans of the House, and is empowered to dispose of the same by private contract.¹⁸

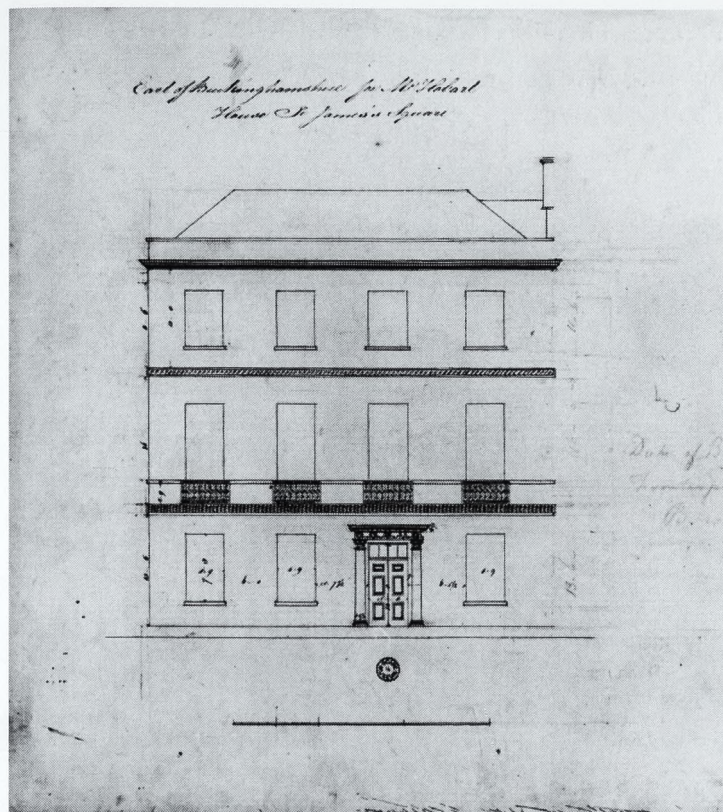


Figure 3. Proposed elevation of No. 33 St. James's Square, 1770-2. Sir John Soane's Museum.

While this glowing description is not unlike that of the modern estate agent, it does crystalize the essence of the Adam town house style – elegance of design united with practical convenience.

The severity of the four-bay façade of Craighleith stone was enlivened by a decorated string course above the *piano nobile*, and iron railings and lamps marked a grand columned entrance porch (of Portland stone).¹⁹ Craighleith stone was employed by the Adam brothers for a number of their buildings in Edinburgh (most notably the Register House of 1776-83), but its use in London was highly unusual, and points to the speculative nature of the project.²⁰ The façade was further enhanced by a characteristically 'Adam style' frieze of swags and rams' heads.²¹ Although no drawing for the façade survives, it is quite similar to the design for No. 33 St. James's Square (1770-2) (Fig. 3), which the brothers were then building for the Hon. George Hobart, except for the position of the entrance and

the replacement of the rams' heads frieze with ox skulls.²² This exterior, though elegant, is still relatively straightforward and restrained. The plans of Chandos House (Fig. 4), however, were quite innovative. While the site was much larger than that of the typical London house, allowing for a courtyard and mews at the back, the Adams were still faced with the problem of providing spacious reception rooms without compromising accommodation and service areas.

The main block of the house roughly follows the then typical town-house format of one front and back room per floor, with the main staircase (here with a service stair behind it) to the side and a closet behind. The wider frontage also allowed for a separate hall and ante-room above. However, in this instance the Adams expanded the closet to create a wing expressly meant for the private apartments of the owners. The wing consisted of a dressing-room and bedroom, water-closet and powdering-room, repeated on the ground and first floors and connected by a private staircase (Fig. 5).²³ With their typical attention to detail, the Adams also provided a mezzanine level above the powdering-room where servants could sleep and would also be close at hand if needed.

Using the wing for the private apartments left the Adams free to create an organized circuit of reception rooms in the main block of the house. From the spacious entrance hall, one progressed through the bow-ended back parlour (labelled 'room for company before dinner'), into the eating-room with its Spalatro order column screen (Fig. 6). A sense of grand procession was intensified by the toplit staircase (Fig. 7), which only rose to the *piano nobile* and was overlooked by a columned loggia at second-floor level. From the ante-room (Fig. 8), with its elaborate plasterwork ceiling of layered starburst and circular patterns (based on an unexecuted design for Luton Hoo), one entered the front drawing-room, both rooms offering views towards

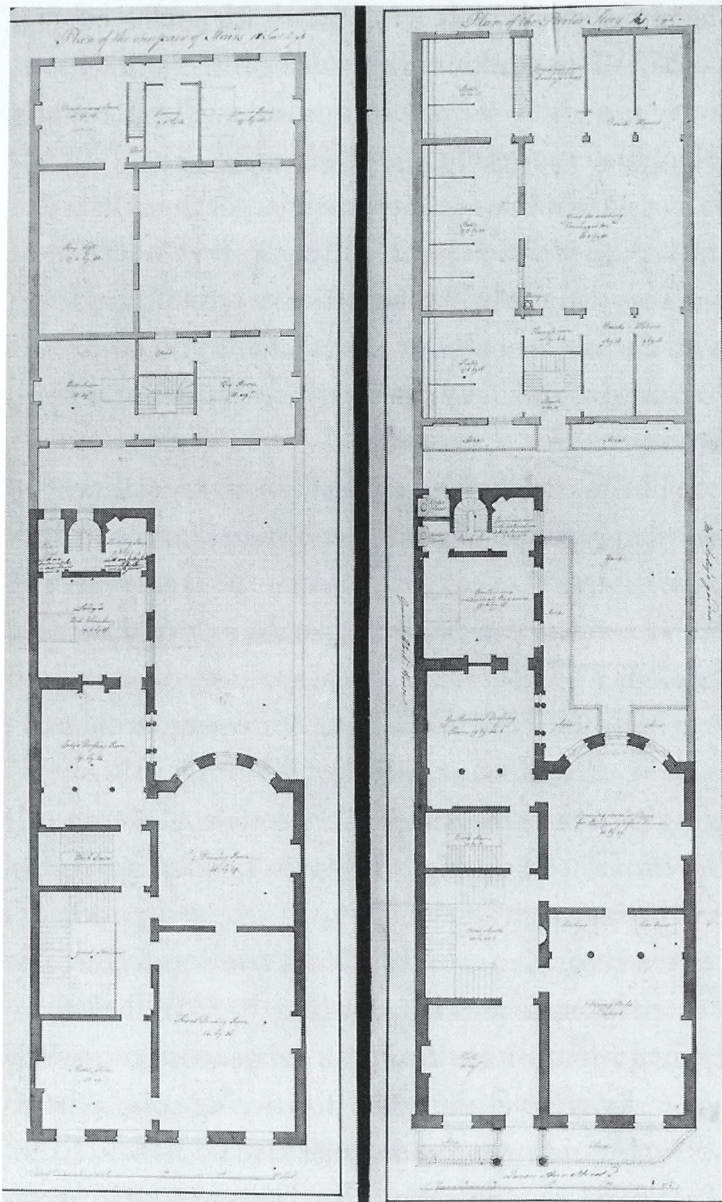


Figure 4. Chandos House, plans of the ground and first floor, c.1769–70. *Cumbria Record Office, Trustees of the Lowther Family.*



Figure 5. Chandos House, staircase in the wing. RCHME.

Cavendish Square.²⁴ The route culminated in the second or back drawing-room, which, like the parlour below, bowed outwards into the courtyard (Fig. 9). Its ceiling was elaborated with allegorical roundel paintings of sculpture, painting, music, and architecture.²⁵ While the wing was conceived as distinct and separate from this circuit, the doorways were arranged so that the private rooms could also be added to the ‘processional route’ if necessary.

The Adams would later explain the reasons behind the formulation of this layout, inspired by the luxurious grandeur of their own mansion and country house designs and influenced by French planning, when describing Derby House,

Grosvenor Square (1773–4) in *The Works* (vol. II, published 1779):

these plans exhibit an attempt to arrange the apartments in the French style, which . . . is best calculated for the convenience and elegance of life. With this view, a large addition has been made to the old wing of the house. The suite of with drawing-rooms on the principal floor is noble, and well suited to every occasion of public parade. At the same time, care has been taken to render the private apartment commodious . . . and a private stair gives convenient access and communication to both stories. The smallness of the sites upon which most houses in London are built, obliges the artists of this country to arrange the apartments of the Ladies and Gentleman on two floors The



Figure 6. Chandos House, ground-floor (front) eating-room. RCHME.



Figure 8. Chandos House, first-floor ante-room, looking south. RCHME.



Figure 7. Chandos House, principal staircase. RCHME.



Figure 9. Chandos House, first-floor back drawing-room, looking north. RCHME.

French, in their great hotels, with their usual attention to what is agreeable and commodius, would introduce both these apartments upon the principal floor; but this we can only do in our country-houses, where our space is unconfined.²⁶

The concept of 'public parade' is important here, for it was certainly the Adams' intention at Chandos House that, just as the reception rooms communicated with one another, so too should there be an interplay between the private and public spaces, and the inside and outside worlds. The noble stone frontage, enhanced by the iron railings and porch, seems to invite the spectator inwards, while the front rooms themselves communicate with the world outside, providing vistas into Cavendish Square.²⁷ This sense of interaction continued in the back drawing-rooms, which projected into the space of the courtyard and mews, with views of the gardens of Foley House to the east, and of the large Venetian windows that marked the dressing-rooms in the wing (Fig. 10), which themselves offered a prospect of Foley House.²⁸ Chandos House was as much meant to be a visual experience as a comfortable home.

There can be little doubt that these plans acted as a prototype which fuelled the brothers' imagination when they came to create the major town house commissions of the mid-1770s, such as No. 20 St James's Square and Derby House.²⁹ In fact, the first known plans for No. 20 St. James's Square (probably dateable to late 1772) were almost identical to those of Chandos House.³⁰ At this house, built for Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, the Adams also conceived of the main block as primarily for reception rooms (the back drawing-rooms bowed into the courtyard as at Chandos House), with a narrow wing for the private apartments extending beyond the main and service stairs. It was not until later in the design process that the Adams enlivened the Chandos House model with a profusion of columns screens, apses, and niches to create the variety of room shapes and decoration that became the trademark of the Adam style (Fig. 11).



Figure 10. Chandos House, view of back elevation and courtyard, looking south. RCHME.

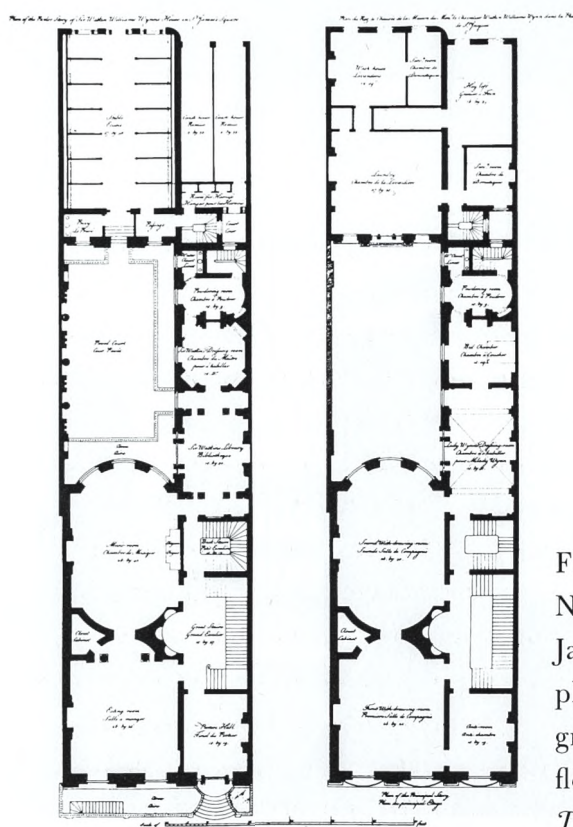


Figure 11. No. 20 St. James's Square, plans of the ground and first floor, 1772, from *The Works*.

Despite its marked elegance and high specification, Christie's failed to sell Chandos House, and it remained empty, even as the Adam brothers began work on Mansfield Street nearby.³¹ In October 1772, the house was seemingly signed over to Sir George Colebrooke, probably because the Adams were unable to pay their loans after the financial problems associated with the Adephe scheme.³² However, they continued to hold an interest in the house, and it was James Adam who paid the rates until June 1774.³³ It was then that a buyer was finally found, in the person of James Brydges, third and last Duke of Chandos, grandson of the first Duke.³⁴ The Duke's small diary survives in the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, and under the date 14 October 1774 he wrote, 'Lay the first Time in my new house in Chandos St.'³⁵ Since then this Adam town house has been known by the name of this family, whose unsuccessful financial speculations had ensured its eventual construction.

I am grateful to my colleagues at the RCHME, Survey of London, especially Colin Thom, Harriet Richardson, Ann Robey, Rosalind Woodhouse, John Greenacombe, John Bold and Jo Smith, for their assistance with this research, and for reading the text. I am also grateful to John Newman for converting me to architecture. As always, a special thank you must go to my beloved parents, who spent many hours driving me to and from the Huntington Library, where they often had to wait outside in the oppressive heat, while I consulted documents in air-conditioned luxury.

NOTES

- 1 RCHME photographs, neg. nos BB91/2210 and BB91/2211, deposited at the National Monuments Record Library, 55 Blandford Street, London, W1H 3AF.
- 2 *Evening Standard*, 19 December 1995, 17; *The Mail on Sunday*, 14 January 1996, 18.
- 3 Paul Litterick-Biggs, 'The Identity of James Adam', unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of London, 1987, 2. This was certainly true in the cases of No. 20 St James's Square and No. 20 Portman Square, which were both already under construction when the Adam brothers received the commissions.
- 4 Frank Kelsall, 'Cavendish Square', *The Georgian Group Report and Journal*, 1989/90, 75–79. Much of the estate is still owned by their descendant, Lord Howard de Walden.
- 5 C. H. Collins Baker and Muriel I. Baker, *The Life and Circumstances of James Brydges First Duke of Chandos*, Oxford, 1949, 294–5, 460–1.
- 6 Baker and Baker, *op. cit.*, 270–1; Kelsall, *op. cit.*, 78.
- 7 Baker and Baker, *op. cit.*, 289–91.
- 8 Kelsall, *op. cit.*, 78; London, London Metropolitan Archives, Middlesex Deeds Registry (hereafter MDR), 1747/2/513; 1748/1/89; 1748/1/190.
- 9 MDR 1749/2/616; 1749/2/617.
- 10 London, British Library, Add MS 40714, fol. 114. The surviving construction estimates for Clerk House show that the dowager Countess of Warwick made the first payment (£500) to the Adams in July 1768. However, plans for a house may have been in progress from as early as May 1765, when Clerk mentioned to the

- Earl of Shelburne (when writing about discussions with James Adam concerning a house at Hyde Park Corner) that he was planning to have floors constructed of 'flat arches' in his house, and this could refer to the Mansfield Street mansion [Arthur T. Bolton, *The Architecture of Robert and James Adam*, 1922, II, 3]. Lady Warwick was living in another house in Queen Anne Street from at least 1767; the sister of Sir William Hamilton, she married General Robert Clerk in 1769 [London, Westminster Archives Centre, Marylebone Ratebooks, 1767–9; Bolton, *op. cit.*, II, 99].
- 11 Bolton, *op. cit.*, II, 3–4.
 - 12 The 99-year lease, for a plot of land 100 feet wide (E/W) and 195 feet deep (N/S) fronting north upon Duchess Street and west upon Mansfield Street was signed in June 1769 [MDR 1769/4/108].
 - 13 Marylebone Ratebooks, 1766. The lease for Foley House was to be a contributing factor in the planning of Portland Place in the 1770s, since Foley and the Duke of Portland had an agreement that no building could obstruct the view from the house [Gordon Mackenzie, *Marylebone: Great City North of Oxford Street*, London, 1972, 57].
 - 14 MDR 1769/4/108; 1770/1/381.
 - 15 MDR 1770/1/381. During this period, it was common practice for landowner and builder to first have a building agreement, with the lease only being granted once the shell of the building had been constructed.
 - 16 MDR 1770/2/40. The Adam brothers would make designs for decoration in Sir George Colebrooke's house in Arlington Street in 1771 [London, Sir John Soane's Museum (hereafter Soane Museum), Adam drawings, XII (77–88); XVII (16, 17, 219); L (52, 53, 54, 55)].
 - 17 Bolton, *op. cit.*, I, 116.
 - 18 *The Public Advertiser*, 28 May 1772. No copy of the original sale particulars has come to light.
 - 19 British Geological Survey Technical Report, WH/96/165R, 29 July 1996.
 - 20 The brothers' company, William Adam & Co., is known to have been involved in the building-supplies trade and had a paving business, while John Adam owned leases in the Aberdeen quarries. It seems likely therefore that the use of Craigleith stone in this case may have been connected in some way to these business interests [T.C. Barker, 'The Aberdeen Quarries', *The Architectural Review*, CXXIII, February 1958, 107; Alistair Rowan, 'William Adam and Company', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, CXXXII, September 1974, 668].
 - 21 The ram's heads and swags were one of Adam's favourite motifs and also appear in the entrance hall of No. 20 St. James's Square.
 - 22 Soane Museum, Adam Drawings, XLIV (14–18). Unlike Chandos House, No. 33 St. James's Square had a brick façade.
 - 23 Closet wings with staircases were not new to the London town house, and had appeared as early as 1725 at No. 43 Brook Street [Survey of London, *The Grosvenor Estate in Mayfair, Part I*, xxxix, London, 1977, 108–9]. However, Adam's innovation was to make it into a private suite, the staircase connecting the lady's and gentleman's apartments. [Tara Draper, 'The London Townhouses of Robert Adam 1761–1792: The Redefinition of a Building Type', unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of London, 1992, 27].
 - 24 David King *The Complete Works of Robert and James Adam*, Oxford, 1992, colour plate VII.
 - 25 Although it has often been suggested that at least one of these inset paintings is signed by Angelica Kauffmann, no trace of a signature has been found, and the paintings have been attributed to Antonio Zucchi [Wendy Wassyng Roworth (ed.), *Angelica Kauffman, A Continental Artist in England*, London, 1992, 116].
 - 26 Robert Oresko (ed.), *The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam*, London, 1975, 59.
 - 27 See John Olley, '20 St. James's Square Part 1,' *The Architects' Journal*, CXCI, February 21, 1990, 34–57, for a similar account of the interaction between interior and exterior space at this later Adam town house.
 - 28 The Adams may well have made the façade of the mews at Chandos House into a decorative feature, as they would do at No. 20 St. James's Square and also in Mansfield Street. At Chandos House the Adams' stable block was rebuilt, and the present courtyard façade, with niches and statues, may have been undertaken by Mewes and Davis when they restored and

- redecorated the house in 1924 [‘A Townhouse by Robert Adam: The Redecoration of Chandos House,’ *The Architects’ Journal*, LX, September 3, 1924, 337].
- 29 The Chandos House plans are also evident in many of the Adams’ unexecuted designs for town houses, such as No. 6 Upper Brook Street (1772–3, for William Weddell of Newby Hall) and No. 14 St. James’s Square (1776, for Lord Newhaven) [Draper, *op. cit.*, 37, 44].
- 30 These drawings are in the RIBA Drawings Collection, vol. A, 16 (3). A second set of plans are in the Soane Museum and are more closely linked to the plans published in *The Works* and dated 1772 [Soane Museum, Adam Drawings, XL (65–6)].
- 31 Mansfield Street was developed from 1770–1 in collaboration with speculative builders, many of whom worked with the Adams on other commissions, including the plasterer Joseph Rose [Bolton, *op. cit.*, II, 102].
- 32 MDR 1772/6/378. In order to raise funds the Adam brothers had sold much of their collection of paintings and works of art in a five-day sale at Christie’s in February 1773.
- 32 Marylebone Ratebooks, 1772–4.
- 33 MDR 1774/4/505–6.
- 34 San Marino (California), Huntington Library, STB Box 12 (67).