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JACOBITES AND HORSES AT NUTHALL TEMPLE

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Buried under the M1 motorway lie the charred remains of Nuthall Temple (Fig. 1), the last and largest of the four Palladian Rotunda villas built in England in the eighteenth century: Mereworth Castle in Kent (Fig. 2), designed by Colen Campbell around 1720–23 for The Hon. John Fane, later seventh Earl of Westmorland; Lord Burlington's Chiswick House, circa 1725–29 (Figs. 6 & 7); and Foot's Cray Place, also in Kent (Fig. 3), designed by Daniel Garrett around 1751–53 for Bouchier Cleeve and demolished in 1949.¹

Whereas the first three villas were within easy reach of London, Nuthall was in the Midlands, on the outskirts of Nottingham. It was begun in 1754 for Sir Charles Sedley, second Baronet, to designs by

Thomas Wright of Durham, philomath and teacher of mathematics, astronomy, drawing and surveying to a close-knit circle of aristocrats who, having him on the spot for months at a time as a resident tutor and friend, took the opportunity to consult him on improving, embellishing and modernising their houses, parks and gardens.

It was entirely by chance, by accident not by intention, that Wright became an architect. He was a competent and exceptionally inventive amateur with an innate ability as a draughtsman. But he was not a professional designer of buildings. Nor, in fact, was he an orthodox Palladian, as can be seen from the *Six Original Designs of Arbours* and *Six Original Designs of Grottos* which he published in 1755 and



Fig. 1. Nuthall Temple, Notts, entrance front.



Fig. 2. Mereworth Castle, Kent, entrance front.

1758 respectively, and from the garden front and interior of Nuthall Temple (Figs. 11 & 13).² How did Sedley come to commission an amateur like Wright to design him a new house at Nuthall, and why did it have to be so manifestly Italianate?

The link between Sedley and Wright was probably forged around 1748 or 49 by Charles Noel Somerset, fourth Duke of Beaufort, who at the time was Wright's principal patron at Badminton.³ Sedley's association with Beaufort was mainly political, following close upon his election as Tory MP for Nottingham in May 1747 and his leading role in the Jacobite demonstration at the Lichfield races in August of that year.⁴ In 1749 Sedley was made a member of the Honourable Board of the Loyal Brotherhood, a high-Tory drinking club with Jacobite leanings of

which the fourth Duke of Beaufort was president from 1746 until his death in 1756.⁵

Beaufort, whom the Tories regarded as 'the head of their party', was a prominent supporter of Frederick, Prince of Wales; a 'most determined and unwavering Jacobite'; and one of the chief 'Remitters' who collected money for the Pretender.⁶ He and John Fane, seventh Earl of Westmorland, were foremost among the English Jacobites who met with Prince Charles Edward, the Young Pretender, during his clandestine visit to London in September 1750. The Earl (who succeeded in 1736) – a member of the leading Whig family of Kent and one of Cobham's 'cubs' – turned vehemently against the Government in 1737 and became a zealous Tory and Jacobite in retaliation for his dismissal from the army without

compensation for voting in favour of an increase of the Prince of Wales's allowance.⁷

The Palladian villa built for John Fane at Mereworth was about eleven miles from Scadbury Manor, near Southfleet, which was the ancient seat of the Sedley family from the fourteenth century until 1718 when Sir Charles Sedley's mother (Elizabeth Frith) inherited Nuthall. It was in a house at Oxton, some ten miles from Nuthall, that Sir Charles was born in 1721 and where he lived – not at Scadbury in Kent.⁸ It was probably to commemorate the Sedley family's *ancient* Kent origins in their comparatively *new* Nottingham estate and, at the same time, to proclaim his own Tory-Jacobite allegiance that Sir Charles decided to build a distinctive Palladian villa like that of his senior cohort, the Earl of Westmorland, at Mereworth (Fig. 2). How Foot's Cray Place (Fig. 3), situated between Scadbury and Mereworth, fits into the picture remains a tantalizing mystery which I hope to solve in future by pursuing its elusive builder, Bouchier Cleeve.

Thomas Wright is not part of the political equation spelled out above. Unfortunately, however, his mumbo jumbo fans are bound to add Jacobitism to freemasonry which they have beaten to death to little or no avail. Having identified the fourth Duke of Beaufort as the person who introduced Sedley to Thomas Wright, and the seventh Earl of Westmorland and his villa at Mereworth as the source of the idea – just the *idea*, nothing more – of building a Palladian Rotunda villa, I now want to look in some detail at the architecture of Nuthall Temple, the only complete and substantial house designed by Wright.⁹

Unlike the conventional 'Rotunda' villas of Mereworth and Foot's Cray, Nuthall was based on Scamozzi rather than Palladio: in particular on Scamozzi's Villa Rocca Pisana in Lonigo near Vicenza (Fig. 4) and Villa Molini near Padua (Fig. 5). From La Rocca Pisana Wright took the octagonal dome, but unusually set it within a balustraded viewing platform and fenestrated it with eight tripartite openings (Fig. 1). Although La Rocca Pisana also gave him the authority

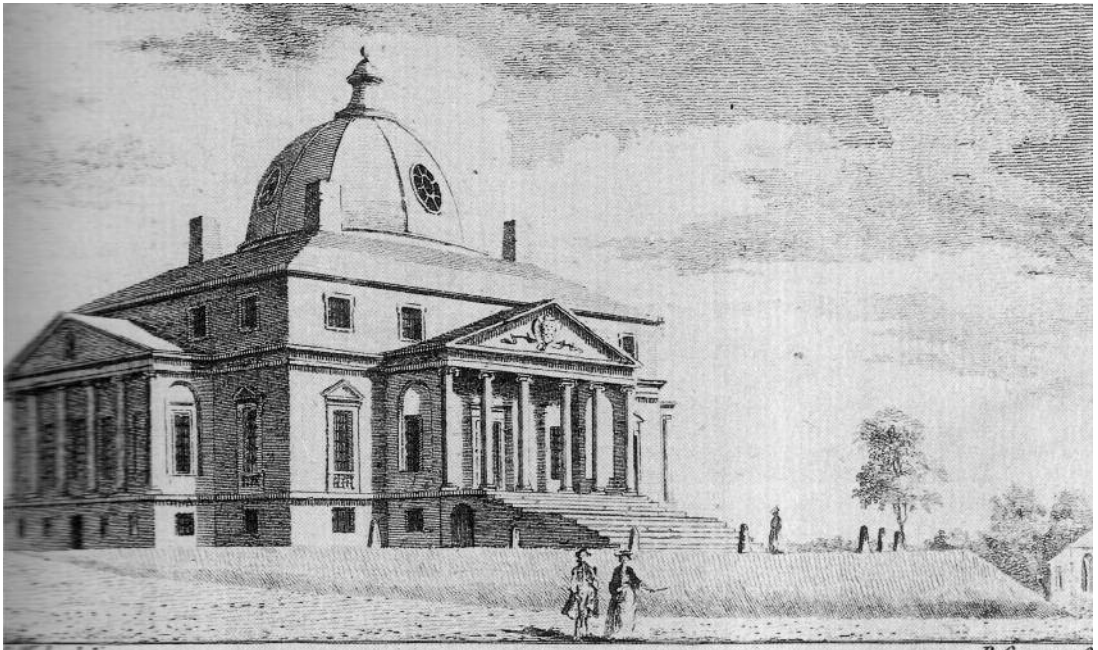


Fig. 3. Foot's Cray Place, Kent. Engraving after Samuel Wale in Dodsley's *London & its environs described*, 1761.

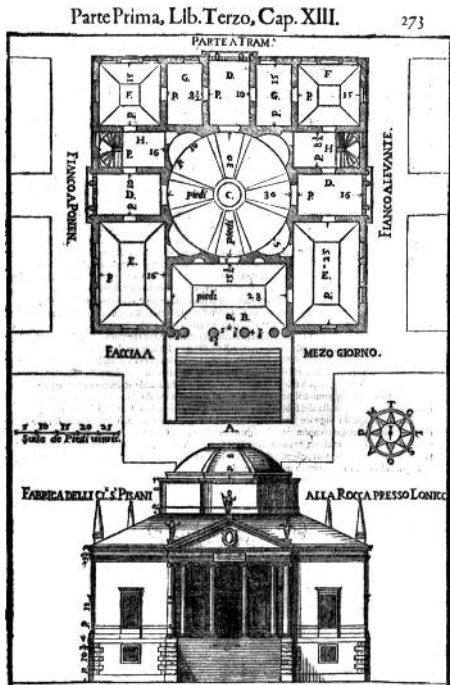


Fig. 4. Vincenzo Scamozzi, Villa Rocca Pisana, plan and elevation, *L'idea della architettura universal*, 1615.

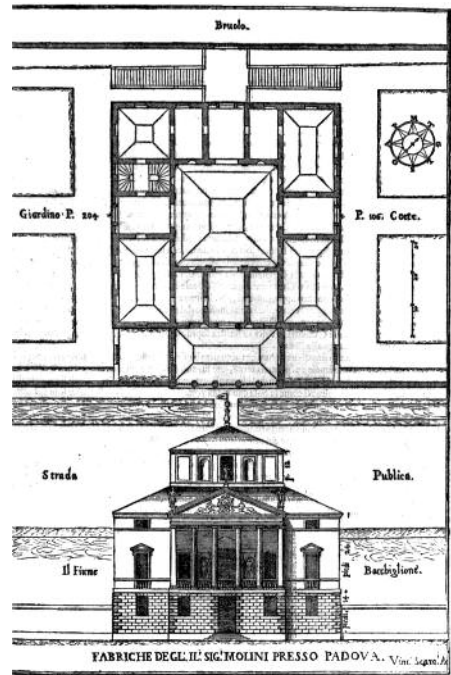


Fig. 5. Vincenzo Scamozzi, Villa Molini, plan and elevation, *L'idea della architettura universal*, 1615.

for the portico in antis, his broad, hexastyle portico is closer to Molini's hexastyle loggia, as were the flanking pedimented windows. The rusticated basement and the attic storey were also inspired by Molini.

Lord Burlington's Scamozzian villa at Chiswick was bound to come into the picture. Its octagonal Lower Tribune with eight free-standing Tuscan columns (Fig. 7) evidently appealed to Wright and Sedley more than the circular halls of the Italian villas. The small vestibule preceding the hall at Nuthall, though wider than the 'Rotunda' - like passage at Chiswick, would nonetheless have greatly enhanced the experience of entering the tall, top-lit, richly decorated central space with its eight free-standing Composite columns (Figs. 8 & 13).

A similar configuration of spaces - portico-in-antis, small vestibule and octagonal hall - appears in a sketch-plan of a villa by the Irish architect Sir

Edward Lovett Pearce, a cousin and protégé of Sir John Vanbrugh (Fig. 9). This sketch is part of a collection of Pearce and Vanbrugh drawings (now at the V&A) which was once at Stillorgan House near Dublin where it was quite likely to have been seen by Thomas Wright when he was in Ireland from 1746 to 47, its owner, Joshua, second Viscount Allen of Stillorgan, being one of his patrons.¹⁰

The balustraded walkway surrounding the dome was one of five vantage points from which the hunt and the exercising of Sedley's seventy-two race horses could be watched (Figs. 1 & 11): the portico *in antis* was one, another was the balustraded roof of the semicircular bow on the garden front, and there were also two fairly large, single-storey extensions (containing kitchens and offices) on either side of the villa whose flat, balustraded roofs were accessible from the first-floor reception rooms through French

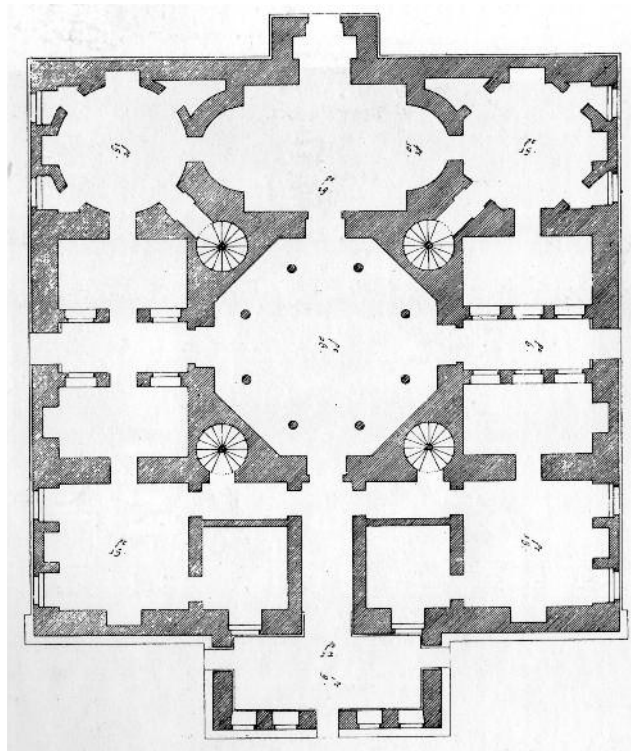
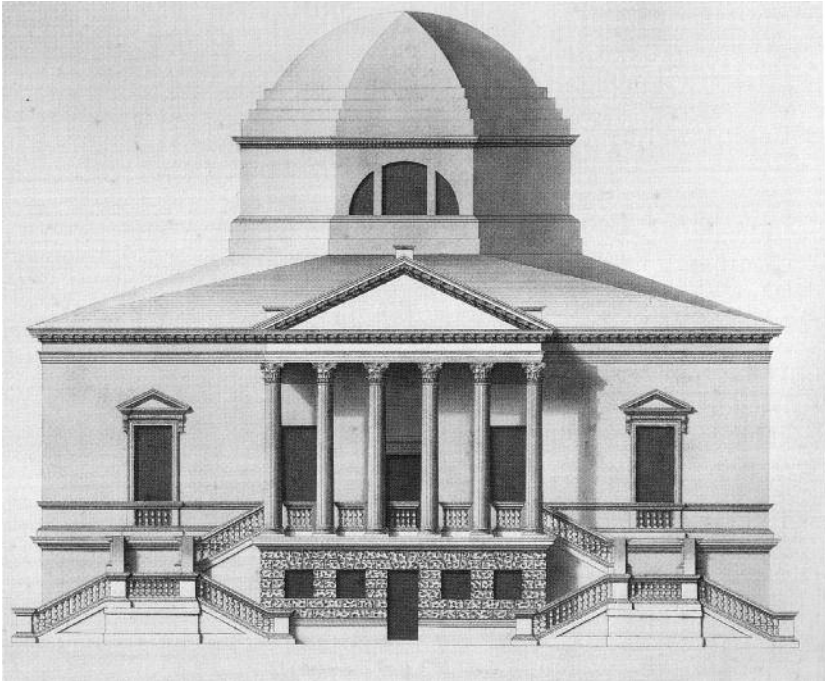


Fig. 6 (above). Chiswick, elevation of the entrance front. Drawing by Henry Flitcroft, probably for William Kent's *Designs of Inigo Jones*, 1727, vol. I, pl. 71 Trustees of the Chatsworth Settlement (Boy [8] 12).
 Fig. 7 (right). Chiswick, plan of the basement floor. Drawing by Henry Flitcroft probably for William Kent's *Designs of Inigo Jones*, 1727, vol. I, pl. 71. *Trustees of the Chatsworth Settlement* (Boy [8] 6).

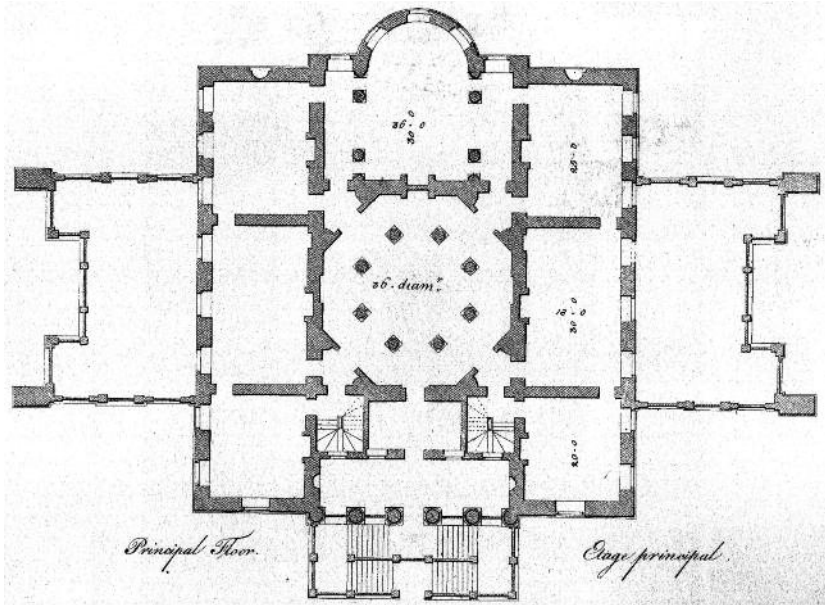


Fig. 8. Nuthall Temple, plan of the principal floor.
Engraving in Woolfe & Gandon's *Vitruvius Britannicus*, IV, pl. 56.

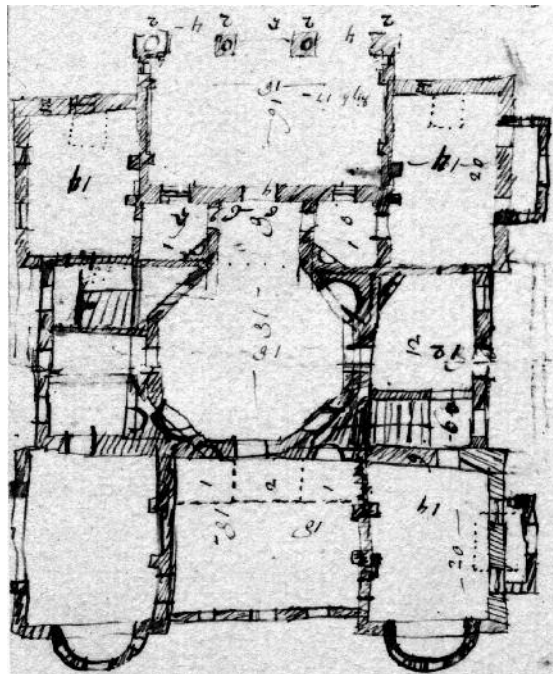


Fig. 9 (above). Sir Edward Lovett Pearce, Sketch-plan of a villa (detail). *Victoria and Albert Museum*.

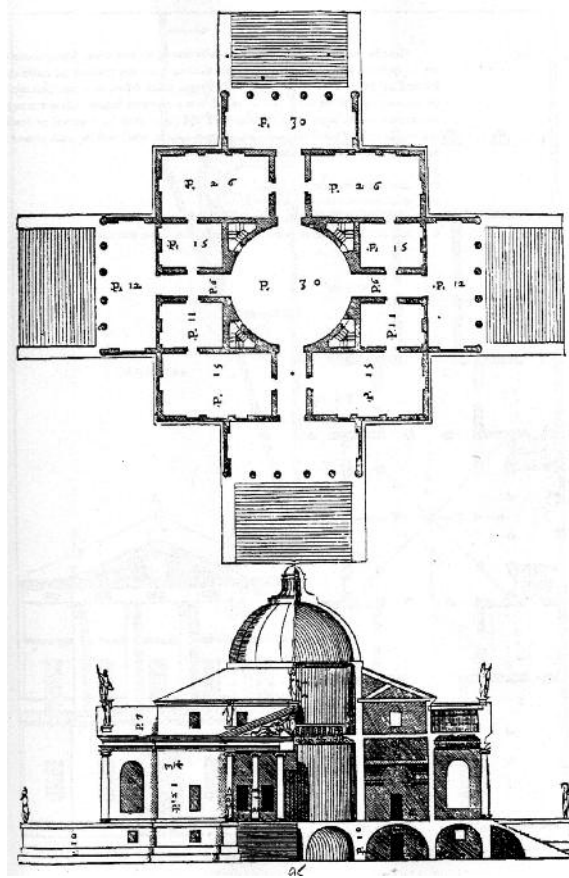


Fig. 10 (right). Andrea Palladio, Villa Almerico 'La Rotunda', plan, half elevation and half section. Woodcut in *I Quattro libri dell'architettura*, bk II, 1570.

windows. What the source of these unusual lateral viewing platforms was, I do not know. The profile of the perrons on Palladio's Villa Rotunda might have suggested the idea (Fig. 10); so too might the single-storey platforms flanking the north front of Badminton House which were used for viewing the stag hunts across the park. They were, of course, well known to Wright and would have been of interest to Sedley.

Whatever its sources, Wright's executed designs for Nuthall Temple – published by Woolfe and Gandon in *Vitruvius Britannicus* IV in 1767 – were a perfect solution to Sedley's demands for an Italianate

villa comparable to Mereworth with maximum provision for viewing his favourite equestrian sports.¹¹ However, the Italianate-Scamozzian display was only wanted on the principal front. Elsewhere, on the garden front and in the interior, Wright had much more freedom of choice and it was to English rather than Italian precedents that he looked.

The most distinctive feature of the west-facing garden front (Fig. 11) was its central, open-base pediment framing a two-storey semicircular bow with a Venetian window above, which gave access to the flat roof as a viewing point. The Venetian windows on the *piano nobile* on either side of the bow were inserted

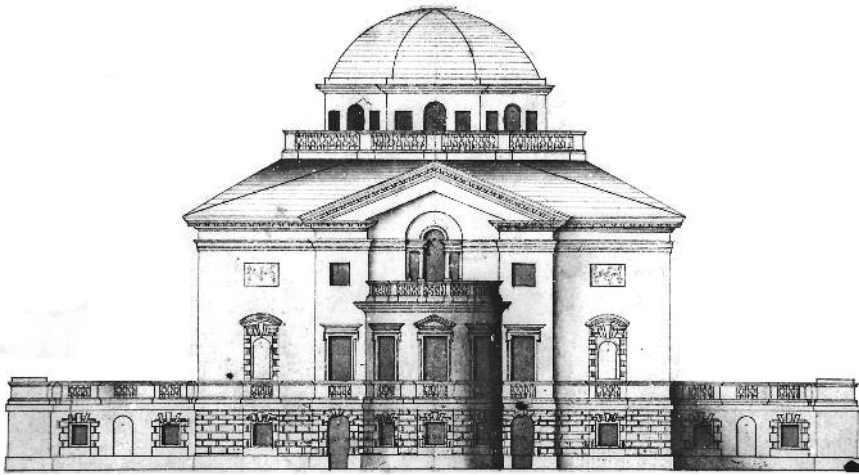


Fig. 11. Nuthall Temple, garden front.

around 1776 by James Wyatt, replacing Wright's niches in pedimented Gibbs surrounds.¹² A remarkably similar arrangement of semicircular bow and open-base pediment was to be found at Russell Farm (Fig. 12) on the Cassiobury estate near Watford, Hertfordshire, which was designed by Wright and built by Stiff Leadbetter for the Dowager Countess of Essex in 1753, just before Nuthall Temple.¹³

On the whole, large semicircular bows, which Wright also introduced (complete with semi-domes) on the east front of Horton, Northants, in 1754, were

less common in the eighteenth century than canted ones.¹⁴ Vanbrugh, Pearce and Halfpenny were notable exceptions whose work may have inspired Wright.¹⁵ But was there a precedent for the combination at Russell Farm and Nuthall Temple of a segmental bow and an open-base pediment, or was this Wright's invention? The idiosyncratic garden front and the riot of rococo plaster decoration and wrought ironwork in the interior (Fig. 13) are more characteristic of Wright, the inventive amateur, than the conventional Scamozzian facade.



Fig. 12. Russell Farm, Watercolour view (detail) Oldfield Collection, vol. 7, p. 68. *Hertfordshire Record Office*.



Fig. 13. Nuthall Temple, the octagonal hall.

NOTES

- 1 This article is based upon a lecture given at the Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio at Vicenza in September 2011. For the attribution to Garrett and the date see H. Colvin and J. Harris, 'The Architect of Foot's Cray Place', *Georgian Group Journal*, VII (1997), pp. 1-7.
- 2 Thomas Wright, *Universal Architecture, Book I, ... Arbours; Book II, ... Grottos* London: Printed for the Author, 1755 [1758]. See also Thomas Wright, *Arbours and Grottos a facsimile ... with a catalogue of Wright's works in architecture and garden design by Eileen Harris*, (London 1979), Nuthall Temple, unpaginated.
- 3 This supersedes my initial suggestion that the link was one of Wright's Nottinghamshire patrons, *ibid.* Peter Smith, 'The Architecture of Nuthall Temple', in M. Airs (ed.), *The later eighteenth-century great house* (Oxford, 1997), p. 206, suggested the link was Robert Burdett of Foremark Hall, Derbyshire who had married Sedley's sister Elizabeth (d. 1747) and who met Wright on 10 August 1750 when he was travelling through Derbyshire with Norborne Berkeley, later Lord Botetourt, the Duke of Beaufort's brother-in-law. See *The Reliquary, Quarterly Archaeological Journal and Review*, ed. Llewellyn Jewett, XV, 1874-75. Botetourt, who employed Wright at Stoke Gifford, Gloucestershire, was another link between him and Sedley.
- 4 Eveline Cruickshanks, *Political Untouchables* (London, 1971), p. 107.
- 5 Linda J. Colley, 'The Loyal Brotherhood And The Cocoa Tree: The London Organization of the Tory Party, 1727-1760', *The Historical Journal*, 20 (1) (1977), pp. 77-95. The Loyal Brotherhood was instituted in 1709 by Henry Somerset, second Duke of Beaufort, who was the first president from 1709 to 1713. Horace Walpole dismissed the Brotherhood as a 'Jacobite Club': Walpole to Sir Horace Mann, 3 March 1743, *Correspondence* II, (New Haven, 1937), p. 186.
- 6 E. Cruickshanks, *loc. cit.* at note 4 above, pp. 73-4; Romney Sedgwick, *The House of Commons 1715-1754*, II (London, 1970), p. 431.
- 7 Cruickshanks, *loc. cit.*, p. 46; Sedgwick, *op. cit.* at note 6 above, I, p. 265; II, pp. 25-6.
- 8 Information provided by Roger Hadfield, FRGS of Nuthall. Sedley was nine years old when he succeeded his father as second Baronet in 1730.
- 9 For a more detailed and discursive analysis of the architecture of Nuthall Temple see P. Smith, *loc. cit.*, at note 3 above. However, I do not agree with all the precedents cited by Smith, e.g. the pedimented niches on the garden front are not only found on the Dormitory of Westminster School (p. 209); they also occur on the north and south fronts of St Paul's Cathedral.
- 10 H. Colvin and M. Craig, *Architectural Drawings in the Library of Elton Hall by Sir John Vanbrugh and Sir Edward Lovett Pearce* (Roxburgh Club, 1964), no. 84, pl. LVIII. The Viscountess Allen (née Margaret DuPass) and their two daughters, Elizabeth who married John Proby of Elton Hall in 1750 and Frances who married William Mayne, were all subscribers to Wright's *Louthiana*, 1748.
- 11 John Woolfe and James Gandon, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, IV, pls. 56-7.
- 12 All the balustrades were also removed from the windows thereby lengthening them. See, Smith, *loc. cit.*, at note 2 above.
- 13 Giles Worsley, 'Stiff Leadbetter', *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society*, 53 (2009), pp. 75-76.
- 14 Giles Worsley, *Classical Architecture in Britain* (New Haven & London 1995), pp. 237-38.
- 15 Segmental bows can be found on Vanbrugh's Eastbury, the east front of Blenheim Palace, Mincepie House, etc.; on Pearce's Arch Hall, Wilkinstown, co. Meath and Wardtown, Ballymacward and in William Halfpenny's *New and compleat system of architecture* (London, 1749), pls. 28, 33, 35, 37. Halfpenny, who was in Ireland in the 1730s, may have worked as an assistant to Pearce, see online Irish Architectural Archive, www.iarc.ie. See also Maurice Craig, 'The Quest for Sir Edward Lovett Pearce', *The Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, 12 (1996), Figs. 11 & 12.