



THE  
GEORGIAN  
GROUP

---

Amy Boyington, 'The Countess of Leicester  
and her contribution to Holkham Hall',  
*The Georgian Group Journal*, Vol. XXII,  
2014, pp. 53-66

# THE COUNTESS OF LEICESTER AND HER CONTRIBUTION TO HOLKHAM HALL

AMY BOYINGTON

*Margaret, Countess of Leicester, inherited Holkham Hall from her husband in 1759 and was given the responsibility of completing the house to the specification set out by him in his will. Academic opinion has largely ignored her vital contribution, assuming that she merely applied the finishing touches. This article demonstrates that the scale of building work was still vast, and that it took a further five years to conclude. During this time Lady Leicester was able to pursue her own aesthetic goals and succeeded in completing Holkham to the highest standards.*

Holkham Hall, the magnificent Palladian masterpiece in North Norfolk, was the creation of Thomas Coke, first Earl of Leicester. Constructed between 1734 and 1764, it successfully demonstrates the correct application of Palladio's principles of

proportion and symmetry (Fig. 1). On 20 April 1759, however, Lord Leicester died aged sixty-one, leaving his country seat unfinished. In a move that surprised his contemporaries, he left the entirety of his estate to his 'deare wife' (Fig. 2), 'to be used occupied held and enjoyed . . . during her life.'<sup>1</sup> He also left his wife debts of more than £90,000, but his will established a trust providing a yearly sum of £2,000 from the estate at large for the completion of Holkham:

'... profits of the said premises . . . every year commencing from my decease towards the carrying on of the Building and finishing and compleating of my said Capital House at Holkham, and the offices Stables and Gardens thereto belonging until the same are fully and compleatly finished according to the Plan and Design which I have made and whereon I have signed and approved of or whereon I shall have at the time of my decease.'<sup>2</sup>



Fig. 1: South elevation of Holkham Hall.



Fig. 2: Lady Margaret Tufton, Countess of Leicester in her ceremonial robes, by Andrea Casali (by kind permission of Viscount Coke and the Trustees at Holkham).

He appointed Lady Leicester, together with Ralph Cauldwell (his land steward), Matthew Lamb (his lawyer) and Wenman Coke (his nephew and heir) as trustees, to ensure that the funds were spent according to the direction of his will.

Although there is a consensus among architectural historians that Lady Leicester was involved in the completion of Holkham, little significance has been attached to her role. Research has focused on the initial conception and building of the house, inevitably concentrating on the contributions of Thomas Coke, William Kent, Lord Burlington and Matthew Brettingham. Lady Leicester's crucial role has been overlooked in a number of significant publications, notably in a recent monograph edited by Leo Schmidt, Christian

Keller and Polly Feversham, which briefly acknowledges that she 'satisfactorily complete[d] the architectural ensemble' but then dismisses her contribution, stating that her rooms 'lack both the artist's and the intellectual's inspiration'.<sup>3</sup> The joint work of Leo Schmidt and John Cornforth published in *Country Life* in 1980 does admit that 'too little attention is devoted to Lady Leicester,' and that her role was a 'crucial one', but fails to evaluate her involvement.

This article aims to explain why Lady Leicester's contribution to Holkham is so significant, and why it should not be overlooked. Holkham Hall is one of the most important classical country houses in Great Britain, but, had it not been for her dedication and perseverance, it is highly likely that it would never have been completed to the high specification that it was. Had she not embraced the building project, it is possible that Wenman Coke would have deviated from the first Earl's Palladian vision by applying his own ideas. This essay demonstrates that Lady Leicester followed the direction of her husband's will by ensuring that his classical creation remained pure, while still pursuing her own aesthetic goals.

Lady Margaret Tufton was born on 18 June 1700, the third daughter of Thomas Tufton, sixth Earl of Thanet and his wife Catherine Cavendish, daughter of Henry Cavendish, second Duke of Newcastle. Thomas Tufton was a high ranking nobleman, heavily involved with politics and intimate with the royal family. He had five daughters, all of whom were married into prominent aristocratic families. On 13 July 1718 Lady Margaret was married to Thomas Coke, heir to the vast Holkham estates. As part of their marriage settlement, Lord Thanet settled upon the newly-weds Thanet House, Great Russell Street, to be used as their principal London house. This was where their only child Edward (later Viscount Lovell) was born in June, 1719. Lady Margaret later sold Thanet House in 1760, after Lord Leicester's death, and was responsible for the massive relocation and rearrangement of the furniture and collections.

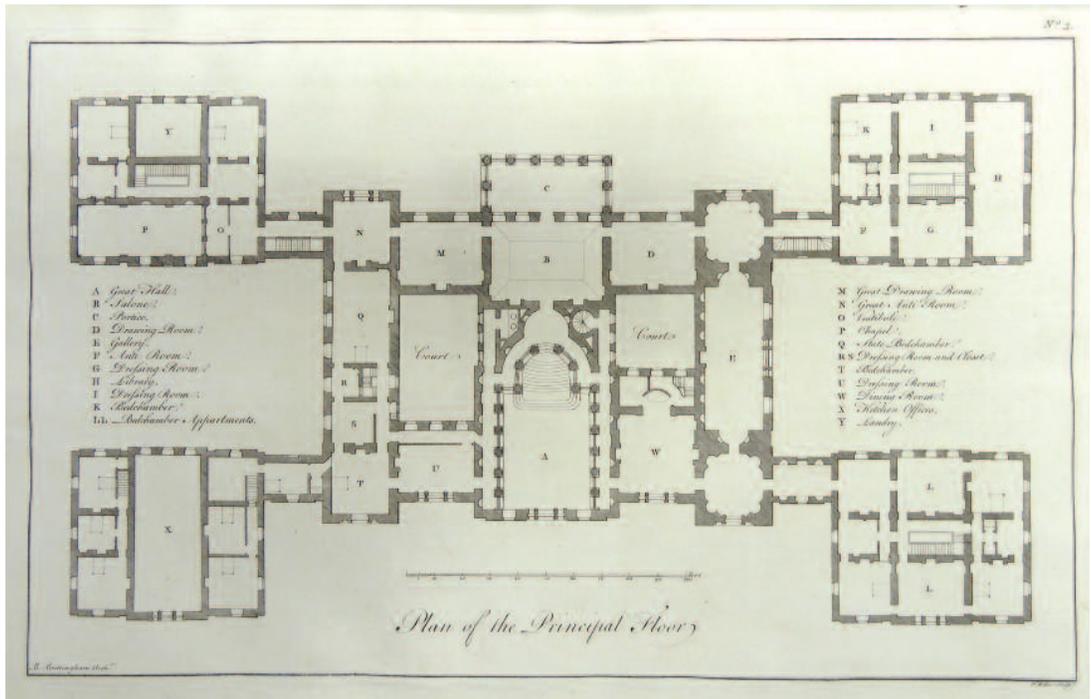


Fig. 3: ‘Plan of the Principal Floor’ taken from Matthew Brettingham [jr.], *The Plans, Elevations and Sections of Holkham in Norfolk, The Seat of the late Earl of Leicester, to which are added, The Ceilings and Chimney Pieces; and also, A Descriptive Account of the Statues, Pictures, and Drawings; Not in the former Edition* (London, 1773), plate 3.

The extent of the building works still to complete in 1759: The Chapel, The Chapel Gallery, North State Bedroom Apartment, The Portico Room, The Marble Hall, The Strangers’ Wing, The State Bedroom Apartment

### HOLKHAM HALL

Thomas Coke’s fascination with classical architecture was encouraged by his Grand Tour, during which he met Lord Burlington and William Kent. They fuelled his interest in Palladianism. The conception of Holkham Hall evolved rapidly during the early years of his marriage. Payments to ‘Mr Campbell for 2 Vol. of Architecture’ and for the ‘Subscription for the second Edition of Andrea Palladio’s four Books of Architecture’ in 1720 suggest that he was already beginning to think seriously about Holkham’s design and plan.<sup>4</sup> Planting of ‘Forest Trees’ began as early as Spring 1722, and the foundations for the Family Wing were finally laid in 1734.<sup>5</sup>

By the early 1740s the first phase of Holkham Hall was complete and the Cokes were able to move into the Family Wing. The second phase of construction concentrated on the south elevation of the body of the house, including the Corinthian hexastyle portico and two towers, which were completed in 1749. By 1752 the basic shell of the *corps de logis* was finished, signalling the beginning of the construction of the South-East or Chapel Wing. The shell of the south façade was completed by the mid 1750s, providing an impressive view for visitors arriving through the Triumphal Arch and Avenue.

Following the death of Viscount Lovell, the son

and heir, in 1753, spending increased significantly, allowing progress to be made on the North-East or Kitchen Wing.<sup>6</sup> In 1757 Admiral Edward Boscawen stayed at Holkham, and in a letter to his wife mentioned that ‘the house . . . is not finished or furnished’ and described the Statue Gallery, where they spent most of their time:

‘the room, or *Chambre d’Assembly*, 105 feet long, we live in, elegant to a degree, and when lighted up, quite scenery; a library at each end, the middle a gallery ornamented with perfect antique statues, all over the house the ceilings are finished, and the finest furniture preparing that can be purchased’<sup>7</sup>

Holkham was clearly still a hive of activity, and in the same year, 1757, the North-West or Strangers’ Wing was begun. But, despite great progress having been made, the house was still not finished when Lord Leicester died in 1759 (Fig. 3). The Strangers’ Wing was an empty shell, devoid of chimneypieces, ceilings, doors, floors or any interior decoration. The Chapel, Portico Room, North State Bedchamber Apartment and Marble Hall were also incomplete. The State Bedchamber Apartment was complete, but it still remained unfurnished in 1759. The Counting House was still under construction, the foundations for the Stables were yet to be dug, and the landscaping of the park closest to the house had not even been considered. The scale of the project that Lady Leicester embraced should therefore not be underestimated, and the fact that it took a further five years to conclude – one sixth of the total building time – is evidence in itself of the importance of her role.

Contemporaries found Lady Leicester’s inheritance unexpected, even though her only son had died and the male heir was a nephew. The gossiping Lady Mary Wortley Montagu remarked to her daughter, the Countess of Bute, in a letter dated 22 May 1759: ‘I am not surprised, as I believe you think I ought to be, at Lord Leicester leaving his large estate to his lady, notwithstanding the contempt with which he always treated her, and her real

inability of managing it.’<sup>8</sup> But, despite such disparaging remarks, it can be argued that by the very act of leaving the entirety of his estate to his wife, Lord Leicester demonstrated trust and respect for her capabilities. She, unlike their son or the eventual male heir, Wenman Coke, had supported him from the beginning, and it was she who knew exactly what he had envisaged as the final product.

One of the most striking changes made by Lady Leicester and her fellow trustees after taking over the management of Holkham was the dismissal of the executant architect Matthew Brettingham, replacing him with the carver James Miller, who had been working on site since 1748.<sup>9</sup> Schmidt argues that this was because the remaining work at Holkham was ‘ornamental rather than architectural’.<sup>10</sup> This, however, does not take account of the fact that the Stables and Coach Houses were yet to be built, nor that the parkland nearest the house was yet to be landscaped. Thus, arguing that a carver was more suitable than an architect as Surveyor of the Buildings seems a little far-fetched. It is more likely that Brettingham was becoming increasingly occupied with his architectural projects elsewhere, and that his dismissal may have been of mutual benefit, enabling Lady Leicester to appoint someone of her own choosing.

To appreciate the scale of the continuing work at the time of Lord Leicester’s death, we need only examine a payment made on 16 September 1759 to a stonemason, Joseph Howell, ‘for putting down window curbs to the Celler windows of the Library wing, fitting sash frames in the Strangers wing, cleaning and piecing a Portland chimney piece for the Counting house and cleaning the Columns of the Portico there . . . taking up and relaying the paving in several parts of the House.’<sup>11</sup> The Family Wing had been considered the most complete part of the house, but the finishing touches were still being made in 1759, and it is clear that the Strangers’ Wing was simply a shell at the time Lady Leicester inherited.

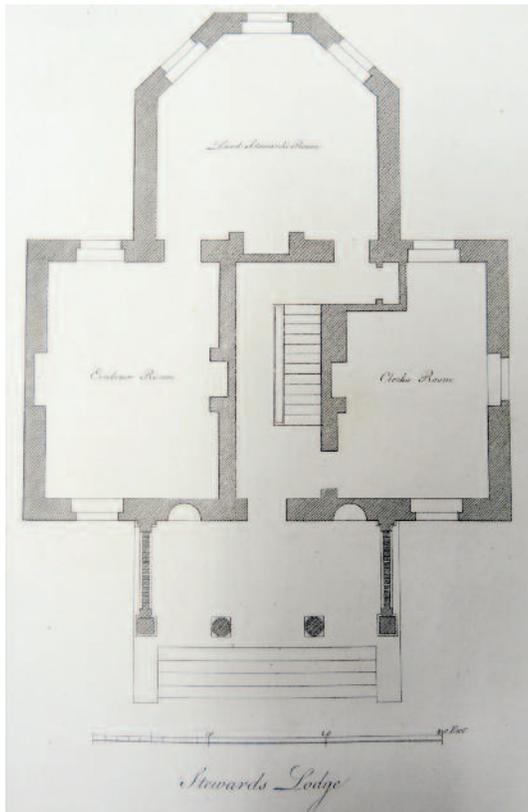


Fig. 4: Plan of the Counting House or Stewards Lodge, taken from Brettingham [jr.], *The Plans, Elevations and Sections of Holkham* (1773), plate 53.

#### THE COUNTING HOUSE

The Counting House or Land-Steward's Lodge (now demolished) was completed under Lady Leicester's own direction in 1761 (Fig. 4). In December of that year James Lillie was paid for carpentry work in the Counting House, including:

‘altering and hanging old doors and window shutters, framing and putting up window linings, plinths, shelves, cupboards, putting in sashes, making and hanging two large wainscot presses a writing desk, Clockcase, stools and a chest, altering and fitting up the drawers in the Evidence room, wainscoting chair high the Parlour walls, putting up a chimney piece and laying with old boards the stewards lodging room floor.’<sup>12</sup>

Following its completion, Lady Leicester ensured that it was appropriately furnished. For example, according to her handwritten Inventory covering all furniture placed in the house and associated buildings by 1765, the Counting Room contained ‘Shelves for Books & Papers, A Double writing Desk with Drawers, A Square wainscot table, 3 backs Windsor chairs, 2 chairs leather seats & 2 stools coverd wth leather, 5 Maps, Barrs fixd fender shovel tongs poker broom.’<sup>13</sup> The inclusion of five maps is an indication of Lady Leicester's practicality. Elsewhere there was the same level of pragmatism; the Evidence Room contained ‘A Plan of the Drains’ and an ‘Iron Chest from Russell Street’.<sup>14</sup>

#### STABLES

Lady Leicester was entirely responsible for the construction of the Stables (now demolished), which were located to the west of the house, across the lake (Fig. 5). William Kent's initial designs (Fig. 6) had been changed and developed by the late Earl and Brettingham, resulting in a sophisticated Palladian structure. In 1760 Joseph Howell was paid for mason's work at the Stables, which included:

‘30 $\frac{8}{16}$  feet supl of plain Portland work in the Plinth at 9d . . . 453 feet supl of Bath stone cornice at 6d, 151 openings of Bath between the modillions at 2ds each, . . . a key stone to the Great arch 5s, putting up a dial in the South Front 4s and altering the Great Pediment 1.12.6. To Ditto for masons work at the Cupulo of the Stables vizh for 384 feet supl of plain portland work'd at 9d.’<sup>15</sup>

The quality of the stone used and the architectural features such as the ‘Great Pediment’, ‘Cupulo’ and ‘Window arches and niches’ demonstrate the elegance of the design. By the end of 1760 most of the masonry was completed and the tiles had been hung and jointed to the roof. This enabled other tradesmen to begin work, and in 1760 carpenters and joiners were paid for ‘framing the fronts and stalls,

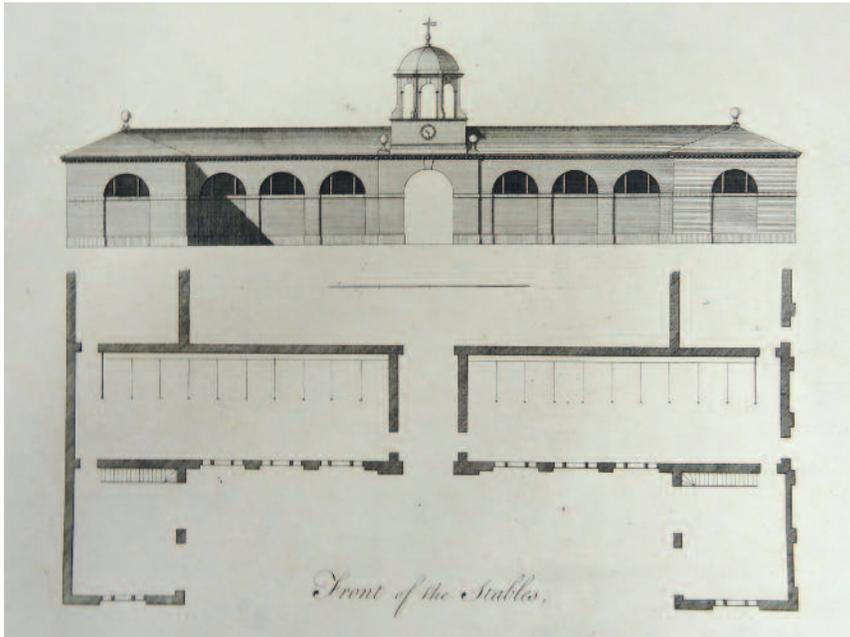


Fig. 5: Design for elevation and partial plan of the Stables, as published in Brettingham [jr.], *The Plans, Elevations and Sections of Holkham* (1773), plate 64.



Fig. 6: Proposed design for elevation and partial plan of the Stables, by William Kent, date unknown (by kind permission of Viscount Coke and the Trustees at Holkham).



Fig. 7: The iron railings commissioned by Lady Margaret for the Marble Hall.

making and hanging doors and door cases and putting up lintels in the South Coach Stable'.<sup>16</sup>

The Stables were largely completed by April 1763 when May and Moor (joiners) received payments for the finishing touches including 'hanging Window shuts to the Store Room over the Common Stable, putting up a Staircase. . .making and hanging Doors in ditto' and installing more mangers, posts and racks.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, a final payment regarding the Stables was actually made in 1764 to Francis Lack 'for Stripping the red Tyles off the Stable and new tiling and jointing Ditto with 13,200 Grey Tyles at 12s pm, and Cutting and Laying Tyles to 12 Hips & Valleys at 3s each'.<sup>18</sup> This clearly indicates that Lady Leicester was not afraid to change her mind in order to achieve the best aesthetic effect.

#### THE MARBLE HALL

Lord Leicester never saw the completion of the most magnificent room at Holkham, the Marble Hall. It is therefore all the more significant that he trusted his wife to finish the work. Throughout 1760 she oversaw the plasterwork and glazing, as well as the

continuation of the carpentry and joinery. The marble masons finally finished in November, when a payment of £2.2.0 was given for them 'to Entertain themselves on finishing the Hall'.<sup>19</sup> Steady progress was made throughout 1761, including the completion of the elaborate carving to the Venetian window.<sup>20</sup> A payment was also made to Joseph Howell 'for . . . moving the Statues into the Hall and working up the Pedestalls for them to stand on'.<sup>21</sup> These were the classical plaster casts, a majority of which were acquired by the younger Brettingham in Rome before Lord Leicester's death, and it is likely that Lady Leicester was following a pre-approved scheme drawn up by her late husband.

Her most significant aesthetic intervention was the installation of the intricately wrought iron railing between the marble columns of the first-floor gallery (Fig. 7). In June 1761 James Miller received a payment for hiring two men for four and a half days to carve the 'Pattern rail to go between the colums in the G.t hall' and 'a man 5 days carving 3 Reverse patterns of the Rail in the Gt Hall for the smith to work from'.<sup>22</sup> Lady Leicester's decision to put an iron railing instead of the more conventional balustrade was noted by Schmidt, who suggested that this act demonstrated that she did not interpret her role as

one of following her late husband's specification too closely.<sup>23</sup> William Kent's drawing of the Marble Hall (Fig. 8) clearly showed a marble balustrade, indicating that that was Lord Leicester's intention. The fact that Lady Margaret decided to deviate from his plan reveals that she had her own ideas of taste.

The elegant scrolled tracery of the iron railing is a direct copy of the railings found on the striking double staircase at No. 44 Berkeley Square, London. Designed by William Kent for Lady Isabella Finch and completed in 1744, the graceful staircase was greatly admired by contemporaries; Horace Walpole himself exclaimed that 'it is as beautiful a piece of scenery, and, considering the space, of art, as can be imagined'.<sup>24</sup> Lady Leicester may have been aware of this staircase, and it is also likely that she had been influenced by Kent's earlier works at Holkham, since he had installed similar iron railings at the top of the staircase in the Family Wing corridor. Her deviation could therefore be justified because she was still following the overall principles of her late husband's decorative scheme.

A final entry relating to the Marble Hall in 1764 marks its completion. James Miller received payment

for '3 Books of Gold used about the inscription in the Hall',<sup>25</sup> and an inscription, commissioned by Lady Margaret, was placed above the front door:

'THIS SEAT, on an open and barren Estate,  
Was planned, planted, built, decorated,  
And inhabited the middle of the XVIIIth Century  
By THO<sup>S</sup> COKE EARL of LEICESTER'

This demonstrates her dedication to her late husband's vision and her personal pride in his achievement. It also highlights her modesty, because she omits her own contribution to the project, recorded by Brettingham in his dedication in his own book on the house:

'Animated with the zeal of its excellent Founder, your Ladyship, by adding the finishing touches to the Great Work of HOLKHAM, has brought it to the degree of splendour, in which it now appears, the delight of the present age, as it promises, from the solidity of its construction, to be that of posterity, while the love of Roman Arts and Magnificence shall continue to distinguish the taste and spirit of a learned and opulent People.'<sup>26</sup>

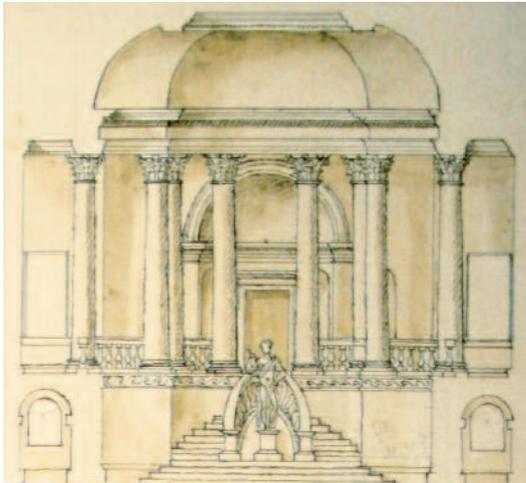


Fig. 8: Detail from the 'exploded' design for the Marble Hall by William Kent, date unknown (by kind permission of Viscount Coke and the Trustees at Holkham).

### THE STRANGERS' WING

The Strangers' Wing was planned and built as the principal accommodation for guests. Designed on a grid plan, the three apartments on the *piano nobile* each consisted of a bedroom, dressing room and shared water closet (Fig. 9). Additional smaller bedrooms were located on the 'Rustic' (ground) floor, as well as in the attic. One of the earliest references to the Strangers' Wing is a payment to James Lillie, the joiner, for work ended 31 March 1760, for 'putting up the Pedestall and working the moulding to the Venetian window in the Strangers' Wing and working architrave, frieze and Cornice for the two doorways in ditto'.<sup>27</sup> This reference, together with a further entry for Lillie's work for 'Setting on Locks and shutter fastnings in the atticks of the

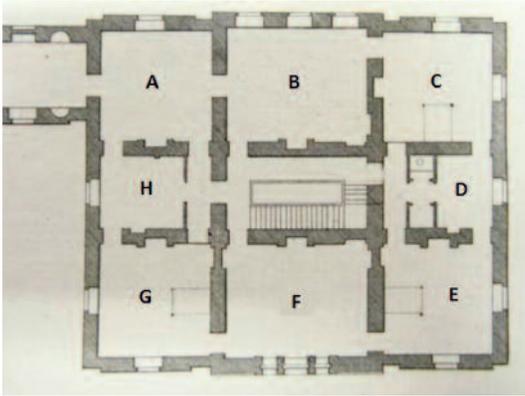


Fig. 9: Detail of 'The Plan of the Principal Floor' as published in Brettingham [jr.] *The Plans, Elevations and Sections of Holkham* (1773), plate 3, showing the Strangers' Wing.

- A) Anti-Room; B) 'Yellow and Red Dressing Room';
- C) 'Tapestry Bed-Chamber'; D) Dressing Room;
- E) 'Green Damask Bed Chamber'; F) 'Green Damask Dressing-Room';
- G) 'Blue and Yellow Bed-Chamber'; H) 'Blue and Yellow Dressing Room'

Strangers wing', shows that Lady Margaret was entirely responsible for the interiors.<sup>28</sup>

By 1761 John Bullin was paid for glazing the Principal floor, using '246ft. 7in of Crown Glass' and '100 feet Glazed with plate Glass', indicating that the shell of Strangers Wing was finally complete.<sup>29</sup> This triggered a flurry of activity including preparations for chimneypieces, and 'wainscotting for hangings'.<sup>30</sup> James Miller was paid a significant sum of £174.5.0 in 1762 for carving in eight rooms on the Principal floor including 'beed and ribband and flower round [the] windows'.<sup>31</sup> However, the interiors were not finally completed until 1764, the last few entries for the wing in the Account Books referring to ongoing painting and gilding work:

'Paid to John Neale for Gilding 378 feet.1in Supl in the Ceiling of the Strangers wing at 2s.9d. 529 yards supl in Ditto 3 times painted at 3,187 yards twice painted at 2d. 709 yards once painted at 1.d p yard, 20 inside sash frames once painted at 4¼ each, 217 sash squares at 8d p doz. 20 iron bars at ½d each and 4 Capitals, at 4½d each.'<sup>32</sup>

Lady Leicester was now able to turn her attention to furnishing the wing, on which she spent lavishly to match the sumptuous standards of the rest of the house. Her total expenditure for the Tapestry Bedchamber alone was £126.16s.9d, including '21 Ells of Tapistrey to add to the hangings' and '66 foot Moulding for the Picture over the Chimney'.<sup>33</sup> The

accompanying Dressing Room (now the Red Parrot Bedroom) was equally lavish, and contained furniture she purchased, as well as some from Thanet House. The red and yellow hangings, formerly stored in a chest in the North Tower Room, comprised '325 Yards & ½ of Crimson & Yellow Belmerene for a Bed & Hangings for a dressing room 5 window curtains covers for Chairs for ye Bedchamber & 2 dressing rooms'.<sup>34</sup> This indicates that Lady Margaret was planning the decorative schemes for the rooms from as early as 1760. Though lavish in design, her planning removed the risk of unnecessary waste by utilising the chattels already available to her.

Of all the rooms in the Strangers' Wing, the Green Damask Bedchamber was the most costly to furnish, totalling £261.18s, for which the '444 Yards & ½ Green Damask for Bed hangings window Curtains & covers for Chairs for the Bedchamber & Dressing Room', cost an astounding £211.1s.<sup>35</sup> It contained:

- 'A Bed Stead Green Damask Curtains & counterprane
- A feather Bed Bolster 3 Pillows 4 Blankets
- A white quilt a carpet round the bed
- Green Damask window curtain lind wth stof under curtains
- 3 Elbow chairs & 2 back Stools coverd wth Green Damask
- Silk & stof covers to ye counterpain & chairs

A mahogany table wth drawers  
 2 night tables  
 A Clossstool  
 A grate, shovel tongs poker fender bellows & broom  
 A 2 leav.d mahogany table all bought but 3 chair frames  
 A Japan cabinet a leather cover from the Tower Gallery.<sup>36</sup>

The accompanying Dressing Room was equally well appointed, costing a further £56.2s.6d,<sup>37</sup> with:

‘3 window green damask curtains lind wth stuf & under curtains  
 4 elbow chairs & one covrd wth some silk scarvs & stuf covers to ye chairs & tables  
 2 Marble Tables on mahogany frames  
 A Turkey Carpet  
 A Mahogany Dressing Table  
 A Mahogany writing Table  
 A Mahogany Table on a Clan  
 4 Frames for ye 4 Small Landscapes  
 A Grate Fender Shovell tongs poker bellows & Broom  
 All bought but ye 4 Elbow Chairs & Marble Slabs & little table  
 A fire Skreen covered wth work on one side.<sup>38</sup>

These sums, paid out of Lady Leicester’s private savings and not from the estate, suggest that she was keen to honour her late husband’s taste. She was determined that her contribution would excite guests no less than the Kentian interiors of the Family Wing or the *corps de logis* which were directed by the late husband in his lifetime.

Furthermore, just as Lord Leicester had delighted in the arrangement of his collection of paintings, so too did his widow. She was responsible for the locations of all paintings in the Strangers’ Wing. Her arrangement of the portraits in the Ante-Room invites particular discussion because she hung it with no less than eleven portraits of the Coke family commissioned by her late husband, the majority painted by Andrea Cassalli and a couple by Sir Godfrey Kneller.<sup>39</sup> Lady Leicester took pride in

her own lineage, as evidenced by her successful campaign for the Baronety de Clifford. Her husband’s rise into the nobility was very recent, having only been granted the barony of Minster Lovell in 1728, and the earldom of Leicester in 1744. Consequently, there was a need to establish and reinforce the fact that the couple could claim an illustrious descent.

#### THE CHAPEL

The Chapel, 23 feet high, had not even been started when Lord Leicester died, and did not receive a mention in the official 1760 Inventory following his death. By 1763 however, great advances had been made. We can assume that the design was approved by Lord Leicester, and it features in Matthew Brettingham senior’s publication of 1761, but it was begun and finished under his widow’s direction.<sup>40</sup> Given what we have seen of her willingness to change existing plans, it is no surprise that it differs from the approved design.

In 1762 payments were made for carving the picture frames which were made in preparation for the paintings commissioned and located by Lady Leicester.<sup>41</sup> In Brettingham’s publication of 1761, the design of the East wall features only one painting behind the Altar, with two Corinthian columns on either side.<sup>42</sup> Although Lady Leicester complied by placing Guido Reni’s ‘The Assumption of the Virgin’, bought by her husband, behind the Altar, she deviated from the original plan by directing that it should be flanked by two paintings, separated by one Corinthian column and one pilaster on each side (Fig. 10). She herself commissioned the London-based contemporary artist Giovanni Battista Cipriani to paint St Anne, the patron saint of mothers (left of the Altar), and St Cecilia the patron saint of music (right), thus revealing that she was highly capable of patronising the Arts to enhance her interior designs. These panels were specially made to fit the precise

space in the Chapel, and were signed and dated by Cipriani in 1764.

Lady Leicester also made significant changes to the south wall by installing three religious paintings there, in place of the three niches intended by Lord Leicester.<sup>43</sup> Comparison between the 1761 and 1773 editions of the Brettingham publications also reveals that she also changed the design for the West Wall. Lord Leicester's intention, it is assumed from the 1761 edition, was to have only a very small family gallery or tribune, supported by a wall flush with the screen (Fig. 11). His widow, however, doubled the size of the gallery by removing the partition walls evident in the 'Plan of the Principal Floor' and included a fire-place.<sup>44</sup> The screen is made not of alabaster Corinthian columns but 'of Cedar Wood, inlaid with Ornaments carved in Lime Tree,' and does not reach to the cornice as detailed in the 1761 design, but is topped with an intricately carved Coke coat of arms, carved and painted by James Miller (Fig. 12).<sup>45</sup>

Lady Leicester did, however, include the Corinthian columns in the Chapel, but on the ground floor, to support the Vestibule screen above. This change in design succeeds aesthetically because the alabaster columns match the rest of the ground floor, which is lined with the same material. The effect is one of purity, uniformity and order, enhanced by the white plastered ceiling, devoid of gilding and providing a refreshing contrast to the rest of the Principal Floor. The ensemble demonstrates Lady Leicester's understanding of decorative decorum and appropriateness, suitable for a place of worship.

#### THE STATE BEDCHAMBER

The State Bedchamber (now known as the Green State Bedroom) was still unfurnished in 1759, but it has generally been assumed that it was finished to Lord Leicester's specification. A couple of interesting entries from the accounts during the



Fig. 10: Photograph of the East Wall.

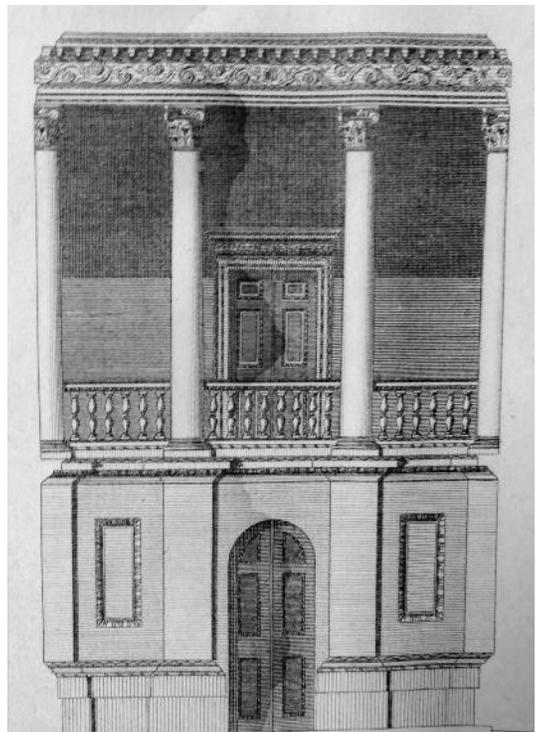


Fig. 11: Engraving of the Chapel West wall as published in Brettingham [sr.], *The plans, Elevations and Sections of Holkham* (1761), plate 14.

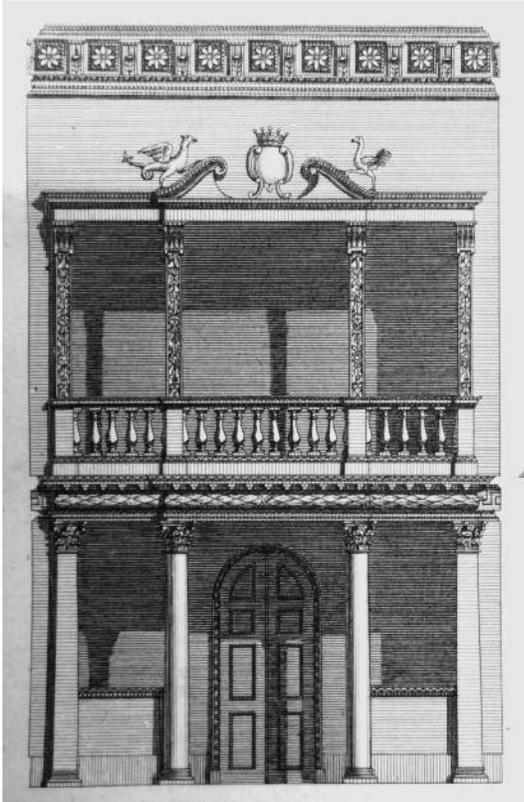


Fig. 12: Engraving of the Chapel West wall as published in Brettingham [jr.], *The Plans, Elevations and Sections of Holkham* (1773), plate not numbered.

summer of 1764, however, reveal that Lady Leicester ordered additional ornamentation to increase its sense of opulence and grandeur. James Miller received a payment for ‘Carving 32 feet 2 inches run of two inch Beed ribbond and flower in the State Bedchamber at 1s. p foot. 8 feet of Ditto Gilded at 2s.9d.’<sup>46</sup> It is likely that this carving was applied to the dado rail that runs along the principal route through the State Bedchamber, and therefore would have been visible to visitors and guests.

Although Lady Leicester was not responsible for the design of the State Bed or the purchasing of the tapestries, she was responsible for the remainder of the sumptuous furnishing. According to her

Inventory, completed in 1765, the State Bedchamber was: ‘Hung with nine Pieces of Tapestry, Bought’, and contained:

- ‘Bed Stead Furniture variegated velvet counterpane ye same curtains lind wth White Sattin
- A feather bed Bolstor 2 pillows 3 mattresses 4 Blanketts All Bought
- A Carpet round the Bed – Bought
- A White Satin Quilt
- A White Indean Damask Quilt a cover for ye counterpane & fals curtains for ye Bed
- 2 Night Tables – Bought
- 3 velvet Festoon window curtains lind wth Pesian
- A Sopha 2 Pillows 2 Bolsters 6 Armd Chairs 2 Backd Stools Gilt Frames 4 Stools all coverd wth velvet ye same as ye Bed
- 2 Marble Tables on Gilt Feet
- A Tapistry.’<sup>47</sup>

She also commissioned Gavin Hamilton to paint the large picture of Jupiter and Juno above the State Bedchamber fireplace. This cost £100 and is further evidence of her independent patronage of the Arts and her grasp of her husband’s intentions. It also illustrates her understanding of the classics, because the theme of Jupiter and Juno runs throughout Holkham Hall.<sup>48</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

The evidence uncovered among the Holkham papers shows that Lady Leicester’s role in completing the house was much greater than previous scholars have argued. It was under her management that Holkham Hall was finally finished. Yet despite this great achievement there is very little to commemorate her contribution. This is probably largely due to her own desire for privacy, as evidenced in an extract from a letter she addressed to Ralph Cauldwell, the agent:

‘I have desired in my letter to Lady Gower [her sister] that you may burn all my Accounts, Books and Papers when of no further use & have left to her to destroy or keep others as she thinks proper. I am sure you are the only person that can be of service to her in the disposal of my Effects in Norfolk . . . I desire you will put no Inscription on the Monument relating to me but the time of my Exit, and that my funeral may be as private as possible.’<sup>49</sup>

Lady Leicester was a modest individual who did not desire acknowledgement for her contributions. Her architectural interventions grew out of a sense of duty that she felt towards her late husband and the estate, but this article has argued that her completion of the house demonstrated more than just a meek following of her late husband’s will. The evidence suggests that she used the approved plans as a guide, and then deviated, changed and updated them as she saw fit. Both the Chapel and Strangers’ Wing were completed to her personal taste; their contrasting levels of sumptuousness demonstrate her grasp of architectural appropriateness and her flair for interior design. Schmidt’s statement claiming that her rooms in the Strangers’ Wing, ‘lack both the artist’s and the intellectual’s inspiration’ misunderstands the level of judgement she applied to the task.<sup>50</sup> The wing was intended to accommodate guests in comfort and grandeur, and consequently differed from the Grand Apartment, which was designed to express Lord Leicester’s appreciation for antiquity and the Arts. The fact that the Strangers’ Wing successfully complements the rest of the interiors as a whole clearly indicates that his widow appreciated the classical designs he had chosen, and that she had the intellect and taste to apply them to the remaining interiors in a manner that was both sumptuous and inviting.

Following its completion, Lady Leicester demonstrated a deep sense of affection and pride for Holkham, and enjoyed impressing and entertaining guests. Her contemporaries regularly spoke of her hospitality. In 1766 Mrs Poyntz of North Creake told

her daughter, Lady Spencer: ‘Holkham is really worth you seeing; Tuesday is the day they show the House; Thursday is her Lady Leicester’s publick day, and it is her delight to show the House.’<sup>51</sup> Eight years later, on 5 November 1774, Mrs Delany wrote to Mrs Boscawen remarking on the beauty of the house: ‘Volumes might be filled with what I see daily in this magnificent Palace, but I am unequal to the description, and more likely to tell you how I wander about it, losing my way. Lady Leicester is often so good to be my guide, and today show’d me a shorter way to my apartment’.<sup>52</sup>

Such comments demonstrate the fact that Lady Leicester successfully completed and developed Holkham so that it became more than merely a grand and empty monument to her late husband. She made Holkham into *her* country seat, and contemporaries tacitly acknowledged this. The 1771 publication of *Vitruvius Britannicus* includes six plates of Holkham, of which the first (plate 64) is labelled: ‘Plan of the Ground Floor of Holkham in Norfolk, the Seat of the R<sup>t</sup>. Hon.<sup>ble</sup> the Countess of Leicester.’<sup>53</sup> Significantly, no mention was made of Thomas Coke within the volume, indicating that by 1771, Lady Margaret was appreciated as far more than a simple contributor to Holkham, but instead was greatly respected as the head of the Coke family, the owner of a substantial country estate and the worthy guardian of Holkham’s magnificent collections. Some two hundred and forty years later, a re-examination of the primary evidence allows us to appreciate fully her notable and substantial contributions to Holkham for the first time.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is a condensed form of my dissertation produced for the MSt in Building History at the University of Cambridge.

Thanks are due to Viscount and Viscountess Coke for their kindness in allowing me to live and

study in their glorious home. My thanks are also due to the Earl and Countess of Leicester for their interest in my research. I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to the staff at Holkham who were forever helpful and supportive during the nine wonderful months that I spent with them.

NOTES

- 1 Holkham Hall Archives, DD/FD 56B (1), Office Copy of the Will and Codicil of Thomas Earl of Leicester (henceforth HA, DD/FD 56 B (1)).
- 2 HA, DD/FD 65B (1) *Will of Thomas Earl of Leicester*.
- 3 Leo Schmidt, Christian Keller and Polly Feversham, (eds.) *Holkham* (Munich and London, 2005), p. 138, (henceforth Schmidt et al. *Holkham*). See also Frank Salmon, "Our Great Master Kent" and the Design of Holkham Hall: a Reassessment', *Architectural History* 56 (2013), pp. 63-96.
- 4 Holkham Hall, Archives, A/5, Household Accounts, p. 102 and p. 100 (henceforth HA, A/ with relevant household account book number).
- 5 HA, A/7, p. 210.
- 6 Leo Schmidt *et al.*, *Holkham*, p. 115.
- 7 C.W. James, *Chief Justice Coke, His Family & Descendants at Holkham* (London, 1929), p. 273.
- 8 Lord Wharncliffe, *The Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, II (London, 1861), p. 179
- 9 HA, A/44, Building Account Book, (1759), p.7
- 10 Schmidt *et al.*, *Holkham*, p. 126.
- 11 HA, A/44, (1759), p. 12.
- 12 HA, A/44, (work ended 29 Dec 1759), p. 3.
- 13 HA, H/Inv 8, Lady Margaret's Inventories, p. 15.
- 14 HA, H/Inv 8, p. 15.
- 15 HA, A/44, (1760), p. 2.
- 16 HA, A/44, (1760), p. 3.
- 17 HA, A/44, (works ended 5 March 1763 & 2 April 1763), p. 34.
- 18 HA, A/44, (1764), p. 41.
- 19 HA, A/44, (work ended 18 Oct 1760), p. 13; A/43, (21 November 1760), p. 9.
- 20 HA, A/44, (1761), p. 14.
- 21 HA, A/44, (1761), p. 14.
- 22 HA, A/44, (work ended 25 May 1761), p. 24.
- 23 Schmidt et al., *Holkham*, p. 126.
- 24 H. Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England: With some Account of the principal Artists*, vol. IV (London, 1782 reprint), p. 242.
- 25 HA, A/44, (1764), p. 40.
- 26 M. Brettingham, [jr.], *The Plans, Elevations and Sections of Holkham in Norfolk, The Seat of the late Earl of Leicester, to which are added, The Ceilings and Chimney Pieces; and also, A Descriptive Account of the Statues, Pictures, and Drawings; Not in the former Edition* (London, 1773). pp. iii-iv.
- 27 HA, A/44, (1760), p. 4.
- 28 HA, A/44, (work ended 8 March 1760), p. 4.
- 29 HA, A/44, (work ended 1761), p. 15.
- 30 HA, A/44, (work ended 4 April 1761), p. 11; A/44, (work ended 2 May 1761). Some of the chimneypieces followed designs by Kent.
- 31 HA, A/44, (1762), p. 27.
- 32 HA, A/44, (1764), p. 44.
- 33 HA, H/Inv 2, p.14; p. 9.
- 34 HA, H/Inv 8, p.14.
- 35 HA, H/Inv 2, p. 9.
- 36 HA, H/Inv 8, p. 8.
- 37 HA, H/Inv 2 p.14; HA, H/Inv 2, p. 9.
- 38 HA, H/Inv 8, p. 8.
- 39 HA, H/Inv 3, p.1.
- 40 M. Brettingham [sr.], *The plans, Elevations and Sections of Holkham in Norfolk* (London: Haberkorn, 1761), plates 14-15.
- 41 HA, A/44, (bill ended 24 July 1762), p. 25.
- 42 M. Brettingham [sr.], *The plans, Elevations and Sections of Holkham* (1761), plate 15.
- 43 *Ibid.*, (1761), plates 14-15; M. Brettingham [jr.], *The Plans, Elevations and Sections of Holkham* (1773), plate not numbered.
- 44 M. Brettingham [jr.], *The Plans, Elevations and Sections of Holkham* (1773). plate 3.
- 45 *Ibid.*, (1773), p. 12; HA, A/44, (bill ended 23 August 1764), p. 47.
- 46 HA, A/44, (1764), p. 43.
- 47 HA, H/Inv 7, p. 2.
- 48 HA, H/Inv 8, p. 3.
- 49 HA, E/G 16, *The Green Book*, undated extract, p. 191.
- 50 Schmidt et al., *Holkham*, p. 138.
- 51 James, *Chief Justice Coke*, p. 294.
- 52 *Ibid.*, p. 295.
- 53 J. Woolfe and J. Gandon, *Vitruvius Britannicus or The British Architect*, V (1771), plate 64.