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THE HIDDEN HAND OF GENIUS: ROBERT ADAM AND THE PULTENEY ESTATE IN SHROPSHIRE

GARETH WILLIAMS

A complicated eighteenth and nineteenth century inheritance of a large Shropshire estate, with one project unbuilt and then another, in the next generation, now greatly altered, has concealed two significant commissions of Robert Adam, including interior designs in the Gothic style. So few are the surviving examples of this aspect of the Adam oeuvre that any new attributions or analyses are of particular importance. This article seeks to reconsider the evidence of Adam's designs for the Pulteney family for Eyton-on-Severn and at Shrewsbury Castle, re-evaluating the role of Thomas Telford at the latter as executant architect rather than lead designer as he has been hitherto described.

Even by eighteenth century standards, the inheritance of the large territorial estates of the Newport family in Shropshire and beyond was fairly unconventional. Illegitimacy, lunacy, scheming and purposeful Acts of Parliament all played a part in creating a complex path of descent, which has made an extremely rocky road for the survival of clear archival details of the estates.

Henry Newport, third Earl of Bradford (1683–1734), had, on the death of his father Richard the second Earl (1644–1723), inherited the family's ancestral Shropshire estates. These comprised the High Erccall property located to the north east of Shrewsbury, which had been owned by the Newports since medieval times and where the house had been slighted, but not restored, following the

Civil War. A fortunate marriage with the Bromley family's heiress in the sixteenth century had also brought the family the Eyton-on-Severn estate, which included lands north and south of the River Severn to the east of Shrewsbury. Henry's grandfather Francis, first Earl of Bradford (1619–1708), who had fought on the side of the King in the Civil War, had been granted Shrewsbury Castle in 1666.¹ This significant building, standing high above the River Severn at the heart of the county town, together with the first Earl's Newport House and further lands at Shrewsbury also formed a conspicuous part of the Newport estate. Outside Shropshire, there was property in Wolverhampton and at Sudborough in Northamptonshire. To this inheritance Henry Newport – the eventual third Earl – added, by purchase in 1711, the barony and manor of Wem, a small town in North Shropshire. Wem's historian, the Rev. Samuel Garbet, who is thought to have died c.1751,² described Lord Bradford as 'affable, generous, kind and obliging [yet]...he had one imperfection, that he chose to keep captain Smith's wife rather than marry a wife of his own'.³ Through this liaison with Ann Smyth (as the name is more usually spelt), a child was produced out of wedlock, known initially as John Harrison (1721–1783). He proved to be mentally unstable, yet his father's will of 1730 left all of the Newport estates to mother and son, with instructions that John should take the name of Newport. The mother of the third Earl of Bradford,⁴ who survived him, sought,

in vain, to challenge the will; she inherited Weston Park, Staffordshire, which was still her possession and ultimately passed via her daughter into the Bridgeman family, who became Earls of Bradford of the second creation in 1815. A seemingly vulnerable heir, as John Newport almost certainly was, soon attracted interest in the form of William Pulteney (1684–1764), who was created Earl of Bath in 1742. Pulteney had known the boy's father, with whom he had undertaken a Grand Tour in 1704–5,⁵ and Ann Smyth may also have been his mistress⁶.

Pulteney claimed descent from an old Leicestershire family who originated in the village of Misterton.⁷ Yet his grandmother had been a Salopian – Grace the daughter of Sir John Corbet first Baronet (1594–1662) of Stoke – and there was evidently a pride in this Shropshire link, since his brother had been named Corbet Pulteney.⁸ Politics were close to Pulteney's heart since he was an ardent Whig, a rival of Walpole and almost a life-long Member of Parliament.⁹ Unsurprisingly, it appears that the Newport Estate and in particular the town of Shrewsbury presented a certain attraction for him, especially since the Newport family had maintained the Whig interest in the town. Pulteney already had considerable property in London, which had come to him by inheritance through his grandfather, Sir William Pulteney or Poultney (1624–91). He had also purchased an estate at Bath from the Earl of Essex in 1726, using funds from a trust under the will of his former political mentor and friend of his grandfather, Henry Guy (1631–1711) of Earl's Court. Like the trusteeship which he undertook for John Newport, this was to bring litigation.¹⁰ In London, Pulteney continued the development of his estates through the sale of leases from 1719 onwards, and streets such as Great Pulteney Street, Sackville Street and Dufour Street, were the results. Inevitably this brought him into contact with a range of architects and builders, and Isaac Ware is known to have been working on the Pulteney property in Sackville Street from 1737.¹¹

As a part of this London work it seems that

Pulteney intended to build himself a grand new town house, to designs by Lord Burlington and drawn up by Henry Flitcroft, probably in the 1720s, in a sophisticated Venetian-inspired style.¹² Flitcroft, who was also involved in the development of some of the plots on the Pulteney Estate in London, evidently had a fairly serious run-in with Pulteney, who gave full vent to his vengeful feelings in a letter to the Dean of Westminster in 1742:

'There is one Flitcroft in the Board of works, who used me extremely ill, and whom I intended to get removed from his employment if I could... When I came to try my strength, I found this Flitcroft had many great supporters, and among others the Duke of Cumberland, so that I was forced to drop my pursuit against him...'¹³

The Pulteney town house on Piccadilly – Bath House, as it was later styled – was in fact altered by Giacomo Leoni in 1735. Demolished in 1821, apparently with no recorded interiors, an engraving of the early nineteenth century shows a quiet three storied frontage set back across a courtyard; it is a world apart from Burlington's stylish Palladian vision illustrated in the despised Flitcroft's drawings.¹⁴

Pulteney's character is illustrated not only in the vindictive passage in his 1742 letter to the Dean of Westminster, but by Horace Walpole who related a story of a tradesman owed £800, which points to not only a miserly man but one keen to retain his public face.¹⁵ After numerous fruitless requests for the outstanding money, the man had followed Pulteney to church where: 'The sermon was on avarice, and the text, "Cursed are they that heap up riches." The man groaned out, "O Lord!" and pointed to my Lord Bath; in short he persisted so much and drew the eyes of all the congregation, that my Lord Bath went out and paid him directly.' Heaping up riches and public display – yet with as little outlay as possible – seem, in many ways, to sum up William Pulteney.

Where the Newport Estates in Shropshire were concerned, Pulteney secured his attachment to them as a trustee for the mentally unstable John

Newport and was able to persuade the boy's mother Anne Smyth to leave the reversion of the estates to him and his heirs. To ensure that the 'lunatick', as John Newport was referred to, did not in any way complicate the transition, Pulteney was able to use his influence to ensure that an act was passed in 1742 to prevent the marriage of lunatics. This act was sometimes referred to as the Bradford Act.¹⁶ The year of the Act was the same year in which Pulteney was raised to the peerage as Earl of Bath, so the legislation might be seen as a further means of ensuring his own family's succession, spurred on by the ennoblement and by his withdrawal from the real political power that the House of Commons had previously offered to him.

Whilst some of his time was spent on his Bath estates,¹⁷ Pulteney was also spending an increasing amount of time in Shropshire. Anna, Lady Bath had died in 1758, and the Earl became Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire in 1761 until his death three years later. Perhaps it was in anticipation of the conferment of the Lieutenantancy that he considered building on the Newport estate. His son and intended heir William,

Viscount Pulteney (1731–1763), was encouraged by the Earl to run as Member of Parliament for Shrewsbury, but this was thwarted by the Shropshire Whigs. Instead, a militia was planned with both the Earl and his son at the helm, for which the bill of Parliament received royal assent in 1757. It was not carried into effect until 1763, though, by which time Viscount Pulteney had gone to serve with the army in Portugal.¹⁸ With the formation of the militia and also the requirement to provide hospitality to fellow trustees of the Newport Estate, the Earl of Bath was given the opportunity to build what seems to be his lasting architectural legacy in Shrewsbury. This is the handsome town house that he built on the Town Walls at the very heart of the county town: Bath House or Swan Hill Court House, a small Palladian villa opportunisticly framed from the road by two gate piers and intended to be seen across an expanse of garden but now hidden behind a dark green wall of Leylandii. This was built for him in 1761 to the design of Thomas Farnolls Pritchard of Shrewsbury, with a contract drawn up for Pritchard and one John Corfield in Chancery.¹⁹

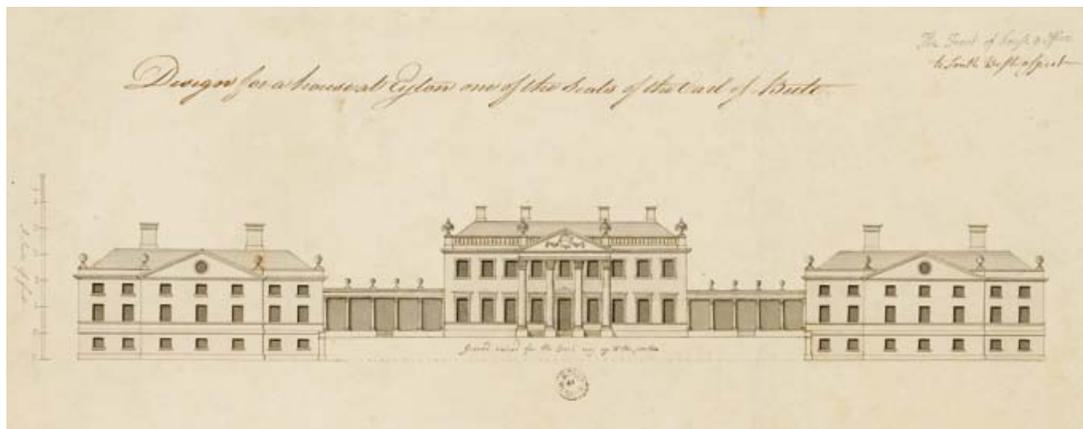


Fig. 1. Unknown architect, unexecuted proposal for Eyton Inscribed 'Design for a house at Eyton one of the Seats of the Earl of Bute' [-in the hand of William Adam] underwritten in pencil / The Front of house & Offices / to South West Aspect / Ground raised for the Coach way up to the portico (verso). Pen, pencil and wash on laid paper, w/m 'LVG' surmounted by fleur de lis within crowned cartouche, 533 × 254mm. (*Sir John Soane's Museum (SM), Adam vols. 39/42*)

However, two distinct sets of plans in the Sir John Soane's Museum suggest that this was not the only piece of building that Lord Bath had in mind, and that, perhaps prior to the conception of Swan Hill Court House, he intended to build a new seat at Eyton-on-Severn, where Henry, third Earl of Bradford, was said to have dismantled the old family seat.²⁰ One of the proposals for a replacement is by a provincial hand, but the other is from the office of Robert Adam, perhaps by the draughtsmen William Hamilton or Robert Nasmyth.²¹ The two sets of plans have been subjected to a confused process of past cataloguing, due to the conflicting inscriptions upon each. But an understanding of the handwriting – for which the present writer is indebted to Dr Frances Sands – together with a consideration of the other site previously suggested as the location of the intended buildings, bears out the notion that the plans were intended for Shropshire. The confusions arose initially from inscriptions that were seemingly added to both sets of plans by William Adam the younger after his brother Robert's death. 'Designs for a house at Eyton one of the Seats of the Earl of Bute', was written across the head of the elevation of the entrance front of the first set of designs; the floor plans were similarly annotated with the suggestion that the client was Bute, King George III's first Prime Minister. The Adam set of drawings, however, present a stylish Neo-classical reinvention of the other elevations and plans and are inscribed, again in William Adam's hand, 'The Seat of the Earl of Bath'. The conclusive evidence seems to come from an inscription on the reverse of one of the first set of drawings, clearly in the hand of Robert Adam, which conclusively states 'Lord Bath/ x 4 Elevations 3 Plans', the reference to the numbers of plans having been crossed out.²² Another drawing in Sir John Soane's Museum, this time a rough sketch in Robert Adam's hand for the plan of a house which is clearly that shown in his presentation drawings, gives further evidence of location to the Adam-authored drawings. This drawing is inscribed 'Sketch for Lord Bath.'²³

The first set of drawings display features which suggest a Midlands mason or architect such as Charles Cope Trubshaw (1715–1772), William Hiorne (c.1712–1776) or possibly William Baker of Audlem (1705–1771). The style of the drawing and the handwriting indicate that the design is not by T.F.Pritchard, whose drawings are more self-assured. The grand house shown would have had an entrance front facing south-west (Fig.1), with a main block raised upon a rusticated plinth, a tetrastyle Corinthian portico, an urn-crowned balustraded parapet, and lugged surrounds to the first-floor windows. This centre range was to be linked, by single-storeyed ball-surmounted Tuscan Doric colonnades, to pedimented service pavilions that would have been almost the size of the main block. On the garden front, which was to have faced north-east, a full-height canted bay projects from the centre of the main block with arched headed windows on its *piano nobile*, flanked to each side by Venetian windows, above which were intended to be awkward pairs of rectangular windows. It was a pretentious proposal, the main block and Tuscan colonnades perhaps intended to recall Bath's old adversary Walpole's Houghton, yet handled in a manner which falls well below par. The pavilions, rusticated basement and canted bay on the garden front have similarities to Teddesley in Staffordshire, a house where both Trubshaw and Baker worked.²⁴

The plans were presumably shown to Adam by Lord Bath, and Adam's drawings brilliantly reinvented both elevations and plans. The rusticated basement, Corinthian portico and flanking pavilions remain in Adam's proposals, yet the scale of the main block's elevations are reduced with Venetian windows flanking both portico of the entrance front (Fig.2) and the centre of the garden front (Fig.3), which has been transformed to a full-height segmental projecting bay embraced by giant Corinthian columns. Within, inside the Drawing Room, the curved window wall is mirrored with a segmental niche on the room's inner side, with

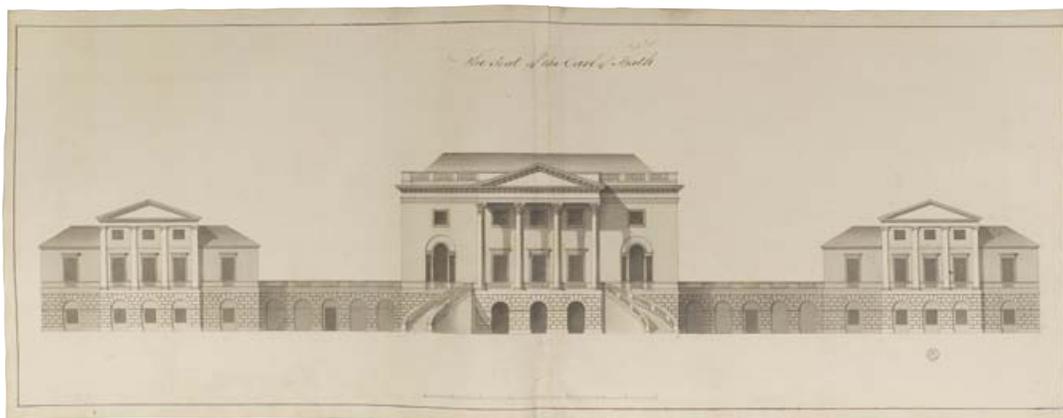


Fig. 2. Office of Robert Adam, possibly William Hamilton or Robert Nasmyth, elevation inscribed ‘The Seat of The Earl of Bath’ [-in the hand of William Adam] ‘Bute (Eyton)’ [-in pencil in the hand of A.T. Bolton] Pen, pencil and wash within a single ruled border on laid paper, w/m footed ‘p’, 648 × 466 mm. (*SM Adam vols. 41/14*)

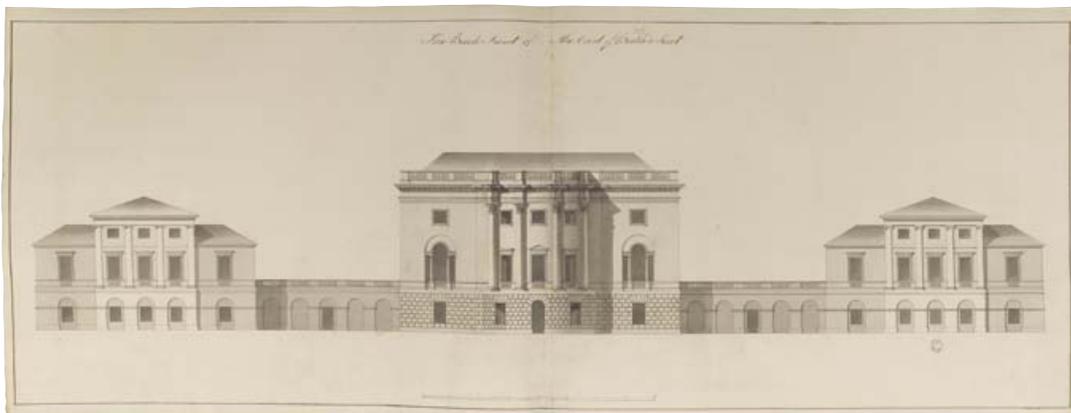


Fig.3. Office of Robert Adam, possibly William Hamilton or Robert Nasmyth, elevation inscribed ‘The Back Front of The Earl of Bath’s Seat’ [-in the hand of William Adam and underwritten in pencil] ‘Bute’ [-in pencil in the hand of A.T. Bolton] Pen, pencil and wash within a single ruled border on laid paper, w/m footed ‘p’, 642 × 467 mm. (*SM Adam vols. 41/11*)

both niche and windows divided from the body of the room by pairs of columns (Fig.4). To the left of the Drawing Room, a Library was to open into – successively – the Ante-Room, ‘My Lord’s Bed Chamber’, and ‘My Lord’s Dressing Room’, completing an *enfilade* along the side of the house. On the other side, the Drawing Room would have

opened into the Dining Room, which was to have a narrow lobby joining it to an Eating Room on the entrance front. The Hall, set behind the portico, would have led to a columned staircase hall leading through to the door at the centre of the Drawing Room’s niche. The service wing and the stables wing, each compact five-bay blocks with an elevated

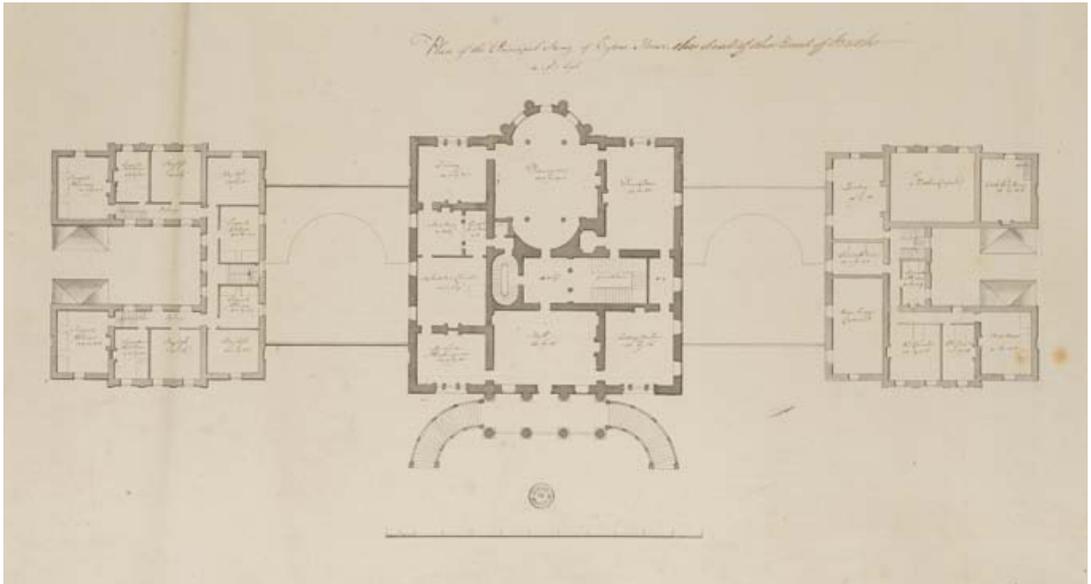


Fig. 4. Office of Robert Adam, possibly William Hamilton or Robert Nasmyth, plan of piano nobile, inscribed 'Plan of the Principal Story of Eyton House the Seat of the Earl of Bath' [the Seat of the Earl of Bath in the hand of William Adam], pencil and wash within a single ruled border on laid paper, w/m footed 'p', 652 × 466mm. (*SM Adam vols. 41/14*)

three-bay pedimented centrepiece, were to be united with the main block with rusticated balustrade screen walls set with blind arcades, allowing the main block of the house to hold a dominant place in the composition.

Adam's plans lack reference to apartments designed specifically for Lady Bath, suggesting that the plans date from after her death in 1758 and, of course, prior to Lord Bath's own demise in 1764. Within this relatively brief window of time, though, Bath had built Pritchard's Swan Hill Court in 1761–2 and then in 1763 buried his son, Viscount Pulteney.

When the Earl of Bath himself died in 1764,²⁵ his interest in the Newport Estate passed to his brother General Harry Pulteney (1686–1767), who seems to have had little concern for the Shropshire properties and who died just three years later in 1767. With the General's demise, his successor was a niece, Frances, daughter of Daniel Pulteney (1682–1731). In 1760 she

had married William Johnstone (1729–1805), third son of Sir James Johnstone, third Baronet (1697–1772), of Westerhall, Dumfries. He was ultimately to succeed his elder brother James (1726–1794) as fifth baronet but, when wife inherited Lord Bath's estates in 1767, he took the name of Pulteney in lieu of his patronymic Johnstone. William Pulteney immediately took an interest in the inheritance, unsuccessfully contesting Shrewsbury in the general election of 1768 against Lord Clive and Noel Hill. Any plans for a new house at Eyton-on-Severn, though, were shelved and the former Newport mansion site there was leased in 1767 to Thomas Farnolls Pritchard, who cleared what remained of the Tudor house and added to the most westerly of a pair of summerhouses on its terrace to create a farmhouse for himself.²⁶

The new Pulteney at the estate's helm was renowned for his frugality, Sir John Sinclair saying

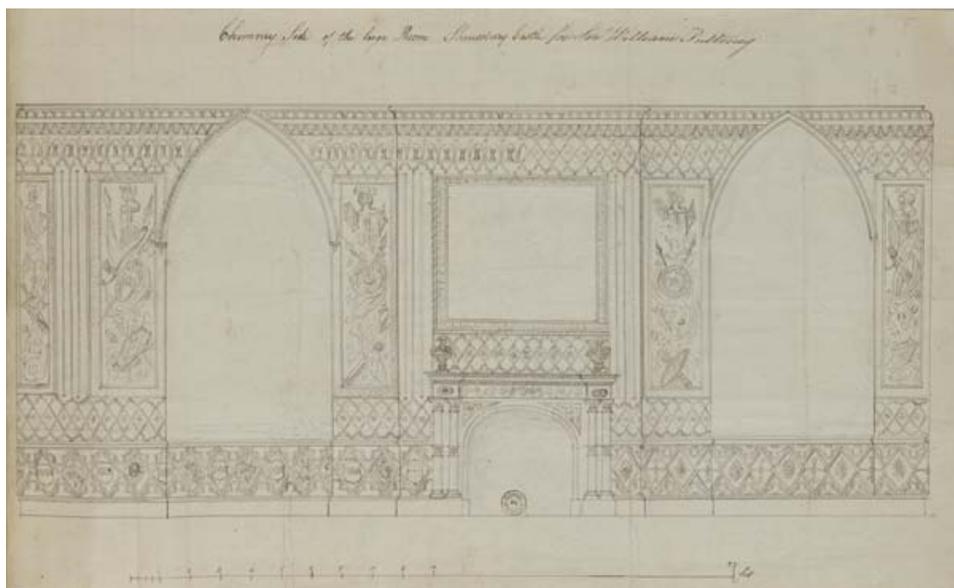


Fig. 5. Office of Robert Adam, elevation inscribed 'Chimney Side of the large Room Shrewsbury Castle for Sir William Pulteney', pen and pencil. (*SM Adam vols. 50–84*)

of him: 'having been accustomed to live on £200 a year, he thought it a great extravagance to spend £2,000 per annum, when he might have spent £20,000'.²⁷ In spite of his meanness, he had a strong sense of business acumen in accruing properties in America²⁸ and in attempts to create fisheries on his Scottish estates²⁹. In Bath, he commissioned Robert Adam to draw up plans for a new town on the Pulteney family's Bathwick estate; these remained largely unexecuted in his lifetime, although Adam's Pulteney Bridge plans were brought into being in 1769–1774.³⁰ Adam, a fellow Scot, also worked for Pulteney's younger brother the nabob John Johnstone (1734–1795), designing the Johnstone Mausoleum and Alva House in Clackmannanshire c.1789. That Adam was a close personal friend of William Pulteney's is borne out by Pulteney being one of the pall bearers at Adam's funeral in 1792.³¹

Pulteney, Adam and Thomas Telford represent

an interesting triangle of characters, the full understanding of the interrelationships between whom would benefit from even more primary documentary evidence than at present appears to exist. This is especially the case where a group of three Adam drawings in Sir John Soane's Museum relating to Shrewsbury Castle are concerned.³² Two of the drawings (Figs. 5 & 6) have been later inscribed to indicate that they were for the 'Large Room, Shrewsbury Castle for Sir William Pulteney', one being for the chimney wall and the other for the wall opposite. The third (Fig.7), entitled 'Section for Sir William Pulteney', comprises a wall section above an elevation showing a Gothick chimneypiece framed by a pair of gothic tracery-headed apsidal recesses. The two drawings for the 'Large Room' each show a pair of windows which flank, in one case (Fig.5), a chimneypiece below a frame for a looking glass or painting. In the other (Fig.6) the windows

embrace a pointed-headed frame with a depiction of a man in armour in position of *contrapposto* as he leans against a spear. Both show exuberant Gothic decoration of a form described by Arthur Bolton as ‘Wild Gothic of the Alnwick type’.³³ The decoration does, indeed, have close affinities with Adam’s now-vanished work in the Saloon at Alnwick Castle, Northumberland,³⁴ with the figure in the frame in Shrewsbury closely similar to another at Alnwick. Frames of classically-inspired trophies derived from those in the Piazza del Campidoglio at Rome, such as Adam also used at Syon, Osterley and Newby,³⁵ appear in rectangular outer panels of the Shrewsbury room. Below the dado in each drawing, Adam suggests either cusped diagonal lattice panels centred with escutcheons, bearing the Pulteney arms, or – in the case of the chimneypiece wall scheme only – a right hand option of the lattice panels being centred alternately with a patera, as he was also to offer at Alnwick. The Pulteney crest, of a leopard’s head, is meanwhile reserved as a repeated ornament in lancet-headed grounds as a frieze or, alternatively, on the right hand of each drawing, a diagonal lattice treatment is shown. On the chimneypiece wall, the chimneypiece itself has paired collared columns, each with stiff-leaf capitals supporting patera-carved blocks that embrace a scroll-carved frieze.

What is the date of this scheme? The Alnwick scheme was of c.1769 and it would seem plausible, in view of Adam’s involvement on the Pulteney Bath estate at the same time, combined with William Pulteney’s political ambitions for Shrewsbury in 1768, that the drawings were produced at this date. What might add further evidence to this dating is that Thomas Farnolls Pritchard seems to have been aware of the drawings, since several of the chimneypiece drawings in his Drawing Book³⁶ are closely related to that shown in the sectional drawing and elevation for Sir William Pulteney (Fig.7). One of Pritchard’s drawings for Sir Charlton Leighton of Loton Park,³⁷ and another for a dressing room for Plowden Slaney at Hatton Grange³⁸ – both

commissions on which Pritchard was working between 1768 and his death in 1777 – have similar features including the repeated stiff-leaf and Gothic-arched frieze and pairs of cluster columns with collared stiff-leaf capitals.³⁹

For any visitor to Shrewsbury, the Castle was a conspicuous building, rising above the River Severn at the neck of an isthmus that was bounded by a great loop of the river, within which Shropshire’s county town had developed. Rebuilt by Roger de Montgomery in the Norman period, after further thirteenth-century rebuildings and later changes, the Castle passed to Francis Newport, first Earl of Bradford, in 1666. Attempts were made to transform the main hall range and its two great drum towers into a house in around 1730 by a Mr Gosnell of Rossall, an estate to the west of the town, who succeeded in creating what was described as a ‘gloomy inconvenient habitation’.⁴⁰ Works to effect a restoration as a ‘handsome house’⁴¹ had to wait, it seems, until 1787, by which time Pulteney had succeeded in being returned as MP for Shrewsbury following a vigorous petition after the 1774 election,⁴² by which date the supposed beneficiary of the Newport Estate, the ‘lunatick’ John Newport, had been dead for four years. It was in 1787 that Thomas Telford arrived in Shrewsbury, having been engaged previously as Clerk of Works in the building of Samuel Wyatt’s Admiralty House at Portsmouth.⁴³ Of this work with Wyatt, Telford wrote: ‘My superintendence afforded me experience in house-building of a higher class and on a greater scale than previously had been entrusted to me’.⁴⁴

On the same page he continued: ‘...the late Sir William Pulteney...invited me into Shropshire, to superintend some alterations in Shrewsbury Castle, which he wished to fit up as a temporary residence’.⁴⁵ Since Telford used the term ‘superintendence, when describing the work that he did for Wyatt at Portsmouth, the inference of him using the same term to describe his work at Shrewsbury Castle in the 1780s is that he was

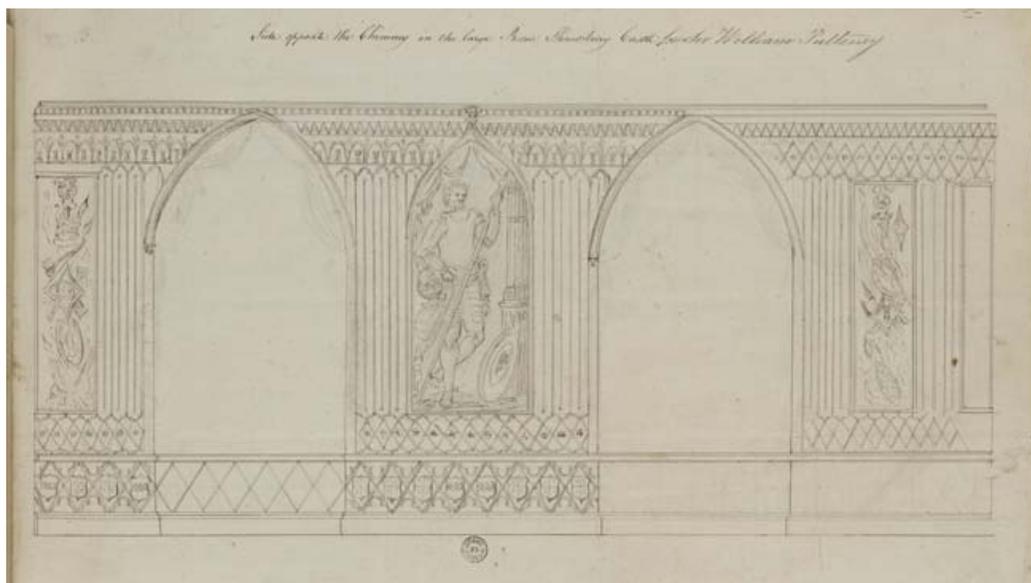


Fig. 6. Office of Robert Adam, elevation inscribed 'Side Opposite the Chimney in the large Room Shrewsbury Castle for Sir William Pulteney', pen and pencil. (*SM Adam vols. 50-83*)

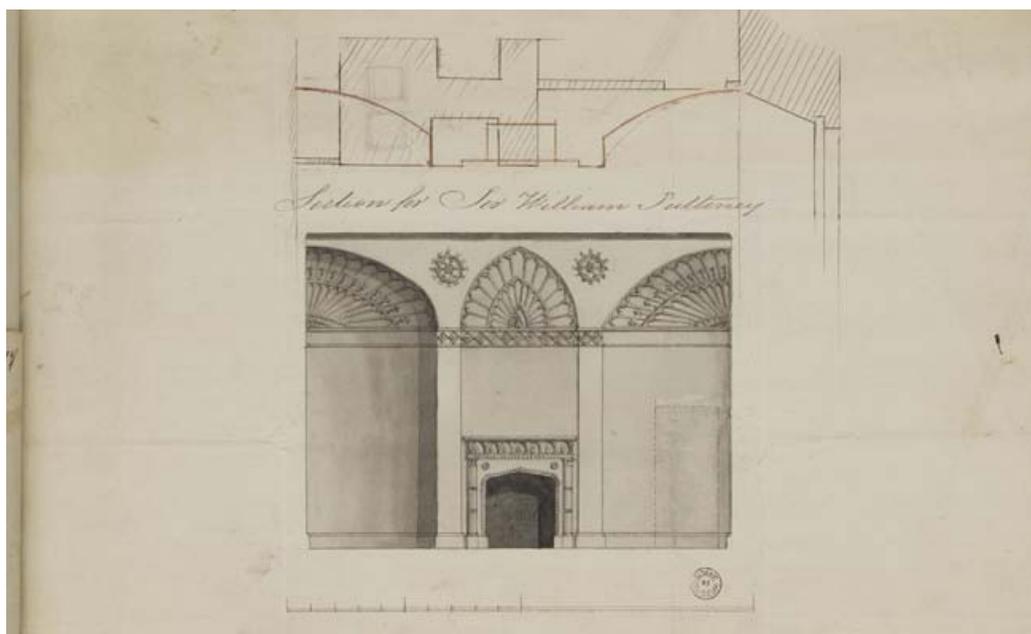


Fig. 7. Office of Robert Adam, elevation and section inscribed 'Section for Sir William Pulteney', pen and pencil. (*SM Adam vols. 50-85*)

probably working to someone else's designs. It was only later writers who assumed that the design of the alterations and ancillary structures, rather than merely its execution, was Telford's – the first being Henry Pigeon in 1837,⁴⁶ from whom subsequent writers have taken their cue in the absence of alternative documentary evidence. By 1791, though, William Pulteney clearly considered Telford to be an architect in his own right; writing to his brother Sir James Johnstone, he referred to 'Mr Thomas Telford, a most ingenious architect, now settled at Shrewsbury, a native of Eskdale'.⁴⁷ In 1787, however, Telford had also become clerk of works at Shrewsbury Gaol, and Adam's direct knowledge of his work and abilities appears evident, in that he was a referee for his fellow Scot for the project.⁴⁸

The results of Telford's 'superintendence' at Shrewsbury Castle were described in 1808:⁴⁹

'The entrance opens upon a handsome stone stair-case, erected on the late reparation:- at which time also, the vestibule was adorned by a statue of Earl Roger, copied from his figure on the tower of the Abbey Church. This stair-case leads to the principal apartments, which, except a modern circular eating room, are all on the first and second floors. The drawing room is very spacious and handsome, and from the style of ornament on its door, appears to have assumed its present form in the times of Charles I. when it was the guard chamber...'

Since that date much of the eighteenth-century layer of the Castle's history has unfortunately been erased. The eventual inheritor of the Pulteney Estate, the tenth Lord Barnard (1888–1964), sold the Castle in 1924 to the Shropshire Horticultural Society who, in turn, gifted the property to Shrewsbury Borough Council. Prior to the sale, the Castle had been tenanted by the Downward family and after the death of the last of the Misses Downward, a period of neglect apparently followed⁵⁰. The eighteenth century layer of the building's history was largely disregarded by the architect Sir Charles Nicholson when he undertook a restoration for Shrewsbury

Council in 1926–7 to remedy the effects of the neglect and to restore the medieval features of the building. This work led to the creation of the current first-floor entrance and steps at the north east corner of the Hall range, the replacement of pointed headed wooden sash windows on the east drum tower with casements, and the substitution throughout with leaded glazing instead of the crown glass in Georgian sashes. Most destructive though was the reconfiguration of the interior as a council chamber, which saw to the removal of the 'handsome stone stair-case', the stripping of the first-floor drawing room, and the removal of the ceiling between first and second floor within the hall range, in order that the carved early seventeenth-century beams of the roof structure could be exposed to view.

Today, sadly few of the eighteenth-century rooms remain. On the ground floor, only the 'modern circular eating room', with its wheat-ear ornamented cornices and a relatively plain chimney-piece, still retaining a pierced steel grate, is to be found. It is entered through a contemporary cusped lancet-headed and quatrefoil-set door case. Adjacent, a small ante-room also remains, containing a continuation of the wheat-eared frieze. This is entered through a pair of six panelled doors, each panel ornamented with pointed chevron mouldings which echo that on the supposedly seventeenth-century oak gates to the castle grounds. On the first floor the Mayor's Parlour, a small former drawing room contained within the west tower, also still retains its eighteenth-century decoration. Here a small rectangular lobby has been ingeniously created, from the existing walls of the irregular medieval plan, as a prelude to the larger body of the main room. This use of geometrical form and the adaptation of the ancient fabric bears out the preoccupation of creating a harmonious ensemble that is illustrated by Adam in the sectional drawing in the Soane Museum,⁵¹ although that drawing was intended for works in another room, probably the lost ground-floor vestibule (Fig.7). Within the Mayor's Parlour,



Fig. 8. Chimneypiece in the Mayor's Parlour, Shrewsbury Castle, 2015. The chimneypiece is of stone and plaster imitating Sienna and statuary marble. The plasterwork probably by Joseph Bromfield. *(Photo: the author)*



Fig. 9. Plaster frieze and cornice in Laura's Tower, a castellated summerhouse in the grounds of Shrewsbury Castle, 2015. *(Photo: the author)*

an ogival-headed chimneypiece, painted to imitate Sienna marble, incorporates a plaster trophy of musical instruments that were perhaps the work of Joseph Bromfield,⁵² the Shrewsbury plasterer who had begun his career with Thomas Farnolls Pritchard (Fig.8).

Outside in the grounds, on the site of a former watch tower, stands Laura's Tower, a conical-roofed embattled octagonal turret of two storeys, named after Pulteney's nervous daughter Henrietta Laura (1766–1808), who succeeded to her mother's property rights in 1782 and was created Baroness (1792) and Countess (1803) of Bath in her own right.⁵³ Its main first-floor room, which enjoys exceptional views across the river and Shropshire

plain, is approached by a graceful perron of steps. Although now fitted with Nicholson's leaded windows, the interior still presents a pretty display of eighteenth-century-designed plasterwork. Clustered columns rise the full height of the room, embracing door, windows and a slight cusped ogee-headed chimneypiece with crocketed central finial. The clustered columns continue above the windows' pointed heads as decorated ogee mouldings, with trefoils above the points (Fig.9) – a feature that Adam used in his c.1769 designs for the end walls of the Alnwick Castle Library,⁵⁴ and which are also reminiscent of his work in Croome Church, Worcestershire, of 1761–3.⁵⁵

These extant eighteenth-century parts of



Fig. 10. The former Drawing Room, Shrewsbury Castle, c.1890, showing a chimneypiece which conforms to the design shown in Fig.5. The room was destroyed during Sir Charles Nicholson's 1926–7 works to the Castle and the whereabouts of the chimneypiece is unknown.
(Photo: Courtesy of David Trumper)

Shrewsbury Castle do not, of course, relate directly to the features shown in the three surviving Adam drawings, since the rooms depicted have been destroyed. Yet two photographs dating to around 1890 from a private collection have recently come to light showing the main drawing room of the Castle, that 'spacious and handsome' room of the 1808 description.⁵⁶ The plasterwork of the Adam drawings is not evident in either photograph, suggesting that Pulteney may have felt that for personal aesthetic reasons this needed toning down in execution. Equally plausibly, in view of his parsimonious reputation, he may have desired that the costs be trimmed. Yet there, in one of the photographs (Fig.10), shown between the two windows, under a helmet, breastplate and pair of

crossed halberds, is a chimneypiece that conforms to the design shown in the Adam drawing of the wall elevation (Fig.5).⁵⁷ The other image of the room (Fig.11) also shows the mitre-moulded panelled door, to centre left, that was inferred when Owen described the room in 1808 and 'from the style of ornament on its door' gauged that it dated from Carolean times. Owen – who went on to co-author the magisterial two volume *History of Shrewsbury* in 1825 – had a good eye, but was he mistaken in the actual date of this door? Adam, on rare occasions, could consciously imitate the Jacobean,⁵⁸ whilst geometrically moulded Jacobean revival doors appear to have formed a part of the mid eighteenth-century alterations at Welbeck Abbey, Nottinghamshire.⁵⁹ At Shrewsbury Castle,



Fig.11. The former Drawing Room, Shrewsbury Castle, c.1890. The wall opposite the chimneypiece with, visible to left, a mitre moulded panelled door of Jacobean revival design similar to that which survives on the ground floor. (Photo: Courtesy of David Trumper)

the original Pulteney ground-floor front door, which is exuberantly mitre-moulded, follows a similar pattern, whilst another internal door also survives in truncated form. Now sited on a cleaning cupboard at ground floor level, this latter door appears to have been cut down and seems to be of eighteenth-century construction. Its former higher-level status is borne out by a precious survival of a set of mercury gilded brass door furniture (Fig.12), which must have been supplied by one of the pre-eminent makers such as Thomas Blockley.⁶⁰ Adam, of course, had produced designs for similar quality Neo-classical door furniture for Pulteney's great friend Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn of Wynnstay, Denbighshire, and of St James' Square, London, and the Shrewsbury Castle survivor takes its cue from such elegant

authorship. Finely cast, it is a world apart from the pared-back neo-medieval surroundings that Nicholson's twentieth-century reorganisation of the Castle interior has inflicted upon its surroundings. It does, though, even in its isolated position, emphasise the quality of the interiors that Adam had intended for Pulteney and in which Telford's overseeing work gave him, as an aspiring architect, a helpful induction following his early training under Samuel Wyatt.

Without a complete surviving Pulteney archive, a detailed understanding of the great properties, immense wealth and the architectural consumption of this extraordinary family is extremely difficult to achieve. The acquisitions made by William Pulteney, Earl of Bath – some of them in the most questionable of circumstances – and then the



Fig.12. Mercury-gilded brass door furniture of late eighteenth century date surviving on the ground floor cleaner's cupboard at Shrewsbury Castle, 2015.

(Photo: the author)

disjointed subsequent fate of the property have added to the difficulty of assimilating the Pulteney inheritance. Added to the lack of substantive primary documentary evidence, the enthusiasm of historians for the earlier history of both Eyton-on-Severn and Shrewsbury Castle has led, initially, to a lack of recording of the eighteenth-century layers at each site. The insistence of subsequent writers for the pre-eminence of Thomas Telford and his unquestionable abilities has further denied a consideration of any other hand having been engaged at Shrewsbury Castle. For the Castle, the previously unconsidered evidence of nineteenth-century photographs, the apparent lack of recording which was followed by the disregard shown by Sir Charles Nicholson in his 1920s work, have worked almost to erase the contribution made by Robert Adam to this important building. Whilst Eyton-on-Severn's eighteenth-century Adam reinvention remained only a dream, Shrewsbury Castle can be seen not only as a notable, previously unrecognised, part of Adam's Gothic *oeuvre* but also as further proof of this significant architect's support for Thomas Telford's career in Shropshire and beyond.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 William A. Champion & Alan Thacker (eds.) *Victoria County History Shropshire*, VI pt.1 (London, 2014), p. 184.
- 2 Samuel Garbet's *The History of Wem* (Wem, 1818) was published posthumously in 1818.
- 3 Garbet, *op.cit.*, pp. 106–7.
- 4 Mary Wilbraham (1661–1737), daughter of Sir Thomas Wilbraham, Bt., of Woodhey, Cheshire, and Elizabeth Mytton. She had married Richard Newport, second Earl of Bradford in 1681.
- 5 J. Ingamells (ed.), *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy* (New Haven & London, 1997), p. 705.
- 6 See R. Sedgwick (ed.), *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1715–1754*, (London, 1970) at <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1715-1754/member/newport-henry-1683-1734>.
- 7 This appears to have been something that his grandfather Sir William Poultney had instigated by adapting his surname to the spelling of the ancient Leicestershire family. See R. Sedgwick (ed.), *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1715–1754*, (London, 1970) at <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1715-1754/member/pulteney-william-1684-1764>.
- 8 Lady Bath's Pedigree, RIBA Library COC/Add5/51. When Pulteney built Bath House in Shrewsbury in 1761 to T.F. Pritchard's designs, a painting of Moreton Corbet Castle, the former Corbet seat, was used as an overmantle painting in one of the rooms.

- 9 See R. Sedgwick (ed.) *op. cit.* 1970.
- 10 The Pulteney property comprised the manors of Bathwick and Wrington. Documentation relating to the Pulteney family ownership can be found at Somerset Heritage Centre, ref. DD\BR\tjf. For the Henry Guy trust litigation specifically, see DD\BR\tjf/6. Henry Guy had been Secretary of the Treasury and had brought Pulteney into Parliament for the Yorkshire East Riding borough of Hedon. On his death in February 1710 William Pulteney inherited his estate of £500 a year and £40,000 in cash.
- 11 See F.H.W. Sheppard (ed.), *Survey of London, vol. 36: Covent Garden* (London, 1970), pp. 263–5.
- 12 RIBA Drawings Collection SD149/VI/3 (1–2). See Pamela D. Kingsbury, *Lord Burlington's Town Architecture* (RIBA, 1995), pp. 74–6.
- 13 Westminster Abbey Muniments (WAM) 64662 Letter from William Pulteney to Zachary Pearce, Dean of Westminster.
- 14 The exterior is illustrated in an early nineteenth-century engraving reproduced in Arthur Irwin Dasent, *Piccadilly in Three Centuries* (London, 1920), facing p. 72. Leoni was also to provide the design for the monument to Pulteney's younger brother Daniel, who predeceased him in 1731. Executed by Rysbrack, yet signed with Leoni's name, this stands in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey.
- 15 Related in Edward Walford, *Mansions in Piccadilly, in Old and New London*, IV (London, 1878), pp. 273–290.
- 16 1041 15 Geo. 2. Cap 30, Marriage of Lunatics Statutes: *An Act to Prevent the Marriage of Lunatics*.
- 17 Letters to Dean Zachary Pearce from Pulteney, WAM 64682–3 and 64691–3, make reference to the waters in Bath and to society there.
- 18 H. Owen and J.B. Blakeway, *A History of Shrewsbury* (London, 1825), I, pp. 509–10.
- 19 A full description is given, and the house illustrated, in Julia Ionides, *Thomas Farnolls Pritchard of Shrewsbury Architect and Inventor of Cast Iron Bridges* (Ludlow, 1999), pp. 160–5.
- 20 Garbet, *op. cit.*, p. 106, states that 'He slighted Eyton, resided chiefly at Shrewsbury or Shiffnall [sic.], when he was in the country.'
- 21 *Ex inf.* Dr Frances Sands.
- 22 There are, in fact, two elevations and four plans surviving in the Soane Museum (SM) Adam volumes (1) 39/43, (2) 39/44, (3) 39/45, (4) 39/46, (5) 39/41, (6) 39/42. The Robert Adam hand inscription is on SM Adam volume 39/42.
- 23 SM Adam volume 4/ 66. The ambiguity of client inscriptions on these drawings has confused the location of the intended building. A.T. Bolton had suggested that the drawings were perhaps for Ayton in the former county of Berwickshire in the Scottish Borders. Whilst Adam apparently worked at Ayton, the client there would have been James Fordyce (1735–1809,) Commissioner for Lands and Forests of Scotland, who acquired the estate in 1765 and there appears to be no record of Bute ownership of that property.
- 24 Baker had added the service pavilions at Teddesley which have strong similarities to those shown in SM, Adam volumes, drawings 39/41 and 39/42.
- 25 He was buried in the Islip Chapel, Westminster Abbey and has a handsome monument by Joseph Wilton.
- 26 Pritchard also continued to be used by the Pulteney/ Newport estate in undertaking surveys at Sudborough, Northants. Thomas Telford was also to work at Sudborough on the Rectory.
- 27 John Sinclair, *The Correspondence of the Right Honourable Sir John Sinclair, Bart....2 Vols.* (London, 1831), p. 367 cited in <http://www.historyorparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/pulteney-william-1729-1805>.
- 28 See http://www.crookedlakereview.com/articles/101_135/132summer2004/132johnstone.html.
- 29 Pulteney was Governor of the British Fisheries Society. See, for instance, John Sinclair, *Memoirs of the life and works of... Sir John Sinclair, Bart.* (London, 1837), pp. 352–3.
- 30 Historic England Listing Listing, NGR: ST7519464952.
- 31 Roderick Graham, *Arbiter of Elegance: A Biography of Robert Adam* (London, 2009), pp. 328–329.
- 32 SM Adam Volumes 50: 83; 50:84; 50:85.
- 33 Cited in Stephen Astley, *Robert Adam's Castles* (Soane Gallery, 2000), p. 12.
- 34 Sir John Soane's Museum: SM Adam vol. 39/16.
- 35 See D. Stillman, *The Decorative Work of Robert Adam*, (London, 1966), p. 64.
- 36 Original in the American Institute of Architects Library, Washington D.C (AIA)., reproduced in facsimile in Ionides, 1999.

- 37 AIA52.
- 38 AIA58.
- 39 There are a number of other Pritchard chimneypieces that suggest that he had access to Adam drawings. The Dining Room chimneypiece at Bitterley Court, Shropshire is a case in point. Dating from c.1769, its ogee-arched hearth opening, with the mouldings of the ogee's point continuing into the frieze, has notable similarities to surviving Adam designed chimneypieces that are now in the bedrooms at Alnwick Castle.
- 40 Anon [Hugh Owen], *Some Account of the Ancient and Present State of Shrewsbury* (Shrewsbury, 1808), p. 68.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- 42 <http://www.historyorparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/pulteney-william-1729-1805>.
- 43 He had, in 1783-4, been engaged by Pulteney on alterations and repairs at Sudborough Rectory, Northants. And, where the Johnstone's Scottish ancestral home was concerned, in July 1783 Telford had written to Andrew Little to say 'Mr Pulteney and I have made 100 alterations in Westerhall' (Historic Scotland, Westerhall, Dumfries and Galloway Listing: Ref. 16936).
- 44 James Rickman (ed.), *Life of Thomas Telford* (London, 1838), p. 20.
- 45 *Ibid.*
- 46 Henry Pigeon, *Memorials of Shrewsbury* (Shrewsbury, 1837), p. 16 Writing of Laura's Tower, the turret erected on the site of a watch tower he credits this 'from a design and under the superintendence of the late Thomas Telford, Esq.'
- 47 National Records of Scotland, NRA 28867/GD/224/31/8, William Pulteney to Sir James Johnstone 27 July 1791.
- 48 J.B.Lawson 'Thomas Telford in Shrewsbury', in Alastair Penfold (ed.) *Thomas Telford: Engineer* (London, 1980), p. 3.
- 49 Anon [Hugh Owen], *Some Account of the Ancient and Present State of Shrewsbury* (Shrewsbury, 1808), p. 68. The figure of Earl Roger referred to was of 1769 and was the work of statuary John Nelson (1726-1812): see Rupert Gunnis, *Dictionary of British Sculptors 1660-1851* (London, 1968), pp. 270-1. The statue was damaged in the twentieth century and only its head now survives, recently put on display in the collection of the Shrewsbury Museum.
- 50 It has been suggested that vandalism led to water ingress which cause severe damage to the softwood boarded first floor of the main building: *Ex inf.* Mr John Taylor.
- 51 SM Adam volumes 50/85.
- 52 The trophy has strong stylistic similarities with those at Pritchard's Hatton Grange and with documented Bromfield plasterwork trophies at the Sham Castle, Acton Burnell Park, Shropshire.
- 53 Emma Hamilton described her shyness and a nervous fit that she had at Naples in 1795, and that 'Sir William [Hamilton] says he wou'd not have her with all her money': See Ingamells (ed.) *op.cit.*, p. 60. Her husband, General Sir James Murray (c.1755-1811), whom she married in 1794, took the name of Pulteney.
- 54 SM Adam volumes 24/214.
- 55 At Croome an ogee surround is also used above a pointed arched door.
- 56 Collection of David Trumper, who reproduces them in his *Glimpse of Old Shrewsbury* (Stroud, 2003), p. 21 where they are described as the Library and Drawing Room; they are, in fact, different views of the same room as evidenced by the furniture. The same book, on p. 22, shows Nelson's statue of Roger de Montgomery in its complete state.
- 57 SM Adam volumes 50/84.
- 58 See for instance his Huntwick Lodge at Nostell, discussed by Gareth J.L. Williams in 'Beyond the Needle's Eye: Robert Adam's Huntwick Lodge at Nostell Priory, Yorkshire', *Apollo* (April 2006), pp. 49-53.
- 59 See Peter Smith 'Lady Oxford's Alterations at Welbeck Abbey, 1741-55', *The Georgian Group Journal* 11 (2001), p. 148, Fig. 29 (the Landing of the present North Hall at Welbeck).
- 60 See Nicholas Goodison, *Matthew Boulton: Ormolu* (London, 2002), p. 34.