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‘THE MOST PERFECT PALACE IN EUROPE’: HENRY HOLLAND, THE PRINCE OF WALES AND THE EARLY CARLTON HOUSE

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In a letter in 1785 Horace Walpole claimed that the new Carlton House, designed by Henry Holland (1745–1806) would be ‘the most perfect palace in Europe’. Focussing exclusively on the nineteen-year period when Holland was working at the house between 1784 and 1803, this article will attempt to show what it was that was so profound and innovative about this early phase of design and decoration at the house, presenting it as a distinct entity when compared to the more familiar later periods. Neither the architecture nor the decoration of the house during this period has been examined closely before; here both will be carefully analysed with the hope of providing new insights on Holland’s inspiration and intentions, and on the taste and motivation of the youthful George, Prince of Wales. This will be done by close examination of evidence drawn together from a variety of different sources, including publications used by Holland, architectural designs and archival documentation. In the process it will be possible to shed light on the important work of Henry Holland as architect to the Prince of Wales, which has so often been unduly overlooked in favour of those who would come later.

By the 1770s it seems that Horace Walpole was beginning to find the work of Robert Adam over-complicated and frivolous; on viewing his work at Syon House in 1773 he lamented ‘grandeur and simplicity are not yet in fashion’.¹ In contrast, on first viewing the Prince of Wales’s newly built Carlton

House in September 1785, he had quite the opposite reaction:

‘It will be the most perfect palace in Europe. There is an august simplicity that astonished me. You cannot call it magnificent; it is the taste and propriety that strike. Every ornament is at a proper distance, and not one too large, but all delicate and new, with more freedom and variety than Greek ornaments ... how sick one shall be, after this chaste palace, of Mr Adam’s gingerbread and snippets of embroidery ...²

Walpole was experienced and knowledgeable; he would turn sixty-eight in 1785, and had remained attuned to architectural and decorative fashions in England and France throughout his life. His opinion was therefore to be respected. Quite why Carlton House prompted such a reaction should be of interest to any architectural historian. Yet whilst much work has been undertaken on the well-documented alterations and embellishments to the house during the early nineteenth-century by James Wyatt, Walsh Porter, Thomas Hopper and John Nash, the early house, as experienced by Walpole in 1785, has been largely under-researched. What Walpole was actually viewing was the work of the Henry Holland (1745–1806) who served as architect to the Prince of Wales for nearly two decades from 1784 to 1803. Perhaps because of a perceived lack of evidence, Holland seems to have often been neglected in favour of his successors; there are no watercolours of the house’s early interiors like those painted by Thomas Wild for William Pyne’s *Royal*

Residences in 1818, and relevant documentary records are elusive. In general Holland is not as famous as many of his contemporaries,³ probably because several of his works have been demolished or altered beyond recognition, Carlton House, his masterpiece, being the most significant loss. His architectural legacy has been further obscured by a family member who burnt many of his papers and designs soon after his death. But even during his lifetime Holland was not a self-publicist, eschewing attention, avoiding any association with the Royal Academy and telling the MP David Hartley the Younger: 'pray no more public complements to me'.⁴ But despite this, there are some valuable sources which do survive to give us an impression of the earlier house; it is the aim of this article to bring these together to create a clearer image of this house, which was characterised by eighteenth-century elegance and refinement, distinct from the later gilding and velvet swags of the Regency. These sources include two sketch books in the collection of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) which contain the only surviving designs from Holland's time at Carlton House, letters and bills in the Royal and National Archives, and drawings and plans which survive in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle, along with a number of other ephemeral references from the period.

Henry Holland's self-effacing character may have had something to do with his relatively humble background. The son of a builder, he enjoyed connections to the leading architects of the age including Adam and Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, building particularly close relations with the latter. By the 1750s the Browns and Hollands were neighbours in Fulham; by 1771 Holland was in partnership with Brown and in 1773 he became his son-in-law. Unlike Wyatt, Adam and Chambers, the young Holland had not travelled abroad to study classical architecture, but in his work we can see clues to where he was looking instead: the range of manuals and publications available on the subject,

such as Antoine Desgodetz's *Les Edifices Antiques de Rome* (1662), Stuart and Revett's *Antiquities of Athens* (1762), and Jean-François de Neufforge's *Recueil Élémentaire d'Architecture* (1757–1780).⁵ Contemporary French architecture was also an important inspiration of which Holland would have undoubtedly seen engravings; there is much in his output, particularly at Carlton House, to suggest familiarity with the work of Marie-Joseph Peyre, Pierre Patte, Charles de Wailly and Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, not to mention French architectural theorists such as Jacques-François Blondel. Some years into the Carlton House project Holland was able to develop his understanding in this area further; a letter in the archives of the Spencer family at Althorp confirms that in early October 1785 he had not yet returned from a trip to Paris.⁶ Although details of the trip have not survived, close examination of some elements at Carlton House hint at locations that may have featured on the itinerary. These and other references in Holland's work to French classical architecture will be discussed in greater detail below.

An understanding of French design and ideas of domestic comfort aided Holland's popularity with a fashionable Whig Francophile clientele. This was demonstrated in his first major architectural work, Claremont House, undertaken with Brown in the early 1770s for Robert Clive. Clive had visited France in 1768, when he probably became familiar with French standards of comfort and convenience in a home, perhaps explaining why he decided to opt for Brown and Holland over the more conservative William Chambers, who also submitted designs for the project. Robert Adam was interested enough to slip into the building site to have a look in 1774.⁷ Holland's new emphasis on comfort and practical living is exemplified in a memoir of Soane which recounts: 'Adam objected to the state bedchamber at Claremont, as the bed can't face the light. In Holland's opinion it should not, as when it is so, most people complain of not being able to sleep so well'.⁸



Fig. 1. Louis Belanger, 'The Rebuilding of Carlton House', c.1784. (Royal Collection, RL 13030)

In a major step forward in planning, Claremont was designed with a bathroom within the living quarters, an improvement that Holland repeated at Benham Park in Berkshire, another of his early works, finished in 1775 for the sixth Baron Craven. Benham also featured the first appearance of an architectural feature which would become a hallmark of Holland's planning; a centrally located double height 'tribune'. However despite major developments in their planning and interior decoration, externally both houses retained a highly traditional Palladian appearance, a formula inherited by Holland from his mentor Brown.

Familiarity with French design and planning would make Holland attractive to clientele of a particular persuasion. Prior to the French Revolution, many Whigs held sympathies with the ideas of radical French politicians and philosophers; to them French design and architecture became imbued with a degree

of political meaning. Conversely, to French liberals England's comparative democracy and constitutional monarchy encouraged an equivalent taste there for all things English, a fashion led by some of the most prominent members of the French aristocracy, including the Duc d'Orléans and his protégé, the Comte d'Artois. The Prince of Wales developed a close friendship with the Duc at this early stage, which was clearly highly influential on the Prince and his plans at Carlton House. It was part of a wider Anglo-French exchange which was briefly able to flourish in the 1780s, which would become one of the main ingredients that made Carlton House so very significant and exceptional. The relationship between Holland and this Whiggish Francophile clique was cemented by one of his most crucial commissions: the reconstruction of the *de facto* headquarters of the Whig party, Brooks's Club, in 1776–8.



Fig. 2. William Westall, 'The North Front of Carlton House', c.1815. (*Royal Collection, RL 22170*)

The club's exterior design draws on Palladian tradition, with two Serlian windows facing onto Park Place, but the overall effect on the front façade is cleverly conceived to appear impressively grand for what is essentially a small building. Inside, Holland created a suite of rooms that displayed his supreme skill in imparting grandeur through simplicity; there are low chimneypieces surmounted by mirrors, and plaster wall-panelling and decoration all in the French manner. It is a scheme from which the club benefits to this day; the Great Subscription Room has been hailed as one of the finest surviving eighteenth-century rooms in London.⁹ This example of Holland's early style helps us to understand his subsequent popularity with the patrons of that establishment, the most notable being the Prince of Wales, who had joined in 1783. It was serendipitous timing for Holland; in the same year the young

Prince had been presented with his new home, Carlton House, then an unsatisfactory jumble of buildings which had previously been the home of the Grandmother Princess Augusta. The Princess had been sufficiently dissatisfied with the ungainly appearance of the house to commission Robert Adam to design a screen to hide the house from the view of those passing on the street.¹⁰ (Fig. 1). But she died in 1772 before these plans were enacted, and the house remained empty for the following eleven years. Initially George III's favoured architect William Chambers, the Surveyor General, was assigned to the project. His involvement was short-lived, however, his name vanishing from the accounts by 1784.¹¹ The Prince instead turned to Holland, who he knew could create something that would make a statement and speak to the world of his sophisticated, modern and forward-looking politics and taste.

The Prince's allegiance to the Whigs is often explained as a negative attempt to annoy his father George III and his Tory ministers. However, the Prince undoubtedly wanted to create an independent persona for himself, an important point to remember when trying to understand the origins of his new house.

The new façade, it seems, was eagerly awaited; on 5 July 1787 *The Times* reported: 'Carlton House begins to promise a scene of active business. The scaffolds rise, the sound of mallets is heard, the high wrought capitals will soon be placed on their shafts; and before the Winter is set in the whole façade, it is to be hoped, will possess a state of entire completion.'¹² Designed in 1784 by Holland, this was the statement the young Prince was looking for (Fig. 2). Whilst well-known, the façade has never been examined very closely in an architectural context, Dorothy Stroud describing it as 'a straightforward essay in the Palladian taste'. This misses its purpose, as the design displays a classical severity and grandeur that was daringly modern. Its architecture embodies the Enlightenment sentiment of theorists such as Abbé Laugier, who, in his *Essai sur L'architecture* of 1755, discarded the harmonic ratios that defined Palladianism and argued that structure should always reflect function in architecture.¹³ Edmund Burke similarly argued in his *Enquiry on the Sublime and Beautiful* of 1757 that beauty was not defined by following rules of proportion or geometry, but by advocating the power of the sublime, stating buildings should show greatness in dimension, succession, and uniformity.¹⁴ The exterior of Holland's Carlton House was clearly conceived with these modern ideas in mind; Laugier would have approved of the portico reaching the roof, and Burke would have been impressed by the sublime verticality of the colossal Corinthian columns. The elevation was wrapped from head to foot in an expanse of uniform rustication; an intense and deliberate reference to antiquity. The rendering of the 'Stoa Poikile' (Fig. 3) in Stuart and Revett's

Antiquities of Athens, now known as the Roman library of Hadrian, seems to have been a key source for Holland, Stroud citing it as the inspiration for the façade of Dover House in Whitehall, built for the Duke of York by Holland in 1788. Yet with its Corinthian portico in front of uniform rustication the 'Stoa' can also be cited as a source for the façade of Carlton House. The choice of Corinthian columns is in itself a reference to the French tradition of 'appropriateness' in architecture, in which that order is reserved exclusively for Royal and public buildings, a point emphasised at Carlton House by the inclusion of the royal arms within the pediment. With the exception of the Palladian window casings and balustrades, Carlton House was an evocation of a fine Roman public building or temple. But running concurrently with this classicising agenda is Holland's continual attention to practicality and convenience; the steps leading to the entrance are brought behind the hexastyle Corinthian portico, forming one of the earliest known porte-cochères in English architecture. This latter motivation is French in impetus; the architectural theorist Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières stipulated that in a grand house a visitor should always descend from their coach sheltered from the elements.¹⁵

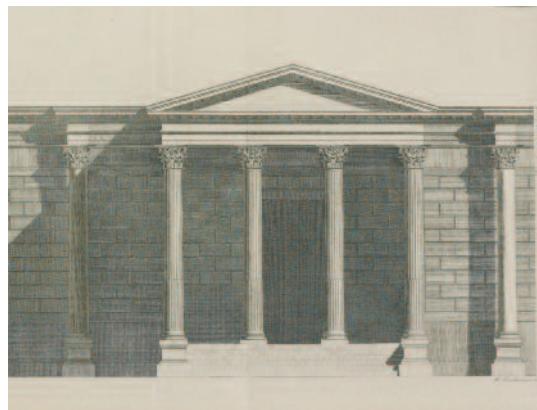


Fig. 3. James Stuart, 'The Stoa Poikile' from *The Antiquities of Athens, measured and delineated by James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, 1762.*



Fig. 4. Thomas Rowlandson and Augustus Welby Pugin, 'Carlton House', from *Ackermann's Repository for the Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufacture, Fashion and Politics*, 1809. Victoria & Albert Museum.

The façade's severity was softened by its screen which served to separate the house from the street whilst not obscuring its magnificence. An illustration from the 1809 *Ackermann's Repository for the Arts, Literature, Commerce, Manufacture, Fashion and Politics* is particularly effective in illustrating the interplay between the façade, the screen, and the varied London streetscape (Fig. 4). Such screens had been popular in France since Marie-Joseph Peyre had published his designs for the Hôtel de Condé in 1765, of which Holland would have surely seen engravings. The screen turns the house into a *hôtel entre court et jardin*; a traditionally French format for a town house which would have been more pronounced had Holland also been able to execute his plans to enclose the front courtyard with two wings housing a porter's lodge and kitchens.¹⁶ Peyre's plans for the Hôtel de Condé, particularly its screen, influenced the Hôtel de Salm by Pierre Rousseau built just prior to Carlton House between 1782 and 87. Its prominent riverside location makes it likely that Holland saw it during his time in Paris; its dome has often been cited

as the inspiration behind the design of his other major project for the Prince; the pavilion at Brighton. The doubling of the columns in the screen at Carlton House is reminiscent of Le Vau's and Perrault's east front of the Louvre, and even more of the colonnade at the Grand Trianon at Versailles, also Ionic and similar in scale. The use of coupled Ionic columns was clearly a motif that Holland favoured; he would use it again on his own house, and at Southill Park, Bedfordshire. The screen was embellished with decorative elements made in Coade stone, including a set of six vases costing £45. The bill for their manufacture in the National Archives again betrays a Neo-classical agenda; they were based on 'drawings from William Hamilton's Collection in the museum'.¹⁷ Peyre's designs for the Hôtel de Condé were never realised, but the house was categorised by Allan Braham as a Parisian town house 'reinterpreted in a Roman style'.¹⁸ Carlton House could be said to fall into much the same category.

Away from the public face of the house, other examples of French architectural influence are to be

found. The gatehouse of the stable block, which could accommodate seventy horses, has seemingly escaped the attention of architectural historians; it was dominated by a large semi-circular alcove with two columns *in antis*, and was expected to cost £9,000 to construct.¹⁹ (Fig. 5) Although this format was used by Adam in his interior designs, its application externally is more unusual and is reminiscent of Ledoux's Hôtel Guimard, where it was employed on a grand scale. One of the most renowned buildings in Paris in the 1770s, the Hôtel Guimard was visited by the Tsarevitch of Russia, by Emperor Joseph II of the Holy Roman Empire and by Horace Walpole.²⁰ It seems likely therefore that it would have featured on Holland's Parisian itinerary. The stables were also the site of some of his greatest technical virtuosity, where he resolved the chronic lack of space by positioning the riding school over the coach houses and forges by deploying a system of supporting clay cones. This ingenious fireproof method would later be borrowed in the construction of the Bank of England by John Soane, who worked in Holland's office as a young trainee from 1772 to 1778.²¹

Aside from its external appearance, Holland's planning for the conversion of the old jumble of buildings into a house complete with impressive state rooms for large-scale entertainments and luxurious accommodation for the Prince was ingenious. In the Print Room at Windsor Castle

there are plans of the old house of 1784, and of the new from 1794. By comparing them it is possible to see how the conversion was achieved. Although at first glance the work appears to be a wholesale rebuild, on closer inspection it becomes apparent that nearly the entire old house was retained. Even the service stairs, with a little remodelling in places, have remained in the same place. The extension that Holland built included an entrance hall and a suite of service rooms forming the east wing. This allowed most of the old house to be used as the state apartments and for a range of rooms on the basement floor, opening on to the garden to form a new suite of private rooms for the Prince's use. To add to the grandeur and scale of the house, *enfilades*, an unmistakably French feature, were created by aligning the doorways on the ground and basement floors. Walpole noticed these during his 1785 visit, commenting that the house was 'full of perspectives'.²² These are also a noticeable feature in the illustrations of the house from Pyne's 1818 *Royal Residences*.

In his additions to the old house, Holland was playful with shape, adding octagons, ovals and circles. Whilst Adam advocated the concept of 'movement' in his room designs, a range of shapes was also popular in France, Ledoux in particular exhibiting considerable skill in the geometrical planning of his Parisian *hôtels*. The circular Music Room (Fig. 6) at Carlton House was probably also



Fig. 5. Henry Holland, 'Carleton House. Elevation of the Entrance to Riding House', undated.
(Royal Collection, RL 18953)



Fig. 6. Charles Wild, 'The Circular Room at Carlton House', c.1816. (*Royal Collection, RL 17604*)

designed with French examples in mind; Le Camus de Mézières asserted that 'les pièces rondes sont les plus gaies',²³ and this belief is reflected in a number of eighteenth-century Parisian hôtels where circular and ovoid shapes were applied with great effect to salons and ballrooms. Built in what was previously a courtyard, the Music Room created a communication between the other two large entertaining spaces, the great Drawing Room and the Dining Room; the three together formed a highly impressive and commodious entertainment suite. In a similar way, the new Entrance Hall, Tribune and Staircase also connected different sections of the house. This careful planning negated any need for corridors, an approach advocated by the French architectural theorist Jacques-François Blondel, who disliked the

manner in which corridors could partition floor plans.²⁴ Attention to detail is also in evidence in the service areas. The new basement included more space for storage of wine and coal, better accommodation for servants, and enabled communication from the service areas in the east wing to the west without passing through the reception areas. Beneath the Music and Dining Rooms were located the confectionery, Coffee and Steward's Rooms, connected with a spiral staircase to the floor above for added convenience.

The arrangement of the rooms was also carefully considered; an estimate dated November 1789 which listed them in order makes a division of usage apparent.²⁵ On passing through the Tribune into the first antechamber on the central axis of the house,

the ceremonial and public areas were to the west, including the entertainment areas mentioned above. To the east were the more private and functional areas: the Council Chamber and State Bedchamber, the latter old fashioned for the 1780s but probably included as a concession to French etiquette. A private stair led upstairs to the Prince's private living quarters beyond. Here Holland was adopting another French idea, first suggested by Blondel; the division of a house into separate suites of rooms for 'display and retreat'.²⁶ The western rooms were public and grand – an *appartement de parade* – yet a turn to the east led to private rooms for official business: an *appartement de société*. It is clear that the suite of low-ceilinged, sumptuously appointed rooms on the basement floor which opened on to the garden, also accessible by the private stair, was conceived as an *appartement de commodité* for the Prince's private use, relaxation and entertainment of close friends. Blondel stipulated that rooms with low ceilings would most suit this room usage. This private downstairs suite comprised a small private Dining Room, a Gallery, at one stage the Library, and the famous Chinese Drawing Room. It also seems to have been the most likely location of the baths, mentioned as being in the east wing basement in an

estimate by Holland in 1784²⁷. Bills show Holland's attempt to bring the garden and house closer by ensuring that the basement reception rooms had French windows. Additionally on the first floor he prepared unexecuted plans to build a loggia or 'stone gallery' running the entire length of the garden front, so that there too windows that stretched to the floor could open out over the garden: another modern innovation which would influence later Regency domestic architecture.²⁸

The new Entrance Hall, Tribune and Staircase gave Carlton House a visually striking new central axis; an exquisitely drafted architectural drawing by Henry Holland held in the collection at the Yale Center for British Art shows a cross section of this area in its entirety (Fig. 7). Its sparse classical decoration is similar to that seen in similar areas of Parisian *hôtels*, aimed at marking a point of progression between the outside and the elaborate interior rooms. The large Entrance Hall, however, was more in the English tradition; it measured 45 by 28 feet,²⁹ and was double-height and top-lit, with a deep coved and coffered ceiling. Any apparent sparseness was misleading; the fitting out of these areas was done at a considerable expense, expected to cost £6,500 by Holland in 1784.³⁰ Some idea of its

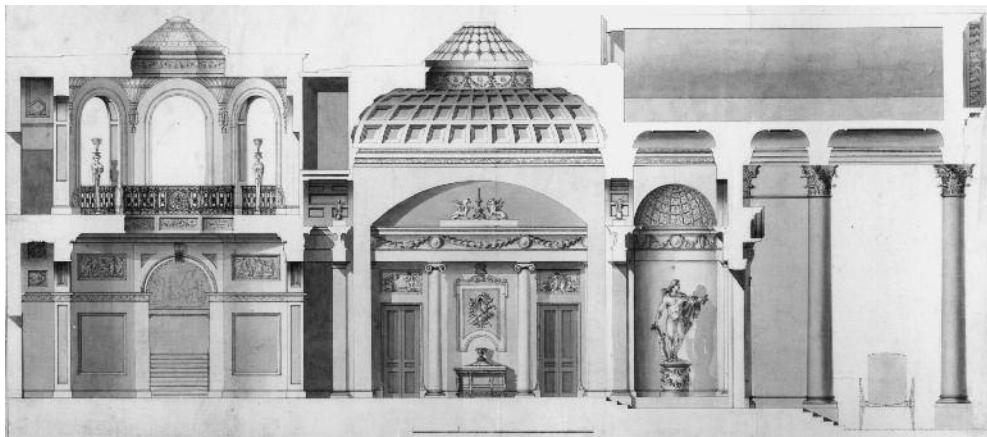


Fig. 7. Henry Holland, 'Design for the Portico, Hall and Tribune at Carlton House, Pall Mall, London: Section', 1787. (Yale Centre for British Art, B1975.2.640)



Fig. 8. Charles Wild, 'The Upper Tribune at Carlton House', c.1816. (Royal Collection, RL 22174)

impact can be gained by comparing Pyne's recording of it to Holland's surviving halls at Dover House and at Berrington Hall, Herefordshire. They all rely on sublime spatial impact to act as an arresting overture to the following rooms, and similarities are immediately obvious; the use of coloured scagliola columns and geometrically paved floors are remarkably similar in all three. However the sculpture, additional decorative devices on the entablatures and coffered ceiling were probably due to the tastes of the Prince, which required Holland to draw upon his wide decorative repertoire to create an intensified sense of luxury.

Following the hall, one of Holland's signatures reappeared; a central communication area known as a 'Tribune'. Tribunes first appeared in classical Antiquity, and had been revived in Renaissance Italy, most famously at the Uffizi in Florence. Holland was not the first architect in England to use them; a square one is featured in Colen Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus*.³¹ Holland first introduced a circular version at Benham Park, Berkshire, but at Carlton House the tribune is octagonal, which may suggest

the Uffizi as a source. But it is much smaller, causing Dorothy Stroud to concede that 'the source of this unusual feature is hard to establish with any certainty'.³² However, the octagonal Tower of the Winds in Athens, which featured prominently in Stuart and Revett's *Antiquities* both in plan and in profile, has a diameter of approximately 25.8 feet,³³ almost exactly the same size as the tribune at Carlton House.³⁴ In its shape and size it may therefore be a possible inspiration. The Tribune continued through to the floor above, where a circular balcony looked down on the space below, with daylight streaming from the roof through a centrally located lantern. The contrast of light and darkness was used cleverly to create atmosphere and loftiness, and the Tribune shows Holland using columns, archways and glass to play with light to add picturesque effect. This is clearly demonstrated in Pyne's view of the upper Tribune (Fig. 8) – a dramatic space, with sweeping vaulting and archways that offer teasing glimpses of the upper staircase beyond. These visual tricks are usually seen as innovations of Holland's

trainee John Soane, but this area demonstrates that they were first developed by the elder architect, and the tribune at Carlton House could be seen as the forerunner to Soane's alterations to the rotunda at the Bank of England in 1794.

The tribune, undoubtedly one of Holland's most creative and ingenious architectural devices, appears in several of his houses, including his own, Sloane Place in Knightsbridge. This house, first used as his address in 1789,³⁵ saw Holland working free from any patron's demands, and its undoubted role as a show-home makes it into a useful point of reference. Alongside its octagonal tribune there were many similarities with Carlton House; it too was approached via a grand forecourt in a highly Parisian fashion; the main ground floor rooms were placed along its 114-feet-long garden front and the rooms on the floor above opened on to a loggia of the type Holland wanted to build at Carlton House, which featured coupled Ionic columns.³⁶ The rooms were built *en enfilade*, this time with mirrors being placed at either extremity to add emphasis,³⁷ again a suggestion of Blondel.³⁸ Robert Adam was interested enough to create his own sketch of the house, now kept in the Soane Museum. Sadly it was destroyed in the 1870s, along with most of the Georgian houses in the area, which had largely also been built by Holland as part of his Hans Town development.

The Staircase at Carlton House was another clever architectural flourish, set into an awkward rectangular space of 35 by 25 ft.³⁹ A crucial but surprising decorative element in this area was hand-painted glass, the effect of which must have been astonishing. At £1,064 it was the most expensive decorative element in this area of the house and was supplied by John Theodore Parrache.⁴⁰ The glass fitted into two large half-dome skylights on either side of a central plaster vault; a hint of the effect is given by Perrache's own trade card, which remains in the Royal Collection (Fig. 9). When answering to the committee on the Carlton House accounts in June 1791, Holland was asked about the 'central

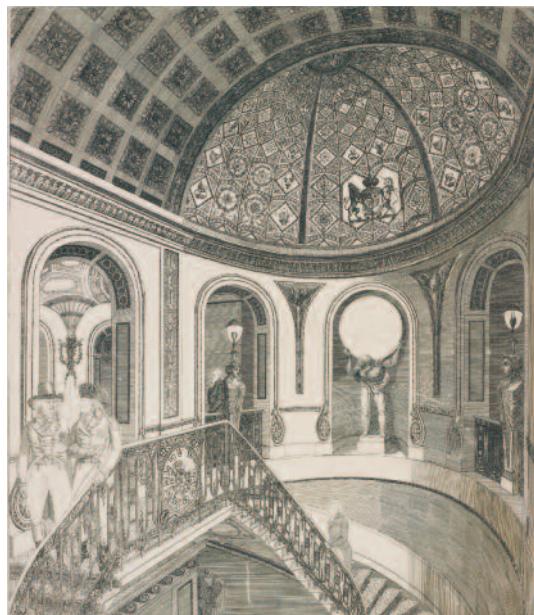


Fig. 9. John Theodore Parrache, after, 'View of the dome of the grand Staircase at Charlton (sic) House', undated.

(Royal Collection, 702857)

skylight', presumably in the tribune, was 'finished with heraldry'.⁴¹ Unlike so many of the other decorative elements in the house, the use of coloured glass has no French or classical precedent, and therefore appears to be a significant concession toward the English Gothic Revival, particularly in its depiction of heraldry. It does not appear in any of Holland's other projects, and it is tempting to view it as the earliest sign of the Prince of Wales's love for the Gothic which would figure so prominently in his later acts of architectural patronage, both at Carlton House and most importantly at Windsor Castle. The balustrade on the stair was also an expensive extravagance; it was designed by Holland and shown in detail in the RIBA sketchbooks. It was supplied by Nathan Beetham in 1787 and cost £800.⁴² The ironwork shows a new complexity compared to Holland's design at his previous projects, and its distinctive interlacing ovals again seem to have been conceived with French examples in mind.

An early unexecuted design for the doorway from the stairwell to the basement floor features two female caryatids (Fig. 10). Although unrealised, this is of great interest. Borrowed from the Erechtheum in Athens, caryatids were recorded by Stuart and Revett in *Antiquities*, but also by the French architect and archaeologist Julian-David Le Roy in his earlier publication *Les Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce* (1758). When Charles de Wailly adapted the Hôtel Voyer in the early 1760s, not long after the publication of Le Roy's *Ruines* in 1758, he included two such caryatids in the decoration of the Dining Room, which were particularly well received and seen by many foreign visitors, including William Chambers, who was impressed enough to draw a sketch. Holland's caryatid doorway design seems to be inspired by the arrangement at the Hôtel Voyer and illustrates very clearly his borrowings from French neoclassicism. This encourages us to speculate that the Hôtel Voyer may have been another location visited by Holland during his trip to Paris. The design's inclusion of a vignette with a personification of familiarity in the centre of the lintel goes further in confirming that the basement floor was intended as a private area for the entertainment of close friends.⁴³

A close examination of the decoration of the house in this early stage reveals much about the objectives of both architect and patron. The improved political situation between Britain and France in the 1780s, enshrined in law with the Eden trade agreement of 1786, meant the cultural exchange between the two nations was not confined to artistic and philosophical ideas, but was extended to products, craftsmen and materials. This was a situation which would be fully exploited in the decoration of Carlton House, aided by the Prince's considerable political and social links with France, in particular his friendship with the Duc d'Orléans mentioned above. The Duc's protégé, the Comte d'Artois, had been busy embellishing his sumptuous miniature château, the Folie de Bagatelle, designed

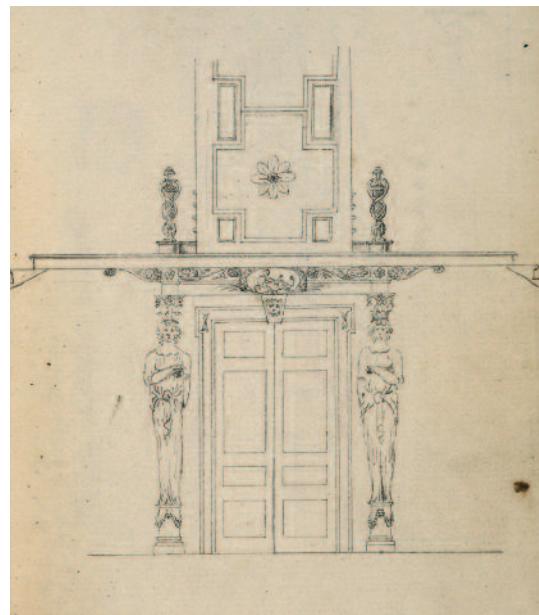


Fig. 10. Henry Holland, Rejected Design for entrance to Basement Floor at Carlton House, 1788, (RIBA, SKB122/4)

by François Joseph Bélanger in 1777, allegedly as a result of a wager between the Comte and his sister-in-law, Queen Marie Antoinette. Its interior decoration continued into the 1780s, around the time that Henry Holland made his visit to Paris. Bélanger had toured England in 1772–5, and had visited Claremont as Holland and Brown were building it; therefore it is possible that the architects had already met.⁴⁴ The little château was conceived as a *maison de plaisir*; its dedication to Cupid and Mars was reflected in its complex painted and stuccoed grotesque decoration. A romantic form of Chinoiserie was also represented in the Chinese House, a picturesque garden building in the surrounding park. A team of considerable skill was assembled to work on the project under Bélanger's brother-in-law, the Designer Jean Démosthène Dugourc. After this point, several leading French craftsmen, some of whom are known to have worked at Bagatelle, came to work at Carlton House.⁴⁵

Bagatelle's successful integration of various elements of decoration including paintwork, sculpture, upholstery and glass and its interpretation of Chinoiserie do indeed seem to have influenced Carlton House. The very conception of a 'pavilion' at Bagatelle is likely to have been the primary inspiration for the Prince of Wales commissioning Holland to design a 'Royal Pavilion' at Brighton, closely resembling in style the Hôtel de Salm.

Holland shared responsibility for decoration at Carlton House with a Superintendent of Furniture and Decoration, a post that was from 1783 to 1787 filled by Guillaume Gaubert, who had previously fulfilled a similar role for the Prince's Whig friends, the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire at Chatsworth. There he had worked with the joiner François Hervé and the decorative painter Philip Reinagle both of whom came with him to Carlton House.⁴⁶ In October 1783 Reinagle was ordered to paint four scenes of Love, Constancy, Fidelity and Nature in an unnamed room of Carlton House for six guineas each.⁴⁷ Another decorative painter, Jirouard le Girard, was employed extensively at this early stage, invoicing for the painting of a Pegasus in a sky on a ceiling in the house in 1784.⁴⁸ These sky-painted ceilings, again highly French, are a feature that endured at Carlton House, appearing in the illustrations of Pyne's *Royal Residences*. Rectangular over-door panels with painted decoration, another French convention, were in abundance; in 1786 Le Girard was paid for painting over-doors in the Council Chamber, and in the Great Drawing Room which featured 'vases of flowers'.⁴⁹ In 1787 Gaubert was replaced by Dominique Daguerre, the renowned Parisian dealer, designer and *marchand-mercier*, who had worked for many leaders of French royal and aristocratic society, including Queen Marie-Antoinette. After the arrival of Daguerre the decorative schemes became even more extravagant. Additional artists were employed such as Biagio Rebecca, Jean-Jacques Boileau and Louis-André Delabrière, the last two being brought directly from Paris.⁵⁰ Boileau had an



Fig. 11. Jirouard le Girard, Painted Decoration in the Dining Room at Inveraray Castle, 1787.

extensive subsequent career in England as a designer in various media, and is recorded as having painted the Turkish Room at Fonthill Abbey with flowers and arabesques on a gold ground: a technique reminiscent of that employed in Marie Antoinette's boudoir at Fontainebleau, perhaps another source of inspiration for this mode of decoration.⁵¹ In the Bow Room on the basement floor of Carlton House at the centre of the garden front Boileau painted arabesques on eight pilasters of blue taffeta with four large panels decorated with further elaborate ornament on an imitation brocade ground.⁵² It seems that few spaces escaped the attentions of the decorative painter; even the painting of the unidentified Guard Room was quoted for by Boileau at £500 with a further £1000 for painting the Music Room furniture.⁵³

Some impression of the effect of this style of decorative painting can be gained from surviving works by these artists elsewhere. Jirouard le Girard's colourful paintwork is still to be found at Inveraray Castle (Fig. 11), and work thought to be by Delabrière decorates the boudoirs at Attingham Park, Shropshire, and Southill Park, the latter also designed by Holland. Biagio Rebecca is also recorded as working

at Carlton House; there is a bill for his painting and finishing of a room 'consisting of ornaments and antiques in a grotesque style'⁵⁴. This sounds much like his surviving work at Heaton Hall in Lancashire, where he decorated the Cupola Room to James Wyatt's design. Dover House, Whitehall, built by Holland almost directly after Carlton House for the Prince's younger brother the Duke of York, still contains one room which features painted decoration of this kind (Fig. 12).

Unfortunately there is little record of the appearance of the individual rooms in Carlton House during this period. There is, however, much evidence about Holland's architectural decoration in two sketchbooks of his designs in the RIBA Drawings Collection. Traditionally it has been assumed that later designers and decorators, particularly the interior decorator Walsh Porter, obliterated much of this decoration. Joseph Farington mentioned in May 1806 that 'although Carlton House as finished by Holland was in a complete and new state he [the Prince of Wales] has ordered the whole thing to be done again under the direction of Walsh Porter who has destroyed all that Holland had done and is substituting a finishing in a most expensive and motley taste.'⁵⁵ This is perhaps what led John Summerson to describe the Prince's later redecorations at the house as 'wanton disfigurement'.⁵⁶ The most commonly-referred to visual source for the interiors of the house are the

watercolours by Charles Wild made for Pyne's *Royal Residences*. These show the later Regency embellishments to Holland's work, with elaborate draperies, velvet-covered walls and copious gilding, but, if compared with Holland's sketchbooks, it becomes apparent that rather more of Holland's work survived into the later phases of the house than was previously thought. For example, his work in the Great Drawing Room (subsequently the Throne Room) is, despite later embellishments and alterations, still clearly visible in Pyne's illustration (Fig. 13), notably the complicated scheme on the ceiling and the highly French decorative panelling on the walls (Fig. 14). On the right wall, invisible in Pyne's view but mentioned in his description, was a series of paned mirrors, another French technique that refers back to the Galerie des Glaces at Versailles. Pyne tells us that the spandrels in the ceiling are painted on a gold ground, a technique which, as already discussed, was a speciality of Jean-Jacques Boileau. An undated bill in the Royal Archives details how Jirouard le Girard was paid two guineas for sixteen small scenes representing the attributes of the muses 'in one of the salons',⁵⁷ presumably the sixteen small circular spaces in this ceiling.

A major development in Holland's interiors was the inclusion of scagliola, the use of which he pioneered along with other architects such as James Wyatt. Domenico Bartoli, the leading 'scagliolist' of the age, did extensive work at Carlton House in 1789

Fig. 12. Unattributed, Painted decoration on the ground floor of Dover House, Whitehall.





Fig. 13. Charles Wild, 'The Throne Room at Carlton House', c.1816. (*Royal Collection, RL 22178*)

including green *apollino* columns in the lower Dining Room and the columns of *porfido rosso* in the Music Room.⁵⁸ The Great Eating Room, converted to the Crimson Drawing Room by James Wyatt in 1804, also originally featured expensive scagliola decoration by Bartoli, incorporating 16 pilasters in *rosso sanguigo* and other elements in green *cipollino*, all of which seems to have been disguised by extensive velvet swags by the time Charles Wild painted the room in its later incarnation as the Crimson Drawing Room. Despite this, Holland's sketchbooks confirm that other elements of the room, in particular the coved ceiling with arabesque stucco work, were much as Holland designed them; as Geoffrey de Bellaigue stated, it was still defined by his 'restrained classicism'.⁵⁹

The most comprehensively documented scheme of decoration in the Holland-era Carlton House was the Chinese Drawing Room on the basement floor, illustrated in Thomas Sheraton's *The Cabinet Maker's and Upholsterer's Drawing Book* (1791) (Fig. 15) and

painstakingly researched by Geoffrey de Bellaigue⁶⁰. Chinoiserie was a style that is more closely associated in England with the mid eighteenth century, its grandest flourish represented by Chambers' pagoda in Kew Gardens built for Princess Augusta in 1762. In contrast, at Carlton House the Prince looked to an interpretation of the style more akin to that shown in the Chinese House in the park at the Comte d'Artois's Bagatelle. Sheraton tells us that Chinese Drawing Room benefitted from a heated sofa, a highly luxurious addition which hints at the use of this space as a location for comfort and relaxation.⁶¹ The Comte d'Artois famously had a Turkish boudoir constructed for him in his apartments at Versailles in the early 1780s, and it is clear that this is what this room – a Chinese Boudoir – was emulating at Carlton House. It was not just the Chinoiserie that was French, but also the way in which it was employed within the house. The inclusion of a Boudoir containing the most elaborate and

expensive decoration was a signature of Holland's architectural projects elsewhere. His sketchbooks show how closely he was involved in the design of the room, together with Dominique Daguerre, who commissioned bespoke furniture and decorative items from the leading Parisian cabinet makers specially for the room.

The bills from Holland's era confirm that even then the use of textiles was one of the most spectacular elements of the decoration at Carlton House. Some idea of the effect is given in the White Drawing Room at Houghton Hall in Norfolk, which is decorated with silk brocade, given as a gift by the Prince of Wales around 1797 to his Chamberlain from 1795 to 1800, the fourth Earl Cholmondeley.⁶² (Fig. 16) As John Cornforth has explained, this material is an English imitation of the products of Lyon, and demonstrates the skill of English silk weavers at that time. The fabrics used in the decoration of the house were famous; Edward Halstead in his history of Kent stated 'in the year 1789 I saw in Mr Calloway's looms the richest and most beautiful piece of silk furnished for the Prince of Wales's Palace of Carlton House'.⁶³ Although cheaper than using imported French material, astronomical amounts were spent on the English version, with companies such as Ibbotson, Barlow and Clarke providing white sarsnet, cherry colour velvet, rich garter blue velvet, yellow satin and green brocade. In 1790, 416 yards of the 'richest white

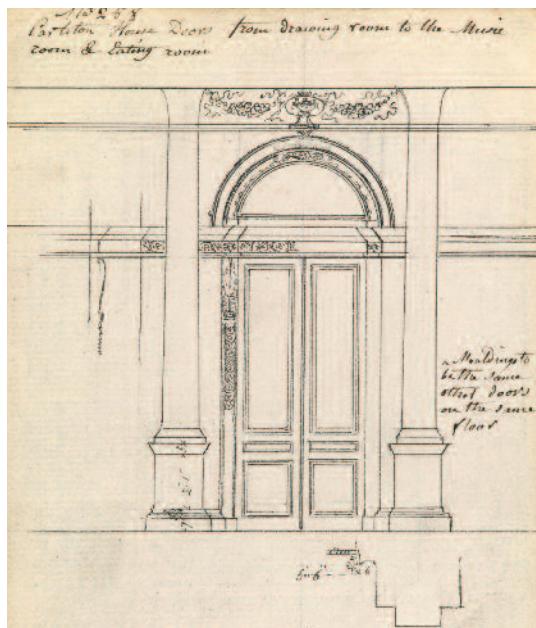


Fig. 14. Henry Holland, 'Design for panelling of Great Drawing Room at Carlton House', 1788. (RIBA, SKB122/4)

brocade with an eagle pattern for the gallery at Carlton House' cost an incredible £2,403.⁶⁴ Although correctly thought to be an integral part of the decorative scheme during the following phases of decoration at the house, it seems that fabrics, albeit of a different style and application, played an equally important role during Holland's tenure.

In 1803 Holland finally withdrew from the

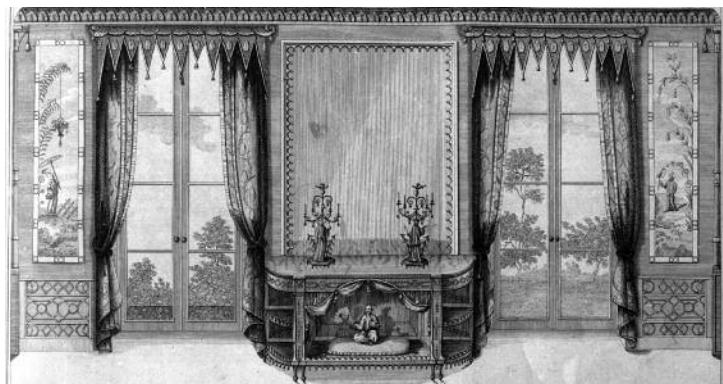


Fig. 15. Thomas Sheraton, 'The Chinese Drawing Room at Carlton House', as reproduced in *The Cabinet Makers' Drawing Book*, 1791. RIBA10262.



Fig. 16. Material from the White Drawing Room at Houghton House.

service of the Prince of Wales under acrimonious circumstances. His *magnum opus*, Carlton House, like so many of his other works, would eventually be demolished in 1826 by his old patron, by then King George IV, who was also responsible for obliterating Holland's fine neo-classical pavilion at Brighton. Yet where it survives, Holland's oeuvre is strikingly beautiful, with an ability to impart magnificence through simplicity. The external architecture of Carlton House introduced a new purer Neo-classical style to Britain, the scale and sublime impact of which would have seemed extraordinarily daring and modern at the time. It is clear that Holland thought carefully about the layout of the house, drawing on his understanding of contemporary French ideas of convenience and comfort in a way which had not been seen before in Britain. In terms of decoration, it has become more apparent how he fused classical and French elements to create the 'chaste palace of august simplicity' of which Walpole spoke. The links Holland enjoyed with France and French craftsmen suggest a fascinating and rare moment of Anglo-French co-operation, above all in the extensive employment of French decorative painters. It was this combination that made the first two decades of the Prince of Wales's Carlton House the summit of eighteenth-century refinement and elegance: a marked contrast to the later, better-known, Regency

schemes. This was a body of work that was profound, influential and significant, confirming that as an architect Holland is perhaps deserving of a greater reputation than he is usually allotted. It is now possible to understand better the breathtaking ingenuity, skill and hard work that caused Walpole to claim Carlton House would become 'the most perfect palace in Europe'.

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NOTES

- 1 Christopher Hussey, *English Country Houses: Mid-Georgian 1760–1800* (Woodbridge, 1984), p. 86.
- 2 Letter to the Countess of Upper Ossory, September 1785, quoted in Dorothy Stroud, *Henry Holland: His Life and Architecture* (London, 1966), p. 67.
- 3 Although he was associated with at least fifty different projects: see H.M. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600–1840* (New Haven and London, 2008), p. 503.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 502.
- 5 He also clearly wrote on one of his drawings for Cadland House that he borrowed a design for a frieze from Montfaucon's *L'Antiquité Expliquée*: Stroud, *op. cit.*, pp. 39–40.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 73.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 9 David Watkin, 'Holland, Henry (1745–1806)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).
- 10 The design was later engraved for *Works in Architecture*, Vol. 1: Stroud, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- 12 *The Times*, July 5th 1787 (Accessed via Times Digital Archive).
- 13 Allan Braham, *The Architecture of the French Enlightenment* (London 1980), p. 45.
- 14 Christopher Hussey, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
- 15 Michel Gallet, *Demeures parisiennes, l'époque de Louis XVI* (Paris, 1964), p. 85.
- 16 These designs survive in the Print Room at Windsor Castle (See RL 18948).
- 17 National Archives, HO 73/18.
- 18 Braham, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
- 19 Royal Archives (hereafter RA) GEO/MAIN/35014.
- 20 Braham *op. cit.*, pp. 174–5.
- 21 Stroud, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- 23 Gallet, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
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- 26 Etlin, *op. cit.*, p. 137.
- 27 RA GEO/MAIN/35014.
- 28 RA GEO/MAIN/38194.
- 29 RA GEO/MAIN/35014.
- 30 RA GEO/MAIN/35014.
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- 32 Stroud, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
- 33 Henry S. Robinson, 'The Tower of the Winds and the Roman Market-Place', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 47(3), p. 345
- 34 The tribune at Carlton House was 24 feet in diameter according to Holland – RA GEO/MAIN/35014.
- 35 Stroud, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
- 36 RA GEO/MAIN/38193.
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- 39 RA GEO/MAIN/35014.
- 40 Geoffrey De Bellaigue, Carlton House: The Past Glories of George IV's Palace (exh. cat., Queen's Gallery, London, 1991), p. 207
- 41 RA GEO/MAIN/32028.
- 42 De Bellaigue, *op. cit.*, p. 207.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 207.
- 44 Stroud, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- 46 See Ivan Hall, 'A Neo-Classical Episode at Chatsworth', *Burlington Magazine*, June 1980).
- 47 RA GEO/MAIN/35010.
- 48 RA GEO/MAIN/35013.
- 49 RA GEO/MAIN/35057.
- 50 Delabrière and Boileau were apparently brought over by the wallpaper designer Sheringham 'to do Carlton House under Henry Holland': Stroud, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
- 51 John Cornforth, 'The Roots of Regency Taste', *Country Life*, April 1991, p. 75
- 52 National Archives, HO 73/17.
- 53 RA GEO/MAIN/32020.
- 54 Stroud, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
- 55 De Bellaigue, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
- 56 Sir John Summerson, *Microcosm of London* (London, 1943), p. 24.
- 57 RA GEO/MAIN/35011.
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- 59 De Bellaigue, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
- 60 G. de Bellaigue, 'The Furnishings of the Chinese Drawing Room, Carlton House' *Burlington Magazine*, September 1967, pp. 518–528.
- 61 Stroud, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
- 62 Cornforth, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- 64 National Archives, HO 73/21.