



THE
GEORGIAN
GROUP

Ben Lennon, 'Rusticated Piers', *The Georgian Group Journal*, Vol. XIX, 2011, pp. 66-74

RUSTICATED PIERS

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*Gate piers are an underrated element in historic architectural design. Often overlooked in the rush to see the principal building, many a gateway to a historic house is given no more than a passing glance, perhaps recognising a few architectural motifs that indicate the splendours beyond. In the past, however, gate piers signified power, presence, wealth and allegiance. This article examines a group of piers at five architecturally important country houses in Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Berkshire, all of them related to a pair illustrated in William Kent's *Designs of Inigo Jones (1727)*, and discusses their wider significance.*

In Volume I of William Kent's *The Designs of Inigo Jones ... with some additional designs, 1727* (Fig. 1)¹ there is an engraving of a pair of ashlar piers, each with shell-topped niches and six bands of rustication. The niches occur on both sides of each pillar, and are supported by symmetrical side blocks, each with five rusticated bands, and each topped by a cornice, above which are S-shaped volutes. Each pillar also has a cornice at the top, above which a gadrooned base supports a rusticated orb over a rusticated square plinth. The overall height is indicated as being around eighteen feet. The design was drawn by Henry Flitcroft on the order of Lord Burlington, and was engraved by Henry Hulsbergh. The design was attributed to Inigo Jones, but the location of the piers are not given.

The five sets of piers related to this design are at Coleshill (Berkshire), Sherborne House and Lodge Park in Gloucestershire, and Tottenham Park and Amesbury Abbey (Wiltshire); others, as yet

undetected, may exist elsewhere. Each pair represents a subtle variation on Flitcroft's drawings. Those at Coleshill form one of a number of sets of piers around the estate and lie 40 yards to the south of the principal gate lodge.² These differ from Flitcroft's drawing in having niches on one side only, along with larger orbs. The single small keystone is also rusticated (Fig. 2), whereas Flitcroft's drawing shows it to be plain, and the vermiculated bands that run through the shell niches are aligned with those of the blocks on either side of the main piers. A second set of piers incorporated into the lodges on the Faringdon road have the same proportions and design but lack the rustication, probably because of later alterations (Fig. 3). The Sherborne piers (Fig. 4) are identical to

Fig. 1. Gate piers from *The Designs of Inigo Jones*. Location not described but likely to be Sherborne, Gloucestershire.
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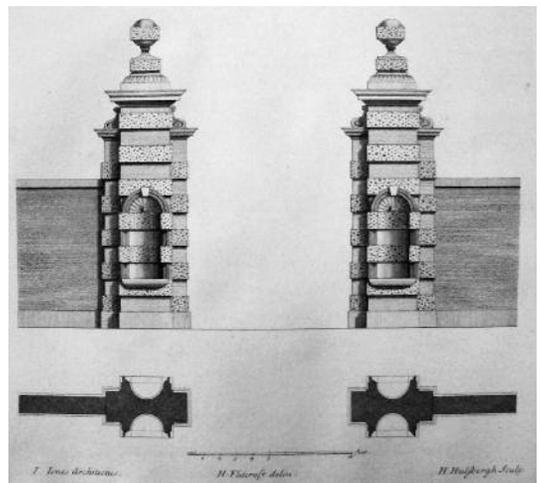


Fig. 2 (right). Gate pier with shell-headed niche at Coleshill. *Ben Lennon.*

Fig. 3 (far right). Gate piers at Coleshill with rustication removed. *Ben Lennon.*

Fig. 4 (below). Gate piers with shell-headed niches at Cheltenham Lodge, Sherborne. *Ben Lennon.*





Fig. 5. Gate piers at Lodge Park. *Ben Lennon*.

those drawn by Flitcroft, apart from the orbs being larger. They now form part of the principal entrance to the estate on the A40 road³, having been moved from a position closer to the house when the lodges were built by Charles Bailey of Cheltenham in 1840.⁴ Ramped walls curve away on either side, terminating in similar piers but on a smaller scale and without shell niches, gadrooning or rusticated plinths. They were added later as part of the lodge buildings. Not far away, at Lodge Park, a seventeenth-century house on the Sherborne estate, there is another almost identical pair, though lacking the shell-headed niches (Fig. 5).⁵ The Coleshill and Sherborne sets are all built of oolitic limestone common on the Cotswolds, and have fine vermiculated rustication.

The rustication on the Amesbury and Savernake piers is coarser than at Coleshill and Sherborne, and

the volutes are treated slightly differently, in a whiter material of unknown origin. The Amesbury piers stand next to Kent Lodge on Countess Road (Fig. 6).⁶ They differ subtly from the Lodge Park pair in having slightly smaller rusticated balls more akin to those found on Flitcroft's drawing. There is also slightly less rustication on the plinth, which here forms a band around rather than being fully rusticated. Overall the rustication is much coarser than the pairs previously described, which are generally finely vermiculated. Nor is the quality of the gadrooning as fine. The quality of the execution also differs from other pairs. The design of the volutes has been refined so as to form a symmetrical double baluster when viewed from the side elevation, details that have not been observed on any of the pairs so far discussed. The final pair, at the northern entrance



Fig. 6. Gate piers at Kent Lodge, Amesbury. *Ben Lennon.*

to the Grand Avenue of Savernake Forest, near Marlborough⁷, lost their plinths and orbs in the twentieth century but were originally all but identical to those found at Amesbury, differing only in the degree of rustication on the plinth supporting the orb. They formed the gateway to the front entrance to Tottenham House in the early 1720s, but were moved to their current location by Capability Brown in 1764.⁸

The relationship between these sets of piers is both curious and complex. It has never been established which pair represents the original design, but a closer examination of the history of the related houses, their architects and their builders, offers some clues. Coleshill House was built from around 1657–8 and remained largely unaltered until its destruction by fire in 1952.⁹ Heavily influenced by Inigo Jones, the design is now generally attributed to Roger Pratt, a cousin of

the owner, Sir George Pratt.¹⁰ Several sets of piers of varying designs can be found around the periphery of the estate, including, along with those already discussed, a highly elaborate pair on the Faringdon Road. The latter were closely modelled on the chimneystacks of the house, with rusticated panels all around, bracketed cornices and carved stone vases. The south sides have framed and recessed roundels holding classical busts, and beneath them shell-headed niches arranged as seats with moulded architraves and small key blocks.¹¹ They are probably roughly contemporary with the house, as are the other piers, though the other few known examples of Pratt's work yield no similar designs, and the stonemason in charge of the execution is not recorded.

Sherborne House was purchased by Thomas Dutton in 1551, and his house was substantially

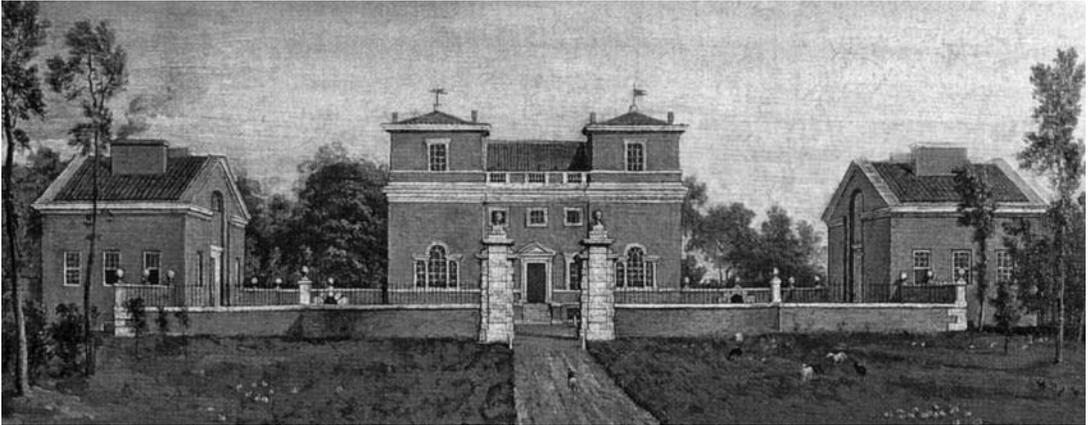


Fig. 7. Tottenham House, painting by Pieter Andreas Rysbrack c.1730. *Private Collection.*

enlarged for John Dutton by the local master-mason Valentine Strong in 1651–3.¹² Lodge Park meanwhile had already been laid for deer coursing and the lodge built by 1634, probably by members of the Strong family, as a kind of grandstand.¹³ For many years attributed to Inigo Jones, it now seems likely that it was the work of Jones' contemporary Balthazar Gerbier, with the execution again being carried out by Strong.¹⁴ Flitcroft drew the lodge at the request of Lord Burlington after 1720, and his drawing was subsequently engraved by Hulsbergh and included in Volume I of Kent's *Designs of Inigo Jones* in 1727. Interestingly, Flitcroft did not accurately represent the building as it stood, but made modifications where he thought the existing design detracted from the classical aesthetic, as in the omission of a pair of shell-headed niches on each side of the first-floor doorway. Flitcroft presumably drew the piers at the approach at about the same time, assuming them also to be the work of Jones. Those at Sherborne bear the closest resemblance to his drawings, and are the only pair displaying the exact alignment of rustication as well as the double niches, though Flitcroft probably adjusted the scale of the orbs in his drawing to fit with his own neo-Palladian, or Jonesian, aesthetic.

The Lodge Park piers are not shown in a painting of the east front of the house by George Lambert of 1749. Nor indeed was there an entrance from the east: merely a solid wall around the park. The east entrance, lodges and piers were in fact not built until c.1898 by M. King of London.¹⁵ King replicated the design from the existing piers at Sherborne, but he omitted the niches and incorporated vermiculated rustication into the design of the adjacent lodges, in keeping with that found at Cheltenham Lodge on the A40.

Amesbury Abbey was granted by Henry VIII to Edward Seymour (then Earl of Hertford, later Duke of Somerset) in 1541.¹⁶ In 1600 the subsequent Earl of Hertford had two lodges built on the eastern edge of the park: Diana's House and Kent House.¹⁷ The main house was completely rebuilt by John Webb c.1660 for the then Marquess of Hertford.¹⁸ For many years it was attributed to Jones, and Flitcroft drew it for inclusion in *The Designs of Inigo Jones*¹⁹; in 1725, the year in which the estate passed to the Duke of Queensberry, it appeared in the second volume of Colen Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus*.²⁰ Webb designed a pair of ashlar piers as part of the approach to the house, very much in the architectural style of the house, with Tuscan pilasters, arched

niches and a raised triangular pediment over a plain entablature; they can still be seen on the approach from the south next to the parish church. The rusticated piers next to Kent House cannot be so precisely dated. Though usually thought to have been erected c.1720–5²¹, they may be the only memento of the occupancy of William Benson, builder of the precociously Palladian Wilbury House close by²², and briefly – and disastrously – Surveyor of the King’s Works under George I. Benson leased the estate between 1708 and 1720, but Lord Charles Bruce then sold the property to the Duke of Queensberry to finance the building of Tottenham House.²³ Flitcroft produced a plan of the estate for the Duke in 1726, and added wings to the house c.1730.²⁴

When Charles Bruce, then Baron Whorlton, sold Amesbury he approached Lord Burlington to supply designs for a new house, Tottenham House, on his Savernake estate. He had married Burlington’s sister, Juliana Boyle, in 1720. His neo-Palladian designs were executed by Flitcroft and much of the work was also supervised by him.²⁵ The gate-piers were placed in a prominent position at the entrance to the main courtyard, their ashlar construction contrasting with the brick house; they are shown in a painting by Pieter Andreas Rysbrack dating from around 1730 after the first phase of house building had been completed (Fig. 7).

Ostensibly the names that provide the link between all of these sites are those of Inigo Jones and Henry Flitcroft. Lodge Park, Amesbury Abbey and Coleshill were for many years attributed to Jones, which explains why the first two were included in the first volume of *The Designs of Inigo Jones*.²⁶ The earliest seem to be those at Sherborne and Coleshill, with the former slightly preceding the latter. Both houses were either rebuilt or significantly remodelled in the 1650s, and the sets of piers are almost identical in design, with the single exception of the double niches which only appear at Sherborne. It seems likely that the piers were constructed within a few years of each other, and that they are probably contemporaneous with the houses. While the quality of the stonework is high in both cases there are significant differences in the rendering of the rustication which suggests different craftsmen may have been employed (Fig. 8).

Valentine Strong and his father worked widely around Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire and would almost certainly have been aware of the proposed construction of Coleshill House when he was working on the refurbishment of Sherborne. He may even have been involved in both projects. Much of the early history of Coleshill has been reconstructed from notes made by Sir Mark Pleydell in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, including



Fig. 8. Rustication styles at Coleshill (left) and Sherborne (right). *Ben Lennon.*



Fig. 9 Valentine Strong's tomb in Fairford cemetery. *Ben Lennon.*

reminiscences from a elderly cousin, who remembered that 'The freestone of wch ye house was built came up Wick Green from Barrington. Surveyors Pratt and Steward'.²⁷ The Strongs owned quarries around Little Barrington and Taynton which supplied high quality stone to a number of local and regional building projects.²⁸ Coupled with the similarity of the piers to those at Sherborne, this suggests that the Strongs were involved to some degree with the construction of Coleshill and some of its landscape features.

Valentine Strong's monument in Fairford churchyard contains a number of architectural elements found in the piers under discussion (Fig. 9), notably the spiral bale top with a shell at the western end and heavy gadrooning below. On the side are embossed scrolls and the ends contain moulded cartouches bearing inscriptions. The quality of the stonework is not as fine as that of the Strongs, and it has weathered since his death in 1662, suggesting that it is not from the highly durable freestone of the Barrington quarries. It is likely therefore that this is the work of a local monumental mason, incorporating

elements and motifs of the Strongs' known work.²⁹

An examination of other building projects associated with the Strongs reveals traces of other stylistic influences. In 1632–3 Valentine and his father Timothy Strong rebuilt Cornbury House, Oxfordshire, for Henry Danvers, Earl of Danby, to a design produced by Nicholas Stone. At the same time Stone was working at Oxford on the Physic Garden (now the Oxford Botanic Garden), also at the expense of Lord Danby.³⁰ It has three gateways, each containing stylistic elements similar to those of the pier design, especially in the main or Danby gateway (Fig. 10). For Pevsner:

'With Inigo Jones this has nothing to do, with Italy, everything, but not with Palladio, rather Serlio's *Extraordinary Book* of archways which show that delight in the alternation of smooth and heavily rusticated parts characteristic of Stone's gateway. Stone's rustication is not rock-faced but vermiculated. The gateway is in three parts, the middle being the arched passage ... The four columns have bands of rusticated vermiculation, the archway has alternation too. In the lateral bays are niches with the (later) statues of Charles I and Charles II.'³¹



Fig. 10. The main gateway to the Botanic Garden in Oxford. *Ben Lennon.*

The Danby Gateway provides a more credible influence for the design of the Sherborne and Coleshill piers than most of Inigo Jones' authenticated works. The piers have a greater aesthetic affinity with the 'artisan mannerist' style of Stone than with the classical purism of Jones. In 1634 the Strongs were working on the Canterbury Quadrangle at St John's College, Oxford and it was recorded that they had been lured away from one of Lord Danvers's projects – probably either Cornbury or the Botanic Garden – by the enticement of extraordinarily high rates of pay.³² But whether or not Valentine Strong actually worked on the Danby Gateway he almost certainly took elements from it to incorporate into his piers at Sherborne, taking the vertical elements, creating a central pier as a housing for the niche and demoting the pilasters to a supporting position on each side. The whole was transposed to a square structure, a motif that had appeared in one of the other gates at the Physic Garden.

While the generic influence of Jones on the pier design is evident, there is no reason to suspect that the structures themselves were attributable to him.

Stone was the Master Mason at the Office of Works during Jones's tenure as Surveyor, and the two must surely have shared architectural influences, notably that of Serlio, which was then transmitted to Valentine Strong at Sherborne. By the 1720s both Coleshill House and Lodge Park had mistakenly been attributed to Inigo Jones by Lord Burlington and most others, hence the inclusion of Lodge Park and the Sherborne piers in the *The Designs of Inigo Jones*, and Vardy's later inclusion of Coleshill. And while Flitcroft was drawing at Sherborne he was engaged in the design of Tottenham House working for Lord Burlington. It seems likely then that the pier design from Sherborne was adapted to give a Jonesian authority to the front of Tottenham House. Within the next decade it is likely that Flitcroft used the Tottenham adaptation at Amesbury. The important role of John Webb in the building of this house had been completely forgotten by the 1720s, when it was attributed to Jones, and the use of the pier design was no doubt used to reinforce the Jonesian canon.

The use and re-use of the pier design, both by Flitcroft at Tottenham and Amesbury, and by King at

Lodge Park over 150 years later, demonstrates the way in which architectural motifs can be absorbed into a collective style to become established idioms. In the case of these piers this has led to confusion over what constitutes a truly Jonesian style. It may bear little relationship to its true origins, but over time it can become a pseudo-style in its own right.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I should like to acknowledge the help, enthusiasm and encouragement of John Harris in the preparation of this paper.

NOTES

- 1 Volume 1, Plate No.61.
- 2 National grid reference (NGR): SU 239 938.
- 3 NGR: SP 161 138.
- 4 English Heritage (1999) Register of Historic Parks and Gardens: Sherborne House.
- 5 NGR: SP 146 122.
- 6 NGR: SU 153 417.
- 7 NGR: SU 210 682.
- 8 Wiltshire and Swindon Archive, Chippenham, 1300/1910.
- 9 J. Harris, 'Extracting sunbeams from cucumbers', in *The National Trust: Historic houses and Collections Annual (Apollo, 2008)* p.9. See also G. Tyack, S. Bradley and N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Berkshire* (New Haven & London, 2010), pp. 245–6.
- 10 J. Summerson, *Architecture in Britain, 1530–1830* (9th ed., New Haven & London 1993), pp. 137–8.
- 11 English Heritage. Listed Building entry. IoE Number: 251512.
- 12 D. Verey and A. Brooks *The Buildings of England: Gloucestershire; the Cotswolds* (New Haven & London 1999), p. 602.
- 13 C. Hobson, *Valentine Strong: Cotswold Stonemason* (Fairford History Society, Occasional Paper 3, 2006).
- 14 K. Fretwell, 'Lodge Park, Gloucestershire: A Rare Surviving Deer Course and Bridgeman Layout' *Garden History*, 23, No. 2 (Winter, 1995), p. 135.
- 15 English Heritage. Listed Building entry. IOE Number 130614.
- 16 Wiltshire and Swindon Archive 9/1/38.
- 17 D. Crowley. *Victoria County History of Wiltshire*, XV (1995), p. 32.
- 18 H. M. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600–1840* (New Haven & London, 2008), p. 1098
- 19 Volume 1, Plate 8.
- 20 N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Wiltshire* (2nd ed., Harmondsworth, 1991), p. 91.
- 21 *Victoria County History of Wiltshire XV*, p. 33.
- 22 T. Mowl, *The Historic Gardens of Wiltshire* (Stroud, 2004). p. 81.
- 23 Wiltshire and Swindon Archive. Antrobus Deeds 283/44.
- 24 J. Harris, 'The building projects of Viscount Bruce' in R. White (ed.) *Lord Burlington and his circle* (Georgian Group / Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982:) Colvin, *op. cit.*, p. 381; Wiltshire and Swindon Archive 144/1.
- 25 J. Harris, *loc. cit.* (1982), pp. 25–51.
- 26 Coleshill House was later engraved by John Vardy and attributed to Jones in *Some Designs of Mr Inigo Jones and Mr William Kent* (1744), Pl. 8.
- 27 Commonplace book of Sir Mark Pleydell, cited in T. Mowl and B. Earnshaw, *Architecture without Kings* (Manchester, 1995). pp. 49–50.
- 28 Hobson, *op. cit.*
- 29 For a fuller account of the distribution of this type of monumental masonry in the Cotswolds see W.R. Elliot, 'Chest-tombs and "Tea-caddies"', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 95 (1977), pp. 68–85.
- 30 Colvin, *Dictionary*, pp. 991.
- 31 J. Sherwood, and N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 267.
- 32 Colvin, *Dictionary*, p. 995.