



THE
GEORGIAN
GROUP

Christine McAleavy, 'Batty Langley, Robert Morris and the writing of *Ancient Masonry*',
The Georgian Group Journal, Vol. XXV,
2017, pp. 95-112

BATTY LANGLEY, ROBERT MORRIS AND THE WRITING OF *ANCIENT MASONRY*

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Batty Langley's Ancient Masonry was published in serial form from 1733 and as a complete work in 1736. It was an important work; Howard Colvin described it as 'one of the largest and most comprehensive treatises in the literature of English architecture'.¹ According to Langley, a society was initially responsible for Ancient Masonry. Until now this society has been a mystery. Here, previously unknown sources will be used to reveal the nature and membership of the society and the leading role that Robert Morris played in the early stages of the project.

Both Batty Langley and Robert Morris were significant architectural writers. Eileen Harris, in her authoritative study of architectural literature, described Morris as the 'outstanding theoretical writer of the first half of the eighteenth century'.² Langley promoted new ideas about garden design, provided many useful books for builders and is particularly remembered for his much criticised but influential book of Gothic patterns, *Ancient Architecture Restored and Improved* (1742).³ The importance of this book has been recognised by several modern authors.⁴

It will be shown here that *Ancient Masonry* began as a collaborative project between Morris, Langley and a wider group of craftsmen (Fig. 1). It is not surprising that Morris and Langley worked together. They must have known each other as young men. Both were born in Twickenham: Langley in 1696 and



Fig. 1. 'Batty Langley' engraving by J. Carwitham, 1741.

There is no known portrait of Robert Morris. Carwitham worked with both Langley and Morris in Twickenham in the 1720s and later engraved many of the plates in *Ancient Masonry*.
(Private collection/Bridgeman Images)

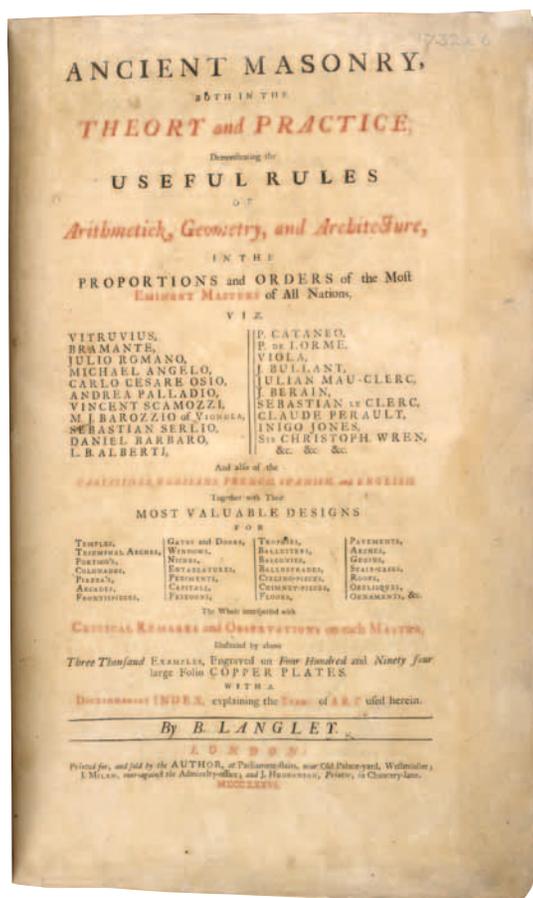


Fig. 2. Title page of *Ancient Masonry*.

This lists many of the architects whose work was included. Morris intended the work to be, ‘entirely new, of our own Production’ but in reality architectural plates

Langley copied from others became the core of the completed work. *Ancient Masonry*, I, title page and p. 4.

(© *The British Library Board*, 1732.e.6)

Morris in 1703. Langley’s father was a gardener and he initially followed his father’s occupation. From 1724 onwards he was a prolific author, particularly of books about horticulture and architecture.⁵ In 1718 Morris was apprenticed as a joiner to his father, Thomas.⁶ Ten years later he published his first book,

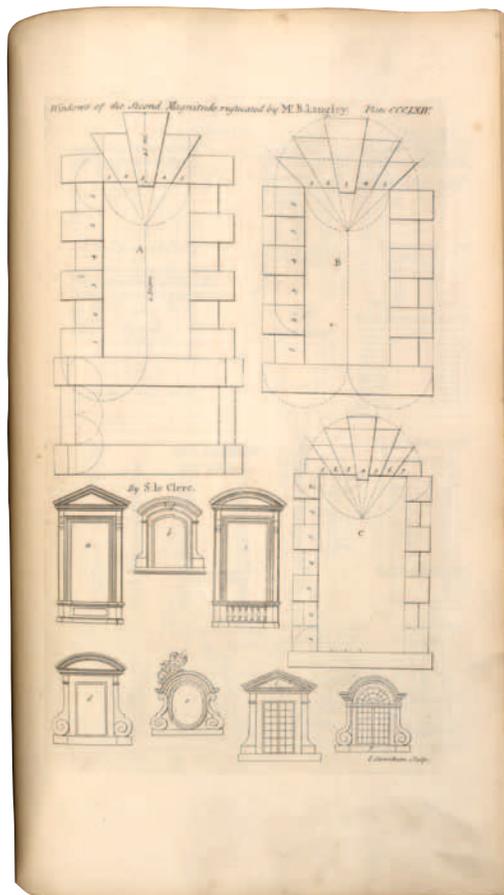


Fig. 3. Window designs. This is a typical plate from Volume II of *Ancient Masonry*. It combines original designs by Langley with examples of windows copied from the French writer, Sebastien Le Clerc (1637–1714).

Ancient Masonry, II, Plate CCCLXIV.

(© *The British Library Board*, 1732.e.6)

In Defence of Ancient Architecture. In 1728 both men were still living in Twickenham.⁷ Langley and Morris were members of the same church, St Mary’s, where the older children of both were baptised.⁸ They both knew the Twickenham engraver, John Carwitham, who worked on Langley’s *Pomona* and engraved

the frontispiece to Morris's *Defence*.⁹ At some point both men moved to London.¹⁰ In 1729, Thomas Morris, Robert's father, provided a testimonial for one of Langley's business ventures, the production of artificial stone.¹¹

Ancient Masonry, as published in 1736, comprised two folio volumes (Fig. 2).¹² Volume I has an essay on architecture as its Introduction and two main parts: Arithmetic and Geometry. Volume II contains only plates, including geometrical constructions, the five orders of architecture by leading architects and technical aspects of building construction (Fig. 3). Mowl and Earnshaw expressed astonishment at the ambition of the work: 'Only those who have seen library staff staggering under the weight of its enormous twin volumes will appreciate what an enterprise and an investment it must have represented for a self-taught nursery gardener to publish.'¹³ *Ancient Masonry* has some unexplained features. It was initially intended to include more topics than appeared in the final work. A 1734 advertisement claimed that it would eventually also cover surveying, perspective drawing, mechanics, making sundials and stained glass windows.¹⁴ These promised chapters did not appear. Something had prevented this ambitious project from being completed as planned.

Curiously, an early advertisement for the first serialised part of *Ancient Masonry* in *The London Magazine*, January 1733, did not mention that Batty Langley was the author. By contrast, in the very next advertisement on the same page, Langley was named as the author of another publication, *The Young Builder's Rudiments*.¹⁵ The Introduction to *Ancient Masonry*, as published in early 1733, also made no reference to Batty Langley as the author, describing it as the work of 'a SOCIETY (who daily experience and practise the several Arts which lead to a general Knowledge of Architecture) [...] every Page will be perus'd and modell'd by the whole Society'.¹⁶

In 1736 Langley mentioned this society in the final published folio volumes. He indicated in a note

to readers that the work had originally been intended as a collaborative project. However, his partners had let him down, leaving him to complete the whole work unaided:

'Advertisement to the READER

The Reader is desired to observe, that this WORK was proposed to the Publick for to be performed by a SOCIETY, (or Set of People) as set forth in the *Introduction*, who for that Purpose entered into Articles with me, and undertook to do very great Things herein; but upon future Examination, when those Parts were wanted, that they undertook to perform, in the Course of the WORK, none of them produced any Thing: So that (had not I, of myself, been able to carry on and finish the Whole, as well as the *Arithmetick*, and Part of the *Geometry* to that Time) I should have been a very great Sufferer in the Expences, that I had then been at, for Paper and Printing, and the World disappointed of the PERFORMANCE also.

B. LANGLEY

*Parliament-Stairs 10 Sept. 1736.*¹⁷

The Introduction to *Ancient Masonry* presents more puzzles. The writer gave as an address 'St Martin's Lane' in Charing Cross. There is no evidence that Langley ever lived there. The Introduction is signed, not by Langley, but by a person who disguised his identity, calling himself, 'X__X__'. The name of the writer of the chapter on Arithmetic is also disguised and stated as 'A__A__'. It appears, therefore, that the authors of the Introduction and Arithmetic were different people. And yet Langley claimed that he had written the whole book.

In *Ancient Masonry* there is a curious note stating that the Arithmetic chapter had been approved at a meeting of the society (Fig. 4). The names of the members were listed but disguised. Each one was given a code-name of capital letters. Thirteen people with code-names were present, apparently including the writers of the Introduction and Arithmetic: X__X__ and A__A__.¹⁸

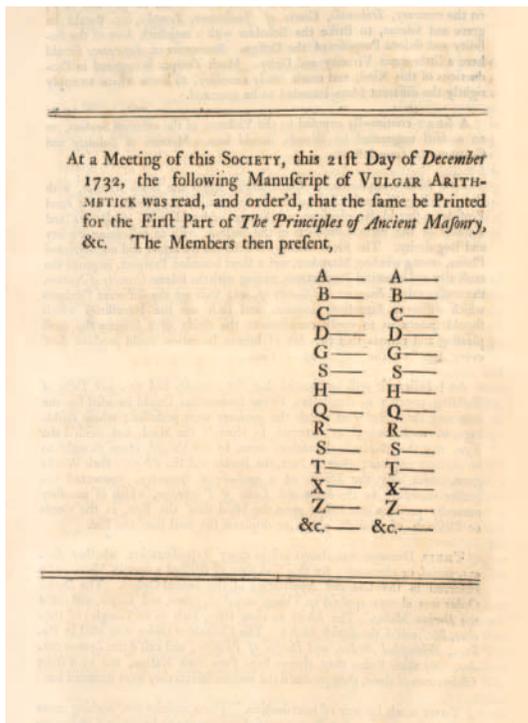


Fig. 4. The society members who approved Langley’s Arithmetic text. Their names are disguised in code and until now their identity has been a mystery. Those present included both Langley and Morris. *Ancient Masonry*, I, p. 8. (© *The British Library Board, 1732.e.6*)

By far the most perceptive treatment of the career of Langley can be found in the work of Eileen Harris.¹⁹ She explained the importance of freemasonry to Langley and how, from his perspective, *Ancient Masonry* was a masonic project.²⁰ She recognised that the original plan was more extensive than the final book. Harris rightly identified that *Ancient Masonry* was meant to rival Edward Oakley’s *Magazine of Architecture*,²¹ which was being re-issued in serial parts at the time.²² Harris noted the references to the mysterious society. She considered that Langley used it as a marketing technique and she questioned its existence.²³

Harris spotted another surprising feature. She noticed similarities between a lecture given by Robert Morris and the Introduction to *Ancient Masonry*: ‘Large parts of the introduction [...] to Batty Langley’s *Ancient Masonry* [...] are taken, with minor alterations, from Morris’s *Lectures*’.²⁴ Between 1730 and 1735 Morris delivered a series of lectures, which were published in 1734 and 1736.²⁵ Much of the Introduction to *Ancient Masonry* was indeed based on Morris’s Lecture II, with some material from Lecture III. The following extracts illustrate how some wording is almost identical.

MORRIS LECTURE II

29 October 1730

LEARNING [...] is a Jewel of inestimable Value, and he who possesseth it enjoys every Thing desirable. The Goods of Fortune, by multitudes of Casualties, perish, and are destroyed: earthquakes, Inundations and Tempests, impoverish and ruin many Countries; but no Misfortunes can shock the Mind of the Philosopher...²⁶

ANCIENT MASONRY INTRODUCTION

15 January 1733

LEARNING is a Jewel of inestimable Value, and he who is possessed of it, possesses all Things. The Goods of Fortune, by Multitudes of Casualties, perish and are destroy’d; Earthquakes, Innundations and Tempests ruin and impoverish many Countries; but no Misfortunes shock the Soul of the Philosopher...²⁷

The sequence is puzzling. The *Lectures* of Morris were not published until 1734 but the Introduction to *Ancient Masonry* was printed in early 1733. How could Langley plagiarise the *Lectures* before they appeared in print?

Newly discovered court documents make it possible to explain the puzzling features of *Ancient Masonry*, confirming that there was a society and that Robert Morris played a leading part in it. The most important new sources come from a Chancery Court case brought in 1734 by Batty Langley against Morris and five others.²⁸ Langley's submission to the court in 1734 survives, as does the response of one defendant, Richard Pickhaver, who also made a second submission in 1736.²⁹ Another source is the record of a different case brought against Langley in the Court of Common Pleas by Pickhaver in 1734.³⁰ These documents, together with newspaper advertisements, shed important new light on the writing of *Ancient Masonry*.

Langley's Chancery submission stated that the idea of *Ancient Masonry* was not his. Several craftsmen, including Robert Morris, had previously come together to organise the writing of a book for builders. About 22 November 1732, Langley was invited to join this already existing group. Langley described his invitation as follows:

'Robert Morris of ye parish of St Georges Hanover Square in the County of Middlesex, Joyner, Robert Motley of the parish of St Giles in the Fields in the County of Middlesex, Mason, Thos. Hopper of ye same Parish, Carpenter, Richard Pickhaver of the Parish of St Martin in the Fields, Cabinet-maker, James Smith of ye Parish of St Anne Soho in the County of Middlesex Carpenter and Edward Hoppus of the Parish of St Michael, Coal Harbour, London, Joyner, Did on or about the twenty second day of November, which was in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and thirty two, Importune, request and desire your orator [Langley] to become a member of a Society, which they then proposed to form and constitute, for the Composing, Writing and Publishing a Book of Architecture for ye use of workmen which

should comprise [...] all the several mathematical Arts that are necessary to be understood by everyone, who desires to be a compleat architect.'³¹

Morris was always listed first by Langley in his Chancery submission, as if he was the leader of the group. Members of the society included two other men who became important writers, the surveyor, Edward Hoppus, and the carpenter, James Smith.³² Nothing more is known of the other defendants, Motley and Hopper. Pickhaver's testimony confirmed the membership of Morris, Hoppus and Smith, in addition identifying the carpenter, Francis Price as another member.³³ Price also became a well-known writer.

Langley was pleased to be approached to join the *Ancient Masonry* project. He had 'very great confidence' in Morris and the others: 'Ingenious workmen in their several and Respective occupations and capable of communicating many new and useful discoveries in their various ways'. The plan was to issue a weekly 'Number' of text or engravings, costing sixpence, which would eventually be published in book form.³⁴ According to Langley, the proposal was that he should contribute to the writing and also manage the whole publication process, purchasing paper and organising the printing. Langley's costs would be reimbursed from sales income. The profit would then be divided between Langley and the particular writer of each section. Langley was to receive one quarter of the profit, 'for his labour, time, trouble and use of moneys advanced in carrying on the said work' and each writer was to get the remainder. Langley received all the profit when he was the writer.³⁵

In the note to readers at the start of *Ancient Masonry* Langley mentioned that he agreed 'Articles' with the other members. Pickhaver's testimony included these Articles in full, as signed on 14 December 1732. The Articles confirm that Langley was entitled to a quarter of the profits but also stipulated that for future editions Langley had no such profit share.³⁶

Langley named Pickhaver as a member of the society. Pickhaver denied that he was a member but he admitted witnessing the signing of the Articles (along with the well-known engraver, Benjamin Cole). It is also obvious from the court case that Pickhaver, if not a full member of the society, was involved in the organisation of the project and collected some of the subscriptions. He provided a meeting-place for the group. Langley mentioned that meetings took place at Pickhaver's house on St Martin's Lane. This was, in fact, a public house, called The Black Boy and Apple Tree, where Pickhaver was landlord. The Articles required that weekly meetings should take place there 'on every Thursday Evening the Hours of seven and nine'. Members were to be fined sixpence for non-attendance. Since Langley's presence was essential, his potential fine was set at two shillings.³⁷ The use of The Black Boy and Apple Tree as a meeting place explains why the writer of the Introduction to *Ancient Masonry* gave 'St Martin's Lane' as the address for the publication. As we shall see, it was here in April 1733 that Langley and Morris had a dramatic confrontation.

Langley described Pickhaver as a cabinet-maker. In the St Martin's Lane area there was a concentration of cabinet-makers, and it seems that his public house was their meeting-place. In 1731 there was a dispute between journeymen cabinet-makers and their employers. The cabinet-makers demanded that their working day be limited to twelve hours. They were dismissed, and the journeymen then offered customers the chance to contact them directly to buy their furniture: 'The Men are to be heard of at the Black Boy and Apple-Tree'.³⁸ As cabinet-maker and landlord of the public house, Pickhaver was apparently an organiser of this very early example of collective action by workers.

From late November 1732, Langley began a frenzy of activity linked to *Ancient Masonry*. He bought large quantities of quality 'Royal Paper'. He organised two print runs of a 'written proposal' for

potential subscribers. The first print run was for 1000 copies, and shortly afterwards he reprinted 2000 more. Langley also prepared the chapter on Arithmetic. This all took place in just four weeks.³⁹ On 12 January the imminent publication of the first 'Number' was advertised,⁴⁰ and Langley stated that on 16 January it was distributed to subscribers.⁴¹

The Introduction to *Ancient Masonry* was not the first serialised part but was apparently issued soon after. It was finalised at a meeting on 15 January 1733.⁴² The court papers demonstrate that the Introduction was written not by Batty Langley but by Robert Morris. The evidence comes from Langley's Chancery submission where he explained the code used to disguise the identity of the members of the society:

'And it was thought proper and agreed that ye names of every Member of ye said Society should be concealed and each to be distinguished by a characteristick, and to be signified as follows (to wit) your orator [Langley] by the capital letter A, Robert Morris by the capital letter X, Robert Motley by ye capital letter G. Thomas Hopper by the capital letter R. James Smith by ye capital letter H, Richard Pickhaver by ye capital letter P and Edward Hoppus by the capital letter Z and that when the whole was compleat every persons name so concealed and distinguished thereunto be printed at Length.'⁴³

Langley's code was 'A'. The code for Morris was 'X'. Since the writer of Arithmetic was described in the text as 'A___A___', this was Langley. The writer of the Introduction was called, 'X___X___', so this was Morris. In explaining the code, Langley had revealed, unintentionally, that the author of the Introduction to *Ancient Masonry* was Morris. This is consistent with the discovery by Eileen Harris that much of the Introduction was based on Morris's lectures. Langley was not plagiarising Morris; Morris was the author.

The lectures of Robert Morris were given to another mysterious 'society'.⁴⁴ The craftsmen

behind *Ancient Masonry* were possibly members of this lecture society. Lecture IV was delivered on 31 December 1732, just days before the initial publication of *Ancient Masonry*. It seems probable that this lecture was attended by some members of the *Ancient Masonry* society. Lectures I-III were given much earlier, during October-November 1730. In Lecture IV Morris stated that he was persuaded by some 'few Friends' to recommence his lectures.⁴⁵ Perhaps these friends were craftsmen from the *Ancient Masonry* writing group.

It is interesting to speculate on how Lecture IV was received by Langley, if he was present. This lecture was an attack on Gothic architecture, and Morris singled out Westminster Abbey for criticism.⁴⁶ In 1735 Langley wrote an article for *The Grub Street Journal* defending Gothic architecture and praising Westminster Abbey.⁴⁷

Pickhaver provided the court with a complete transcription of his subscription book. This gives us an insight into the nature of the people who bought *Ancient Masonry* in serialised form. Most of the addresses are from Soho, Covent Garden and Holborn. Many of the subscribers gave public houses as their postal address, others gave shops. Some of the entries are illegible but about a hundred subscribers are listed by name. Unfortunately, only the occupations of a few were listed. These were all craftsmen and most were woodworkers, including five joiners and four carpenters.⁴⁸

Ancient Masonry soon ran into difficulties. The collaboration involved two significant risks. All the writers had to produce their contributions on time. The members also had to secure enough subscribers to ensure that income covered costs. During the printing of the first parts of 'Arithmetic' in January 1733, Langley became concerned that there were too few subscribers. He had previously been confident about achieving sufficient income because the others had promised that 'they would use their utmost Interest to promote ye sale of said Work'.⁴⁹ In fact, the subscription income did not cover the costs:

'Your orator [Langley] being every week upwards of Eight pounds expence in Paper, Printing, Stitching, Coverings, advertisements, servants wages and other outgoings on account of ye work and ye Number of Subscribers very few.'⁵⁰ Langley knew that if weekly expenditure was £8 and each subscriber was charged sixpence then they needed at least 320 subscribers to avoid making a loss. He provided each member with a 'Blank paper Book', for recording names and addresses of subscribers, who had to sign, thereby agreeing to pay weekly for all issues of *Ancient Masonry*.

Langley became alarmed about the number of subscribers. To make matters worse, members were requesting extra copies but not paying for them. Langley delivered an additional twenty copies to each of them hoping that, as his friends, they would not let him down and would pass them on to paying subscribers: 'He was willing to comply with each other of their said requests, Believing that every [one] of them were his real friends'. The situation rapidly deteriorated. Langley claimed that within a few weeks he had accumulated a substantial loss. He told the court that he was 'thereby damaged upwards of Sixty Pounds which your orator was actually out of Pocket at that time'.⁵¹

Meanwhile, another problem was developing. During January-February 1733 the chapter on Geometry was due to be written so that it could follow on from that on Arithmetic. The others assured Langley that 'they would have and procure a manuscript or manuscripts of practical Geometry ready to succeed the Arithmetick'.⁵² According to Langley, his partners let him down and he was 'forced to [...] take upon himself the whole undertaking', which he was able to do as 'a person well skilled in Geometry and capable of performing the part of that science necessary to carry on the said work'. Langley alleged that the others then started meeting privately to plot against him, holding, 'several private meetings and Consultations How to annoy your orator'.⁵³

Perhaps the problems with the production of the Geometry chapter were made worse because his partners were also working on other books at the same time. In spring 1733, Francis Price published *A Treatise on Carpentry* and James Smith published *The Carpenter's Companion*.⁵⁴ Throughout 1733 Hoppus was redrawing plates for the serialised publication of *Palladio's Architecture* for Benjamin Cole. Hoppus was also employed as surveyor to the London Assurance Company.⁵⁵

Langley claimed to be the sole author of the Geometry chapter. He stated that the others had completely failed him; they 'declined contributing the least performance towards the Geometry'.⁵⁶ In fact, there is conclusive evidence that a substantial part of 'Geometry' was written by Morris and other members of the society. In his 'Advertisement to the READER' at the beginning of *Ancient Masonry*, Langley admitted, in passing, that he had only written 'Part of the Geometry'. The use of code-names also indicates that the first part of Geometry was written by several people, including Robert Morris. The section is in the form of six lectures.⁵⁷ The first two lectures are anonymous; the remaining four are attributed to members of the society. The writer of Lecture III was described as Z___Z___; according to Langley's code this was Edward Hoppus. Lecture IV was written by X___X___, the code for Morris (Fig. 5). S___S___ was the author of Lecture V; Langley did not explain his identity. Lecture VI was described as the work of 'Mr &c___ &c___'. This reads like a collaborative lecture on the application of geometrical skills to practical situations such as the surveying of irregular fields or stretches of water (Fig. 6).

Further clues suggesting the involvement of Morris in the writing of the early Geometry section can be found in the style of the short introduction before Lecture I. This is a philosophical reflection on the nature of thought, which draws on the ideas of John Locke, stating: 'Since that we have no innate Idea's, therefore all Objects, or Materials for *Thinking*, must be first let in upon the Mind

through the Organs of Sense'.⁵⁸ Morris was strongly influenced by contemporary philosophical ideas, and this highly theoretical passage is much more likely to be his work than Langley's.⁵⁹

The first five lectures of 'Geometry' were of varying length. Unlike Langley's Arithmetic lectures, they contained few practical applications of mathematical ideas to building practice. Lecture III,

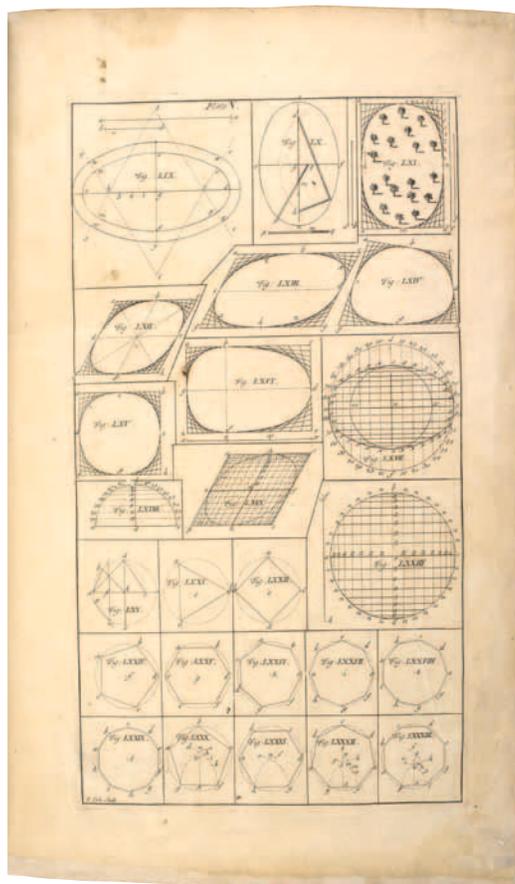


Fig. 5. Geometrical constructions. These diagrams were almost certainly drawn by Robert Morris to accompany Geometry Lecture IV which he wrote. *Ancient Masonry*, II, Plate V. (© The British Library Board, 1732.e.6)

by Hoppus, was insubstantial, amounting to just over one page of text on geometrical constructions with four diagrams. Hoppus covered the construction of some of the same geometrical figures – square, parallelogram, rhombus – as Morris considered in Lecture IV, but, confusingly for the reader, the two men suggested different methods. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the early parts of ‘Geometry’ were not

well received. Lecture VI revealed that some readers considered the previous geometry lectures ‘were useless’. In Lecture VI one of the unnamed writers responded by attacking the judgement of these critical readers. The style suggests that the attack on the readers was probably written by Morris:

‘My witty Readers, who have said, many of these Problems were useless, will be convinced that they have found Fault with what they have not understood; and which indeed, I believe, has been the only Cause of their ill-natur’d Censure: For none but the Stubborn, the Conceited, and the Ignorant, will condemn the Labours or good Intentions of others, or pretend to be Judges of a Knowledge, to which they are entire Strangers; Whilst the judicious and thinking Man maturely considers, without Prejudice, the Reasons and Causes of every Thing presented to his Consideration; and to such only do I dedicate this Work.’⁶⁰

Langley was surely dismayed by this attack on readers whose subscriptions were essential to the commercial success of the project.

Commercial worries and arguments about writing *Geometry* appear to have caused tension between Langley and Morris in the early months of 1733. At the beginning of April there was a dramatic confrontation between the two men. At a meeting at The Black Boy and Apple Tree, Morris declared that he no longer wanted to be a member of the society. There followed an angry clash between Langley and Morris, who demanded that Pickhaver should produce the Articles of Agreement.⁶¹ On production of the document by Pickhaver, Morris announced to Langley that he intended to tear off his name, signifying that he had left the society. Langley replied provocatively. Morris carried out his threat. Langley responded by taunting Morris, making it clear that he was pleased that Morris was leaving

‘He [Pickhaver] then produced and brought the said articles to the said Morris who taking the same into his hand addressed himself to the said Complainant

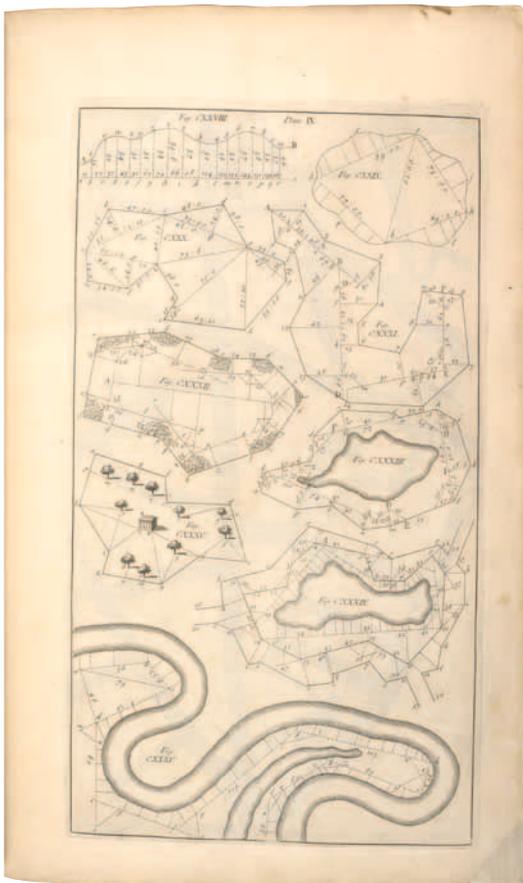


Fig. 6. One of the plates accompanying *Geometry* Lecture VI showing how to survey irregular tracts of water and land. This was one of the last engravings produced jointly by Morris and the society before the rift with Langley. *Ancient Masonry*, II, Plate IX. (© The British Library Board, 1732.e.6)

[Langley] and said without oath I will tear my Name out or to that Effect to which the said Complainant answered [...] I do not care or to that Effect and immediately thereupon the said Morris did cancel and tear off his Name (Being of his own signing) from the said Deed or Articles in the presence of the said Complainant upon which the said Complainant told the said Robert Morris that if he had not torn his own name off he (meaning the said Complainant) would have done it himself.⁶²

According to Pickhaver, Morris never again met Langley after this incident. Langley also confirmed that Morris tore off his name from the Articles during this incident:

‘The said Robert Morris, at one meeting of your orator [Langley] with ye said Motley, Hopper, Smith, Pickhaver and Hoppus at ye said Pickhaver’s House in St Martin’s Lane did demand ye said articles from ye said Pickhaver which the said Pickhaver brought and delivered to him accordingly, He ye said Morris without any consent of your orator did then and there in your orators Presence, cancel and tear off his name and seale from ye said deed or articles.’⁶³

The breakdown in the relationship between Morris and Langley became public through newspaper advertisements in April 1733.⁶⁴ Morris placed one, claiming that he was the author of the Introduction to *Ancient Masonry*; it has not been possible to locate it, but we know of its existence because Langley mentioned it a week later in the *St James Evening Post* for 21–24 April 1733. Langley’s statement was included within an announcement promoting the thirteenth part of *Ancient Masonry*. Langley admitted that Morris had submitted a draft for the Introduction, but claimed that it was not good enough for publication without alteration:

‘Whereas ROBERT MORRIS, Surveyor of Harmonicks, did in this Paper, on Thursday last, impudently advertise, That he wrote the Introduction to the above Work; this is to certify, That the said *Morris* did attempt the same, and for that Purpose, did deliver to the Society at least Eight Sheets of Medley,

most of which was so like unto the Preface of Palladio, as not to be known from it, and was protested against by the Society in general.’

‘But that he, the said *Morris*, might not be discouraged, I out of pure Respect to him, did connect some few Lines thereof, which to reduce into good Sense, fit for the Press, was oblig’d to strike out many Improperities and Pieces of Sentences, that he, Rustick like, had illiterately introduced, began, and unfinish’d. To this many Additions were made by several, who are, at this Time, worthy Members of the Society, and are ready to attest the same, who, with myself, did give *Morris* the Reputation thereof &c. But had *Morris*’s own Words been printed *verbatim*, the World would have believ’d that the Society consisted of Blockheads in general.’⁶⁵

Langley attempted to diminish Morris by contemptuously calling him illiterate, ‘Rustick like’ and a ‘Surveyor of Harmonicks’, a mocking reference to the interest that Morris had in architecture based on harmonic proportions.⁶⁶ The close correspondence between the wording of the lectures of Morris and the Introduction as printed suggests that Langley was not telling the truth when he claimed that the Introduction had been re-written.

Curiously, Langley included within this advertisement a letter by an unknown person to the engraver, William Toms, alleging that the society for *Ancient Masonry* was in difficulties. Toms had shown the letter to Langley, but, anxious to hide the writer’s identity, he had first torn off the signature: ‘Mr. *Toms* [...] did last Week receive the following Letter by the Penny-Post, from a Person, whose Name and Place of Abode the said Mr. *Toms* tore from the Letter, and concealed from Mr. Langley to whom he shew’d the said Letter on Saturday last.’⁶⁷ The writer of this remarkable letter claimed to have information from Robert Morris about the imminent collapse of the society. Knowing that Toms was working on *Ancient Masonry*, the letter warned him that he was in danger of not being paid because the society was ‘blown up’:

'To Mr. TOMS, Engraver at No 19, in Union-Court,
Holbourn
April 18, 1733.

Mr. TOMS,

This wet Day prevented my seeing you, and particularly to let you into some secret Affairs of *Langley's*; I understood yesterday that you were concern'd in Graving for him: If you have any Demands on him, you must be very diligent and speedy, for the whole Work, with the *Society is blown up*, and there is no other Member remaining but himself, and he can't possibly support the same, not three Weeks at farthest; all this I had yesterday from a sincere Friend, and one of the Members, *R. Morris* by Name: Let this forward you in your own Interest, to the Pleasure of your sincere Friend and Humble Servant.⁶⁸

Langley insisted in his newspaper advert that the mysterious letter writer should reveal his name. He also threatened to sue Morris for apparently suggesting that the society had collapsed:

'Its demanded, that the Author of the said Letter, do, on Thursday next, publish his Name in this Paper; and if that the said *R. Morris*, therein mention'd be *Robert Morris*, living in Brown's Court in Green-Street, near Grosvenor-Square, Joyner by Trade, or not, that proper *Proceedings at Law*, be made against the said *Morris*, for Damages, so sustained by the SOCIETY and me BATTY LANGLEY.⁶⁹

Langley was anxious to dispel rumours about the crisis in the society for *Ancient Masonry*, pointing out that other people were still involved. Subscriptions were collected by Langley but also were 'taken in by Mr. Edward Hoppus, Surveyor in Old Fish-street' and by 'Mr Pickhaver, at the Black-Boy and Apple-Tree in St. Martin's-lane, Charing-Cross'.⁷⁰

Langley claimed that, after his break with Morris, there were no more meetings and that the others failed to submit any more text, 'or ever brought or sent your orator a Line or Letter towards the

said work altho often required there unto by your orator'.⁷¹ Pickhaver disagreed, stating that there were several more meetings after the departure of Morris: 'He [Pickhaver] believes that Motley, Hopper, Smith and Hoppus several times came to meet the Complainant [Langley] as usual after the said Morris had cancelled his Name from the said Deed or articles.'⁷² It seems likely that Pickhaver was correct and these further meetings did take place, but at some stage the rest of the society completely collapsed. This, according to Pickhaver, was marked by another dramatic event at The Black Boy and Apple Tree. Langley barged his way into the kitchen intent on destroying the society's Articles. He ordered Pickhaver to fetch them. The enraged Langley proceeded to tear off all the names of the others, leaving only his own name. He then attempted to burn the Articles:

'The said Complainant [Langley] himself came sometime afterwards into this Defendants [Pickhaver's] Kitchen and called for the said Articles and this Defendt. having brought the same to him He the said Complainant cancelled and tore from the said articles all the other persons Names by them signed as parties thereto his the said Complainants own Name only excepted and the said Complainant would then have burnt the said Articles had not this Defendt. dissuaded him from so doing.'⁷³

After this event, there were no more meetings at The Black Boy and Apple Tree. Unsurprisingly this event is not mentioned by Langley in his testimony.

Members of the society for *Ancient Masonry*, having broken with Langley, proceeded to publish elsewhere. Several important books followed. After arguing with Langley, Morris published his lectures, including the material that he had used for the Introduction to *Ancient Masonry*. His first volume of *Lectures* appeared in 1734. The decision by Morris to publish the lectures was perhaps prompted by the ending of his involvement in *Ancient Masonry*.

Price greatly expanded his earlier *Treatise* in 1735 and re-named it *The British Carpenter*.⁷⁴ Smith

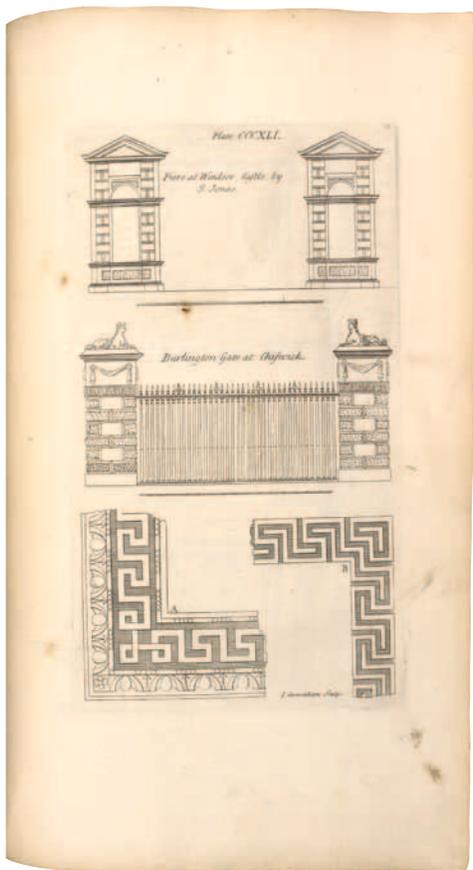


Fig. 7. Designs for gates from Windsor and Chiswick, engraved by John Carwitham. Langley's commentary was often critical. Here he attacked Burlington's taste at Chiswick describing the gate post decorations as 'Festoons of Drapery (which are more proper to adorn the *Drapers Shops* at *Charing Cross*, than the Entrance into a Nobleman's Palace)'. *Ancient Masonry*, II, Plate CCCXLI and I, p. 333. (© The British Library Board, 1732.e.6)



Fig. 8. Architectural design by Julien Mauclerc (1543-c.1600). After the breakdown of his relationship with Morris, Langley provided multiple examples of the orders by different authors such as this French writer. *Ancient Masonry*, II, Plate CCLXXXVI. (© The British Library Board, 1732.e.6)

published *A Specimen of Antient Carpentry* in 1736, described by Colvin as 'the earliest antiquarian study of English medieval carpentry'.⁷⁵ Hoppus published his measuring tables for surveyors, *Practical Measuring*, in 1736.⁷⁶ It is possible that

the *Lectures* of Morris, Price's *British Carpenter*, Smith's *Specimen of Antient Carpentry* and *Practical Measuring* by Hoppus all used material that the authors had originally intended for *Ancient Masonry*. Most early plates in *Ancient Masonry* were engraved

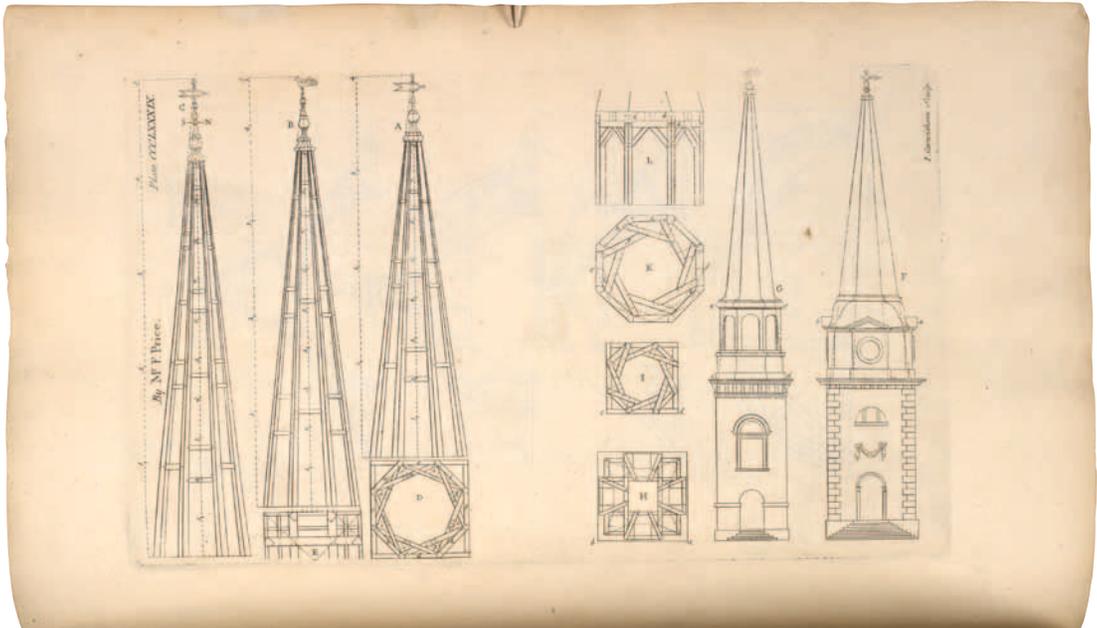


Fig. 9. Church towers and spires by Francis Price. According to Richard Pickhaver, Price was a member of the society for the writing of *Ancient Masonry*. After the split, Langley described these designs by his former partner as ‘a manifest Proof of a Barrenness of Invention’. *Ancient Masonry*, II, Plate CCCLXXXIX and I, p. 368. (© *The British Library Board, 1732.e.6*)

by Cole or Toms. It seems they sided with Morris and continued to work for him.⁷⁷ Langley turned instead to John Carwitham, his Twickenham associate, who engraved the great majority of the later plates in *Ancient Masonry* (Fig. 7).

Langley had to write the remainder of *Ancient Masonry* single-handedly. It is obvious where the work stops being a joint project and Langley takes over. On page 185 of Volume I, after a detailed commentary on Plate XI, the style changes abruptly. A moment of panic is evident. The commentary relating to Plate XII is incoherent. It looks as if Langley was under pressure to write something at short notice while also trying to work out how he could carry on the project alone.

Langley’s response to the crisis, once he had recovered his composure, was to continue the

Geometry chapter with a new focus on the orders of architecture. Langley had a large collection of British and European architectural engravings, ‘derived from a wide range of sources from Vredeman de Vries to Gibbs’ (Fig. 8).⁷⁸ He decided to copy and issue these designs with a commentary about how builders could use them to construct buildings in the same style:

‘I shall now proceed to assemble together all the great Masters, who have assigned Proportions to the Orders, and given Examples for Practice; which, with very great Pains and Expence, I have collected from *Rome, Paris* and other eminent Cities in *Europe*, as well as from the Libraries of the most learned in *England*, which are exhibited in the following Plates, and which contain so great a Variety of useful Examples, that, ‘tis impossible any Design can be wanted.’⁷⁹

The architectural plates that he used included those of his former associates on *Ancient Masonry*, Smith and Price. Langley copied their material while making critical remarks about them.⁸⁰ Plate CCCLXXXI is, for example, headed, ‘Mr. J Smith’s Method for Backing of Hip’s proved to be false by Mr. B Langley’, while Plate CCCLXXXIII has a similar title, ‘Mr. Popes Method for Backing of Hips as publish’d by [...] Mr. Francis Price proved false by Mr. Batty Langley’.⁸¹ The commentary on Plate CCCLXXXIX, showing designs by Francis Price for church towers and spires, described Price’s architectural detail as demonstrating ‘a manifest Proof of a Barrenness of Invention’ (Fig. 9).⁸² Langley was also very disparaging about a book he believed, incorrectly, that Hoppus had written called *Proportional Architecture*.⁸³ Langley suggested it should have been called *Disproportional Architecture*, stating that ‘the Whole is absurd, and unworthy of our Regard’.⁸⁴

After the break-up of the society Langley managed to produce over four hundred more engraved plates with commentary, aimed at both craftsmen and gentlemen with an interest in architecture. Although much was copied from others, the plates included some original material; for example, Langley invented two new orders: ‘The English Order’ (Fig. 10) and ‘The Grotesque Order for Entrances in Grotto’s, Hermitages, &c.’ (Fig. 11).⁸⁵ The cost of producing the plates was undoubtedly considerable. Langley must have sustained enough interest to keep the subscription income at a good level. By the autumn of 1735 he was collecting subscriptions from wealthier clients to fund the printing of the folio volumes. On 23 September 1735 he wrote to the Duke of Kent thanking him for his subscription to ‘Antient Masonry’: ‘I return your Grace My Most Humble Thanks for yr favour of Subscribing to My Antient Masonry which will be complete about Christmas Next’.⁸⁶ By 10 September 1736 the folio volumes were apparently ready for printing.⁸⁷

Completing *Ancient Masonry* alone was a huge effort, because at the same time Langley was busy on many other projects. He submitted unsuccessful proposals for the new Mansion House in London in 1735.⁸⁸ Around 1734–36 he was involved in major work at Wrest Park, Bedfordshire, including the construction of a terraced Orangery and the addition of a classical façade to the Bowling Green House.⁸⁹ He was living at Parliament Stairs in Westminster, where he built a garden temple for his patron, Nathaniel Blackerby in 1735.⁹⁰ Between July 1734 and March 1735 he wrote regular articles on architecture for the *Grub Street Journal*, under the pseudonym Hiram.⁹¹ He published a design for the proposed bridge at Westminster in 1736.⁹²

Early in 1734, Pickhaver sued Langley in the Court of Common Pleas for money owed for work on *Ancient Masonry*. Pickhaver described Langley, perhaps disparagingly, as a ‘Gardiner’.⁹³ Apparently Pickhaver played some part in the production of the weekly issues. He claimed that in July 1733 and January 1734 Langley had given him promissory notes – a form of IOU – for costs related to materials and work done. Langley failed to honour these notes and Pickhaver accused Langley of fraud and deceit: ‘Nevertheless the said Batty [...] contriving and fraudulently intending the said Richard in this behalf craftily and subtly to deceive and defraud the aforesaid several sumes or any part thereof to the said Richard.’⁹⁴ The case went to trial by jury at Langley’s request. Langley failed to appear, and judgement was given against him. On 28 May 1734 Langley was ordered to pay Pickhaver damages and costs of thirty-one pounds and ten shillings.⁹⁵

In May 1734, during the Common Pleas proceedings, Langley brought his own case in Chancery against six individuals, of whom the leading defendant was Robert Morris. It is the documents from this case that shed particular light on the early stages of the writing of *Ancient Masonry*. Langley had two reasons for litigation. Firstly, he wanted the court to establish that Morris and the

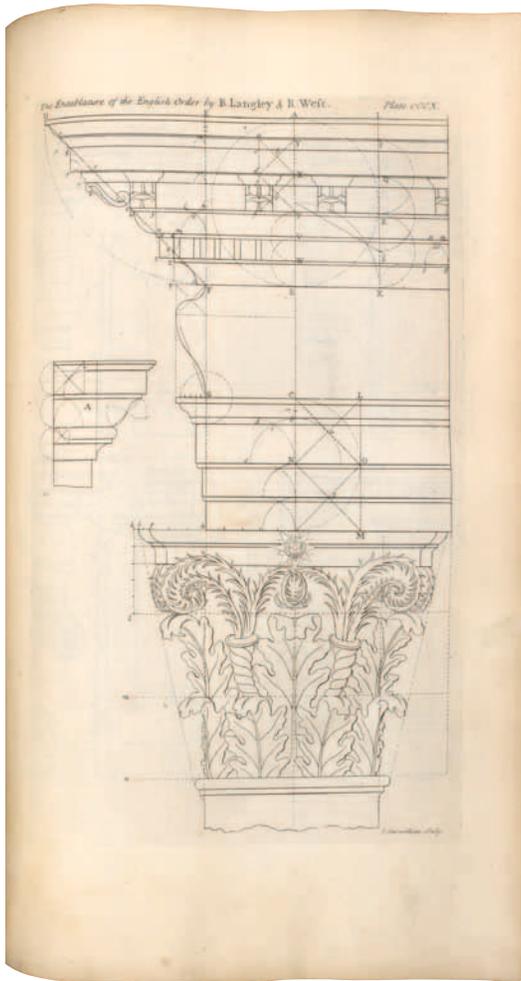


Fig. 10. The English Order by Langley.

Langley patriotically invented an English order of architecture with oak leaves decorating the capital as a symbol of 'THE Blessing and Strength of the Nation'. He explained why he chose oak: Charles II escaped by hiding in an oak tree and English naval supremacy and trade depended on ships made from oak.

Ancient Masonry, II, Plate CCCX and I, p. 323.

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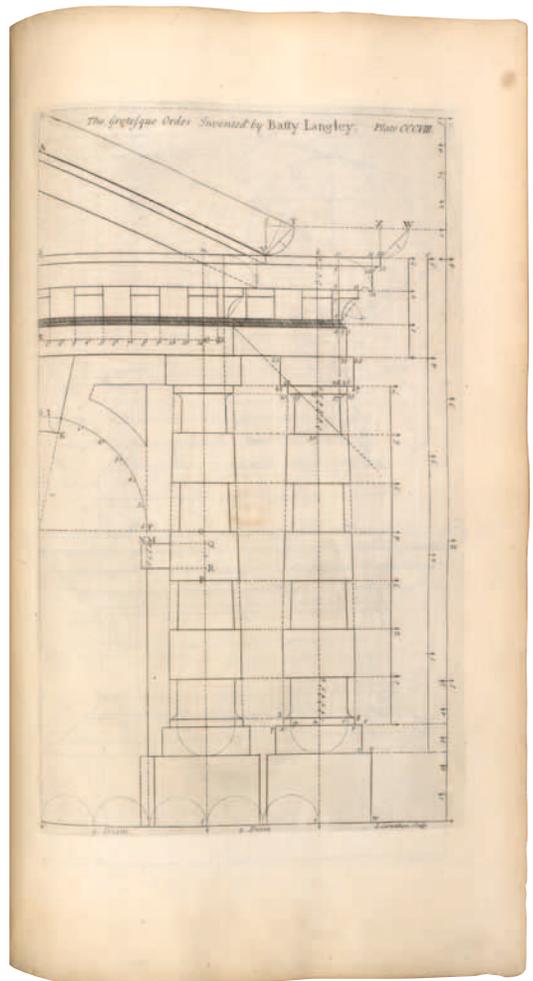


Fig. 11. Langley's Grottoesque Order.

This new order was invented by Langley for 'Grotto's, Subterranean Passages, Hermitages &c.'. The design deliberately admitted rainwater to encourage fracturing of the stone, 'for the more ruinous and antient those Buildings seem to be, the nearer they approach the Taste of the present Age'.

Ancient Masonry, II, Plate CCCVIII and I, p. 321.

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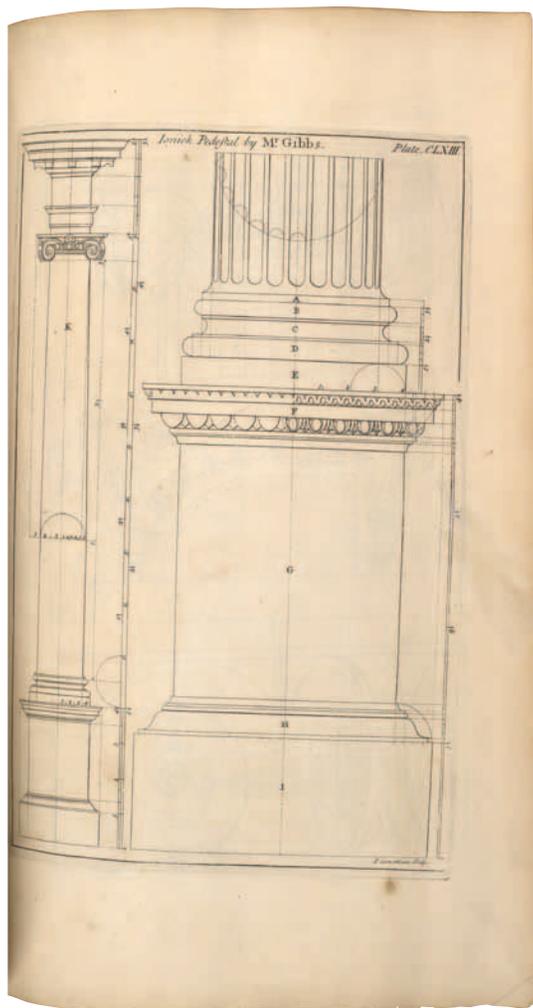


Fig. 12. 'Ionic Pedestal by Mr. Gibbs'.

This plate from *Ancient Masonry* was copied by Langley from Plate X of *Rules for Drawing* (London, 1732) by James Gibbs. Langley plagiarised Gibbs extensively but could also be critical, describing, for example, a staircase at Gibbs's church of St Martin-in-the-Fields as a 'Practice to be abominated by every Artist'. *Ancient Masonry*, II, Plate CLXIII and I, p. 385. (© *The British Library Board*, 1732.e.6)

other defendants had no claim to any income from *Ancient Masonry*. Langley stated that, by acting in breach of the Articles, 'they have forfeited to your orator, all their Rights and Claims'. Secondly, he thought this action might 'stay the proceedings' by Pickhaver against him in Common Pleas.⁹⁶ The Chancery case dragged on for at least two years and the final outcome is not clear.

In the Introduction to *Ancient Masonry*, Morris contrasted the intended work with another book, which was clearly Edward Oakley's *Magazine of Architecture*. *Ancient Masonry* would be different because it would contain exclusively original material:

'It would be of no Advantage [...] if we were only to collect the Labours of other Men, and place them in our *Magazine of Architecture*, as many have done, and particularly ONE lately published under that Title, which is wholly composed of other Mens Works, that were before in different Books extant.'⁹⁷

Morris intended *Ancient Masonry* to contain entirely new material. However, the final folio volumes were very different from the original vision of Morris. Langley completed the work, using many copied plates, taken from 'other Mens Works' (Fig. 12).⁹⁸ He was a plagiarist, but the resulting work was still magnificent, featuring as it did an astonishing collection of architectural designs. Eileen Harris considered that his *Ancient Masonry* 'was and perhaps still is the largest book of the orders ever published', containing 'virtually everything of any significance that had been written on the subject since the sixteenth century'.⁹⁹

The sources used here provide a fascinating window into the lives of two important Georgian writers on architecture. Morris and Langley were both remarkably talented and came from similar backgrounds but they had very different personalities. Morris was above all an intellectual and did not understand the needs of craftsmen for practical guidance. As Harris said: 'It was a great mistake to believe, as he did, that the speculations

of Shaftesbury and Pope, which guided the moral thoughts of enlightened gentlemen, could also guide the practices of men engaged in the business of building'.¹⁰⁰ Langley, by contrast, had a better understanding of the workman's perspective, but he was extremely argumentative and short-tempered and capable of being untruthful. It is therefore not surprising that their ambitious collaboration on *Ancient Masonry* was short-lived, and that it ended in a legal dispute.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Timothy Mowl for his advice and for reviewing an early draft of this article.

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- 6 S. Parissien, 'The Careers of Roger and Robert Morris, Architects' (DPhil Dissertation, University of Oxford, 1989), p. 44.
- 7 R. Morris, *An Essay in Defence of Ancient*

Architecture (London, 1728), 'By Robert Morris of Twickenham'; B. Langley, *Pomona* (London, 1729), p. xii. The preface to *Pomona* dated 1728 gave Langley's address as Twickenham.

- 8 A. Rowan, 'Batty Langley's Gothic', pp. 199–200; Parissien, 'Careers', p. 44.
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- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
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- 28 Langley v. Pickhaver (1734); The National Archive, TNA, C11/516/35.
- 29 Langley v. Pickhaver (1736); TNA, C12/2219/37.

- 30 Pickhaver v. Langley (1734); TNA, CP40/3451.
- 31 Langley v. Pickhaver (1734).
- 32 *Ibid.* Here it was revealed that Hoppus was a trained joiner.
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 *Ibid.*
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- 36 *Ibid.*
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- 38 *Daily Advertiser*, 30 March, 1 April 1731.
- 39 Langley v. Pickhaver (1734).
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- 44 Morris, *Lectures*, I, p. A2.
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- 54 Harris, *British Architectural Books*, p. 425.
- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 238. Morris did not publish in 1733 but experienced tragedy in his personal life because his wife died and was buried on 6 March 1733: Parissien, 'Careers', p. 48
- 56 Langley v. Pickhaver (1734).
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- 61 Langley v. Pickhaver (1736).
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- 78 Colvin, *Dictionary*, p. 597.
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- 80 Langley did not reserve his criticism for former members of the society. He made disparaging remarks about many people including Burlington and Gibbs.
- 81 Langley, *Ancient Masonry*, II, plates CCCLXXXI and CCCLXXXIII.
- 82 Langley, *Ancient Masonry*, I, p. 368.
- 83 Harris, *British Architectural Books*, p. 239.
- 84 Langley, *Ancient Masonry*, I, pp. 324–5.
- 85 Langley, *Ancient Masonry*, II, plates CCCIX and CCCVIII; *Ancient Masonry*, I, pp. 319–324.
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- 93 Pickhaver v. Langley (1734).
- 94 *Ibid.*
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- 97 Langley, *Ancient Masonry*, I, p. 4.
- 98 R.M. Wiles, *Serial Publication in England before 1750* (Cambridge, 1957), pp. 155–6. The first Copyright Act (8 Anne, c.19) was introduced in 1710 to protect authors' intellectual property. The Act was badly drafted and led 'to half a century of confusion and the most involved litigation'. Despite the legislation, plagiarism remained widespread.
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