



THE
GEORGIAN
GROUP

Sally Goodsir, 'George Steuart and Robert Adam: A Professional Relationship Revealed',
The Georgian Group Journal, Vol. XVIII,
2010, pp. 91-104

GEORGE STEUART AND ROBERT ADAM: A PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP REVEALED

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The identities of many of the craftsmen who worked for the architectural practice of Robert Adam and his brothers are known through correspondence, bank accounts and surviving private archives. The artists Antonio Zucchi, Giovanni Battista Cipriani, Biagio Rebecca and Angelica Kauffmann are well documented for creating decorative panels for Robert Adam's interiors and as artists in their own right. But no general painter for the interiors has previously been identified. Using unpublished letters between the architect George Steuart and the third Duke of Atholl, Steuart is here identified for the first time as one of these interior painters. The letters also reveal Robert Adam's jealously protective attitude towards his architectural practice in London during the 1760s and early 1770s.

Robert Adam returned from his tour of the Continent in 1758 and established an architectural practice in London, first in Lower Grosvenor Street and then from 1772 within his Thames-side development, the Adelphi. His brothers John, James and William were also involved in architecture while retaining strong links to their native Scotland. Robert Adam's popularity grew through assiduous networking and from the freedom of his style. His expanding and elite client base required many different craftsmen and labourers, some of whom became involved in architecture. The draughtsman Joseph Bonomi became an architect in his own right. The two Joseph Roses, uncle and nephew, worked as plasterers at Adam commissions such as Harewood, Kenwood,

Kedleston, and several large London town houses. Joseph Rose, junior, independently assisted Sir Christopher Sykes in designing the decorative work at Sledmere, Yorkshire in the late 1780s.¹ Many more specialist craftsmen earned their livelihoods working on the Adams' commissions for London town houses, country houses and public buildings. Antonio Zucchi, Giovanni Battista Cipriani, Biagio Rebecca and Angelica Kauffmann are well documented for creating decorative panels for Robert Adam's interiors and as artists in their own right. The names of the craftsmen and artists who worked for Adam are traceable through his bank account with Drummond's, and in the correspondence, bills and drawings known to architectural historians. There has been one omission: the name of Adam's interior painter.

PAINTING

The background of the Scots architect George Steuart (c.1730–1806) is largely unknown. From references in his letters to the third and fourth Dukes of Atholl it can be deduced that he was from Perthshire and a Gaelic speaker.² He had an artist brother, Charles, whose work survives in the dining room of Blair Castle, the main seat of the Dukes of Atholl. In George's will there appears a third brother, William, but no existing birth records connect him with George and Charles.³ The particular spelling of Steuart is indigenous to Perthshire, and it was the surname of several local gentry families; Steuart's

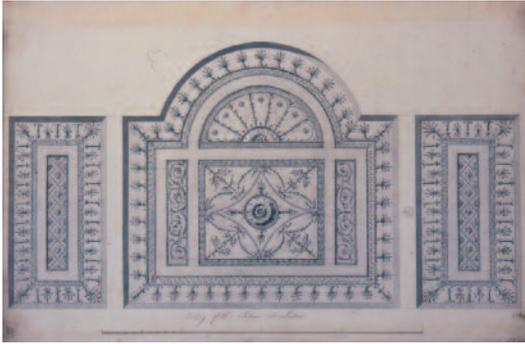


Fig.1 (above). Drawing by Robert Adam of the saloon ceiling at Luton Hoo. *Sir John Soane's Museum.*

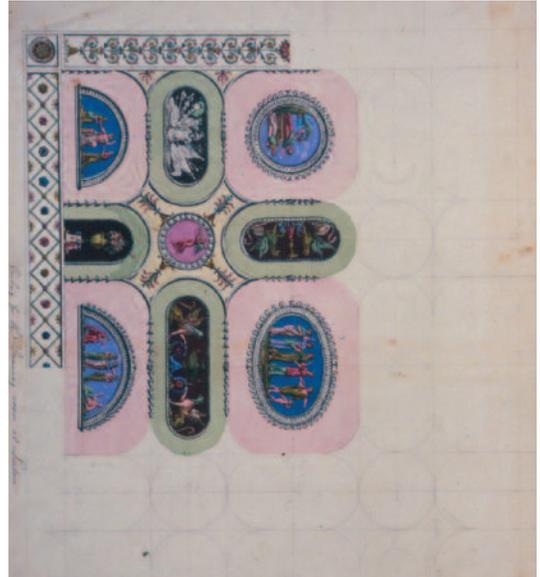


Fig. 2 (right). Drawing by Robert Adam of a first floor ceiling at Luton Hoo. *Sir John Soane's Museum.*

obvious education suggests that he may have been related to one of them.⁴ George Steuart had no formal architectural training, and appears to have been self-taught. He had a wife who died in 1796 at their home in Harley Street, London, and one known child, Robert (c.1766–1832). Steuart moved to London around the age of nineteen, but little is known of his early career prior to 1764, when he was living in Berners Street and working as an interior and exterior house painter.⁵ The third and fourth Dukes of Atholl were his major patrons, for whom he also became a London agent and family friend. The third Duke (1729–1774) gave him his first architectural commission in 1764, renovating his London town house in South Audley Street. Painting work continued throughout his life, supplementing architectural commissions for the Atholls and other patrons. He wrote frequent and detailed letters to the third and fourth Dukes, but these have been overlooked by previous scholarship, and they are not mentioned in the entries on Steuart in H.M. Colvin's *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1600–1840* and the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

Until recently Steuart was acknowledged only as a minor architect, the majority of whose surviving work is in Shropshire. The Salopian connection developed when the third Duke of Atholl introduced Steuart to Robert More (1703–1780), the owner of Millichope Park. Atholl and More were members of the Royal Society, and both were experimenting with growing larches for timber on their estates.⁶ Steuart built More a rotunda in his park in 1770, which still stands.⁷ This must have impressed the local gentry, as he subsequently designed and built several houses around Shrewsbury, as well as the conventionally neoclassical All Saints' church, Wellington, and the startlingly circular St Chad's church, Shrewsbury, of 1792. St Chad's is one of the most impressive late eighteenth-century churches in the country. These two churches and Steuart's surviving Shropshire house, Attingham Park, built 1783–85, show his willingness to experiment with geometry. Attingham's attenuated portico columns are a feature peculiar to Steuart, and an unusual Francophile influence is apparent in its plan, especially in the two gendered enfilades on the *piano nobile* culminating in an ultra-masculine octagonal study and a feminine circular

boudoir, its delicately painted interior attributed to Louis-Andre Délabrière.⁸

However, it is also important to relocate Steuart within the London practice which he built over forty years, the output of which has largely been demolished or altered. Steuart's surviving buildings have been the focus of formal stylistic analysis, but they have only survived because of their distance from the ever-evolving capital. A study of Steuart's letters to the third and fourth Dukes of Atholl reveal a professional relationship with Robert Adam during the 1760s and early 1770s, which establishes Steuart within an urbanised professional career. Steuart and Adam were both Scots with their main residences and professional premises in London. Adam, whose family came from Kirkcaldy, Fife, established himself in London nine years later than Steuart, and their shared nationality must have created a bond that strengthened their professional relationship.

A relationship between Steuart and the Adam brothers first emerged in 1766. In April of that year Steuart was appointed 'Painter to the Board of Ordnance for North Britain, which will occasion my going to Scotland.'⁹ At the time Robert Adam's older brother John was Mason to the Board of Ordnance in Scotland. The Board was a government department responsible for the maintenance of defences and ordnance logistics. Steuart's appointment was confirmed by the Marquess of Granby (1721–70), an army commander and Master General of the Ordnance. Robert Adam may have recommended Steuart to this position, since their professional relationship predated Steuart's appointment. Steuart's letters reveal a wide knowledge of paint production, shipping lead white and verdigris to Scotland for the third Duke of Atholl, for instance, and enquiring if the Duchess would prefer blue or green verditer in the main rooms of the family's London town house.¹⁰

ARCHITECTURE

Steuart's renovations in South Audley Street for the third Duke of Atholl did not satisfy the Duke's desire for a prestigious family town house. Atholl therefore leased a building plot in Grosvenor Place, a new street behind Buckingham House, and Steuart was appointed architect in 1769. Such a prestigious client, so substantial a commission and such a newly fashionable location aroused jealousy in his part-time employer, Robert Adam. Steuart had expected to be contracted as the painter for the interior of Adam's Luton Hoo, the Bedfordshire seat of former Prime Minister and fellow Scot the third Earl of Bute, and wrote to the third Duke:

'About a year ago I solicited Mr Adam to be employ'd as painter at a Very Capital Building under his direction Carrying on at Luton for Lord Bute, and he did promise I should be employ'd, and I actually did furnish by his Order Materials for that Work; about 2 Weeks ago Mr Adam sent another person there to Work.'¹¹

Steuart called on Adam, and was informed that the other painter came with a superior recommendation. Surviving Adam drawings show the intended colourful plaster ceilings (Figs. 1–2). The usurping painter and his workmen would have travelled to Bedfordshire with tinted drawings of the ceilings and other plans.¹² Steuart refused to accept that Adam had received a superior recommendation, and sent a friend to question Adam further. Adam then:

'... imprudently gave for reason that altho' he did not mind it, it was taking the bread out of their mouths, my freind considering the great success of the Brothers, and my attention to their Intrest, heartly despis'd the Littleness of mind and wish'd me success in a Capacity that gave them uneasiness. the whole convinces me I have no great loss in their pretended attachment to me, and I am perfectly easy about the matter, as I never entertain a Confidence in a man who once breaks his promise, and philosopher enough to know providence always opens one Door when another shuts.'¹³



Fig. 3. The Library at Kenwood, designed by Robert Adam, 1767-69. © *English Heritage Photo Library*.

Steuart lost the painting contract for Luton Hoo in August 1769. By this date Adam's success at securing major commissions at Kedleston, Syon House, Osterley and Harewood make his accusation of Steuart 'taking the bread out of their mouths' appear ridiculous. However, Adam had failed to gain commissions for many important London town houses. Most of his London commissions were for interior renovations: new ceilings, chimneypieces, or a new library. Adam's only complete London houses by this date had been the protracted building of Lansdowne House, a house for General Robert

Clerk in Mansfield Street, and the Deputy Ranger's House attached to Green Park. For Steuart to build a duke's town house as his second architectural work must have galled Adam, especially as he had intended to employ Steuart as his inferior, painting at Luton Hoo.

Steuart's town house for the third Duke of Atholl in Grosvenor Place was demolished in the 1860s, but from his letters its structure can be resurrected. By February 1770 he was laying floorboards,¹⁴ purchasing his deal from William Adam and Company,¹⁵ a business venture of all four Adam brothers with

interests in contracting, granite quarrying, brick making and timber.¹⁶ Carron and Company of Falkirk, of which John Adam was a partner, supplied the cast iron grates. One of the two John Devalls, a father and son team who were Adam's main chimneypiece carvers, supplied marble chimneypieces for the drawing room, breakfast room and dining parlour.¹⁷

In April 1770 Steuart had yet to pay for the deal from the brothers' company, and complained at the thought of giving them money: 'they are more in my debt for Painting at Lord Mansfields &c, of Old Accts (for I believe I will not be hereafter troubled to make them bills). I have cancel'd any obligation I had to them, in a religious way.'¹⁸ The date of this brief complaint identifies Steuart as the interior painter for Adam's work at Kenwood, Lord Mansfield's house north of London. Adam added a library between 1767–69 which is one of his most impressive rooms (Fig. 3). A new staircase was also added, and the exterior stuccoed to mask different ages of brick. The Joseph Roses created the vaulted library ceiling, with inserted painted panels by Antonio Zucchi (1726–95). Steuart and his team of workmen painted between the Zucchi panels, the bookcases and the windows, yet his name has never been attributed to this work. In the first volume of Robert and James Adam's *Works in Architecture* Robert described the library ceiling:

'... the grounds of the panels and freeses are coloured with light tints of pink and green, so as to take off the glare of white, so common in every ceiling, till of late. . . I ventured to introduce this variety of grounds, at once to relieve the ornaments, remove the crudeness of the white, and create a harmony between the ceiling and the side walls, with their hangings, pictures and other decorations.'¹⁹

But by the time the first part of the *Works* was published, in 1773, Steuart and Adam had permanently parted. Steuart was never acknowledged as Adam's painter and his name has been dislocated from that of his former employer.

In August 1771 Steuart commented 'I have just finish'd my Lord Mansfield's front.'²⁰ This statement could refer to Mansfield's house at Kenwood, or to his town house in Bloomsbury Square. But the Adams never worked at Bloomsbury Square, so it is likely that Steuart was contracted to paint the exterior stucco of Kenwood as well as the delicate interiors. Steuart would have been unaware as he supervised the painting of Kenwood's facades that stucco would hasten the Adams' retreat to Scotland. In 1778 the brothers claimed that a rival stucco, by John Johnson, was actually their patented formula. Lord Mansfield heard the case and found for the Adams, leading to accusations of judicial partiality and substantially damaging their reputation. The Adams' stucco was prone to failure; that at Kenwood was removed after 1793.

TOWN HOUSES

In April 1770 Sir Watkin Williams-Wynne, fourth baronet (1749–89), came of age and took possession of an estate on the Clywd-Cheshire border and a London town house. He hosted a party for friends and tenants at his country estate where guests apparently numbered 15,000.²¹ Sir Watkin desired a new town house with new furnishings. The new town house was No. 20 St James's Square, and still stands today with some alterations to the front façade. Steuart attended the auction of contents at the old house on 3 June 1770 and dined there with Sir Watkin's steward and the auctioneer, surrounded by the sold items.²² The steward 'told me Sir Watkin had been long engaged to Mr Adam, as architect, but he believed I woud succeed as painter.'²³ Steuart then called on Robert Adam to enquire about the work. Adam's response to Steuart was relayed at great length to the third Duke of Atholl:

'Mr Steuart your warm freind the Duke of Atholl, spoke to me to employ you as a painter; could I consistently do it, surely it wou'd give me pleasure to

oblige him. . . He is a worthy Nobleman, none more so, but I have done some things for him. I made some drawings for the Country . . . and I never saw the colour of his money; when the Duke had business to do, in my way, he employs another person and recommends to me the very person (who, as I may say, is taking the very bread out of our mouths) to my favour, to be by me employ'd; do you not see the impropriety of this. . .²⁴

The drawings Adam made for Atholl may have been for a new entrance gateway to Dunkeld House, Perthshire, which was never built.²⁵ One drawing of this project survives at Sir John Soane's Museum (Fig. 4). Adam told Steuart that their mutual friends all agreed that Atholl was wrong to use Steuart as an architect and then expect Adam to employ him as a painter. Adam's particular objection appeared to be that Steuart was still painting: 'In Gods name why do you not say, I dislike this profession of a Painter, I will be an Architect. . .that wou'd be like an Honest

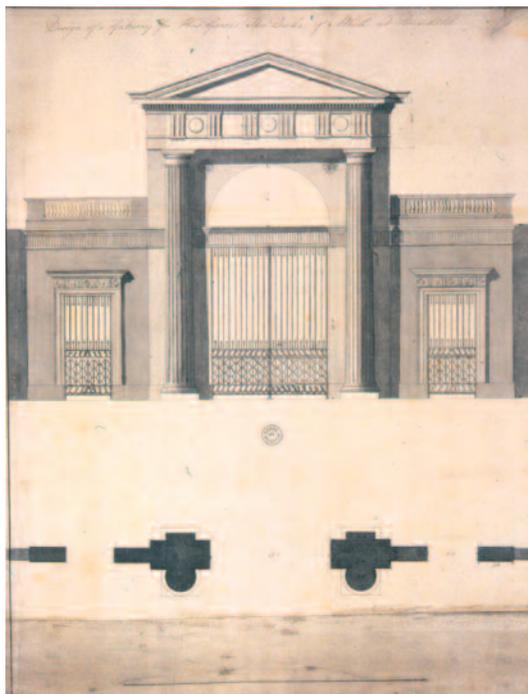


Fig. 4. Drawing by Robert Adam for a new gatehouse at Dunkeld House, Perthshire. *Sir John Soane's Museum.*

man!²⁶ The concept of architecture being distinct from the work of craftsmen was relatively recent; the Adam brothers' father William was a mason by training, yet he also designed houses. Provincial masons would design houses into the nineteenth century, alongside increasing numbers of architects who would serve architectural apprenticeships and practise no manual trade. Adam's belief that profession and craft were discrete was a relatively novel idea, yet incongruous with his own origins.

The third Duke of Atholl had recently introduced Steuart to Robert More, who commissioned Steuart to build a rotunda in his park at Millichope Hall, Shropshire, in 1770. With only an incomplete town house and a garden rotunda in his portfolio, it could hardly be said that Steuart was taking bread from the Adam's mouths. Yet Adam accused Steuart of being 'architect to any body that will employ you.'²⁷ Adam had conveniently forgotten the basis of his own practice for a wide range of wealthy and largely Scots members of the elite. Adam's jealousy was not limited to Steuart, however:

'Mr Steuart, I own you have as good a genius, or better, than many others who for some years has been picking a bitt here, and a bitt there, from the Labour of our Studys and converted them to designs of their own. Mr Chambers when I came here made such ridiculous ornaments placed closs to the eye, that ought to be at 18 or 20 feet distance; run down my manner & stile he found it wou'd not do; and now coppys me as much as any body. Mr Wyat at the Pantheon, still closser as he draws better; is this not the same as putting their hands in my pocket and taking out my money.'²⁸

Robert Adam's relationship with William Chambers was indeed permanently strained. Chambers had returned from his Grand Tour three years before Adam, and became architectural tutor to the Prince of Wales, later George III. Adam and Chambers were created Joint Architects of His Majesty's Works just after George III succeeded to the throne, yet Chambers had already imbued the intellectually slow King with the opinion that his style was superior.

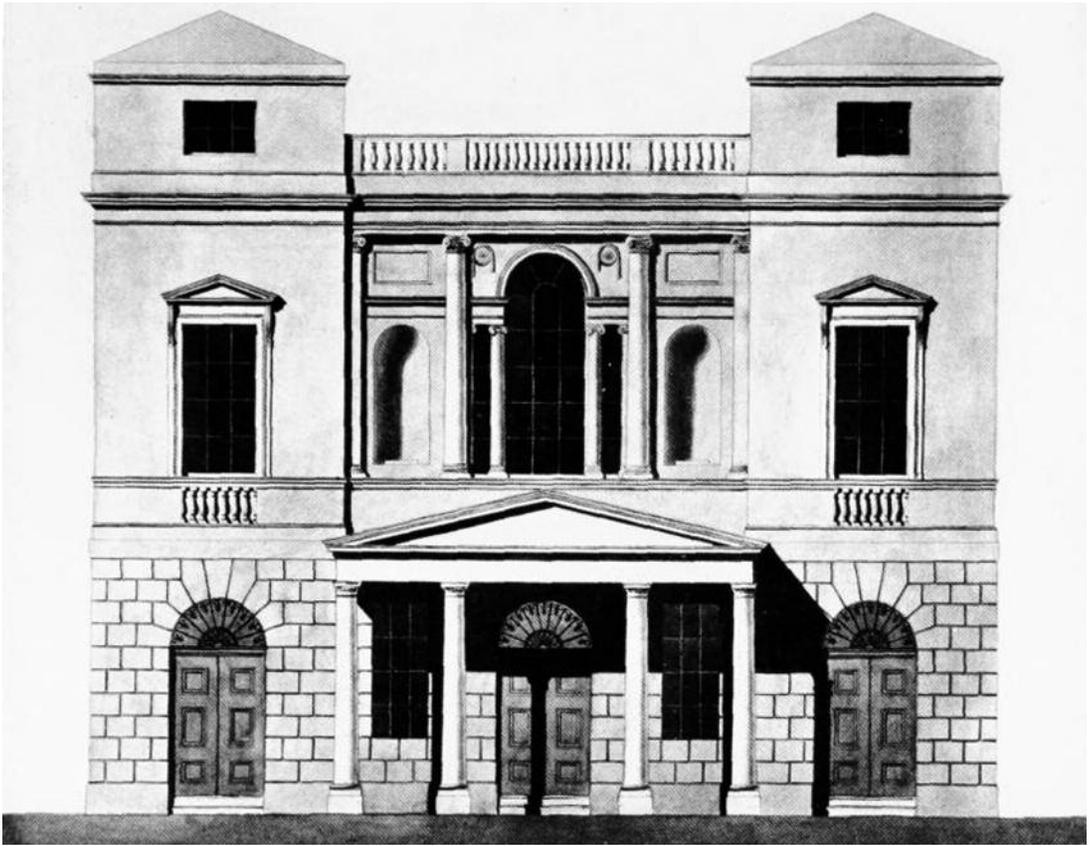


Fig. 5. Drawing by James Wyatt of The Pantheon, 1769.

Adam gained only one minor royal commission, and his major public buildings were all in Scotland. By 1781, despite their earlier professional alliance, Adam claimed he was unable to influence royal architectural commissions, as he had ‘no correspondence with Sir William Chambers.’²⁹ James Wyatt was a younger rival. On his return from the continent he built the assembly rooms called the Pantheon in Oxford Street (1769–72), where he used Adamesque architectural details (Fig. 5). Unlike the stylistically stiffer Chambers, he designed for such a wide clientele, and in neo-Gothic as well as classical styles, so that the Adam brothers were justified in regarding him as a dangerous rival. In later life Wyatt

claimed he had never met the Adams during his earlier career,³⁰ and this is corroborated by Steuart’s quotation of Adam’s conversation. Adam had seen examples of his drawings but makes no reference to meeting the man himself.

Steuart declared that Atholl’s commission for the Grosvenor Place town house was intended to give him employment rather than from stylistic choice. Steuart ‘cou’d never harbour a thought that Mr Adam, overcharg’d with Business, cou’d possibly take this Notice of the Affair.’³¹ Steuart’s work for Adam ‘did not exceed the amt. of £600 in the Course of 9 or 10 years’³², and he had repaid any obligations by using William Adam and Company to source timber.

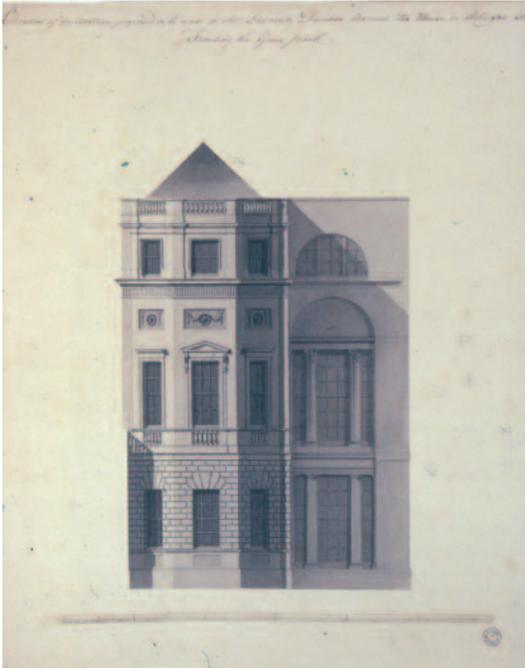


Fig. 6. Drawing by Robert Adam of No. 19 Arlington Street. *Sir John Soane's Museum*.

To refuse to build a house for 'my Best freind the Duke of Atholl' would have offended valuable connections in favour of irregular and unreliable painting work under Adam. Steuart then defended his style:

'I must add, sir, I have endeavour'd to steer clear of the charge of picking & stealing. I have ever consider'd it as unfair; my plan is my own, and my Ornaments Likewise; it has cost me some Study, to avoid the Introduction of your manner or any other Architect now in being.'³³

The recommendation to paint Sir Watkin's new town house was then discussed. Adam refused to contract Steuart as the painter, claiming it was too early in the commission to think of such things although the bricklayer, carpenter and mason were already decided upon. Adam wanted to employ craftsmen he was on good terms with as 'the

commission of 5 per Cent is a very trifling consideration for the trouble of attending a building, without the pleasure of serving ones Freinds.'³⁴ The men parted on poor terms: "'Mr Steuart you'l do very well, you have good connections, you'l get money, I wish you success,'" I answer'd "Sir I am much oblig'd to you, I wish you good Day."³⁵

In this lengthy letter Steuart revealed two other painting commissions he had gained through Robert Adam. For Sir Laurence Dundas he painted the alterations at No. 19 Arlington Street, and he also worked for Henry Drummond MP (d.1795) at No. 10 Great George Street. At Arlington Street the wealthy Dundas commissioned a new eating room, library and staircase and a canted bay to the rear of the house (Fig. 6). The bay was never built and the house was altered substantially in the nineteenth century before demolition in the twentieth. Fortunately the artist Johann Zoffany painted Dundas in his Adam library in 1769, with its Steuart paintwork (Fig. 7). The blue contrasts strongly with gilt picture frames and the white marble chimneypiece and lower walls. Giovanni Battista Cipriani painted canvases of classical subjects for the first floor landing, and on the second floor were panels of foliate plasterwork and a segmental ceiling.³⁶

Adam's work for Henry Drummond was less extensive. Drummond was the leaseholder of No. 10 Great George Street from June 1762 to 1771. He had taken the lease before the house was completed and directed Adam to complete the interiors. A description of the house before demolition in the 1930s suggests that Adams' interiors included the staircase and the first floor rear drawing room which had 'a decorative plaster ceiling in low relief.'³⁷ The 'moulded and carved white mantelpiece with fluted Corinthian columns' in the front drawing room could have been carved by one of the Devalls.³⁸ Small commissions such as Arlington Street and Great George Street would help account for the £600 Steuart earned from painting for Adam in the decade of their association.



Fig. 7. Johan Zoffany. 'Sir Lawrence Dundas with his Grandson', 1769, oil on canvas.
Collection of the Marquess of Zetland.

PROFESSIONAL INDEPENDENCE

Steuart's first known address was in Berners Street, London, where he lived until June 1769 when he rented it to the Scots lawyer and plantation owner The Hon. John Grant.³⁹ In June 1771 Grant moved to No. 20 Soho Square, formerly the town house of the Duke of Argyll.⁴⁰ It is known that Grant commissioned Adam to redesign the facade and the interior, including the ceilings, friezes, chimneypieces and carpets,⁴¹ but he also separately employed Steuart as the painter, the only time the two men worked together independently on the same commission. The situation must have been awkward for both parties; Steuart felt that Adam

'is not satisfy'd to find me so much in . . . favour, but I carry myself with great civility to him.'⁴² The extent of Adam's interior alterations is unclear, as No. 20 Soho Square was demolished in 1924, but surviving tinted drawings show that Adam intended the dining room ceiling to be light pink and green, with blue and white medallions. The oval parlour ceiling was to have similar colouring, but the drawing room, obviously meant for public display, was highlighted with purple, red and gold.⁴³ Steuart could have followed his own colour scheme, however. Pictorial panels in the ceiling were probably by Biagio Rebecca and Angelica Kauffmann.⁴⁴



Fig. 8. Adelphi, London, engraving of south front, from Robert and James Adam's *Works in Architecture*, III (1822).

In June 1772 the Scottish bank run by Alexander Fordyce and partners crashed after months of public speculation. Many Scots were affected by this, and Steuart wrote to the third Duke of Atholl that one of Fordyce's partners committed suicide in a Hampstead pond and another 'qualify'd for a cell at Bethlem,' the mental asylum.⁴⁵ Later that month Steuart recorded other bank collapses and the panic that spread through London as account holders tried to withdraw from previously unaffected banks such as Drummond's, where Atholl and the Adam brothers banked.⁴⁶

The biggest architectural disaster from this economic crisis was the Adelphi, the Thameside development in which all four Adam brothers were involved (Fig. 8). Previously a slum area with unsupported river banks, the Adams lobbied government to clear the area and build a dual level development, with vaulted warehouses at river level and large town houses above, between the Strand and the river. In the summer of 1772 during the banking crisis the Adelphi was still under construction. The Board of Ordnance refused to

lease any of the warehouse space due to a miscalculation of the tide levels which flooded the wharves at high tide.⁴⁷ With credit difficult to obtain 3 000 workmen were laid off, Steuart commenting that 'the failure of the Messrs. Adams diffuses itself to the great disappointment of the Labouring Class . . . the Adelphi cannot answer their too sanguine expectations they had form'd, it was ever my opinion, and Now confirm'd by the general opinion.'⁴⁸ Steuart predicted bankruptcy for the brothers, a disaster only averted by a five-day auction of the Adams' collection of continental antiquities. John Adam remortgaged the family estate at Blair Adam in Fife,⁴⁹ and the unleased houses within the Adelphi development were offered in a lottery at £50 a ticket.⁵⁰ In December 1773 Steuart enquired whether Adam would offer him any more painting contracts, but 'the overstrain'd complacence with which He carries himself to me, gives me very little reason to think He has yet divested himself of all prejudice.'⁵¹ The Adelphi lottery was still open and 'they say, fills very well; I doubt it, the game is very unequal, if not Iniquitous, I'll have none on't!'⁵²

By 1774 the third Duke of Atholl had recommended Steuart to five other Scottish noblemen. The fifth Duke of Argyll (1723–1806), Chief Commissioner for the army in Scotland, helped Steuart retain his position as painter to the Board of Ordnance. Argyll later stopped Steuart ‘in the street, [and] told me . . . if He could be of any further service He woud readily Interest himself for me.’⁵³ Steuart supplied wire frames for the windows at Gordon Castle, Morayshire, for the fourth Duke of Gordon (1743–1827).⁵⁴ Gordon also requested an estimate for repairs to his London town house in Grosvenor Street.⁵⁵ Steuart designed a new town house for him, costing £7000, to be built using credit Steuart would raise against his Berners Street home. Gordon was to have repaid Steuart £1000 per annum,⁵⁶ but the scheme collapsed after the third Duke of Atholl urged caution. Gordon was already involved with extensive building work and almost constant entertaining at Gordon Castle.

Through an introduction from Atholl, the Duchess of Montagu (c.1711–1775) commissioned a room for her grandchildren at her Richmond home.⁵⁷ These were the children of her daughter and the third Duke of Buccleuch. In May 1774 work began:

‘. . . last week I was order’d to Richmond, to begin the Building, where the Family and the Duke and Dutchess of Bucclugh met me, and had the honr. of a seat at Dinner, I mention this, knowing the genteel reception; was owing to your Graces letter, Altho there was not the least hint from the Duke of receiving one.’⁵⁸

Another evening at Richmond, Steuart and the Duke of Montagu discussed ‘natural Researches’⁵⁹ during an after dinner stroll. Steuart later improved the drains of the Montagu’s houses at Richmond and Blackheath.⁶⁰ Simultaneous involvement with five ducal families amused Steuart:

‘All this flatters my Vanity much! will it not stir the spleen of the Adelphi! that I have the Honour to serve so many noble Dukes! Happy! Very happy shall I be in acquiting myself to occasion these noble personages. I thank your Grace for recomending me to them.’⁶¹

Stirring ‘the spleen of the Adelphi’ was highly likely; Robert Adam craved bigger commissions from the élite. His major early patron Lord Bute scaled back from his previously extensive patronage. Argyll, Atholl, Gordon and Buccleuch were all Scots dukes, yet none of them became major patrons of Robert Adam.⁶² Through his connection with Atholl, Steuart had gained commissions from the cream of the Scottish aristocracy.

Steuart’s relationship with Adam effectively ended after working alongside him at John Grant’s house in Soho Square. The Adams’ London and English architectural practice decreased from the 1780s after the Adelphi disaster, and the brothers retreated to Scotland, where Robert reinvented his classicism and applied it to country houses and public buildings. He also developed a personal and adventurous castle style. In October 1774 Steuart wrote his penultimate letter to the third Duke of Atholl, who drowned in the River Tay the next month. Atholl had urged caution against Steuart securing finance for the Duke of Gordon’s town house by remortgaging his Berners Street home. Steuart wrote:

‘I thank your Grace for the recent good advice, the example of my Bror. Architect will not in haste induse me to covet a seat at St Stephens,⁶³ Build Babel, or puff off tickets;- the seat is now annihilate, the Building a Monument of their Folly; and the occasional recollection of the burthen hung round their necks must be mighty agreeable;- I have no commerce with them, and see no likelihood, Indeed, it would be inconsistent now, every new acquisition on my part is a fresh stab that widens the breach.’⁶⁴

The professional disagreements between Robert Adam and Steuart were never discussed after the third Duke drowned. Adam himself never named Steuart as his painter, and their relationship was lost to architectural history. Steuart’s architectural career was scarcely affected by the death of his first patron. The fourth Duke used him extensively as a London agent and small-scale architect. Painting work,



Fig. 9. Marble chimneypiece in the Drawing Room at Attingham Park, Shropshire, designed by John Deval the Younger, 1785. *Author.*



Fig. 10. Ceiling of the Drawing Room at Attingham Park, designed by George Steuart, 1782–85. *Author.*

speculative building and the restyling of London town houses continued throughout his career, but his practice now extended into country houses. He used many of Robert Adam's craftsmen. Giovanni Battista Cipriani painted panels of Aurora and Flora for the breakfast room at Grosvenor Street, and one of the John Devalls carved the chimneypieces.⁶⁵ John Devall the younger carved chimneypieces for Portman Square, London, and Attingham Park, both for Noel Hill, first Lord Berwick (1745–89) (Fig. 9).⁶⁶ The ceilings at Attingham borrowed heavily from those of Robert Adam (Fig. 10). Designs by Angelica Kauffmann were used as painted panels for the ceilings of the Boudoir and Sultana Room at Attingham and for the cartouches on Devall's chimneypieces.⁶⁷ In the 1790s Steuart moved to the Isle of Man to be the Manx agent of the fourth Duke of Atholl, Governor of the island. He designed and built a variety of judicial and administrative buildings on the island until his death there in December 1806. These included a courthouse in Ramsey, a new pier at Douglas and Castle Mona, the former governor's residence, all of which still stand.⁶⁸

Steuart's close personal relationship with the third Duke of Atholl was forged through frequent, detailed and witty letters. With Atholl's assistance, he bridged the increasing divide between the trade of painter and the profession of architect. His work was for a much more elite client base than Robert Adam ever achieved, illustrating the importance of a wealthy, stable and long-term major patron who took great personal interest in the career of his protégé.

The relationship between Steuart and Robert Adam that is catalogued within the letters is interesting both for the nature of a particularly strained and fluctuating liaison between an architect and his craftsman, but also for Steuart's involvement in some of Adam's key architectural projects. Adam's withdrawal of promises of work at Luton Hoo and No. 20 St James's Square resulted in lengthy and heated arguments at Adam's home. They reveal the competitive nature between architects and the

increasingly discrete classifications of trades and professions. They also show something of the arrogance and ambition of Robert Adam, who has so often been subsumed into his vast architectural practice, conjoined with his brothers, or relegated as the arbiter of a style that became universal. From these fresh and illuminating letters the ability to attribute the interior and exterior painting of Kenwood House is especially significant. The stylistic peak of the library and the eventual disaster surrounding the stucco work have been attributed purely to Robert Adam's genius and experimentalism, but it is important not to underestimate the involvement of his many employees, among whom we must now include the painter George Steuart.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

George Steuart was the subject of my M.A. dissertation in History of Art at the University of York, under the supervision of Dr A. Geraghty. All of George Steuart's surviving correspondence to the third and fourth Dukes of Atholl is held in the Atholl Papers, Blair Castle, Perthshire. This article and the M.A. dissertation which preceded it would not have been possible without the help of Jane Anderson, archivist at Blair Castle, who allowed me access to Steuart's letters in June 2008. My visit to Scotland was partly funded by a grant from the Scottish Society for Art History.

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NOTES

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- 11 AP. 49 (8) 103.
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- 44 *Ibid.* 72.
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- 57 *Ibid.* 60.
- 58 *Ibid.* 86.
- 59 *Ibid.* 99.
- 60 *Ibid.* 120.
- 61 *Ibid.* 86.
- 62 Bolton, II, *op. cit.*, Appendix. The fifth Duke of Argyll and fourth Duke of Gordon commissioned nothing traceable from Adam, Montagu commissioned a garden seat in 1772 and Buccleuch entrance gates and a lodge to his Edinburgh town house in 1792. The third Duke of Atholl has already been discussed as not paying for unexecuted designs for a new entrance to Dunkeld House.
- 63 Robert Adam was M.P. for Clackmannanshire and Kinrosshire from 1768 to 1774.
- 64 AP. 54 (5) 198.
- 65 AP. 54 (2) 189; AP. 54 (1) 197.
- 66 Shropshire Archives, Shrewsbury, Attingham Collection 112/10/11; Newman and Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Shropshire* (New Haven and London, 2006), pp. 128-9.
- 67 The name of the sultana room at Attingham Park is a corruption of sultane, an alternative name for the day bed which occupies one of the walls.
- 68 Colvin, *op. cit.*, pp. 982-3.