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NEW LIGHT ON 'LONG SIR THOMAS'

GILES WORSLEY

Sir Thomas Robinson of Rokeby – ‘Long Sir Thomas’ as he was known by his contemporaries to distinguish him from his eponymous contemporary, later Lord Grantham – had a keen sense of his own posterity (Fig. 1). He commissioned an imposing monument in Westminster Abbey, composing his own epitaph and reserving the space a quarter of a century before he died. He planned to publish the designs of his house at Rokeby in a special volume, emulating those great patrons of architecture Horace Walpole and the Earl of Leicester. Unfortunately he lacked their deep pockets and only the drawings were produced. When his reputation was threatened by complaints from planters in Barbados, where he was governor, he responded with two massive manuscript volumes defending his actions. But, above all, his posterity was to be ensured by the publication of his carefully preserved letters, including a lifetime’s correspondence with the Earl of Chesterfield, after his death. Unfortunately for him his brother Richard, Archbishop of Armagh, intervened, worried what indiscretions they might reveal. The letters were never published, indeed never seen again and the assumption must be that they were destroyed.

The result is that Robinson’s reputation was left in the hands of the catty commentators of his day who made him out to be little more than a figure of fun (Fig. 2). His reputation might be very different had those letters survived. Such that do – particularly those to his father-in-law the Earl of Carlisle¹ and to Lord Verney² – are packed with valuable information, especially about architecture and gardening, as well as politics and gossip. It was

Robinson, after all, who confirmed Kent’s authorship of the Treasury in Whitehall,³ who provided the key reference to Kent’s garden at Carlton House inspiring a revolution in gardening in the 1730s,⁴ and who left us the best description of Houghton in Sir Robert Walpole’s heyday.⁵ But they did not survive and Robinson’s reputation has suffered as a result. In the course of writing his entry for the *New Dictionary of National Biography* I have found further information which sheds light on his character and interests. While it provides only limited evidence for new architectural commissions it provides a broader understanding of Robinson than the two-dimensional caricature of the *litterateurs*. In particular, it provides further information about his family background, about his close involvement with the Royal Society of Arts, about his years as Governor of Barbados and about the fate of his possessions, including his library.

The precise date and place of Robinson’s birth remains a mystery. He was not baptised on his family estate at Rokeby in Yorkshire and a thorough search of other alternatives has not been fruitful. Probably he was baptised at Merton in Surrey, where his younger brothers Richard and Septimus were baptised on 13 July 1708 and 15 March 1710 respectively, and where his mother Anne was buried in 1730. A note of 1715 in the parish register records that the parish register book for the years around Robinson’s birth had been torn to pieces and a new transcript had been made that was as accurate as possible, but it is not, it would appear, complete.⁶ A date of 1702 (or possibly 1703) remains the most plausible for Robinson’s birth, as he enrolled as a

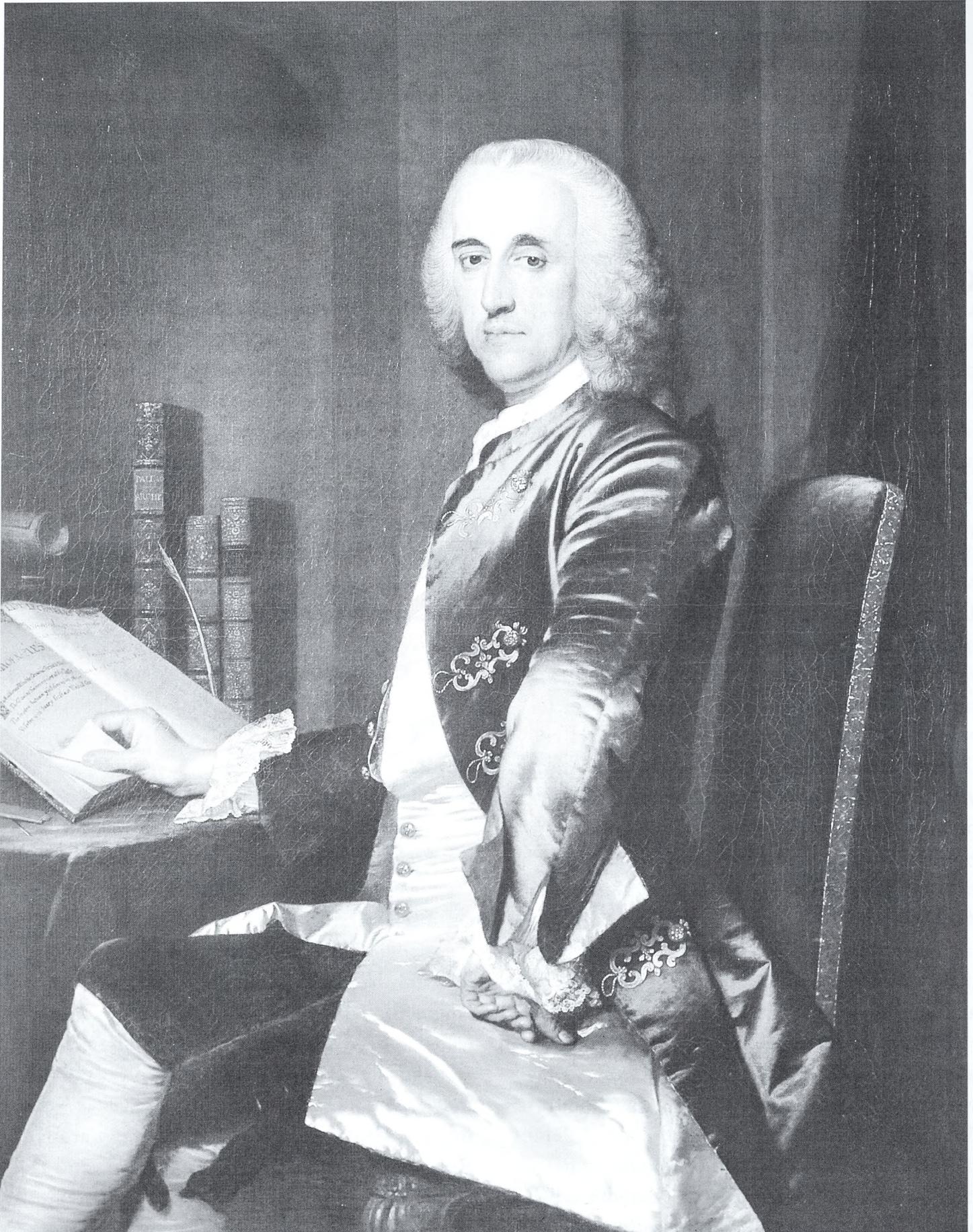


Figure 1. Sir Thomas Robinson, as he wished to be seen, by Francis van der Mijn, 1750.

By courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London



Figure 2. Sir Thomas Robinson, as he was seen, by William Austin, 1777. *By courtesy of Mr and Mrs P. J. Lorimer*

Gentleman Commoner at Exeter College, Oxford, on 21 June 1721, aged 18.⁷

The Robinsons had been connected with Merton since Thomas Robinson, grandfather of 'Long Sir Thomas', married Grace, daughter of Sir Henry Stapylton of Myton on Swale and of Merton Abbey. Their marriage was brief, for she died in 1676, aged 24, and was buried at Merton. Her daughter Elizabeth Robinson was subsequently buried at Merton in 1739. The Stapylton connection with Merton continued into the eighteenth century. Christopher Stapylton, youngest son of Sir John Stapylton of Myton, who died at Westminster School, aged 15, was buried there in 1743.⁸ In his will Robinson ordered that he be buried near his mother in Merton church.⁹

Some accounts further confuse him with his namesake. This was Thomas Robinson (1695–1770), fourth son of Sir William Robinson, Bart., of Baldersby, Yorkshire. It was the namesake who was educated at Middle Temple, not 'Long Sir Thomas', as is sometimes suggested.¹⁰ Confusion between the two Yorkshiremen is easy, particularly as for a time they owned adjacent houses in Whitehall. The second Sir Thomas Robinson was knighted in 1742, was never a baronet and was created Lord Grantham in 1761.¹¹ He was neither a Fellow of the Royal Society nor a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, as has sometimes been suggested by those confusing him with 'Long Sir Thomas'.¹² However, he was a member of the Society of Dilettanti, which 'Long Sir Thomas' was not.¹³

Robinson's father, William Robinson, died in 1720, when he was still under age. His will shows that he left Robinson the residue of his estate, including Rokeby (which had been in the family since 1610), £1,000 in stock in Paris, on the payment of various legacies, principally to his siblings. His widow was left £100 and the use of his jewels, plate, household goods and furniture at his house in Stockwell, Surrey, as long as she remained a widow.¹⁴

Ten years later, on the death of his mother, daughter and heiress of Robert Walters of Cundall in Yorkshire, Robinson was left further property, including lands at Thirslington, Co. Durham, as intended in her marriage settlement, and also lands at Theakston, Yorks. Again the bequest was on the condition that he paid a series of legacies to members of his family.¹⁵

Sadly, little further information has come to light about Robinson's finances. Two bank accounts have emerged, but both were only held briefly and neither is of much value. One is at Hoare's Bank from 1756 to 1758. This is a very brief account, opened on February 10, 1756 with a payment of £1,000, a further payment of £1,000 being made on 22 March. It was closed on 19 April 1758.¹⁶ It is more enigmatic than informative, although it does include one intriguing payment of £224 to the distinguished mason John Devall on 1 April 1758. The other is at Drummond's Bank from 4 October 1764 to 11 August 1769, and is solely given over to payments of rent (£32 10s every quarter) by Richard Ponsonby.¹⁷

From his earliest years Robinson engaged keenly in London's intellectual life. He was admitted as member of the Royal Society on 2 February 1727¹⁸ and elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries on 15 January 1735. He became an honorary fellow on 28 April 1743, on being made Governor of Barbados, and was readmitted as an ordinary fellow on 9 March 1749, following his return to England.¹⁹

Robinson was a keen promoter of architects and craftsmen. It is already known that he actively

supported Daniel Garrett's successful attempt to establish a prosperous practice in the north and that he attempted the same, though with less success, with (the unrelated) William Robinson.²⁰

Robinson's influence is shown in the suggestion made by Henry Willoughby to Sir William Chambers on his return to London in 1755 that he should meet Robinson 'who is a very extraordinary person, but perhaps you might make some use of him'.²¹

It comes as no surprise that Robinson was an early member of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufacturers and Commerce, which was founded in 1754.²² He signed the original subscription book and was proposed for membership by Henry Baker, a scientist important in the improvement of the microscope and another Fellow of the Royal Society, on 20 August 1755. He is listed as living in Soho Square.²³ Robinson became an active member of the society, frequently attending its committees, which he regularly chaired,²⁴ and was sometimes closely bound up in internal politics.

Robinson was a particularly active proposer of new members and the list of those elected on his sponsorship, 153 in all, is both a revealing testament to the breadth of his social circle and to his desire to encourage rising architects and craftsmen.²⁵ Peers included the Dukes of Ancaster, Devonshire, Northumberland, Portland and Queensberry; the Earls of Abercorn, Bute, Egremont, Farnham, Northampton, Powis, Shelburn and Sutherland; the Countess of Northumberland; Viscounts Howe, Ligonier, Palmerston and Pulteney; Lords Bateman, Clive, Edgcumbe, Grey, Pigot, Walpole, Warkworth, Widdrington, Winterton and Willoughby de Brook; as well as Lord Adam Gordon and Lord Charles Spencer. To them can be added a further 15 baronets and five knights, as well as numerous gentlemen. Among the architects and craftsmen whom he proposed were James Adam, Matthew Brettingham, Thomas Chippendale, Lancelot Brown, Samuel Norman,²⁶ Timothy Lightoler,

John Prestage,²⁷ Joseph Rose, William Timbrell,²⁸ Isaac Ware and Stephen Wright.²⁹

Evidence of the breadth of Robinson's interests and the extent of his involvement in the society can be seen by examining the number of committees he is recorded as attending in the first seven months of 1762.³⁰ On 9 January he heard papers on verdigris, sheep marking and varnish. On 23 February he chaired a committee to consider the question of more branches of arts and manufactures. On 11 March he attended a committee on drawing. On 13 March he heard papers on pig and bar iron and salmioniac and fish carriages. On 23 March he attended a meeting discussing the copper medal and landscapes. On 27 March he attended a committee discussing statues. On 1 April he attended a committee discussing the annual exhibition, and in particular his design for a temporary staircase. On 9 April he heard a paper on making sea water sweet. On 16 April he attended a committee discussing the exhibition, in which it was agreed that he should supervise the execution of an additional hatch door in the passage. On 20 May he chaired a committee on new arts and manufactures and attended another committee on officers of the society and their salaries. On 25 May he attended a meeting on ventilation of the Great Room. On 1 June he chaired a committee discussing repairs to the Great Room. On 17 June he chaired a committee considering Mr Woodin's plan for repairing the Great Room. On 24 June he heard a paper on the Swiss engine for tearing up trees, a demonstration of which he attended in Mr Beaufroy's garden in Lambeth on 6 July. On 14 July he chaired the meeting where Mr Tomkyns received a premium of 25 guineas for landscape painting.

A few other references help give an idea of his standing in the society. Thus on 24 May 1758 it was Robinson who proposed a motion that Lord Folkestone, President of the society, be presented with its first gold medal. It was Robinson who in 1759 acted as intermediary from the society to the Earl of Exeter over proposals to take Exeter

Exchange. In 1760 he chaired a committee looking into the delicate matter of the 'affair of the porter', an unfortunate incident during the annual exhibition when the porter, Morgan, came to blows with a visitor. Morgan 'declared he did not strike the first, but pushed the man gently with his hand to make way for some ladies and without any provocation was struck, upon which he made a blow at him'. In March 1764 he attended three committee meetings discussing the annual exhibition, chairing one.

Sometimes his involvement became controversial, as in October 1769, when he was seen as instrumental in an attempt to elect 76 new members, an 'extraordinary influx of new members . . . calculated only to serve the particular purpose of voting for a new Secretary, in the room of the late Dr Templeman'. Insinuations of a 'Ministerial job' were made against the Vice President in the chair, Sir Charles Whitworth, and Robinson, who apparently supported the 'new-creation'. The proposal was voted down.³¹

Robinson failed to hold formal office in the society. His attempt to stand as Vice President on 5 March 1765 received only 12 votes, compared to the successful Duke of Richmond's 76.

Perhaps inevitably, Robinson showed a particular interest in the society's encouragement of architecture and in its own building activities. Thus he was the only architect who attended the committee on 17 February 1763 which resolved that a 30 guinea premium for architecture, open to those under 30 years, should be presented the following year. The subject was to be 'a country house and offices for a Person of Quality, situated on an eminence and commanding fine prospects on three sides, the figure, disposition, size and proportions of the parts to be left to the discretion of the designer, the designs to be regular, the parts well proportioned and decorated in the Palladian style and to consist of a front elevation, a longitudinal and traverse section and the plans of all the different stories with a name or use of each room and its dimensions written on the plan'. A year later he attended the

committee on 2 March 1764 which awarded the 30 guinea prize to James Gandon, with Thomas Cooley receiving 20 guineas and Robert Baldwin 10 guineas. The committee decided that the following year's premium for design in architecture should be for the side of a street 500ft long with 19 houses fit for gentlemen. The winners were to be James Pollard, Richard Edwin and Thomas Sutton.

However, it would be a mistake to read too much into this. Robinson did not attend the meeting on 18 March 1763 at which John Plaw was awarded the premium of 20 guineas for his measured drawing of the Banqueting House and at which it was decided that the subject for the following year's premium for a measured drawing should be the York Building Watergate 'built by Inigo Jones – the plan, elevation and section to be done from actual measurement'. Nor did he attend the meeting on 17 February 1764 at which it was decided that the subject of the following year's premium for drawing in architecture should be the portico of St George's Church, Hanover Square.

Robinson was particularly assiduous when it came to the society's own building, with his expertise frequently being called upon. The proposal to take Exeter Exchange came to nothing and instead Sir William Chambers was employed to design the Great Room and its furniture in Little Denmark Court in 1759. Frustratingly there is no reference to any involvement by Robinson in the decision in the Society's minutes and no minutes survive from the committee set up to oversee the project. However, the room was not without its drawbacks and on 27 February 1760 a committee, headed by Robinson, was set up 'to consider in what manner the Society's large room can be made more commodious'.

The minutes of this committee survive from July 1760. The meeting of 10 July 1760, when the contract for new seats and partitions 'according to Sir Thomas Robinson's plan' was discussed, is particularly interesting. Mr Ross offered to do the work for £90, Mr Chippendale for £120 if allowed the old stuff, £130 if not, and Mr Stemson for £68. It was

agreed that Samuel Stemson should do the work which would be supervised by Robinson and various others.

Further meetings were held discussing ventilation and extra seating in 1761, again with Robinson usually in the chair. On 8 January detailed proposals were put forward about painting and coverings. On 25 June Robinson delivered a plan for three more benches which would hold a further 80 people. This was carried out by Mr West. His bill, which totalled £80 7s 6d, included £21 for 'making alterations in the south part of the room agreeable to Sir Thomas Robinson's plan'. Sadly, neither drawings nor furniture survive.

The Great Room remained unsatisfactory and Robinson chaired two meetings in June on its repair, at one of which Mr Woodin's plan for repairs was discussed. On 10 August 1763 Robinson was present at a meeting which discussed legal advice on repairing the Great Room and on 18 February 1764 chaired a meeting on relations with the landlord.

On 24 August 1764, with Mr Wyatt and Mr Dance also present, Robinson chaired a meeting 'to consider and report where there is a proper vacant piece of ground for building a house with offices to be built there on or take a lease under a builder of such a house'. Particular attention was drawn to Canary Court, a plot 150 by 90 feet which Thomas Clifton had on a lease from the Earl of Exeter for 61 years from 1766. Clifton's site was accepted and on 12 January 1765 Robinson was in the chair when a list was drawn up of the apartments and conveniences the society would want in a new building; it was agreed that members should be asked to send in an appropriate plan or plans. The proposal was ratified at a meeting of the society on 16 January. The plans were discussed on 5 February, and on 12 February it was agreed that it was possible to build on the site for less than £12,000, 'having received several ingenious plans'. Members who had sent in plans were thanked and asked to provide elevations and an estimate. It would be interesting to know

whether Robinson was one of the members who submitted plans. Given his relish for designing it is hard to imagine that he did not.

The following day Robinson moved a successful resolution at a meeting of the society that it should consider whether it was expedient to build a Room with proper offices and apartments for the use of the society. A subscription book was opened but when only £980 16s had been subscribed by 15 May 1765 the project was dropped. Despite his energetic promotion of the scheme Robinson did not actually subscribe himself.³² It was not until 1773 that a purpose-built house was designed by Robert Adam, an undertaking in which Robinson took no part.³³

The committee minutes demonstrate that it was to Robinson's designs that the Great Room was altered and new furniture designed – although sadly not executed by Thomas Chippendale. But what perhaps comes out most clearly is his application in such relatively mundane affairs, with Robinson not merely chairing the committee but personally supervising the work. Robinson's involvement was exceptional for a gentleman of his standing. No other gentleman, let alone person with title, took such a role. Most of the other members of the house committee were not even 'Esq' but simply 'Mr'.

Robinson's sense of the importance of his reputation and posterity comes over very strongly in the two immensely thick folio manuscript volumes he sent to the Duke of Newcastle in defence of his years as Governor of Barbados.³⁴ The volumes provide a detailed record of his governorship with transcripts of meetings of the assembly and council. In particular they establish exactly what were Robinson's architectural activities on the island.

Robinson arrived on the island on 10 August 1742 and almost immediately set about altering the official residence at Pilgrim, a compact villa with a central hall running the full depth of the house and a wing of offices (Fig. 3). The extent of his work can be established by a set of plans drawn by John Trail, 'Engineer', of the house and ancillary buildings before and after his alterations and a list of

'Alterations, Repairs and new erected buildings at Pilgrim done at the expense of Sir Thomas Robinson'. There is also a list of workmen and the sums they were owed but without stating their trades.³⁵

Robinson's work was driven partly by decay – the centre beam of the room below his bedroom was almost eaten through by vermin and the whole floor and roof in immediate danger of falling – and partly by the desire to make the house more convenient, in particular through creating larger rooms where the air might flow more freely and he could entertain more easily (Fig. 4). He made a larger bedroom for himself by knocking two bedrooms into one, 'finding the bedchambers very small and the climate extremely hot'; he extended the assembly room and dining room by throwing in adjoining rooms; he remodelled the staircase; he demolished what was known as the 'Stone Room' which projected at one corner of the house and replaced it with an enclosed court; he added a substantial porch and created new negro quarters in the service court. He also laid out squares of grass in the forecourt to Pilgrim House (Fig. 5), enlarged and repaired the private and common stables (Fig. 6) and fitted up houses for raising stock and preserving grain.

Unfortunately Robinson had not sought the approval of the island's General Assembly before beginning work and, although no objections were initially raised, complaints began when the Stone Room was demolished. As a result Robinson was soon at loggerheads with members of the Assembly. A committee was set up to supervise work to which Robinson delivered bills totalling £1,359 8s 2d in May 1743. The General Assembly showed no desire to pay the bills and in August 1744 Robinson, who had already advanced £600 to workmen, was forced to pay the full cost himself.

With the outbreak of war with France in June 1744 Robinson was faced with a further dilemma. Muskets and powder were delivered to the island which had no suitable place to store them. He decided to rebuild the south-east corner of the stable yard at Pilgrim to form an arsenal and

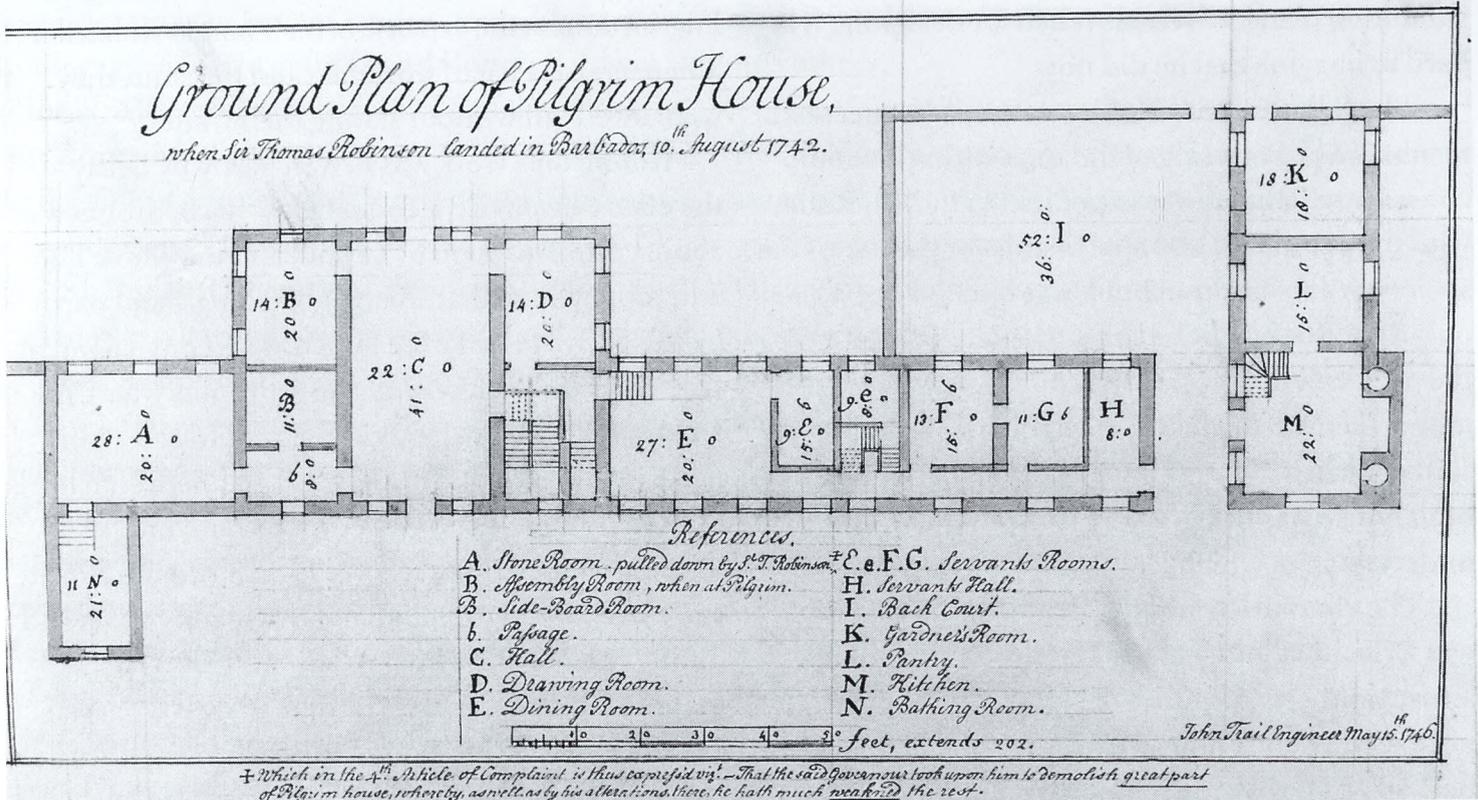


Figure 3. John Trail, plan of the Governor's house at Pilgrim, Barbados, in 1742.
Public Record Office

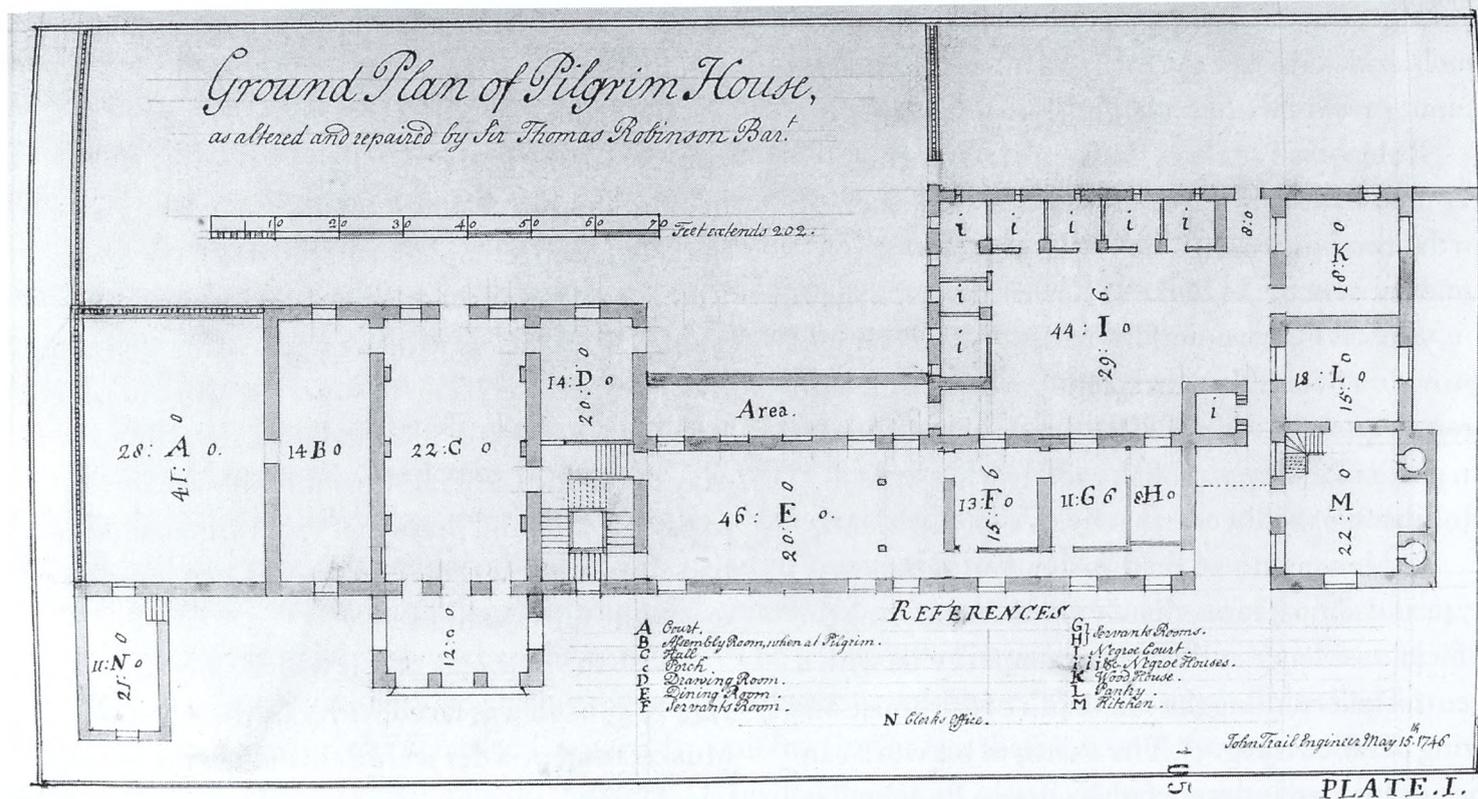


Figure 4. John Trail, plan of the Governor's house at Pilgrim, Barbados, in 1746.
Public Record Office

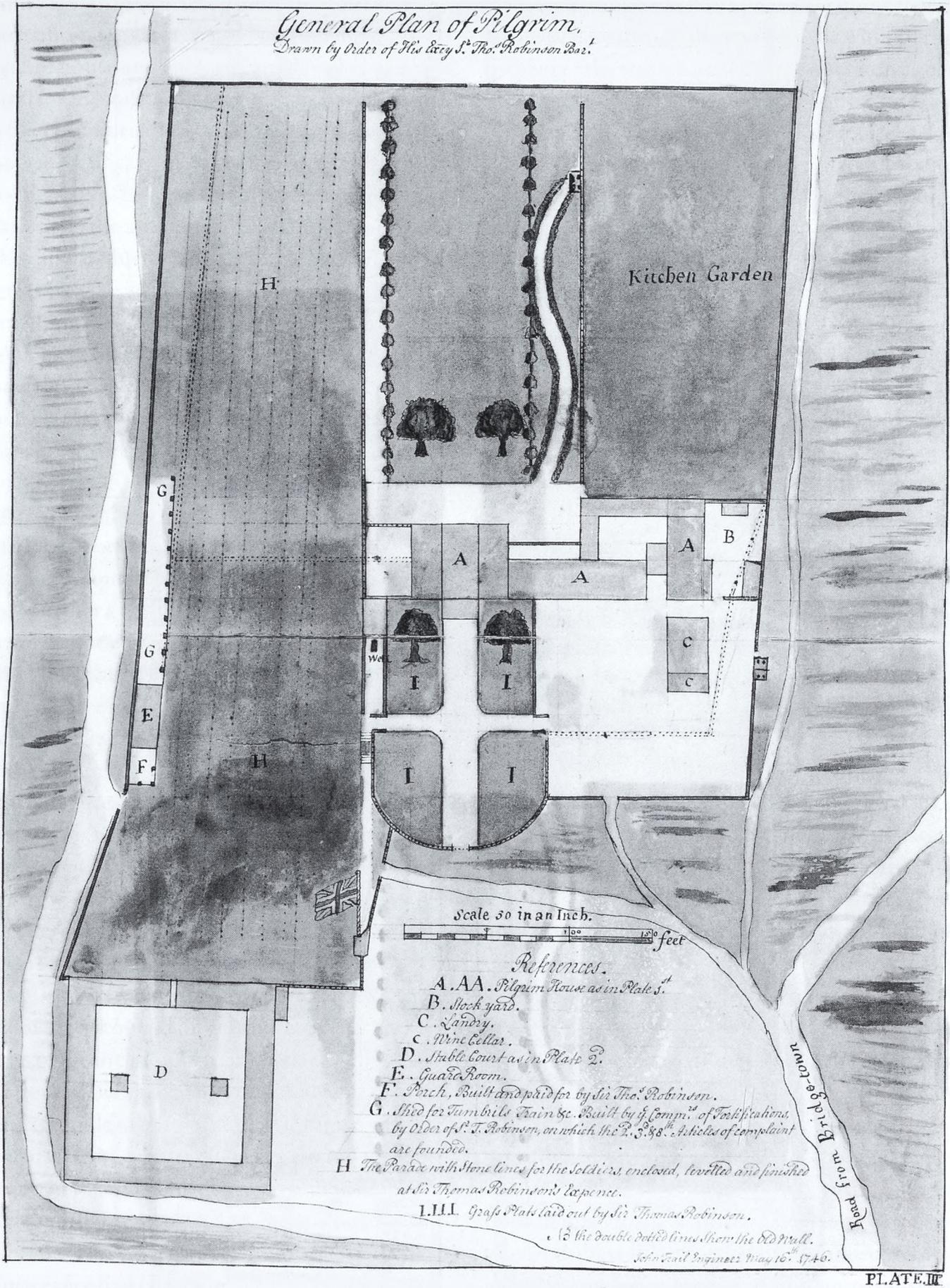


Figure 5. John Trail, plan of the Governor's house, garden and outbuildings, Pilgrim, Barbados, in 1746.
Public Record Office

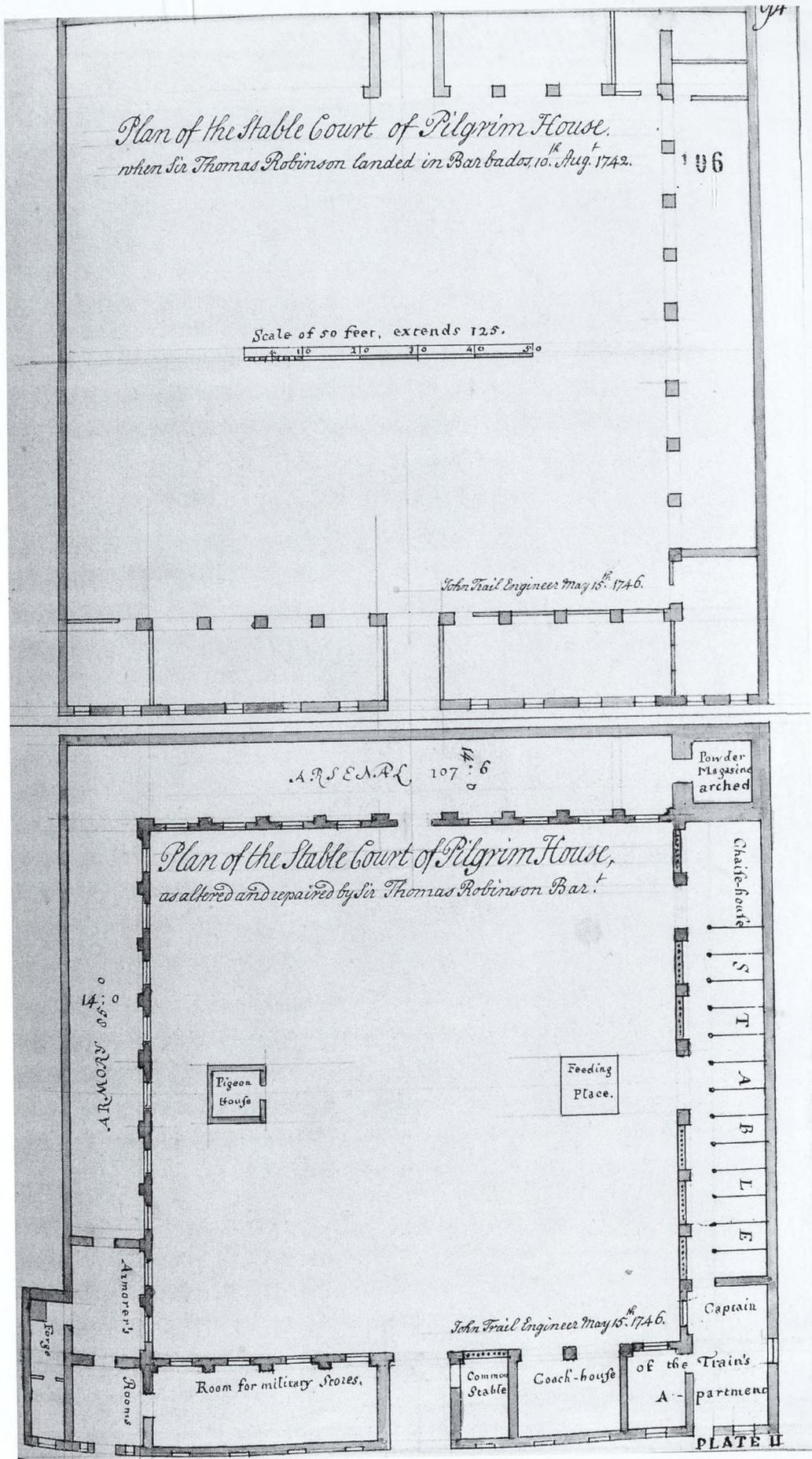


Figure 5. John Trail, plan of the Governor's stables, Pilgrim, Barbados, in 1742.

Public Record Office

armoury and to create a forge and apartment for the armourer. He also repaired and enlarged the old guard house and enclosed and levelled a parade ground for the militia. In May 1745 he had sheds for 12 artillery tumbrils built at Pilgrim by the commissioners of fortifications, according to a plan drawn by John Thody. Trail's drawings do not include elevations so the architectural quality of Robinson's work is impossible to judge, although the plan suggests that the additions to the house and the remodelling of the stable were sophisticated.

A committee of the island's council, appointed to view the work on 26 January 1746, found that Robinson had spent £4,245 15s 7d on 'repairs, alterations and structures at Pilgrim', without making any charge for his own servants, negroes, horses or carriage. It commented that the bills were correct and that as a result the house was not only habitable but commodious. It added that Robinson had also spent a further £191 5s 6½d on provisions for prisoners of war. It was reported that Robinson complained that 'the sallaries he has received as Governor have in no degree been equal to the expences he has been in his Government'.

The committee had been appointed following the presentation of 15 articles of complaint to Robinson on 12 September 1745 'by two gentlemen of the assembly'. The complaints centred on the building work, but ranged wide over Robinson's governorship. The second article, for instance, focused on the building of the tumbril sheds at Pilgrim, and argued that Robinson, 'by granting orders with the consent of council on certificates of the commissioners of fortifications for St Michael's division for work done at his special instance and materials furnished for buildings at Pilgrim as if such work was for the use of the fortifications has altered the constitution of the island, misapplied public money, raised for other purposes, absolutely destroyed all public faith and credit and introduced a precedent whence every bad consequence may ensue'.

The fourth article claimed that 'the Governor took upon him to demolish great part of Pilgrim

House whereby as well as by his alterations there he hath much weakened the rest and this without the consent of the trustee or of the representatives of the people by whose committee all alteration, additions and repair ought to have been ordered . . . and now alledges that he has expended at least £3,000 about the said buildings although the whole land and buildings including the repairs are not worth half the sum he pretends to have expended'.

Robinson's defence was as heavily laden with irony as it was detailed and wordy. Replying to accusations that he had failed to seek permission before removing the lath and plaster wall separating the bedrooms he commented that 'this I did without consulting the Representatives of the People; or Imagining 'twas a work of such solemn deliberation as not to be undertaken with out their grave advice and concurrence'.

It is clear from reading Robinson's defence that improper expenditure was merely the justification for a broader attack on his governorship. It is perhaps significant that the first article complains that he had prevented five bills being passed. Robinson admitted that he had been wrong in carrying out the work without permission but noted that members of the assembly had seen the work in hand without making complaint and that previous governors had had their building work paid for. He reckoned that the problem all stemmed from a decision early in his governorship when Thomas Harrison was removed from the council, whom he accused of hounding him ever since. His frustration is clear in the comment to the Duke of Newcastle: 'From Evidences thus drawn from the lips of my accusers, I trust the accusation itself will be look'd upon, in the judgement of your Grace, as the effect of malice, ek'd out and patch'd up with matters of convenience, rather than the complaint of an injur'd people labouring under the oppression and artifice of an imperious Governor.'

All Robinson's efforts at compromise were in vain. His apologies for acting without permission were dismissed. His offer to cover the cost of the porch in exchange for demolishing the Stone Room

was rejected. The report of the committee which acknowledged the work had been satisfactorily carried out and that the bills were correct was ignored. The assembly was not prepared to repay Robinson and certain members of it were, in Robinson's eyes, libellous in their attacks on him. His position was untenable and it can have been with little regret – except financial – that he handed over the governorship to his replacement on 14 April 1747.

It would appear that he never recovered his costs from the assembly. After much grumbling he was granted a government pension of £500 a year in 1750.³⁶ But in 1753 he was still seeking further office in compensation, complaining to Lady Yarmouth that without it 'there will be nothing left for me but to retire to my ancestral home and play patiently among the remains of my goods, greatly reduced by service to the Crown'.³⁷

However, Robinson's time in Barbados was not without some financial recompense. Among his defence papers is the note that on 14 March 1742 he married Sarah, widow of Samuel Salmon Esq, owner of 46 negroes. *The Gentleman's Magazine* duly reported the wedding on 31 May 1743: 'Sir Thomas Robinson, governor of Barbados, to Mrs Salmon of that island with £30,000'.³⁸ Whether this was in Barbadian pounds or pounds sterling is unclear. According to Robinson the £3,000 he was paid as salary in Barbados was worth about £2,000 sterling.

Robinson's role as an architectural advisor to his fellow landowners is well documented.³⁹ One example that has so far passed unremarked is his advice to Edwin Lascelles on Harewood House, Yorkshire, in 1762, following the demolition of Robert Adam's recently erected semi-circular internal court. On 15 June Lascelles wrote to his steward Samuel Popplewell explaining that he had sent Sir Thomas Robinson's plan of alterations and the accompanying letter answering John Carr's objections to his proposals and explaining his sentiments and amendments. Lascelles saw no reason to vary Robinson's suggestions.⁴⁰ The

court was rebuilt as a smaller lightwell and two new rooms, the South Drawing Room and the Common Dining Room, were added. It is not clear from subsequent documentation what Robinson suggested nor to what degree the finished design represented his ideas.

The publication of his letters was one of Robinson's plans to ensure his posterity. Another was the publication of an architectural monograph on his work, apparently a volume on Rokeby Park, including the house, park and estate buildings, intended to rival those on Houghton and Holkham. Carefully prepared drawings for this survive at Rokeby. According to a note in his personal account book, Lord Temple subscribed to the proposed publication in 1755.⁴¹ The subscription was clearly not a success and no more was heard of the project.

Robinson was equally careful to ensure that his likeness survived. A number of portraits are known, including a small ivory relief, now in the Ashmolean Museum,⁴² which portrays Robinson in profile, in the clothes and with the hairstyle of a Roman general. Somewhat curiously, though inscribed 'Roma 1730' it describes him as 'Sr Thos Robinson Bart'. Although Robinson was created a baronet on 10 March 1730 in the old calendar (actually 1731), he had left Rome some time earlier.

Among the finest of Robinson's likenesses is that on his monument in Westminster Abbey, traditionally ascribed to John Walsh.⁴³ In 1959 Hugh Honour, cataloguing the works of the eighteenth-century Italian sculptor Filippo della Valle, wrote that it was tempting to associate a recorded bust of Mr Robinson with Sir Thomas Robinson, who was known to have been in Rome in 1730.⁴⁴ Honour's guess was correct. In his will Robinson decreed that the bust of himself by 'Phillippo della Valle', along with the bust of his late wife Lady Lechmere by Bouchardon, both of which were made at Rome in 1730, should be fixed on his monument in Westminster Abbey.⁴⁵

The will reveals that Robinson had bought a place for the monument, beside that of the late duke

of Argyll, from the Dean and Chapter on 22 July 1753 for £77 15s 9d. He ordered his executors to spend £200, or more if necessary, on erecting the monument to a design which he had made and including an epitaph which he had written. Should no such design or epitaph be found they were to commission a suitable design and inscription. The monument is signed by John Walsh, who carved the coat of arms of William Trevor, Bishop of Durham, on the chapel at Glynde Place, Sussex, which Robinson designed.⁴⁶

Robinson's will, dated 13 November 1775 and proved 10 March 1777, has other useful information. He left 'such of my books, several of which on architecture, antiquities etc are very valuable, as my brother, Richard Robinson, Archbishop of Armagh, shall chose in order to complete the collection which he is now making'. The executors were to make a catalogue of his books to present to the archbishop, who founded the Robinson Library, now Armagh Public Library, in 1771, intended as the first element of a new university at Armagh.⁴⁷ The library survives with significant numbers of the original books. According to Dr Edward McParland some of the architectural volumes bear Robinson's name in the flyleaf. The executors' catalogue does not survive.

Robinson left his family pictures to his brother William. These included the handsome portrait of Robinson by Francis van der Mijl now in the National Portrait Gallery (Fig. 1).⁴⁸ His fine bust of Lord Chesterfield made by Joseph Wilton, his portrait of Chesterfield by Allan Ramsay and the medal of the nobleman given by Chesterfield to Robinson were left to the British Museum. They were given to the museum as 'testimony for the memory of that illustrious person with whom I have lived in intimacy for more than half a century'.

The British Museum 'Books of Presents' records that on 27 September 1777 'according to the Will of the late Sir Thomas Robinson Bart, a marble bust by Wilton, a medal in coper by Dassier and a picture by Ramsay, all of the late Earl of Chesterfield, have

been deposited in this Museum'. The Wilton bust remains in the Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities. The Ramsay portrait of 1765, originally suspended with other portraits on the walls of the Eastern Zoological Gallery, was transferred to the National Portrait Gallery in the late 1870s. A copper medal by J. A. Dassier of the Earl of Chesterfield is held in the Department of Coins and Medals, but this came from the collections of Edward Hawkins, Keeper of the Department of Antiquities from 1826 to 1860. This may have replaced the medal given by Robinson as such medals were apparently quite common.⁴⁹

Robinson left his drawings, prints, plans, designs, manuscripts and letters to his executors, Fleming Pinkstan, Hugh Kelly and James Parkinson, and his son-in-law, William Pirnor, 'leaving it to their discretion to dispose of and publish the same in such manner as they shall think proper as I am fully persuaded they will make no other use of them but what is suitable to the nature of that trust and perfectly consistent with a sincere regard for my memory and the reputation of my family and connections and the profit or loss attending such publication is to be the sole risque and likewise the sole benefit' of the four.

According to Horace Walpole, Robinson had preserved every letter he ever received and all the copies of all his responses, including a correspondence he had kept up with Lord Chesterfield for 50 years. Walpole adds that though Robinson had asked his son-in-law to publish them Robinson's brother the Archbishop of Armagh was consulting lawyers to see whether he could stop their publication.⁵⁰ They never appeared and the subsequent fate of Robinson's manuscripts and drawings is unknown.

Robinson's will provides a number of small insights into his later life. The Christian name of his illegitimate daughter Anne Pirnor's husband William is left blank three times, suggesting a surprising lack of intimacy. However, after sundry legacies Anne Pirnor was to be left the residue of

his estate, which was to be placed in government securities with the dividends being paid to her.⁵¹

An otherwise unrecorded drama emerges from the will in the legacy of an annuity of £50 for life (together with all his wearing apparel and an annuity to her mother for life of £50) to Robinson's housekeeper, Susanna Griffith 'for her great integrity, diligence and respectful attention she has always paid me (particularly during the several illnesses I have had) and to whom under providence I owe

much on account of her discovery and extinguishing a fire in my library at the hazard of her life'.

Robinson asked to be buried at Merton Abbey, Surrey, 'along with my ancestors, in the privatest manner, with a plain tablet or inscription as my executors shall direct'. His baronetcy passed to his brother William, then to his brother Richard, and then by special remainder to his distant cousin Matthew in whose family it remained until its extinction in 1883 on the death of the 8th baronet.⁵²

NOTES

- 1 Historical Manuscripts Commission, *The Manuscripts of the Earl of Carlisle preserved at Castle Howard*, London, 1897.
- 2 Margaret, Lady Verney and Patrick Abercrombie, 'Letters of an Eighteenth Century Architect', *Architectural Review*, LIX, 258; LX, 1, 50, 92.
- 3 Historical Manuscripts Commission, *op. cit.*, 143
- 4 *Idem*.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 85–86.
- 6 Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey County Record Office, Merton Parish Register.
- 7 C. W. Boase, *An Alphabetical Register of Commoners of Exeter College, Oxford, Oxford*, 1894, 275: 'Thomas Robinson, 1st son of William Robinson of Rokeby'...
- 8 O. Manning and W. Bray, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey*, London, 1804, I, 260–1.
- 9 PRO, PROB 11/1029.
- 10 *Register of Admissions to Middle Temple*, I, 1949, x; G.E.C., *Complete Baronetage*, Exeter, 1906, 68; Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke, *The House of Commons, 1754–70*, III, London, 1964, 388; John Ingamells, *Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701–1800*, New Haven and London, 1997, 816.
- 11 G.E.C., *Complete Baronetage*, London, 1926, VI, 82–83.
- 12 *Record of the Royal Society of London*, London, 1940, 398; London, Society of Antiquaries of London, Membership Index.
- 13 *Historical Notices of the Society of Dilettanti*, London, 1855, 120.
- 14 PRO, PROB 11/574. To his sister £100 plus the plate at Rookby and what books she thinks fit. To his daughter Anne Robinson £1,000 for her portion. To every other daughter and younger sons £500 for their portion, with £10 to each daughter and the younger sons on his decease.
- 15 PRO, PROB 11/642. To her daughter Ann Robinson £100. To her sons William £100, Henry £50, Richard £150, Septimus £200 in South Sea Stock. To Lady Lechmere 50 gns.
- 16 London, Hoare's Bank, Ledger 57: payments are 24 April 1756, K. Lowther £375; 21 May, 1756 John Layton, £125; 29 March 1758, William Whittaker, £250; 1 April 1758, John Devall, £224; 12 April 1758, Richard Robinson, £388; 15 April 1758, Thomas Day, £113; 18 April 1758, balance of £25 withdrawn.
- 17 Drummond's Bank Archives, 1764–9.
- 18 Thomas Thomson, *History of the Royal Society*, London, 1812, xxxvii.
- 19 London, Society of Antiquaries of London, Members Index.
- 20 Giles Worsley, 'Rokeby Park-II', *Country Life*, March 26, 1987, CLXXI, 74, 176
- 21 London, British Architectural Library, MSS Cha 2/2.
- 22 London, Royal Society of Arts, membership book.
- 23 This is confirmed by the *Survey of London*. Robinson was living in Carlisle House in Soho Street which was being let out on an annual basis following the death of the 3rd Countess of Carlisle in 1752. Robinson seems to have occupied it just for 1755. The *Survey of London* mistakenly suggests that it was Robinson's namesake, later Lord Grantham, who was in residence. Robinson would have been renting from his brother-in-law [*Survey of London*, xxxiii, *The Parish of St Anne Soho*, London, 1966. 145].

- 24 D.G.C. Allan and J.L. Abbott, *The Virtuoso Tribe of Arts and Sciences*, Athens (Ga.), 1992, 299, 363.
- 25 London, Royal Society of Arts, membership index. I am grateful to Susan Bennett, archivist at the Royal Society of Arts, for providing the list.
- 26 Probably the very expensive carver and gilder [Geoffrey Beard and Christopher Gilbert, *Dictionary of English Furniture Makers*, London, 651].
- 27 Probably the cabinet maker and auctioneer [*Ibid.*, 713].
- 28 Presumably the carpenter William Timbrell who helped build the rotunda at Ranelagh which opened in 1742. Mr John Spenser, another on the list, may be Timbrell's partner in the work, John Spencer [Giles Worsley, 'I thought myself in paradise', *Country Life*, January 30, 1986, CLXXIX, 1380–1].
- 29 Those not already named included Michael Adolphus Esq, William Aislable Esq, Dr Thomas Arne, William Atkinson, George Barber Esq, General Barrington, Mr Mark Beaufoy, John Birtles Esq, William Nevil Blondeau Esq, George Bowes Esq, Thomas Bullock Esq, James Cecil Esq, Charles Cheere Esq, Francis Child Esq, George Clive Esq, Henry Clive Esq, Richard Clive Esq, Wenman Coke, Capt. Thomas Cole, Hon Spencer Compton, General Cornwallis, Ranke Coulthrop Esq, Alex Dalmahay Esq, George Delaval Esq, Edward Dering Esq, Sir James Douglas, Rev Dr John Douglas, Sir Laurence Dundas Bart, Thomas Dundas Esq, Jonas Durden Esq, Sir John Eden Bart, Robert Raikes Farthorp Esq, Hon Richard Fitzpatrick, Gilbert Fane Fleming Esq, Tobias Frere Esq, James Glen Esq, Sir Richard Glynn Bart, Major Gowland, Mr Josiah Graham, Rev Mr Robert Graham, Admiral Griffin, Francis Grojan Esq, John Hall Esq, Sir Charles Hardy, James Harington Esq, Josiah Hart Esq, Sir William Harte Kt, Joseph Henry Esq, William Hewitt Esq, Sir Robert Hildyard Bart, General Hodgson, Mr Charles Holmes, Mr William Jelf, Soame Jennings Esq, Mr John Jones, Hon Henry Knight, James Lacy Esq, Sir Matthew Lamb Bart, Edward Lascelles Esq, Edwin Lascelles Esq, Henry Lascelles Esq, Robert Lovelace Esq, Jonathan Lovett Esq, Major Lovett, Charles Lowndes Esq, Robert Lowther Esq, Sir James Lowther Bart, Hon. James Steward Mackenzie, Mr B. Martin, Edmund Maskelyne, Thomas Matthews Esq, Francis Molyneux Esq, Sir Henry Moore Bart, Sir Roger Mostyn, William Murgatroyd Esq, Sir William Musgrave Bart, Arnold Nesbit Esq. Lieut Gen. Oglethorpe, James Oswald Esq, Edward Thomas Pare Esq, Thomas Pitt Esq, Sir George Pocock, Sir James Porter, Thomas Pownall Esq, Mr George Rastell, Mr Isaace Resoliere, William Reynolds Esq, John Rich Esq, John Roberts Esq, Hon Thomas Robinson, Sir William Robinson Bart, Mr George Shakespear, Sir John Shaw Bart, Sir Edward Simpson Kt, Mr John Spenser, Capt. Stables, Philip Stanhope Esq, General Stanwix, Sir Bryan Stapylton Bart, Sir Thomas Stapylton Bart, Philip Stevens Esq, Sir George Strickland Bart, John Tuile Esq, Marmaduke Tunstall Esq, Edward Turner Esq, Hon Frederick Vane, Philip Stanhope Esq, General Stanwix, Sir John Webb Bart, Sir Thomas Webb Bart, Albany Wallis Esq.
- 30 For evidence of Robinson's activities at the RSA see the manuscript Minutes of the Society, Minutes of Committees and Miscellaneous Committees.
- 31 Allan and Abbott, *op. cit.*, 299.
- 32 Subscription Book for erecting a building for the use of the Society instituted at London for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce.
- 33 D. G. C Allan, *The Houses of the Royal Society of Arts*, 1974, 6–16; London, Royal Society of Arts, Minutes of Committees and Miscellaneous Committees.
- 34 PRO, CO 28/47, 48.
- 35 PRO, CO 28/47, fols. 93–5, fol. 213.
- 36 Namier and Brooke, *op. cit.*, 389.
- 37 London, British Library, Add ms 32732, fol. 90.
- 38 *Gentleman's Magazine*, XIII, 332,
- 39 As note 20.
- 40 Leeds, West Yorkshire Archive Service sc 3/3/88. I am grateful to Mary Mauchline's manuscript notes on the Harewood building records for noting the reference to Robinson and to her comments on his activity at Harewood.
- 41 San Marino (Ca.), Henry E. Huntingdon Library, Department of Manuscripts, Stowe Papers, Richard Earl Temple's Personal Account Book 1732–1779, cited in Michael McCarthy, 'Sir Thomas Robinson: An Original English Palladian', *Architectura*, x, 1980, 53.
- 42 Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, wa 1996.384.
- 43 Rupert Gunnis, *Dictionary of British Sculptors 1660–1851*, London, 1968, 412.
- 44 Hugh Honour, 'Filippo della Valle', *Connoisseur*, CXLIV, 1959, 179.
- 45 PRO, PROB 11/1029.
- 46 Gunnis, *op. cit.*, 412.
- 47 Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, London, 1849, I, 65.
- 48 According to the National Portrait Gallery archives the portrait passed from the collection of Sir Thomas Robinson Bt in 1777 to that of the 1st Lord Rokeby in 1785, then by descent to Hon. Elizabeth Robinson

Montagu. It was acquired by the NPG via Leggatt Brothers from the collection of the Hon. Lady Cary in 1979.

- 49 Letter from Alexander Pullen, Archives Assistant, British Museum, August 1998.
- 50 W. S. Lewis, *op. cit.*, xxviii, 297.
- 51 Robinson's two brothers, the Archbishop of Armagh and William Robinson, both received £50, as did his sister Mrs Friend. Her three sons William, Robert and John were left £50. Her daughter was left £50 for her sole use, along with £200 for her husband Captain Campbell. Other legacies included Matthew Robinson of Esgoley, Co. York, his son Morris and two daughters, Mrs Scott and Mrs Montague, who each received 20 gns. Robinson's son-in-law Mr Pirnor of Arlington Street 'Joint Apothecary with Mr Brande to their majesties' was left £200. Mr Moore, rector of Rookby and Barningham, was left 5gns to be disposed of to the

poor of those parishes. Robinson also ordered his executors not to pursue those of his former Yorkshire tenants who still had debts outstanding. The three executors, Fleming Pinkstan, Hugh Kelly and James Parkinson, were each to receive £200 for their trouble. Mr Brounton of Red Lion Square was left £50, Porter Shebbeare of Pimlico £30. Robinson's clerk William Lomax received 20gns and – along with each of his servants – a year's wages. James Parkinson was also left a furnished house adjoining his own in Chelsea, but, that subsequently being disposed of, he left him £400 in a subsequent codicil. A note on the will dated 19 May 1825 records that the last surviving executor, James Parkinson, died, intestate. Anne Pirnor by then having died, the residuary legacies went to Mary Anne Yonge, wife of Henry Yonge Esq, daughter of Ann Pirnor by William Pirnor.

- 52 G.E.C., *Complete Baronetage*, Exeter, 1906, 69.