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THE GARTER ROOM AT STOWE HOUSE

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The Garter Room at Stowe House was described by Michael Gibbon as ‘following, or rather blazing, the Neo-classical trail’.¹ This article will show that its shell was built by Lord Cobham, perhaps to the design of Capability Brown, before 1748, and that the plan itself was unique. It was completed for Earl Temple, mainly in 1755, to a design by John Hobcraft, perhaps advised by Giovanni-Battista Borra. Its detailed decoration, however, was taken from newly documented Hellenistic buildings in the near east, especially the Temple of the Sun at Palmyra. Borra’s drawings of this building were published in the first of Robert Wood’s two famous books, *The Ruins of Palmyra otherwise Tedmor in the Desart*, in 1753. This article will demonstrate that the Garter Room was the first room in the modern world to be based on the Temple of the Sun, and it will suggest why the iconography of Palmyra would have been so attractive to Earl Temple.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STATE APARTMENT AT STOWE

The State Bedchamber or Garter Room (Figs. 1 and 2) was the culmination of Lord Cobham’s design of the 1740’s.² During this decade he embarked on the grand scheme of extending his father’s seventeenth-century house by galleries and two end pavilions. The result was an impressive enfilade of eleven rooms centred on the Great Parlour (replaced in the 1770’s with the Marble Hall). Lord Cobham had started on the eastern side with a gallery once known

as the Ball Room and subsequently as the large Library, which led to a three-room apartment, which Lady Newdigate noted as all ‘newly built’ in July 1748.³ On the western side the answering gallery was known as the State Gallery and subsequently as the State Dining Room. Next west was the State Dressing Room, and the State Bedchamber was at the western end of the main enfilade. In 1748 Lady Newdigate was told by ‘the person who shewd the house’ that this room was to be ‘a prodigious large bedchamber ... in which the bed is to be raised upon steps’, intended ‘for any of the Royal Family, if ever they should do my Lord the honour of a visit.’ ‘This apartment is to be fitted up with the greatest Magnificence, it is at present only brick walls yet said to have cost ten thousand pounds’.⁴ The room was not mentioned by the Duchess of Beaufort, who visited on 25 September 1750, so it was presumably still unfinished then.⁵

Since the brickwork seen by Lady Newdigate presumably included the fireplace, the only possible location for the bed would have been against the west wall, where it eventually went. Here the Stowe State Bed was intended to stand on a dais behind railings.⁶ This may have been Lord Cobham’s own idea, as by this time he had designed at least one garden and one park building. Or it could have been one of his architects, who included Gibbs in 1731–35,⁷ possibly Flitcroft c.1742,⁸ and Brown, nominally head gardener, but effectively clerk of works from 1741 to 1751.⁹ Lord Cobham had requested Brown’s plans for the ‘Long Room’ in April 1747. This is unlikely to have been for the

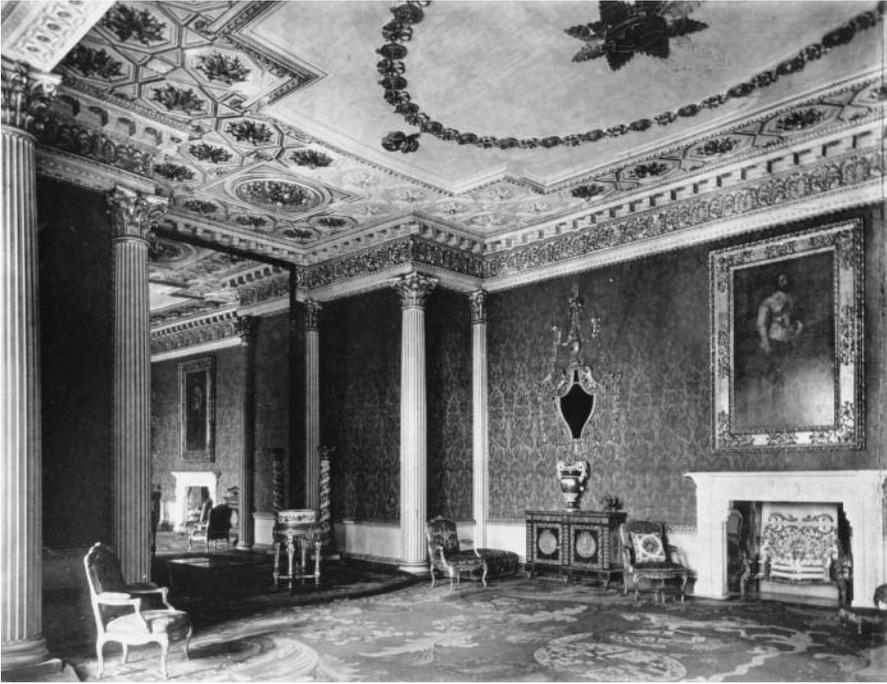


Fig. 1. The Garter Room photographed by J. Mudd in the 1870s. The State Bed in the recess at the west end until 1839 had been replaced by a large mirror. *Stowe School*.



Fig. 2. The Garter Room as school Dining Room, before 1935. The mirror had been removed and an elliptical window set in the west wall by Clough Williams-Ellis. The former loggia is on the left. *Buckinghamshire County Council*.

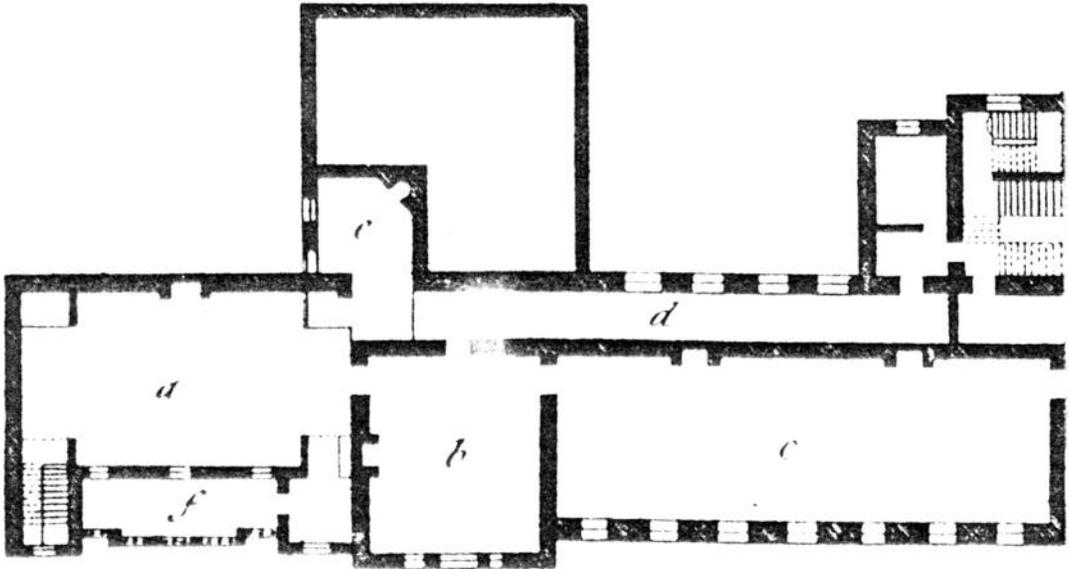


Fig. 3. Fairchild, plan of the State Apartment at Stowe House, 1763.
 a) is the State Bed Chamber (the Garter Room), b) is the State Dressing Room,
 c) is the State Dining Room (the Gallery), and f) is the loggia.

gallery on the east side (the Ball room, now the Library), since its cornice and cove were plastered by April 1747 and it was complete by July 1748.¹⁰ It is also unlikely to have meant the State Gallery (now the State Dining Room), which answers the Library on the west side, as joiners and plasterers were at work there in 1746, and Francesco Sleter was paid for the four paintings in the cove in April 1747. Although the Library and State Dining Room are 74 and 70 feet long respectively, it may be significant that Seeley called them both ‘galleries’, not ‘rooms’, in the 1759 *Description* However, the State Bedchamber, originally 50 feet 8 inches by 25 feet 10 inches, could also have been described as a long room. Brown, who had designed the Grecian Temple and other buildings in the garden, may therefore have drawn up the plans, but the idea could have been Lord Cobham’s. It may be significant that Lord Cobham’s portrait was to feature in this part of the house.

Lord Cobham clearly intended that the State Bed itself should be the climax of his enfilade. In 1676 Stowe had been designed with an enfilade aligned with windows in the end rooms and located close to the exterior wall. The positioning of doorways close to the exterior walls limited the range of possibilities for the dynamic shapes of rooms. But this was the usual position.¹¹ Several large English houses included the bedchamber near the end of the progression through the State Rooms. At Chatsworth the state apartment on the first floor of the south side runs east to west towards the State Bedchamber. In the south front of Hampton Court, progressing from west to east, the State Bedchamber lay beyond the Throne Room, although the Queen’s closet occupied the actual corner. Only in a few instances, as in the Saloon at Blenheim, was the enfilade used more creatively, providing vistas along the centres of the rooms. At Blenheim a pair of three-roomed

apartments in the state rooms along the south front was mirrored on the east front by another pair of private apartments.¹² Likewise Stowe had its private apartment at the east end of the enfilade, mirroring the location of the state apartment at the west end. Nevertheless, at Blenheim, more typical of a seventeenth-century layout, the final room in the sequence was the dressing room or closet, and the bed in the previous room could therefore not be in the alignment but had to stand to one side, at right angles. The ground floor on the south side of Beningbrough has bedroom suites at either end but, again, the dressing rooms are in the corners, with the bedchambers one room in towards the centre of the house. Stowe's State Bedchamber is therefore probably unique on two counts. The bedchamber is at the very end of the enfilade, and the bed itself is aligned with the enfilade, not set back from it at right angles.¹³

Although Earl Temple inherited Stowe in 1749, it was not until 1755 that work started on the interior of the State Bedchamber. In February 1755 John Hobcraft charged for 'Drawing a Plan for State Bedchamber'.¹⁴ In April Thomas Collingridge was paid for joining the floors.¹⁵ In June Charles Scriven was paid for glass.¹⁶ In July Thomas Collingridge was paid for work about the partitions.¹⁷ In October George Pain was paid (£34) for the ceiling.¹⁸ Nearly three years later, in September 1758, Thomas Page was paid for hanging the doors,¹⁹ and the room must have been complete by 1759, when William Bacon set up the State Bed.²⁰ 1759 was also the date of Seeley's first *Description* . . . to give details of the interior of the house. Earl Temple, however, was awarded the Garter only in February 1760, after his brother-in-law William Pitt had asked for it on his behalf, so the centre of the ceiling with its Garter insignia and the hangings on the bed were not added until then.²¹

As completed the Garter Room had an elongated cruciform plan (Fig. 3), with four closets in the corners, closed off perhaps by the partitions for which Collingridge was paid in July 1755. The east and west arms were narrower, and the west one was

the bed alcove. The wide south arm was adjoined by a loggia (*f* on the plan in fig. 3), to balance that on the south side of the east pavilion. But the room was rebuilt for structural reasons by Fielding Dodds in 1935 (Figs. 4 & 5). The four closets were removed, as were the two additional Palmyrene ceilings near the windows. The 1935 ceiling is aligned on the centre of the new room and not on the enfilade, like the original ceiling.

THE SOURCE OF THE DESIGN

It was clearly Lord Cobham's intention from the start that his state apartment should be decorated with classical themes. The four medallion paintings in the cove of the State Gallery, for which Sleter was paid six guineas in April 1747, represent *Hebe, Diana, and Cupid and two Graces*. Lord Cobham commissioned Urban Leyniers at Brussels to manufacture a series of five large tapestries, all on the theme of the triumphs of classical deities (Bacchus, Neptune, Mars, Diana, Ceres), while the overmantels illustrated the importance of truth and poetic inspiration. Such a classical triumph was part of the carefully orchestrated iconography supporting Cobham's other martial and political themes elsewhere in the house.

Earl Temple, who succeeded his uncle at Stowe in 1749, was more single-mindedly devoted to the classical world. He spent much time and money purifying Stowe's classical buildings and developing more complex classical iconographies. Previously classical architecture had been copied from sources like Palladio's engravings of Roman temples. These were turned into trend-setting copies like William Kent's Temple of Ancient Virtue at Stowe in the mid 1730's. A decade earlier Sir John Vanbrugh had experimented with reconstructing a circular Temple, the Rotondo, from a surviving account by the Roman writer Vitruvius.²² No one, however, had tried to copy accurate details from a newly discovered ancient ruin until the 1750's, when Borra's drawings

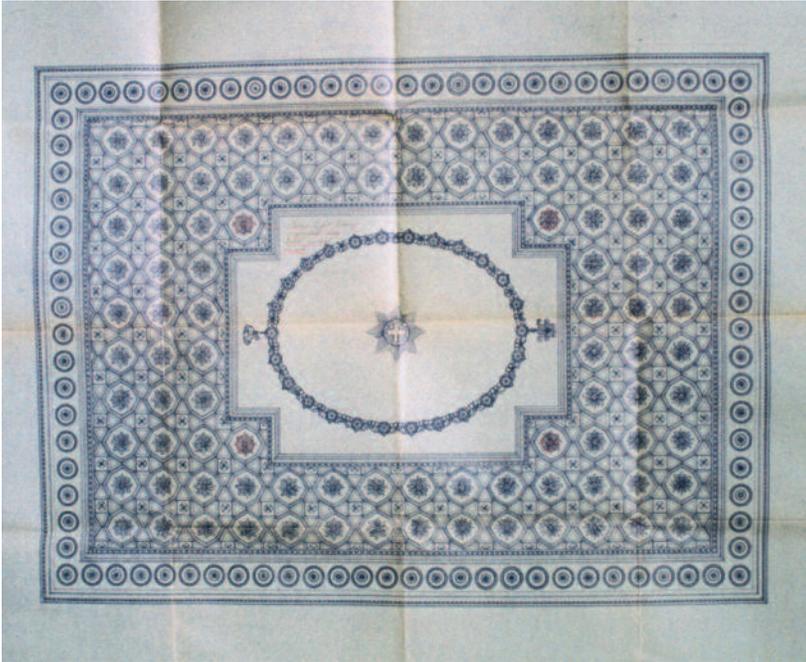


Fig. 4. R. Fielding Dodd and C. Hawkes, plan of the proposed Garter Room ceiling after the removal of the corner closets, 1936. *Stowe School*.

became available in Wood's two publications. At Brown's departure in the autumn of 1751,²³ Earl Temple grasped a unique opportunity to take the lead in importing classical expertise in his development of Stowe.

From late 1751 the Torinese architect Giovanni Battista Borra (1713–70) had probably the greatest direct knowledge of classical architecture of any architect in England. When Robert Wood (c.1717–71) and John Bouverie (c.1722–1750, who died on the expedition) set out from Naples in 1750 to record classical architecture in the near east, they took James Dawkins (1722–57) and Borra with them as draughtsmen. To avoid conflicting with James Stuart's expedition to Athens, they went further and recorded the remains of two Roman cities in the Greek east, Palmyra and Baalbeck. Palmyra had been located by some English merchants only in 1678 and Baalbeck was first visited by Henry Maundrell in

1697.²⁴ Borra's drawings were published as *The Ruins of Palmyra* in 1753 and *The Ruins of Balbec* in 1757.²⁵ These books were the first of several archaeological volumes to inform the classical revival.²⁶ James 'Athenian' Stuart (1713–88) and Nicholas Revett (1720–1804) had planned their Greek expedition from 1748 to 1751, but they had yet to complete their travels, and their first volume was not published until 1762.²⁷

Earl Temple had been a member of the Society of Dilettanti, the leading society for classical archaeologists, from 1736, and probably from its start two years earlier. Both Wood's and Stuart's expeditions were supported by this society and Wood was elected a member in 1763. Earl Temple therefore engaged Borra soon after the latter arrived in London in the autumn of 1751 ready to prepare his drawings for Wood's publications. Eight letters in French survive from Borra in London to Earl



Fig. 5. The Garter Room, looking east, in 1936, after the removal of the corner closets.
The circular motif on the central axis of the ceiling is also derived from the ceiling of the Temple of the Sun at Palmyra. *Stowe School*.

Temple, referring to his work at Stowe in 1752 and 1754. Borra reconstructed various existing garden buildings at Stowe on purer classical lines, including Vanbrugh's Rotondo (between 1752 and 1754), the Grecian Temple (in 1753 and 1754), and the Gibbs' Building (in 1756), rededicating it to Diana. He has also been credited with plans for altering the Boycott Pavilions and the addition of ceilings in the Palladian Bridge and the Lake Pavilions. The execution of his proposals may have been delayed, since it occurred

between 1758 and 1764, while Borra returned to Turin in 1756 and there is no evidence for subsequent visits by him to England.²⁸

The first evidence of Borra's proposals for Stowe House itself is the engraving of the South Front 'according to the Plan Propos'd by Signor Borra', usually dated 1753.²⁹ Earl Temple rejected Borra's design, but in 1754 he himself designed with Borra the double flight of steps for the south front which survived until 1771. It is not yet certain whether the

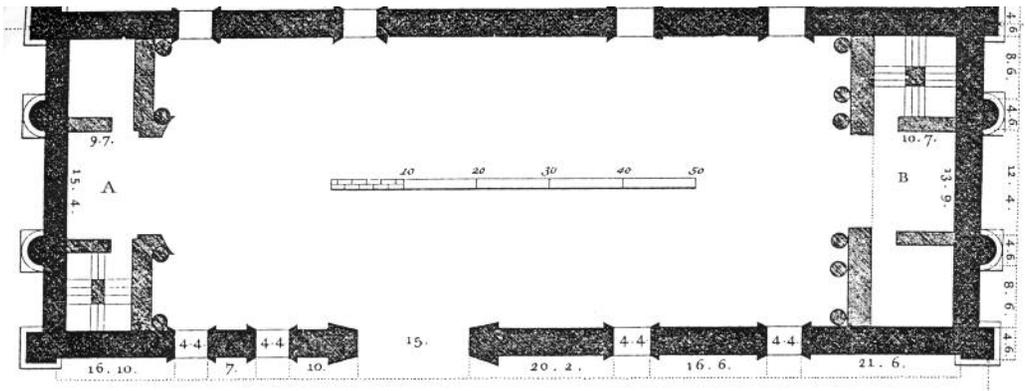


Fig. 6. J.-B. Borra, plan of the Temple of the Sun at Palmyra, from Robert Wood, *The Ruins of Palmyra...*, London, 1753, plate xvi.

two Palmyrene features of the Garter Room were contemporary with Borra's south front proposal. These were the ceiling design, taken from the Temple of the Sun, and the location of the four closets, modelled on the floor-plan of the same temple (Fig. 6). On 5 August 1755 Temple praised the proposed alterations of his brother-in-law, William Pitt, to 'Signor Borra's plan for the house', which Borra had himself adopted. Pitt's proposals may have included the State Dressing Room and State Bedchamber, although by August 1755 work on these was well under way.³⁰

PALMYRENE CEILINGS

Four patterns of Palmyrene ceilings were copied in England. Two were based on octagons and two on circles. Stowe's Garter Room must be unique among neo-classical rooms in England in that it had examples of three of the four types, while the fourth was used on the Temple of Concord and Victory in the garden.

Of the two based on octagons, one had regular octagons joined at the angles, with small squares and triangles in between (Appendix: type A1) (Fig. 7). The other had non-regular octagons, or squares with

truncated corners, placed near each other along their long sides, with small squares at 45° in between (Appendix: type A2) (Fig. 9). This latter pattern should be distinguished from a similar pattern with regular octagons, illustrated by Serlio and copied by William Kent, Robert Adam and others (Appendix: type A3) (Fig. 14).

Of the two based on circles, one had adjoining circles in a rectangular grid pattern, with small four-pointed stars with smooth convex sides (Appendix: type B1) (Fig. 11). The other had interlocking circles in a rectangular grid pattern, forming very small four-pointed stars with smooth convex sides in between four adjacent circles (Appendix: type B2) (Fig. 13). There were also a few patterns based on hexagons, but these were less distinctive from well tried ideas of earlier centuries.

Of the two octagonal patterns, one came from inside the Temple of the Sun at Palmyra and one from its courtyard. The first use in England of both was probably at Stowe: the former in the Garter Room (Fig. 8) and the latter in the *pronaos* of the Temple of Concord & Victory (Fig. 10). The former, discussed in 1988 by Richard Hewlings in an article on one of its manifestations, became the best known of all Palmyrene features.³¹

The two circular patterns were less frequently used. Their origin as sepulchral decoration may have put off clients, and the slightly less attractive aesthetic arrangement of circles within the rectangular frame of a ceiling may also have been a factor. Their use is slightly later in date, although Borra made good use of them in Turin in the late 1750s.³² Both circular patterns were used for the Garter Room's lower-level ceiling near the windows (Fig. 12). It is just possible that these were part of Borra's loggia on the south side of the Garter Room, as originally designed, and that they were then incorporated or copied in the enlarged room when the south front was rebuilt in the early 1770's. Alternatively, they could have been introduced then.

The one awkward feature of the original angled octagonal ceiling from Palmyra was its central circular recess. Although bordered with an impressive Greek key pattern, the junction between the circle and the straight lines of the surrounding octagons was not very happy. A similar circular centrepiece featuring a bust was found on the other octagonal ceiling at Palmyra. Borra therefore eliminated these central circles at Stowe, although he kept a small one over the bed recess at the far end of the State Bedroom and at the eastern end (Fig. 5). Instead he introduced a flat central panel with mainly straight edges, doubtless designed for recording the eventual grant of the Garter (Figs. 1 and 4). A similar design can be found inside the Temple of Concord and Victory, although it has not yet received any decoration.

THE TEMPLE OF THE SUN AND LIBERTARIAN IDEALS

The State Bedroom recreated Palmyra not only in the ceiling design from the Temple of the Sun but also in its general plan. In each corner were rectangular closets, breaking forward into the central space (Fig. 5). This recalls the oriental design of the

interior of the Temple of the Sun at Palmyra, with its two *adytons* inside the *cella* (Fig. 6). In recreating this Earl Temple was creating his own temple as the climax of the enfilade, his axis of honour. In place of the altar, on the dais at the end recess, stood the state bed. The twelve attached Corinthian pilasters also recalled the Palmyrene temple. Wood noted that 'the whole architecture of Palmyra is Corinthian, richly ornamented'.³³

Earl Temple was probably driven not only by his desire to produce the first archaeologically authentic reconstruction of a newly recorded Hellenistic temple. He was also, doubtless, restating his strong political views. As so often at Stowe, development in architecture and gardening reflected political themes and libertarian ideals. The iconographical significance of the Temple of the Sun is made clear in Robert Wood's preface to *The Ruins of Palmyra*. He commented on its Syrian name, Tedmor, meaning 'palm', according to St Jerome, and its Greek name 'Palmyra' with the same meaning. These obviously suited the finale of Earl Temple's triumphal progression along the enfilade, since a palm stood for victory and triumph.

Wood then wrote a eulogy of Palmyra's most famous ruler, Queen Zenobia, who reigned from 266 to 273 AD. He followed Trebellius Pollio in highlighting her regal beauty (she 'puts one more in mind of Minerva than Venus'), her linguistic abilities, her prudent government, her chaste views even within marriage, her capacity for drink (doubtless a winner with Earl Temple, who honoured Bacchus in several places at Stowe),³⁴ and above all her great military conquests – 'an example of one of the most rapid and extraordinary changes of fortune we meet with in history'.³⁵ She thus became an exemplar of military virtues (amid Persian luxury), the result of a 'republican' government, so dear in its libertarian form to Earl Temple. At the same time Zenobia encouraged excellence in literature. Wood applauded Zenobia's minister Dionysius Cassius Longinus, Alexander Pope's 'ardent Judge ... always just',³⁶

for his *Treatise on the Sublime*, which must have influenced Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* published in 1757.

Zenobia, or 'Augusta' as she called herself on her coins, was thus considered the 'noblest woman in all the Orient'. She had come to symbolise wealth, trade and political independence, challenging totalitarian Rome, rather like Boudica and Caractacus in Britain, both in favour at this time, the latter with a relief later commissioned for Stowe's North Hall.³⁷ This would have appealed strongly both to Earl Temple and to William Pitt. The Eagle Relief at Palmyra (plate XVIII of Wood's book) was actually incorporated into the seal of the United States, an indication of its republican associations.³⁸

Given the republican overtones of the Garter Room's original shape and ceiling, it is significant that the four pillars of Borra's State Bed were carved as bound *fascies*, symbolising Roman totalitarian control. This must have been a deliberate choice.³⁹ The bed was designed for visiting royalty but George II disliked Temple intensely and long refused his request for the Garter. Its eventual grant, after the King's death in 1760, and its immediate display on the ceiling of the State Bedroom would have focused Earl Temple's choice of iconography even more sharply, with the central insignia of the Garter blazing like the Sun, as befitted the original Temple, with its rays spreading into eight points. Regal power was to be eclipsed by Earl Temple's libertarian archaeology.

The republican overtones of the Palmyrene ceiling used in the Garter Room may also have influenced its later use on the Palladian Bridge at Stowe, in about 1762. This building already had strong libertarian themes, including a painting of William Penn, the Quaker founder of Pennsylvania. This could also reflect a later phase of William Pitt's iconographical influence at Stowe, since 'concord' with his brother-in-law, Earl Temple, had been restored by then. At Bath a similar re-use of the

layout of an ancient building, in this case of Stonehenge for John Wood's Circus, took place from 1754, although here the motive was a complex mixture of religious and political aetiology.⁴⁰

The earliest influence of Stowe's State Bedroom can probably be seen at Woburn, where the State Apartments were being finished in about 1758–1760.⁴¹ Here the enfilade of state apartments in the west wing is united by the addition of triumphal palm-branches over each door. The progression from south to north culminates in the state bedroom, which also has a ceiling of regular octagons linked at the angles and taken from the Temple of the Sun. The allusion to Palmyra is not so strong, however, as there are no corner closets as at Stowe (nor is the bed in alignment with the enfilade). On the other hand the sun-allusion of the Palmyrene ceiling in the church which Sir Francis Dashwood built at West Wycombe in 1763–5 is supported by a mausoleum at its eastern end, copied from the hexagonal court at Baalbeck, the ancient Heliopolis or 'City of the Sun', and a sun-like golden globe on the tower.

A second, nationalistic, iconography could perhaps be deduced from the depiction of the Garter insignia on the ceiling. It concerns the significance of 23 April. This date, St George's Day, is used for the institution of new knights of the Garter. It was also the date for the publication of the great political libertarian John Wilkes's anti-government journal, *The North Briton*, No. 45, and the traditional birthday of William Shakespeare, whose Chandos portrait became the most celebrated picture at Stowe and was hung in one of the four Closets in this room.⁴²

Although *The North Briton*, No. 45 cannot have been a consideration, as it only appeared in 1763, Wilkes was to be alluded to in due course. When the south front was rebuilt in 1772–77, Earl Temple added a statue of Liberty on the exterior skyline. George Clarke has shown that the statue of Liberty was to be identified with Wilkes from his squint.⁴³ Until the political overtones of the Garter Room,

immediately below the statue of Liberty, are understood, it is difficult to understand why Earl Temple chose this particular location for such an obscure but specifically political feature.

The publication of *The North Briton*, No. 45, in 1763 led to Wilkes's imprisonment by the government of George Grenville, Earl Temple's brother. Robert Wood, the author of *Palmyra*, had already turned to politics as Under-Secretary of State to William Pitt in 1756, and since 1761 he had been MP for Brackley, a few miles from Stowe. He now supported the government and had a heated argument with Earl Temple in Wilkes's own house while Wilkes was being arrested, when Temple objected to the violence used in searching for Wilkes's private papers. Wood's victory was only temporary; later that year he was prosecuted for abusing the General Warrant under which Wilkes had been arrested, and had to pay damages of £1,000.⁴⁴

Wilkes and Temple rightly claimed to have safeguarded the nation's liberties. In June that year Earl Temple announced from Stowe that 'Wilkes and Liberty and all her friends will continue to be most welcome here'.⁴⁵ Robert Wood would never have known of Temple's tribute to Wilkes, since Liberty's squint cannot be seen from the ground outside the Garter Room.⁴⁶ Wood could, however, have remained pleased with the first comprehensive use of his ground-breaking book on Palmyra inside the Garter Room.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to published articles by Mr George Clarke, The Knight of Glin, the late Michael Gibbon, Mr Richard Hewlings, Professor Michael McCarthy, and for discussions with Mr John Davis and Professor Susan Tebby. Professor Tebby has made a detailed study of both the Palmyrene ceilings and Borra's interpretation of them.

APPENDIX

PALMYRENE CEILINGS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN⁴⁷

A1: regular octagons joined at the angles, and small squares and triangles.

[Wood, *Ruins of Palmyra* (1753), pl. XIX (top), the Temple of the Sun, south recess (Fig. 7)]

Stowe, State Bedroom, main ceiling, by Borra, 1755–8 (Fig. 8).

Woburn Abbey, State Bedroom, ceiling, by Flitcroft, c.1758–1760.

No. 5 Pottergate, Lincoln, first floor rear room, perhaps by Chambers, 1761–62.⁴⁸

Stowe, Palladian Bridge, ceiling, c.1762.

West Wycombe, Church, ceiling, by Giovanni Borgnis (younger), 1763.

Warwick Castle, Green Room, ceiling, possibly by Lightoler, 1763–1769.

West Wycombe, Hall, ceiling, by Giovanni Borgnis (younger), c.1770.

Osterley Park, Drawing Room, ceiling, by Robert Adam, c.1773.

Drayton, Drawing Room, ceiling, by William Rhodes, 1774.

Milton Abbey, Library, ceiling, by Chambers, in or after 1774, though perhaps designed after 1769.⁴⁹

Stratfield Saye, Dining Room, ceiling, room added c.1775.

A2: non-regular octagons, or squares with truncated corners, set next to each other with long sides parallel, and small squares set at an angle.

[Wood, *Ruins of Palmyra* (1753), pl. VIII, courtyard to the Temple of the Sun (Fig. 9)]

Stowe, the Temple of Concord & Victory, ceiling of the *pronaos*, by Borra, 1753–4 (Fig. 10).

Norfolk House, Flowered Red Velvet Room, ceiling, by Borra, c.1752–1756.

Corsham Court, the Picture Gallery, flat of ceiling, by Lancelot Brown, 1761–4.

Spencer House, The Great or Ball Room, cove of ceiling, by James Stuart, decorated 1764.

Osterley Park, Library, carpet, by Robert Adam, 1766–73.

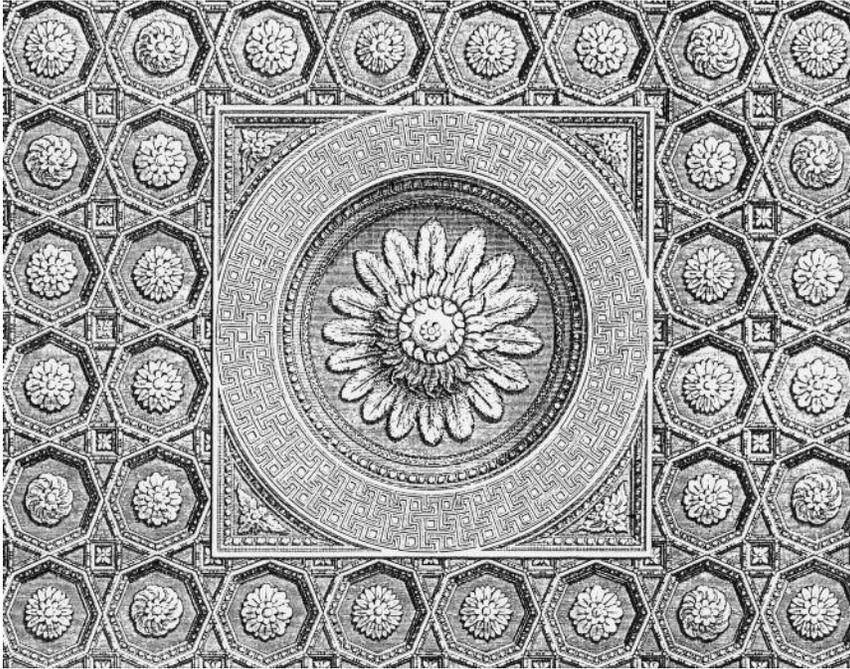


Fig. 7. Type A1, from Robert Wood, *The Ruins of Palmyra*..., London, 1753, plate xix.

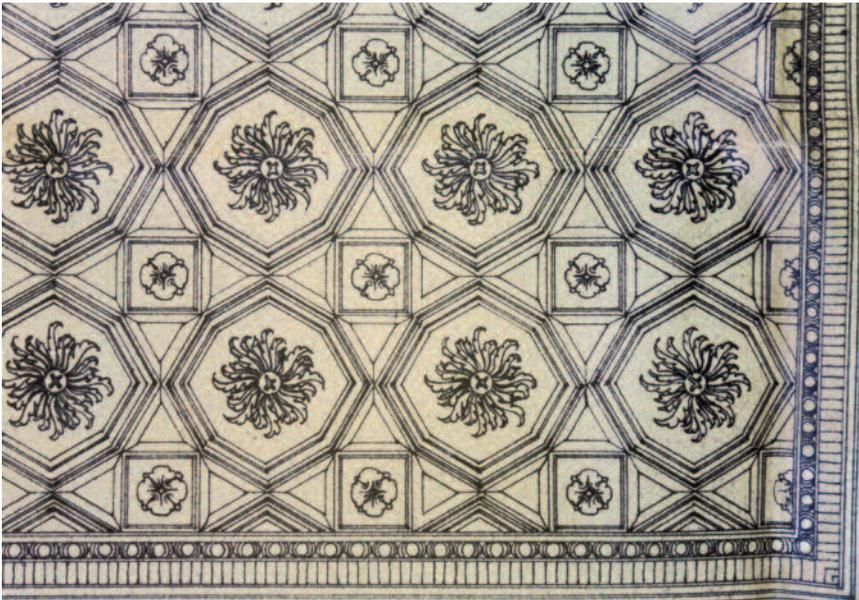


Fig. 8. Detail of fig.4. *Stowe School*.

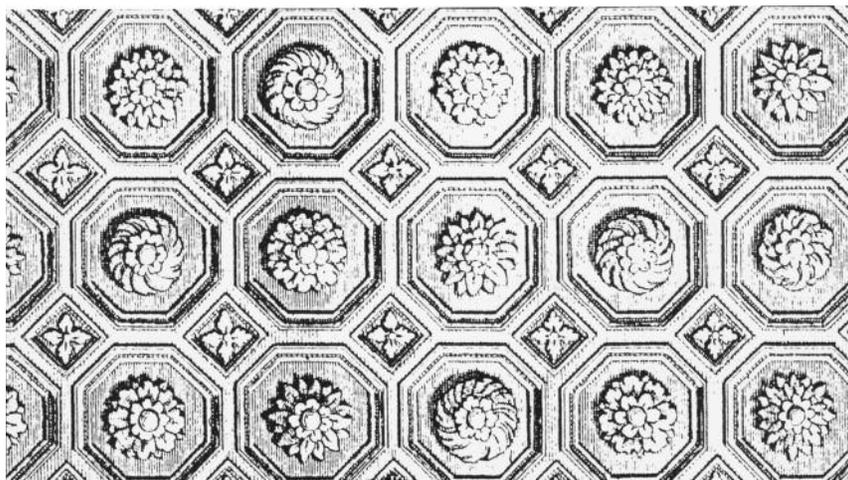


Fig. 9. Type A2, from Robert Wood, *The Ruins of Palmyra...*, London, 1753, plate viii.



Fig. 10. Ceiling of the *pronaos* of the Temple of Cocord and Victory, Stowe.

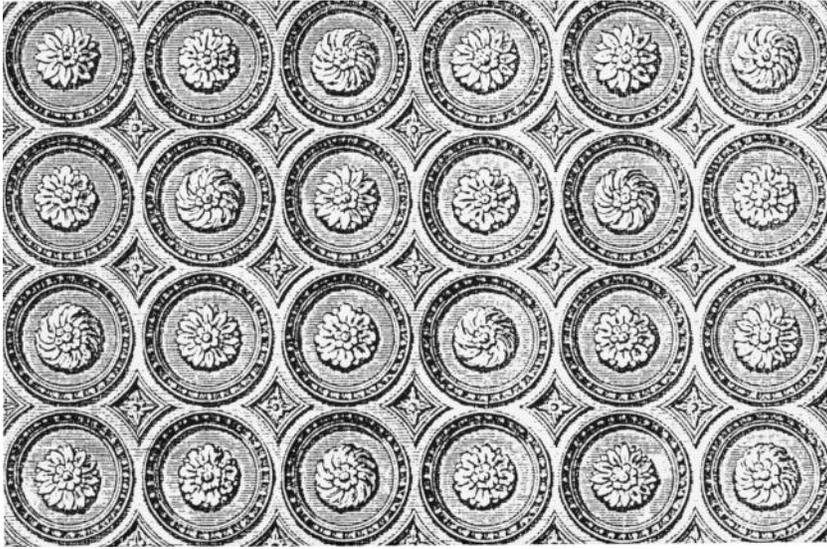


Fig. 11. Type B1, from Robert Wood, *The Ruins of Palmyra...*, London, 1753, plate xxxvii.



Fig. 12. Ceiling of the loggia of the Garter Room, showing type B1 ornament, and (just visible at the edge) type B2 ornament on the soffit of the colonnade.

H.A. Mason.

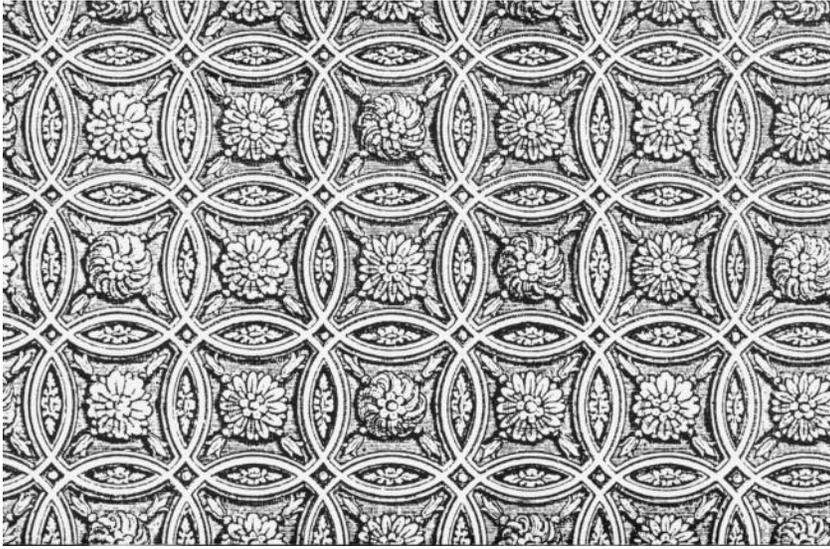


Fig. 13. Type B2, from Robert Wood, *The Ruins of Palmyra...*,
London, 1753, plate xlii.

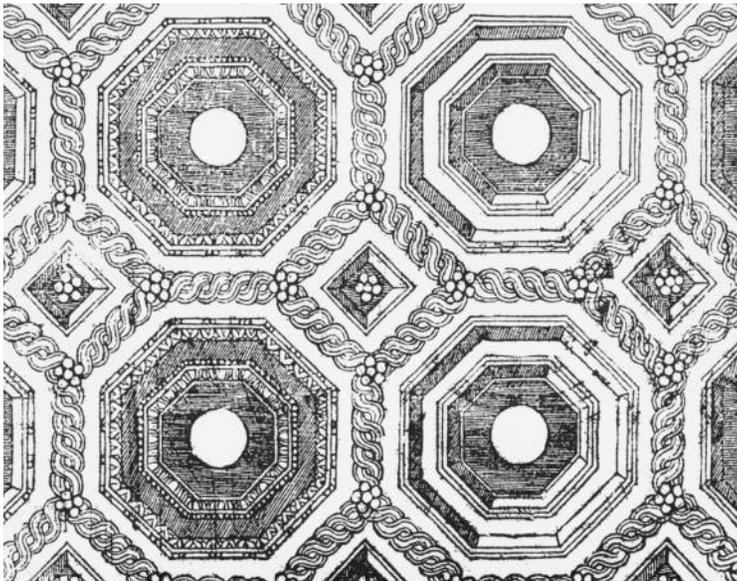


Fig. 14. Type A3, from Sebastiano Serlio, Book IV, chapter 12, fol. 70.

B1: separate circles set in a rectangular grid, and small four-pointed stars with smooth convex sides.

[Wood, *Ruins of Palmyra* (1753), pl. XXXVII, (not recorded as drawn by Borra), sepulchre repository (Fig. 11)]

Norfolk House, Great Drawing Room, ceiling, by Borra, c.1752–1756.

Harewood House, Study, design for ceiling, by Robert Adam, 1766.⁵⁰

Stowe, Garter Room, window bay ceiling, possibly by Robert Adam or Thomas Pitt, c.1773, (or possibly by Borra, c.1755), removed 1935 (Fig. 12).

B2: interlocking circles

[Wood, *Ruins of Palmyra* (1753), pl. XLII (bottom), sepulchre (Fig. 13)]

West Wycombe, Dining Room (originally the ‘First Hall’), ceiling, by Giovanni Borghis (younger), c.1770.

Stowe, Garter Room, window bay ceiling border, possibly by Robert Adam or Thomas Pitt, c.1773, (or possibly by Borra, c.1755), removed 1935 (Fig. 12).

Octagon-patterned ceilings earlier than Wood’s Palmyra of 1753:

A3: regular octagons set side-on, and small squares set at an angle.

[Sebastiano Serlio, *The Five Books of Architecture*, London, 1611, Book IV, ch.12, fol. 70 (Fig. 14); Andrea Palladio, *The Four Books of Architecture*, 1570, IV, pl.III (The Temple of Peace)]

Kensington Palace, Cupola Room, painted cove of ceiling, by William Kent, 1722.

Chiswick House, Saloon, ceiling, by William Kent, 1725–1729.

Hexagons:

These sometimes featured on earlier classical ceilings, usually in combination with other shapes.

Stowe, the Temple of Concord & Victory, *cella* (interior) ceiling, presumably by Borra in 1752–3.⁵¹

Holderness House, London, Centre Drawing Room, by Stuart, c.1760–65;

15 St James’ Square, London, first-floor Front Drawing Room, by Stuart, 1764–66.

Stowe, the Lake Pavilions, c.1764.

Mount Stewart, Co. Down, Tower of the Winds, first floor room ceiling, by Stuart, c.1780.

NOTES

- 1 Michael Gibbon, 'The History of Stowe, XVIII, Earl Temple and Giambattista Borra', *The Stoic*, XXV.5, No. 150, March 1973, 202. A shorter version of this article appeared in *The Stoic*, No. 203, 2004, 11–18. For a fuller list of sources, see Michael Bevington, 'Stowe: The Bibliography: The Landscape Garden, Park, House, Estate and School', supplement to *New Arcadian Journal*, Nos. 55/56, 2003/04.
- 2 For ease of identification in this article, I have mostly used 'Garter Room' instead of 'State Bedroom'. It was known as 'the State Bedroom' 1755–1840, 'the Duchess's Drawing Room' 1840–1923, and 'the Garter Room' from 1923 to now. The name 'Garter Room' applies to all its existence except its first five years and thus is the most easily understood.
- 3 G.B. Clarke (ed.), 'Descriptions of Lord Cobham's Gardens at Stowe (1700–1750)', *Buckinghamshire Record Society*, XXVI, 1990, 176–179.
- 4 *Idem*.
- 5 John Harris, 'The Duchess of Beaufort's *Observations on Places*', *The Georgian Group Journal*, X, 2000, 36.
- 6 A bed behind railings, imitating Versailles, where Louis XIV would allow only princes beyond this balustrade at a *levée*, survives in Britain apparently only at Powis Castle, where it dates from the 1680's [The National Trust, *Powis Castle*, London, 2000, 16]. A bed alcove was designed by John Webb in 1664–9 for Greenwich Palace [John Bold, *John Webb*, London, 1989, 144–45]. For their use by Campbell and Morris, see Steven Brindle, 'Pembroke House, Whitehall', *The Georgian Group Journal*, VIII, 1998, 112, note 93. At Pembroke House in 1757 the bed alcoves had pilasters or half-columns at the corners, similar to the arrangement at Stowe designed two years before. At Stowe bed alcoves were still used in the nineteenth century, for instance in the Buckingham Suite.
- 7 Michael Gibbon, 'Stowe, Bucks., The house and garden buildings and their designers', *Architectural History*, XX, 1977.
- 8 Michael Gibbon, in *The Stoic*, March 1969, 162; Desmond Fitz-Gerald, 'A History of the Interior of Stowe', *Apollo*, XCVII, 136, June 1973, 577.
- 9 Dorothy Stroud, *Capability Brown*, London, 1984, 50, 55.
- 10 The accounts suggest that the description 'Long Room' was used for both the Ball Room and the Garter Room. The following payments, for instance, made in 1747, must refer to the Ball Room:
 - 11 Feb.: 'To W^m Pain on Acc^t for the Cornice of The Long Room – £11.1.0'
 - 7 March: 'To W^m Pain for Plastering The Cornice of the Great Room – £8.19.0'
 - 11 April: 'To W^m Pain on Acct for The Cove of The Long R:om – £10.12.2'
 - 25 April: 'To Shoular on Acct for Masons work on pr The great [room] – £7.7.0'
 - 6 June: 'To Thomas Walker for Carveing the Scrowels in The Three Chimny Pieces below The Long Room – £0.10.6'
 [San Marino (Ca.), Henry E. Huntington Library (hereafter cited as HL), 16626 and 238, *ex inf.* Cathy Fisher]. While money disbursed by James Squibb on 20 September 1756, 'For 100 of Leaf Gold & 2 Pencils for the Festoons in the long Room at Stowe– 0.5.10' [*Idem*] may refer to either. 'The Great Room', however, refers to the State Dining Room, contemporary with the matching gallery of the Ball Room. As an aid to identification the two galleries have coves, while the Garter Room does not; and the Ball Room has three rooms with fireplaces below.
- 11 In the 1720's and 1730's the influence of Palladio's villa designs produced enfilades aligned with the fireplaces in the rooms at each end. This was the case at Houghton in the east and west side enfilades and at one end of the south side of Holkham, but it is less effective in England than the brighter regions of Italy.
- 12 Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History*, London, 1980, 160, fig.12.
- 13 In 1839 Borra's State Bed was removed to the eastern end of the enfilade. A large mirror in the recess replaced it [H. R. Forster (ed.), *The Stowe Sale Catalogue, Priced and Annotated*, London, 1848, 15, lot 248]. This was not unique, but it cleverly exploited the visual effect of the long alignment. At Dyrham House van Hoogstraeten's painting of *A View down a corridor* maintains the illusion of a continuous enfilade. The size of the later Garter Room mirror, however, nearly 18 feet high by 11 wide, must have made this a compelling vista to complete the visitor's tour and to brighten a relatively dark room.

- 14 Fitz-Gerald, *op. cit.*, 577.
- 15 HL, STG a/c, Box 2.9, '11 days Joyning up the flowering Bords for the State room £1. 2. 0'
- 16 *Ibid.*, STG a/c Repairs Box 111.8, '50 Squares of best Crowne Glass Content 114 ft. _ £5. 14. 6, Box for packing, 3. 0, [total] £5. 17. 6', endorsed 'Great Bedchamber'.
- 17 *Ibid.*, STG a/c Repairs Box 111.8, 'about ye partitions in the State Room £1. 2. 0'.
- 18 *Ibid.*, STG a/c Box 2.7, 'for the ceeling of the State Bedchamber £34. 00. 00'.
- 19 *Ibid.*, STG a/c Box 143, 8.2, 'Hang. the Doors in the State Bed Chamber'.
- 20 Fitz-Gerald, *loc.cit.*. The State Bed is now in the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight.
- 21 By contrast the Garter in the central oval compartment of the ceiling in the hall at Wakefield Lodge, close to Stowe in Northamptonshire, must have been part of Samuel Calderwood's plasterwork, done between 1752 and 1754 [Richard Hewlings, 'Wakefield Lodge and other houses of the second Duke of Grafton', *Georgian Group Journal*, III, 1993, 50], even though the Duke of Grafton had received the Garter in October 1721, over 30 years earlier.
- 22 Michael Bevington, 'The development of the classical revival at Stowe', *Architectura*, XXI, no.2, 1992 (hereafter cited as Bevington, 'Development'), 136-163.
- 23 Brown wrote possibly his last letter from Stowe in October 1751 [Stroud, *op. cit.*, 64, note 31].
- 24 J. Mordaunt Crook, *The Greek Revival: Neo-Classical Attitudes in British Architecture 1760-1870*, London, 1972, 18. Dr William Halifax, chaplain to the English Factory at Aleppo, recorded that Dr Huntington and other English visitors from Aleppo discovered Palmyra in 1678, but Arabian robbers stole their clothes, so 'they staid not to take a more exact survey of ye ancient ruines' [William Halifax, 'A relation of a voyage to Tadmor in 1691' from the original manuscript in the possession of Mr Albert Hartshorne, reprinted with notes by Major C.R. Conder, *The Journal of the Palestine Exploration Fund*, London, June 1890]. Henry Maundrell, like Bouverie from a Wiltshire family, was also chaplain to the Factory at Aleppo. His account, *A Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem at Easter AD 1697*, was published in 1703, two years after his death.
- 25 Dawkins is said to have spent £50,000 on the publication of both *The Ruins of Palmyra otherwise Tedmor in the Desert* in 1753 and *The Ruins of Balbec otherwise Heliopolis in Coelosyria* in 1757 [Desmond Fitz-Gerald, *The Norfolk House Music Room*, London, 1973, 42, note 16]. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, February 1754, 78, records that the expedition was 'undertaken by two gentlemen of fortune, without any view of pecuniary advantage', referring to Bouverie and Dawkins.
- 26 The sudden spurt in number and quality of archaeological publications is evident from the fact that there were four major publications in the ten years from 1743 to 1752, whereas for the eleven years after Robert Wood's two publications, from 1758 to 1769, there were ten major publications. Before Wood's books the following appeared: Richard Pococke, *A Description of the East and some other countries*, London, 1743-1745; G. B. Piranesi, *Antichità romane de' tempi della Repubblica, e de' primi imperatori*, Rome, 1748; G.M. Pancrazi, *Antichità Siciliane spiegate colle notizie generali di questo regno*, Naples, 1751; and Richard Dalton, *Antiquities and Views in Greece and Egypt*, 1752, following visits to Sicily, Greece and Asia Minor with Lord Charlemont in 1749. After Wood's books the number and quality increased: J.-D. Le Roy, *Les Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce*, Paris, 1758; Robert Sayer, *Ruins of Athens and Other Valuable Antiquities in Greece*, 1759; James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, *The Antiquities of Athens*, I, 1762; Robert Adam, *Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian, at Spalatro, in Dalmatia*, 1764; G.-M. Dumont, *Les Ruins de Paestum*, 1764 and 1769, Filippo Morghen, [*Paestum*], 1765; John Berkenhout, *The Ruins of Paestum or Posidonia*, 1767; Thomas Major, *The Ruins of Paestum*, 1768; Stephen Riou, *Grecian Orders*, 1768; Richard Chandler, Nicholas Revett and W. Pars, *etc.*, *Ionian Antiquities*, I, 1769.
- 27 In his Preface to *Palmyra*, Wood states that he left Athens to 'Mr Stewart and Mr Revet', implying that he saw his two volumes as part of the record of eastern classical architecture. Borra was probably planning to produce a further volume of archaeological sources for classical architecture. He had a collection of finished drawings from Asia Minor. There are 98 drawings by him in the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut [Francis Russell, 'Breaking fresh Ground', *Country Life*, CLX, November 4, 1976, 1292-94].

- 28 Laurence Whistler, 'Signor Borra at Stowe', *Country Life*, CXXII, August 29, 1957, 390–93.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 391; Jean-Baptiste Chatelain and George Bickham, *The Beauties of Stowe*, [c.1752–3]. Its three massive pavilions with numerous columns *in antis* seem inspired by the Great Temple at Baalbeck. It might then be assumed that this fits with the suggestion that Stowe's Grecian Temple of 1747 was based by 'Capability' Brown on Pococke's inaccurate Baalbeck drawing, and that this was a major reason why Earl Temple called in Borra so soon after his arrival in England [Bevington, 'Development', *cit.*, 156–160. This also includes the first suggestion of Brown as the architect of the Temple of Concord and Victory, an attribution confirmed by anon., 'Anecdotes of Mr Brown, the Gardener', *The Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (30 July 1774), discovered by Cathy Fisher in the Huntington Library in 2002. This account stated that Brown 'gave the design for the temple of Concord and Victory, which raised him into some degree of estimation as an architect'].
- 30 Michael Bevington, 'The South Front', *Templa Quam Dilecta*, XI, Stowe, 1993, for fuller accounts of relevant letters and evidence.
- 31 Richard Hewlings, 'A Palmyra ceiling in Lincoln', *Architectural History*, XXXI, 1988, 166–67. Mr Hewlings recorded all the examples listed as type A1 in the appendix to the present article, except for that at Warwick Castle, but followed Fitz-Gerald, *Norfolk House Music Room*, *cit.*, 25, in dating the example at Woburn (see *infra*, note 41). The present article also refines and revises his evidence for the date of the Stowe example.
- 32 Olga Zoller, 'Giovanni Battista Borra disegnatore e architetto nel Levante e in Inghilterra', in Giuseppe Dardanello, *Sperimentare L'Architettura: Guarini, Juvarra, Alfieri, Borra e Vittoni*, Turin, 2001, 263–264.
- 33 The Garter Room first used the Corinthian order at Stowe, apart from the statue of George II (first recorded in August 1724): this might signify a regal link [Clarke, *op. cit.*, 19].
- 34 In the Rotondo, where he replaced a statue of Venus with one of Bacchus, in the frieze of the south portico, and in the Blue Room ceiling. He also attributed his survival from a serious illness to drinking wine [Bevington, 'South Front', *cit.*, 19].
- 35 Wood could have found a reference to Zenobia in Ben Jonson, *Masque of Queens* of 1609. Jonson called her 'the vertuous Palmyrene', 'chaste' and ninth in time but equal in 'Fame and virtue' with the eighth, Boudica. An odd link is that Alice Spencer, who played the part of Zenobia, married Sir Thomas Egerton and through the marriage of her second daughter to the later Earl of Bridgewater provided another connection with Robert Wood who acted as tutor to the 3rd Duke of Bridgewater in 1755 and was M.P. for Brackley with its Bridgewater influence. Zenobia's virtues were comparable with those painted in 1735 by Boucher on the ceiling of The Queen's Chamber at Versailles: charity, generosity, fidelity and prudence.
- 36 Alexander Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, London 1709, 675–680. The name 'Cassius' in Dionysius Cassius Longinus, often confused with the republican author Cassius Longinus, would have enhanced his appeal to libertarians, given the fame of Cassius the conspirator against Caesar.
- 37 Wood saw various similarities between Palmyra and Great Britain, in one being surrounded by desert and the other by seas, aiding both by riches through trade and defence, in both having prospered through independence and in both having sound government. 'To Wood the story of Palmyra was a portent of the future of Great Britain', according to John M. Monro, 'Palmyra – A Portent?' *Saudi Aramco World*, XXXII, No.5, September/October 1981.
- 38 The influence of Palmyra was also evident in regal circles. The Prince of Wales, aged 19, drew one of the Palmyra temples set in a northern landscape in about 1757, perhaps influenced by Chambers [David Watkin, 'Enlightened Farmer George', *Country Life*, CXCVIII, March 18 2004, 85]. The Prince of Wales, of course, could have been an occupant of Stowe's own Palmyrene room.
- 39 In contrast to Stowe's authoritarian bed, Robert Adam's State Bed at Osterley of 1775 featured motifs of Venus and the owners' family [Eileen Harris, *Osterley Park, Middlesex*, London, 2001, 64–6].
- 40 Stuart Piggott, *The Druids*, London, 1974, 129; Bevington, 'Development', *cit.*, 159.
- 41 Horace Walpole made at least two visits to Woburn, in October 1751, and after the State Bedroom was decorated. Following the latter visit he commented on the Palmyrene ceiling. For the earlier visit, see Horace Walpole's letter to George Montagu, 8 October 1751, where Walpole wrote that 'the house is in building' [Christopher Hussey, 'Woburn

- Abbey, Bedfordshire – II. Some Georgian Craftsmen’, *Country Life*, CXVIII, September 8, 1955, 488]. For the later visit see Paget Toynbee (ed.), ‘Horace Walpole’s Journals of Visits to Country Seats &c.’, *The Walpole Society*, 1932, XVI, 1927–28, 19. The two visits, however, seem to have been conflated in Fitz-Gerald, *Norfolk House Music Room*, *cit.*, 25, followed by Hewlings, *op. cit.*, 166, and in the otherwise excellent discussion by Zoller, *op. cit.*. For the date of work in the state rooms, such as the State Bed, done up in 1759, see Christopher Hussey, ‘The Opening of Woburn Abbey’, *Country Life*, CXVII, March 31, 1955, 857.
- 42 Even Queen Victoria is said to have held her only ‘drawing-room’ in a private house in this very room with its mixture of republican and royalist motifs [Michael Bevington, *Stowe House*, London, 2002, 62]. The significance of the 23 April continues: Queen Anne was crowned on this day and in recent times her portrait has been hung on the west wall.
- 43 George Clarke, ‘The Lady with the Squint: An Examination of Revolutionary Iconography at Stowe’, in *La Grecia Antica Mito e Simbolo per l’Età della Grande Rivoluzione*, Milan, 1991, 299–319.
- 44 Charles Chenevix-Trench, *Portrait of a Patriot: A Biography of John Wilkes*, Edinburgh and London, 1962, 107, 127–28.
- 45 Earl Temple also had a shrine to Liberty erected in the Temple of Concord and Victory in or soon after 1763 [Benton Seeley, *Stowe: A Description*. . ., London, Buckingham and Stowe, 1763, 31].
- 46 Earl Temple, ‘The man to virtue and to wit allied’ as he was described in a poem of probably 1778 [*The Grenville Papers*, I, vii], hid his wit under the guise of virtue, like another libertarian, Thomas Hollis, in his double portrait for Harvard College [Patrick Eyres, ‘Thomas Hollis (1720–1774): an introduction’, *The Invisible Pantheon*, *New Arcadian Journal*, No.55/56, 2003, 12–13. The location of the statue of Religion next to that of Liberty may have owed something to the addition of ‘otherwise *Tedmor in the Desart*’ to Wood’s Palmyra title, a reference to 1 *Kings* 9.18 and 2 *Chronicles* 8.4, and the tradition that the libertarian city of Palmyra was originally built by King Solomon.
47. According to Mordaunt Crook, *op. cit.*, 73, the following examples of reticulated coffering were taken from Wood’s *Palmyra*: Bowood (1761–64), Compton Verney (c.1761–65) and Audley End (1763–65).
- 48 Hewlings, *loc. cit.*.
- 49 I am grateful to Richard Hewlings for drawing my attention to this ceiling, which is further discussed in Arthur Oswald, ‘Milton Abbey, Dorset—V’, *Country Life*, CXL, July 28, 1966, 210.
- 50 London, Sir John Soane’s Museum, SM 11–138.
- 51 Hexagons were a feature of Baalbek, perhaps supporting the argument for the Baalbek inspiration of this temple via Dr Richard Pococke [see Wood’s ‘Most Entire Temple’, plate XXIV, ‘The Lacunarii’].