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# JOSEPH ROSE AND COMPANY

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*Whilst scholars have given decorative plasterwork technologies detailed attention, analysis of the craftsmen who executed the work is often overlooked. This paper examines the plastering firm of Joseph Rose & Co. It provides an overview of the history of the Company and investigates the technologies used by the firm before analysing the organisation of the Company by considering matters such as the people involved, the Roses' presence on site and the management of the Company. Finally, it interprets the extent to which their creative freedom was restricted by the increasing control exercised through architectural drawings.*

The illustrious plastering firm of Joseph Rose & Co. operated between 1738 and 1799. The business was run by two significant craftsmen, namely Joseph Rose Senior (c.1723–1780) and his nephew, Joseph Rose Junior (1745–99). Although a confusion of their Christian names has often complicated the matter of accurately attributing some of their individual commissions, what can be recognised is that, collectively, the Company enjoyed an almost complete monopoly of significant interior decorative plasterwork commissions in England during the latter part of the eighteenth century.

While a good deal of research has been carried out on traditional plastering techniques, a subject that has been largely neglected by scholars is the study of the individual craftsmen who executed the work. An exception is Geoffrey Beard, the only modern scholar to have given these craftsmen detailed attention.

His seminal book, *Decorative Plasterwork in Great Britain*,<sup>1</sup> published in 1975, remains the best account of the history of decorative plasterwork in England. The merit of this monograph is emphasised by its reprint in 2011, almost forty years after its initial publication.

The research at the heart of Beard's book is the 'Select List of Plasterers'. By thorough examination of bills and other documentary evidence, Beard was able to catalogue the names of individual plasterers and provide a biographical entry for each (where possible), in addition to a register of their work. His is the only publication where the Rose family is given detailed attention.

What is most striking about the entries for the Rose family is that the account of Rose Jnr's life and works spans more than seven pages, by far the longest entry on the list, significantly underlining the great importance of the firm.

Otherwise the Roses are mentioned only when architectural historians, such as James Lees-Milne and Eileen Harris, discuss the work of Robert Adam.<sup>2</sup> Further investigation of this Company is thus overdue.

## BACKGROUND

Joseph Rose Senior was probably born in Yorkshire, c.1723. On the 16 October 1738, he was apprenticed to the plasterer Thomas Perritt (1710–59). Rose Snr worked with Perritt at several well-known residences, mainly in the Rococo style under the architect James Paine. In the early 1750s, he moved



Fig. 1. Library of Sledmere House, Yorkshire, where Rose Jnr designed and executed the decorative plasterwork 1789–93. Although a great fire on 23 May 1911 led to the almost total destruction of the interior, key items were saved which enabled an authentic reinstatement of the main rooms, c.1911–16. *By kind permission of Sir Tatton Sykes, Bt.*

to Doncaster and set up on his own. By 1753 he had employed two apprentices, Richard Mott and John Wright. During this period he also collaborated with his brother, Jonathan, father of Joseph Rose Junior.<sup>3</sup> Although Rose Snr no longer worked with Perritt, he continued to work at several commissions in association with James Paine; these included Cusworth, Doncaster (1752), Worksop Manor, Nottinghamshire (1758–61) and Chatsworth, Derbyshire (c.1756–67).<sup>4</sup>

In 1754, when Paine was awarded an important commission for a house (now called Dover House) in Whitehall for Sir Matthew Featherstonehaugh, he proved to be an agent in the promotion of Rose Snr's career in London. Featherstonehaugh recorded that Rose Snr had been recommended to him by Paine and that his work at the Whitehall house was his first work in the capital. Writing of the house in Whitehall, Featherstonehaugh declared:

‘The most application that he [Paine] gave was during the time of Mr Rose the Plasterer carrying on the Cielings; he hav . recommended the s . Rose to S M . to do the Plaster's Work, & it being the 1<sup>st</sup> Work he did in London, he was minded, it shou'd be done for the Reputation of the s . Rose, who then intended to settle & reside in London & who has succeeded accordingly, he hav . by this Job, got into some of the best business in London.’<sup>5</sup>

By the 1760s, Rose Snr is recorded as working with his two nephews, Jonathan and Joseph Rose Junior. The latter, born at Norton in Derbyshire on the 5 April 1745, followed in the footsteps of his father, Jonathan, his uncle, Joseph, and his grandfather, Jacob, by training as a plasterer. Although it is not known whether he was apprenticed to his father or his uncle, the stamp duties kept by the Worshipful Company of Plaisterers record that he was made free of the Company on the 9 November, 1765. Rose Jnr proceeded immediately (in 1766) to take on two apprentices of his own: Bartholomew Bullivant of Portland Street and James Price of Isleworth, and yet another in 1767: William Smith of Oxford.<sup>6</sup>

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, Joseph Rose & Co. worked predominantly in the emergent Neo-classical style. In fact, it is most likely Rose Jnr's own travels to Italy in 1769–70,<sup>7</sup> and the influence of classical antiquity upon him, that provided the incentive for the Company's complete adoption of the new style.<sup>8</sup> During the Neo-classical period (1760–1800) the Company enjoyed an almost complete monopoly of plasterwork commissions in England. They mainly worked for Robert Adam but other notable clients included Sir William Chambers (1723–96), Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown (1716–1783), and James Stuart (1713–1788).

By 1780, Rose Jnr had succeeded his uncle in the Company after the latter's death. Unfortunately for Rose Jnr, several factors affected the affairs of the Company during his time in charge, as revealed by letters he sent to Sir Christopher Sykes of Sledmere House, Yorkshire.<sup>9</sup> (Fig. 1) His health appears to have deteriorated during the 1790s, which had an obvious effect on the business. On 3 November 1792 he declares: ‘I am almost teased out of my life’.<sup>10</sup> He explains that he had gout in his ankle and, as a result, states: ‘I had many models to make which I could not get done – and complaints from every quarter several jobs I was obliged to give up – one in North Wales near St Asaph’.<sup>11</sup> Also, during the summer months of 1795, Rose Jnr tells Sykes of his plans to visit the spa town of Buxton in order to improve his health.<sup>12</sup> The supposed healing powers of the Buxton springs, unfortunately, were of no help to Rose Jnr, for on the 27<sup>th</sup> Oct 1795 he excuses his delayed response to Sykes by explaining that he was, for more than a month (again), ‘almost teased to death’.<sup>13</sup>

Sadly, Rose Jnr's difficulties not only consisted of failing health. Problems of a more immediate kind arose in the Company's ability both to recruit and pay workers. On 31 May 1792 Rose Jnr explains how he had ‘been much perplexed about men of late (rise of wages) and indeed at present [he] cannot get Men for love or money’.<sup>14</sup> He makes this complaint again



Fig. 2. Red Drawing Room Ceiling, Uppark, West Sussex.  
*Photograph courtesy of Geoffrey Preston.*

in 1795,<sup>15</sup> and there are also references to shortages of money, such as: ‘you will oblige me with a little money as building has me very poor’;<sup>16</sup> and ‘I must again thank you Sir for the money you left me indeed money is very scarce in London’.<sup>17</sup> The business was also significantly affected by the French Revolution. Rose Jnr states in a letter on 13 February 1798: ‘I am sure I have great reason to be dissatisfied with the war – I have not work for more than two men and how long that is continue I cannot tell’.<sup>18</sup>

Rose Jnr’s physical condition, in conjunction with that of his business, further deteriorated and he died early in the following year (11 February 1799) bringing an end to the celebrated plastering firm of Joseph Rose & Co. Part of his will instructed that a choice of furniture should go to his wife, Mary Richmond, whom he had married on 15 December 1774 at St Mary le Bone, Middlesex,<sup>19</sup> and that the rest of the furniture was to be sold at Christie’s Auction House with all

‘Books, Moulds, Models, Casts, Scaffolding and every implement which belongs to my business.’<sup>20</sup> The first of two Christie’s sale catalogues (10 April 1799) reveals that some strand of the Company did, at least, continue, for a Clement Cryer (*fl.* c.1769–1800) announces on the last page that he:

‘Humbly solicits the Favors of the Employers of Mr Joseph Rose of Queen Anne Street East, Deceased; and the Public in General, as he has permission of the Executor to make this Application, and flatters himself that a Servitude of near Thirty Years as Apprentice and Assistant, under the Inspection of his late Ingenuous Master, will be deemed a sufficient Proof of his Capability of executing all the Branches of the Business... His fixed Determination to execute his Work, in the best Manner (as practised by Mr Rose,) leads him to hope for Success. He has engaged Part of the Premises, in which the Trade was carried on. For the present, all Orders, addressed to No. 18 Edward Street, Queen Anne Street, East, will be thankfully received, and instantly attended to.’<sup>21</sup>

## TECHNOLOGY

Geoffrey Beard noted in 1975 that ‘there [was] little documentary evidence about methods of work in the past, but from observation of surviving plaster and conversations with restorers and plasterers some facts can be pieced together.’<sup>22</sup> In the meantime, Richard Ireland,<sup>23</sup> in his introduction to the 2011 reprint of this book, explains that in recent years a significant turning point for the research of plasterwork has been the fire at Uppark House, West Sussex, in 1989. This otherwise disastrous event has fortuitously provided an opportunity for more accurate research into eighteenth and nineteenth-century plasterwork (from both the Rococo and Neo-classical periods), by allowing both methods and materials to be more easily understood. This has been of great benefit as it has enabled Ireland, in the course of his introduction, to offer new insights into plasterwork technology.

With this in mind, some analysis of the methods and materials used by Joseph Rose & Co. will be made. First, it must be made clear that work done *in situ* and the use of moulds occurred simultaneously for centuries. As early as the sixteenth century, moulds were being incorporated into work.<sup>24</sup> It is often difficult to separate the evolutions of style and technology. Consequently, in relation to the Rococo style, (with which Rose Snr began) Jenny Saunt argues that the freedom of line and undercutting was better suited to freehand modelling.<sup>25</sup> The more asymmetrical a design was, the less economical it was to create moulds. However, Rococo work did occasionally incorporate moulds.

An examination of the Rococo plasterwork at Uppark House (after the fire) allows for an indication of the methods used by Rose Snr. There is a strong possibility that Rose Snr was employed here;<sup>26</sup> James Paine had recommended him to Sir Matthew, who

was then personally responsible for his employment in London. As Sir Matthew was working on Uppark (c.1747–59) and the house in Whitehall (1754–58) simultaneously, it is, therefore, plausible that the interiors of Uppark were executed by his favourite plasterer. Furthermore, the Red Drawing Room ceiling (Fig. 2) is a combination of Rococo elements together with a Palladian composition. This type of scheme can similarly be found in the North Staircase in Nostell Priory (Fig. 3), where Rose Snr and Thomas Perritt worked with Paine (c.1740).<sup>27</sup> Such comparable designs also allow one to conclude that similar plasterwork techniques were employed at both properties.

In the Red Drawing Room at Uppark (Fig. 2) linear mouldings, such as cornices and panel ribs, were run *in situ*. The enrichments (decorative ornamentations) attached to these were formed in standard lengths using moulds. These were then



Fig. 3 (right). (The North Staircase, Nostell Priory, West Yorkshire.  
By kind permission of the National Trust.



Fig. 4. Oak Leaves ‘work’d by hand’, Hall, Nostell Priory, West Yorkshire. The elliptical shape means that each leaf is a different size and so it is logical that they were worked by hand rather than formed using moulds.  
*By kind permission of the National Trust.*

fixed in place using a thin layer of plaster. However, in some cases, where a greater depth was required, they were modelled *in situ*. Regarding the foliage ornament, this was set out using scored lines on the finishing coat of plaster and then built up by hand. Large projections included iron nails or armatures to provide extra strength. Additionally, some elements were moulded which were then made to blend in with the hand-modelled work.<sup>28</sup> These conclusions can be also applied to the work done by Rose Snr at Nostell Priory. However, the State Dining Room ceiling at Nostell (Fig. 8) is more asymmetrical in form, and this might indicate a greater exploitation of free-hand work.

Nostell Priory, in particular, is of interest as Joseph Rose & Co. also worked there under Robert Adam c.1766–77 in the Neo-classical style. In general terms, this style was governed by symmetry which (along with low relief) encouraged standardisation and prefabrication. However, one has to be careful not to assume that *all* elements from the Neo-classical period were cast from moulds. At Nostell an important document exists entitled ‘Sir Rowland Winn Baronet, To Joseph Rose – For Plaisterers Work done at his house at Nostell – From the Year

1766 to 1777 – Under the Direction of Messrs Robert and James Adam Architects’: a 49 page receipt for the work carried out by Joseph Rose & Co.<sup>29</sup> In each room the different plaster elements are described and their costs specified. In many cases the phrase ‘run of’ is used for elements such as cornices and frames which would indicate that some of this type of work was run *in situ*. Concerning more decorative elements, there are just three cases where work is specifically referred to as ‘work’d by hand’; two occur in the Hall, namely oak leaves on the ceiling (Fig. 4) and husks above the chimneypiece, and one in the Saloon, namely husks in oblong panels on the ceiling.

An inspection of the executed decorative plasterwork at Nostell suggests that in some instances (rinseau bands in particular) additional work was carried out *in situ*, although this is not mentioned in the receipt. In support of this, the rinseau decorations on the ceiling of the Tapestry Room of Croome Court (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), executed by Joseph Rose & Co., are also noted to ‘not repeat each other exactly, and may have been part modelled and finished by hand’.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, concerning *in situ*

work, Jenny Saunt comments that for large one-off pieces, if the skills were present, there were occasions when it could have been more economical to carry out work *in situ* rather than creating moulds. For example, at Syon House, where the Company also worked, the large trophies located in the Ante-Room were executed in free-hand modelling *in situ*.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, to a great extent moulds were used by the Company during the Neo-classical period. A section of the Nostell Priory receipt includes work started for the niche in the Saloon before alterations were made.<sup>32</sup> Elements such as ornaments for the frieze were ‘modell’d, cast and trimmed’, highlighting the fact that moulds were used.

Furthermore, there was a significant discovery in 1979 during excavations at Audley End, Essex, where the Company worked from 1764–6. Plaster debris was discovered underneath the floorboards of the former library. The items found were studied by P.J. Drury and have been discussed by him in a very detailed article.<sup>33</sup> Particularly revealing were the discoveries of hand-worked lumps of clay, seven fragments of clay models for elements of the plasterwork and a wax mould.<sup>34</sup> Drury concludes that the technique employed by Joseph Rose & Co. involved modelling ornamentation in clay, forming wax moulds around these and then using the moulds to produce plaster elements.<sup>35</sup> This conclusion is supported by information contained in the Christie’s sale catalogue of Joseph Rose Jnr’s possessions.<sup>36</sup> Rose’s premises in Edward Mews, Edward Street, near Queen Anne Street East, contained Casting Rooms, a Wax Room and a Mould Room. Moreover, the title of the catalogue explains that the main contents of the sale included ‘Models of Capitals, Friezes, Mouldings, Bas Reliefs, &c. in Plaster and Terra Cotta, with the Wax Moulds’. This underpins the fact that the company used wax moulds.<sup>37</sup> In addition, it illuminates the fact that models were also formed using plaster.

During the Neo-classical period, then, the Company generally worked in quite an industrial,

mass-produced way. However, although a lot of work was executed using prefabricated moulds, the models for these moulds would originally have been sculpted. Richard Ireland makes clear that with each custom job new items had to be produced.<sup>38</sup> For example, if a guilloche motif was required that was even half an inch larger than an existing mould, a new one would have to be created. Ireland notes that it is only when a company builds up a stock of moulds over many decades that a large percentage of the work in place can be undertaken using existing moulds.

As Joseph Rose & Co. worked in the Neo-classical idiom only from about 1760 to 1799, it is likely that, for the most part, new moulds had to be made for each custom commission.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, although the Company did work on many London commissions which are often more standardised, those recorded were generally custom jobs where the Company followed the designs of architects, such as Robert Adam or James Wyatt, meaning that new moulds would have been made. By the 1790s, evidence of production is clear in the letters written to Sir Christopher Sykes of Sledmere: Rose Jnr writes on 2 April 1791 from Queen Anne Street East (in relation to Lady Sykes’s rooms) that ‘the moulds are now in the making and I will send them as soon as they are done’.<sup>40</sup>

#### ORGANISATION OF THE COMPANY

As Geoffrey Beard argues in *Georgian Craftsmen and their Work*, ‘it is easy in writing of the erection of a great country house to forget the part played in its creation by the owner and the craftsman. There is a natural inclination to say it was built by, for example, Vanbrugh or Robert Adam.’<sup>41</sup> It is also easy to associate a solitary plasterer, such as Joseph Rose Jnr, with executed work in a house. In fact, Joseph Rose & Co. was made up of quite a sizeable skilled workforce. The Nostell receipt provides some insight

into the different skills utilised. Part of the document includes day accounts for work carried out 1766–77, separate from the main rooms. The types of work generally comprised repairing plasterwork in the house and grounds and often involved preparing walls for paper. Five different job titles are specified: ‘Plasterer’, ‘Apprentice Plasterer’, ‘Ornament Plasterer’, ‘Labourer’ and ‘Boy’. Generally, the casting of ornaments on site was done by ‘Labourers’ and the results were fixed by ‘Plasterers’.<sup>42</sup> ‘Ornament Plasterers’ were then employed for *in situ* work.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, on certain occasions in the receipt two ‘Plasterers’ and two ‘Labourers’ are mentioned as working at the same time, meaning that there was at least a workforce of seven on site.

Furthermore, there are fourteen known names associated with the Company.<sup>44</sup> As has been mentioned, the Company consisted of Joseph Rose Snr, his brother Jonathan Rose and his two nephews, Joseph Rose Jnr and Jonathan Rose. In addition, Rose Snr took on two apprentices, Richard Mott and John Wright, between 1752–3, and Rose Jnr took on two more Bartholomew Bullivant and James Price, in 1766, and another, William Smith in 1767. Clement Cryer is known to have worked for the company for thirty years by 1799 and John Papworth (1750–99) was also apprenticed to the Company before becoming a leading plasterer in his own right. Additionally, Richard Shires is mentioned at work at Castlecoole, Co. Fermanagh, Ireland,<sup>45</sup> and also at Sledmere (Fig. 1) where two men were to be sent in lieu of ‘Shires and his nephew’ as they had left the house.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, at Sledmere the main plasterer was a man named Dobbins<sup>47</sup> who is presumably the Dobbins who spoke in opposition to the Adam brothers in the case of *Liardet v. Johnson* (1778), in which Adam protected his rights over Liardet’s patented stucco.<sup>48</sup>

The presence of Rose Snr and Jnr on site is also of interest. Although this is quite difficult to ascertain, certain pieces of documentation help to shed some light on the matter. Rose Snr worked under James Paine at Felbrigg in 1752, and letters

relating to the building works examined by R. W. Ketton-Cremer reveal some interesting facts.<sup>49</sup> The owner, William Windham, wrote in February 1752: ‘It was very absurd sending a plasterer who could not do Ornaments and Hull must write to Mr Rose for another’. Then, it appears from subsequent letters that Rose Snr came down to Felbrigg himself. This leaves one to wonder to what degree the work on site was, in fact, usually delegated to other members of the work force.

The Nostell receipt provides some additional evidence. In the day accounts Rose Snr is mentioned by name on only two occasions; for ‘putting up the Medallions in different parts of the library for Sir Rowland’s Approbation’ (28 Feb, 1767) and for ‘taking down the shield and repairing the pediment & cornice over doors in anti-room, & altering flower in Pediment’ (27 Sept, 1776).<sup>50</sup> Otherwise, it is only generic terms, such as ‘Plasterer’ or ‘Labourer’, that are used. In the main part of the receipt ‘two medallions [for mirrors in the Saloon] were done by Mr Rose Junr & Sir Rowland paid him for them’. These facts could lead to the assumption that the Roses were not often present on site. However, one has to be cautious, since the main part of the receipt merely lists the plasterwork elements and costs, not the people who executed the work. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Company worked simultaneously on many commissions – for example, in the year 1770 they were involved with at least ten properties<sup>51</sup> – meaning that the Roses’ personal attention may have been stretched quite considerably.

A clearer understanding of operations in the 1790s can be determined from the letters sent by Rose Jnr to Sir Christopher Sykes of Sledmere.<sup>52</sup> The plasterwork was executed 1791–93 and during this time Rose Snr frequently wrote to Sykes from Queen Anne Street East. From these letters it can be deduced that, generally, he visited Sledmere only once a year: sometime between mid-July and 18 August, 1791, July and mid-August, 1792, and August, 1793, in addition

to a possible visit at Christmas in 1791.<sup>53</sup> Otherwise, Rose Jnr tended to operate from his workshop where items such as moulds, capitals and bas-reliefs were made before being sent to Sledmere by coach in packing-cases.<sup>54</sup>

In effect, the workshop in London formed a major part of the organisation. What is unclear, however, is how many people were employed there. The only reference discovered so far is in a letter written by Rose Jnr on the 11 Oct 1791 where he explains that ‘two of [his] principal men were not at work for some time...so that indeed [his] hands were full enough’.<sup>55</sup> This indicates a workforce of several people at least, but a specific number is not clear. Nevertheless, the sheer size of the workshop can be realised from the Christie’s sale catalogue (10 April 1799) where numerous rooms are mentioned at his premises in Edward Mews, including a Gallery, Mill Room and Cart House, in addition to an Exhibition Room (which contained items that helped to advertise the business to

potential clients), Mould Room and Coach House at Riding House Lane.

A Counting House is also named at Edward Mews, highlighting the financial management of the Company. Estimates were offered to clients, as early as 1760 at Kedleston,<sup>56</sup> so that, in the words of Rose Jnr, ‘Gentlemen may know what they are to pay before the work is begun’.<sup>57</sup> However, the Company was not always meticulous with its accounts. At Nostell Priory ‘Joseph Rose’ writes to Robert Adam on 20 August 1777 stating:

‘I have not made the customary charge for the mens travelling to & from Nostel during the course of eleven years which that work has been in hand, nor any charge made for the earnings of their hoses; nor even the Packing cases for the Medallions & Models sent from London, nor Porterage for any thing. The truth is (ashamed I am to say it) that a regular account has not been kept of these things; and as I could not make an accurate account, I have made none at all; & however moderate I meant to be in any charge to

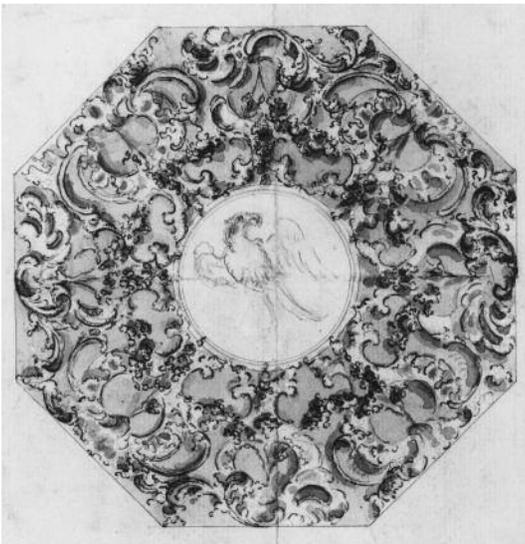


Fig. 5. Paine’s Drawing of the Central Octagonal, Ceiling in the North Staircase, Nostell Priory, West Yorkshire.

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Fig. 6. Central Octagonal, Ceiling in the North Staircase, Nostell Priory, West Yorkshire.

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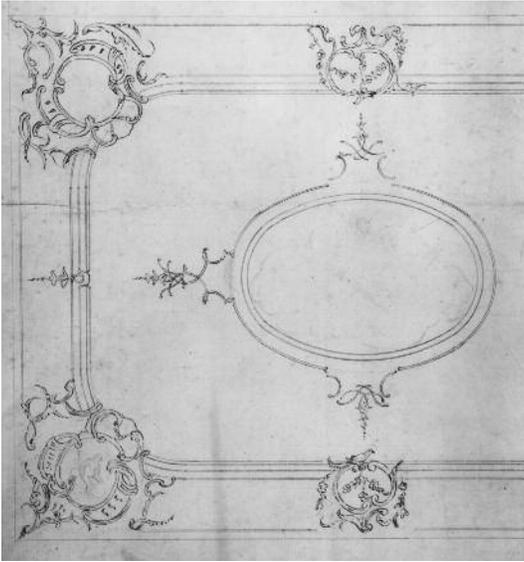


Fig. 7 (left). Paine's Drawing of the Ceiling of State Dining Room, Nostell Priory, Yorkshire. © *National Trust*.  
 Fig. 8 (above). Ceiling in State Dining Room, Nostell Priory, Yorkshire. *By kind permission of the National Trust*.

Sr Rowland Winn I think some allowance for these things, shou'd be made in my favour, after having offered these things to your consideration.<sup>58</sup>

This polite but firm tone clearly would have helped with the Company's reputation, as would the obvious trustworthiness. In fact, when Thomas Robinson speaks of 'Joseph Rose' (presumably Rose Snr) on 20 August 1768, regarding work at Claydon, he declares 'I will believe Mr Rose's account he is an honest man, & an able man, & can have no Interest to deceive'.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, this thread of honesty and fairness can be seen to continue into the 1790s when Rose Jnr states: 'The prices are such as have been charged by my uncle twenty years ago'.<sup>60</sup> Rose Jnr's effective management skills not only involved honourable dealings with clients but, also, consideration for his staff; when Rose Jnr writes to Sir Christopher about replacements for Shires and his nephew he explains that he 'certainly shall not send a married Man and his wife for so short a time as he would be at Sledmere'.<sup>61</sup>

#### EXECUTED WORK

When considering executed decorative plasterwork a question that is often considered is: how artistically restricted were the plasterers? James Ayres reflects a generally held opinion when he states that 'with Neo-classicism and its measured and more archaeological approach plasterers lost... creative freedom and became subject to the premeditated demands of a burgeoning architectural profession'.<sup>62</sup> Although this may be true to a certain extent, plasterers such as Rose Snr were, in fact, subjected to the restraints of architectural drawings long before the Neo-classical period.

In order to determine how constrained Joseph Rose & Co. were by architectural designs, Nostell Priory has been investigated because it provides examples of work from both the Rococo and Neo-classical periods. First, the work carried out by Thomas Perritt and Rose Snr under James Paine in the North Staircase and State Dining Room has been examined. Paine's drawing of the North Staircase ceiling (Fig. 5) has been adhered to reasonably accurately (Fig. 6). In an overall drawing of the ceiling the main difference is merely that oval busts

of a Roman Emperor have been replaced by Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. Similarly, there is a wall elevation that has been executed fairly accurately; however, the over-door medallions (Fig. 3) are not depicted in the architectural drawing. Possible reasons for this, as Frances Sands notes,<sup>63</sup> are that Paine was not confident when drawing human form (see below) and that the executed medallions are a characteristic motif of Thomas Perritt, with examples at Temple Newsam, Leeds.<sup>64</sup> Sands concludes that, considering Paine's heavy control over the rest of the plasterwork, the design for these portrait medallions was a collaborative effort.

For the State Dining Room, Paine's ceiling drawing (Fig. 7) is more or less as executed (Fig. 8), besides the addition of the foliate border around a central panel of Ceres, goddess of agriculture, and the *putti* fishing, ploughing, hawking or making a fire in the four corners. Sands deduces that Paine controlled the design of these parts. She states how the cornice has a frieze of vines and satyrs' masks and how the side-tables, also designed by Paine, are carved with goats' masks, elements all associated with the worship of Bacchus, the god of wine. In addition, the chimneypiece is supported by two caryatids of Ceres, who is usually depicted with Bacchus in eating rooms. Notably, when writing about the chimneypiece, Paine explained in 1749 that he was 'a young student in figures or that part of Drawing',<sup>65</sup> and describes the caryatids in detail rather than drawing them. Sands thus concludes that although Paine refrained from drawing the figures for the ceiling design, he most likely provided a written or verbal description.<sup>66</sup> In addition, Paine's control of the Bacchic theme in the room supports the supposition that it is Paine who governed the ceiling designs rather than the plasterers, Rose Snr and Thomas Perritt.

Secondly, the Neo-classical work carried out by Joseph Rose & Co. under Robert Adam in the Hall and the Saloon has been investigated. Damie Stillman, in *The Decorative Work of Robert Adam*, declares that, in general, 'plasterworkers carried out Adam

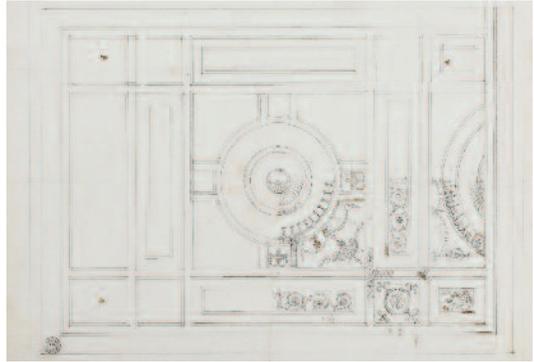


Fig. 9 (top). Adam's Drawing of the Ceiling, Hall, Nostell Priory, Yorkshire. *By Courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum.*

Fig. 10 (above). Ceiling in the Hall, Nostell Priory, Yorkshire. *By kind permission of the National Trust.*

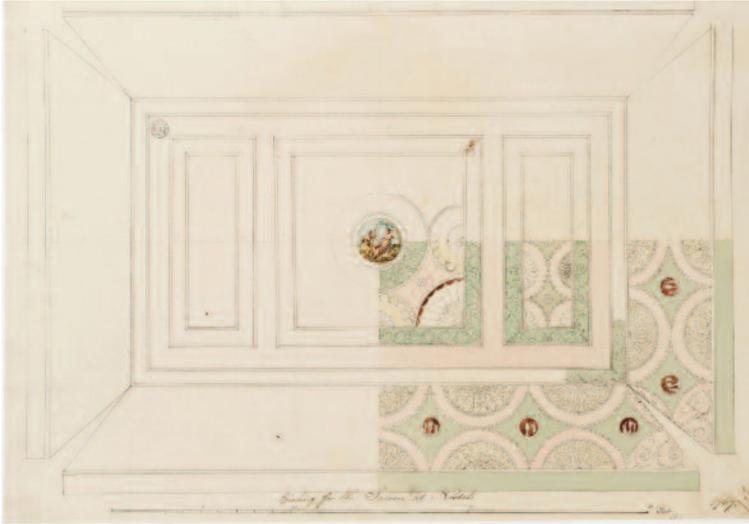


Fig. 11. Adam's Drawing of the Ceiling, Saloon, Nostell Priory, West Yorkshire. *By Courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum.*



Fig. 12. Ceiling in the Saloon, Nostell Priory, West Yorkshire. *By kind permission of the National Trust.*

designs with virtually no alteration.<sup>67</sup> This is certainly true at Nostell Priory, as can be seen by Adam's drawing for the Hall ceiling (Fig. 9) and the Company's executed work (Fig. 10). The only obvious difference, in this instance, is that the vases near the centre are turned the opposite way; otherwise everything is accurate. Likewise, the Company's adherence to Adam's drawings can be seen in the Saloon (Figs. 11 & 12).

Such unimaginative copying of architectural designs must have been an influencing factor on Rose Jnr's career. Accordingly, he began to create decorative plasterwork designs for clients of the Company. Rose Jnr was as well-equipped (both academically and in terms of resources) as any leading architect of the day. He gained first-hand knowledge of the antique from his stay in Rome. In addition, on 8 November 1770 he enrolled as a student at the Royal Academy Schools, whose purpose was to promote the arts of design through exhibitions and education.<sup>68</sup> He also possessed an array of source material, examples of which are revealed by the Christie's sale catalogue (10 April 1799) which is entitled: 'Models of Capitals, Friezes, Mouldings, Bas Reliefs, & c...many of which were collected by him during his late residence in Rome'.

Rose Jnr's involvement in design is known from two sources. First, there is a sketchbook that Rose Jnr compiled in 1782 of 331 frieze designs. It is entitled 'Sketches of Ornamental Friezes from Original Models in the Possession of Joseph Rose. Many of the Models were made from the designs of the most eminent Architects and the whole executed in Stucco work by Joseph and Joseph Rose'.<sup>69</sup> The book is indexed, and the designs not only record the work of Robert Adam, James Wyatt, James Stuart, Sir William Chambers, Henry Keane and 'Yeman' (presumably John Yenn) but also that of Rose Snr and Rose Jnr.<sup>70</sup>

There is another sketchbook assembled by Rose Jnr that contains designs for larger features, such as ceilings.<sup>71</sup> Again, not only does this illustrate sketches of commissions executed by the Company for prominent architects; it also includes several designs by Rose Jnr. For example, at Fisherwick, Staffordshire, where the Company worked (1770–71) under Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, the sketchbook contains two designs by Rose Jnr, namely the 'Anty Room, Fisherwick. Staffs. Mr Rose's desine' and the 'Staircase ceiling, Mr Rose's desine'. A number of drawings of this sort are for London commissions, including: 'At Lord Donegall in St James Square. Mr Roses desine' and 'Lord Grinstons in Grosvenor Square, Mr Rose's design' and 'Back Drg Room 16 Portland Place, Mr R's design. Done 1780'.

Ultimately, the climax of Rose Jnr's career is his later work at Sledmere (1789–98). Not only did Rose Jnr design the interior rooms and have his Company execute the decorative plasterwork; he also controlled most of the interior elements whilst acting as Sir Christopher Sykes's agent in London.<sup>72</sup> The most impressive room in this house is the Library (Fig. 1), inspired by Roman buildings such as the Baths of Diocletian and Caracalla.<sup>73</sup> Rose Jnr speaks admiringly of this room: 'I think it will be one of the finest rooms in the Kingdom'.<sup>74</sup> A great fire broke out in the house on 23 May 1911 which led to the almost total destruction of the interior.<sup>75</sup> Fortunately, certain items, including drawings by Rose Jnr and early

Victorian watercolours, were saved which enabled an authentic (and immediate) reinstatement of the main rooms, including the Library.<sup>76</sup> Christopher Hussey wrote in 1949:

'Architecturally designed libraries are a feature of several of Adam's country houses, most notably Kenwood. But this one surpasses them all in majesty of conception, suggesting rather the library of a college or learned and wealthy society; indeed in the space allotted to it, in the amount of shelf room, and in the beauty of its decoration it is surely the climax of the Georgian conception of the library as the heart and soul of the country house.'<sup>77</sup>

Here Rose Jnr outshone even Robert Adam, the renowned architect for whom he had worked as a subordinate for years.

At the time when Rose Jnr was at the height of his career in terms of artistry, it is unfortunate that the Company was also in serious trouble. Both the business and Rose Jnr's health deteriorated considerably during the last decade of the eighteenth century, leading to Rose Jnr's eventual death in 1799. Although this was a disheartening end to such an accomplished firm, the great significance of the plastering firm of Joseph Rose & Co. during the latter part of the eighteenth century is evident. It is hoped that this paper will go some way to re-evaluating its role and importance and will help to return it to its rightful place in architectural history as one of the foremost plastering firms of its day. It is also hoped that interest will be encouraged, not only in this illustrious firm but in eighteenth-century English decorative plasterwork in general.

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## NOTES

- 1 G. Beard, *Decorative Plasterwork in Great Britain* (London, 1975, reprint 2011).
- 2 J. Lees-Milne, *The Age of Adam* (London, 1947); E. Harris, *The Genius of Robert Adam* (London, 2001).
- 3 Beard, *Plasterwork*, p.237.
- 4 P. Leach, *James Paine* (London, 1988), pp. 181, 216 & 178.
- 5 Leach, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
- 6 Beard, *Plasterwork*, p. 238.
- 7 J. Ingamells, *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701–1800* (London, 1997), p. 822.
- 8 Concerning Rose Snr, although there is no positive evidence that he visited Italy there is a view by Richard Wilson of the Ruins of the Temple of Venus inscribed 'Painted for William Rose's father' (i.e. Rose Snr) and it is stated that Rose Snr was there at its execution: see W. G. Constable, *Richard Wilson* (London, 1953), pp. 196–7.
- 9 Hull History Centre, Hull, Sykes Family Letters and Papers, U DDSY/101/62 (1791–93) & U DDSY3/6/1 (1793–98).
- 10 Hull History Centre, U DDSY/101/62.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Hull History Centre, U DDSY3/6/1, 6<sup>th</sup> June & 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1795.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Hull History Centre, U DDSY/101/62.
- 15 Hull History Centre, U DDSY3/6/1, 27<sup>th</sup> Oct 1795.
- 16 Hull History Centre, U DDSY/101/62, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1791.
- 17 Hull History Centre, U DDSY/101/62, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1793.
- 18 Hull History Centre, U DDSY3/6/1.
- 19 Beard, *Plasterwork*, p. 238.
- 20 *Loc. cit.*
- 21 Christie's Archives, King Street, London, Sale Catalogue.
- 22 Beard, *Plasterwork*, p. 17.
- 23 Richard Ireland is a Historic Buildings Decorative Plaster and Architectural Paint Consultant and Conservator.
- 24 C. Gapper, 'Decorative Plasterwork Ceilings in London c.1540–c.1640' (MA Dissertation, University of London, 1990).
- 25 Jenny Saunt, *Decorative Plaster Historian*, pers. comm, 10/08/11.
- 26 It must be noted that it has also been suggested that the plasterer Thomas Clarke (fl. 1742–82) may have

- been responsible for the ornamental plaster ceilings: see R. Hewlings, 'The Builders of Uppark 1747–54', *Georgian Group Journal* 8 (1998), p. 119.
- 27 Although no receipts survive to confirm their involvement at Nostell, sufficient stylistic evidence exists to allow one to conclude that Perritt and Rose Snr were the main plasterers. This can be seen particularly in the eight medallion heads, located in the North Staircase, which bear a striking resemblance to the thirteen portrait medallions in the Long Gallery at Temple Newsam. Furthermore, in a letter addressed to Sir Rowland, 4<sup>th</sup> Baronet, dated 11 January 1748, Paine states: '[I] will use my best endeavour to send you down the ceiling for the Dining Rm, Abt the time Mr Rose returns from the North': West Yorkshire Archive Service, Wakefield, WYL1352/A4/[1622]/11.
- 28 C. Rowell & J.M. Robinson, *Uppark Restored* (London, 1996), pp. 75–77.
- 29 A copy of this receipt was examined in the National Trust Regional Office in York, Yorkshire, NP/C3/1/5/4/2.
- 30 E. A. Standen, 'Croome Court', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bulletin* (1959), p. 83.
- 31 Jenny Saunt, *Decorative Plaster Historian*, pers. comm. 10/08/11.
- 32 See note 29.
- 33 P. J. Drury, 'Joseph Rose Senior's Site Workshop at Audley End, Essex', *The Antiquaries Journal* 64 (1984).
- 34 Drury, *op. cit.*, pp. 67 & 74.
- 35 Clay modelling and the creation of moulds tended to be done in a workshop rather than on site (see Organisation of the Company). However, the presence of certain items on site at Audley End may indicate that some additional moulds were required as work was being executed.
- 36 Christie's Archives, King Street, London, Sale Catalogue.
- 37 W. Millar, *Plastering Plain and Decorative* (Dorset, 1897), p. 217 explains that wax or boxwood moulds were used as they lasted longer than any other kind of moulds without drying out.
- 38 See note 23; Richard Ireland, pers. comm. 30/06/11.
- 39 The eating rooms at Osterley Park and Shardeloes provide a rare instance whereby Adam replicated a design. This could be an instance where the Company reused moulds. However, no documentary evidence survives to that show the Roses were the plasterers at Osterley (although this is a strong possibility).
- 40 Hull History Centre, U DDSY/101/62.
- 41 G. Beard, *Georgian Craftsmen and their Work* (London, 1966), p.17.
- 42 Drury, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
- 43 Beard, *Plasterwork*, p. 20.
- 44 *Ibid.*, pp. 237–238, 214, 231.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- 46 Hull History Centre, U DDSY/101/62. 14 August 1792.
- 47 Hull History Centre, U DDSY/101/62.
- 48 G. Beard, *Stucco and Decorative Plasterwork in Europe* (London, 1983), p. 175.
- 49 R. W. Ketton-Cremer, *Felbrigg: The Story of a House* (London, 1986), p. 134.
- 50 As 'Joseph Rose Jnr' is specified in the document it is assumed that the when 'Joseph Rose' is mentioned this relates to Rose Snr.
- 51 The houses include Ampthill, Bedfordshire; Fisherwick, Staffordshire; Harewood, Yorkshire; Mersham Le Hatch, Kent; Newby Hall, Yorkshire; Northumberland House, London; Nostell Priory, Yorkshire; Saltram, Devon; The Pantheon, London; and No. 3 St James's Square, London.
- 52 Hull History Centre, U DDSY/101/62.
- 53 The visits during summer months may be a reflection of it being a better time to travel in addition to it being the most suitable working period.
- 54 Hull History Centre, U DDSY/101/62, several letters, including 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1791 and 21 May 1793.
- 55 *Ibid.*
- 56 Harris, *Adam*, p. 25.
- 57 Hull History Centre, U DDSY/101/62, 14 January 1791.
- 58 West Yorkshire Archive Service, Wakefield, WYAS WYL1352(2) C3/1/5/4/11.
- 59 M. M. Verne & P. Abercrombie, 'Sir Thomas Robinson, Bart., to Ralph, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Verney', *Architectural Review*, July 1926, p. 1.
- 60 Hull History Centre, U DDSY/101/62, 14 January 1791.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 14 August 1792.
- 62 J. Ayres, *Building the Georgian City* (London, 1998), p. 210.
- 63 Frances Sands pers. comm. 6/7/11. Sands is completing her PhD thesis on Nostell Priory's construction, interior decoration and social and political history, which includes a catalogue of the architectural drawings.

- 64 See Beard, *Plasterwork*, plate, 76–77.
- 65 West Yorkshire Archive Service, Wakefield, WYL1352(1) A4/1525/54.
- 66 Frances Sands pers. comm, 6/7/11.
- 67 D. Stillman, *The Decorative Work of Robert Adam* (London, 1973), p. 47.
- 68 S. Hutchinson ‘The Royal Academy Schools, 1768–1830’, *Walpole Society* (1960–62), p. 136.
- 69 RIBA/British Architectural Library, ROSE.
- 70 It is interesting to note that Rose Snr also involved himself in design.
- 71 This item is in the possession of the Earl of Harewood and I have not had the opportunity to personally examine it. However, information relating to this volume has been obtained from Beard, *Plasterwork*, p. 239.
- 72 Hull History Centre, U DDSY/101/62 & U DDSY3/6/1.
- 73 Sykes, C. S., *The Big House: The Story of a Country House and its Family* (London, 2004), p. 71.
- 74 Hull History Centre, U DDSY/101/62, 2 April 1791.
- 75 *Sledmere House, Sledmere* (Norfolk: 2008), p. 30.
- 76 *Loc. cit.*
- 77 C. Hussey, *Country Life*, 14 Oct 1949, p. 1140.