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‘BASTARD’ GOTHIC’S SURVIVAL IN GEORGIAN BRITAIN

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Horace Walpole (1717–97), the great patron of Georgian Gothic, was not faint-of-heart when reflecting upon others creating or producing designs for Gothic buildings at the time when Strawberry Hill was being erected (from 1748). One of his more barbed critiques was aimed at Batty Langley (1696–1751) in 1755 because his pattern-book, *Ancient Architecture: Restored and Improved* (1741–42), presented and formalised what Walpole deemed to be ‘bastard Gothic’.¹ This disparaging assessment was meant to differentiate Langley’s bogus, though apparently historically accurate and credible, form of ‘Classical Gothic’ from the later, more mature and archaeologically informed, work being undertaken at and proposed for Strawberry Hill.² Indeed, it coloured Langley’s long-term reception and that of his designs which are generally considered to mark a low point in the history of Gothic design; a position expressed well by Charles Locke Eastlake (1836–1906) in his *History of the Gothic Revival* (1872).³ Langley’s idiosyncratic reformulation of Gothic was, however, no momentary chimera: he reissued *Ancient Architecture* in 1747 under the new title of *Gothic Architecture, Improved by Rules and Proportions*; this new edition crucially omitted the historical ‘Dissertation’ found in *Ancient Architecture* that was designed to validate the authenticity of his Gothic ‘system’. And finally, the pattern-book was also re-issued c.1790 by I & J Taylor (certainly before 1793 when it appears in their catalogue of that year),



Fig. 1. Gothic door casement of 25 Byrom Street, Manchester. Late eighteenth century (before 1794).
(Photograph: Peter N. Lindfield)



Fig. 2. S. Hooper’s ‘A COMMON COUNCIL MAN of CANDLESTICK WARD and his WIFE on a Visit to Mr. DEPUTY at his Modern Built Villa Near CLAPHAM’, 1771. (771.11.01.02+. Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University)

and his Gothic designs can also be found in *The Builder’s Director or Bench-Mate* (1747).⁴

Significantly, Langley’s pattern-book was unique in delineating systematically and in high-quality, detailed plates, numerous designs for Gothic architecture ranging from ornamental details, including columns, colonnades, windows, and chimneypieces, through to larger structures, including pavilions and even garden buildings. The Halfpennys’ two slim publications, *Rural Architecture in the Gothick Taste* and *Chinese and Gothic Architecture Properly Ornamented* (both

1752), could not compete with Langley’s pattern-book in terms of detail and highly-calculated fine architectural ornament. And despite the vast improvement in the awareness of medieval architecture during the course of the eighteenth century, as articulated by the shift from the Bucks’ *A Collection of Engravings of Castles, and Abbeys in England* (1739) through to the Society of Antiquaries of London’s *Vetusta Monumenta* and *Archaeologia*, no other publication existed that demonstrated how to apply Gothic forms to the creation of new buildings, or Gothicise existing structures. Langley’s

'bastard Gothic' pattern-book remained a valuable resource throughout the eighteenth century, and his plates contained easily reproducible patterns applicable in different contexts.

Two notable applications of Langley's 'bastard' Gothic from the late eighteenth century are the subject of this note, and these buildings demonstrate the legacy and continued relevance of Langley's Gothic to Georgian architectural and visual culture. The first example is a set of four Gothic door casements fixed to a range of late Georgian brick town houses, 25–31 Byrom Street, just off Deansgate in central Manchester, that survived the city's Victorian rebuilding (Fig. 1). The casements, carved from stone, have been described as 'charming Gothick', but they are more complex than this statement suggests.⁵ They reproduce Langley's distinctive second Gothic order (Pl. VII), found also on Pls XXXII, *Gothic Portico*, and XLIV and LV, *Gothic Umbrello*, and these plates similarly provide the model for the casements' attenuated ogee flip arch and stocky pinnacles ornamented with distinctive acanthus leaves that form not only the crockets but also a type of surface matting. These Gothic fixtures are clearly derived from *Ancient Architecture*, yet the combination of elements from different plates indicates how the pattern-book was used: individual motifs from across the book were brought together to create a new, yet distinctively Langlian, Gothic door casement. The total reliance upon Langley's plates speaks perhaps to the confidence (or lack thereof) of the architect or builder responsible for the Byrom Street buildings, and it is, perhaps, for the same reason that the chimneypiece in the family pew of Shobdon Church (Herefordshire), goes against the remainder of the building's William Kent-inspired design to recreate that found on Pl. XLIII of Langley's *Ancient Architecture*.⁶ Mirroring the stylistic incongruities illustrated in the 1771 print *A Common Council Man of Candlestick Ward and his Wife on a Visit to Mr. Deputy at his Modern Built Villa near Clapham*

(Fig. 2), these four houses' Gothic augmentations contrast with the otherwise plain and straightforward Georgian façades.

The second structure discussed here is Maspie House, Falkland, Fife (Fig. 3). Erected in the early nineteenth century, the façade demonstrates a more wholesale recreation of larger design elements found in Langley's *Ancient Architecture*. The house's external door casements (Fig. 4) are not modelled upon one of Langley's 'frontispieces' – effectively direct models – which would be the most direct inspiration, but instead appear to be a wholesale execution of Langley's overtly Classical column-and-entablature system. They are, actually, a composite: the clustered columns and capitals are derived from those on Pl. VII, *Third Gothic Order*, albeit



Fig. 3. Main façade of Maspie House, Falkland, Fife. Early nineteenth century. (Photograph: Peter N. Lindfield)



Fig. 4. Front entrance of Maspie House, Falkland, Fife. Early 19th century. (Photograph: Peter N. Lindfield)

without shaft rings, and the Gothic entablature’s frieze – three trefoil-cusped triglyphs alternating with a quatrefoil – is taken wholesale from Plates I and II, *The First Gothic Order*. The remainder of the façade, with square labels above the windows, and a crenellated roofline, is not incompatible with Langley’s plates, however the individual elements do not speak exclusively to any particular design.

These two façades, created towards the end of the Georgian period, demonstrate how buildings continued to make use of Langley’s particular type of Gothic. Dismissing this early and important phase of eighteenth-century design because of the value judgements made by, amongst others, Walpole and Eastlake, ignores the continued significance of Langley’s plates to Georgian architects and builders searching for ways in which to impart Gothic

tinctures to their creations. Unlike the Temple at Bramham Park, Yorkshire, 1750, or the fireplace in the family Pew of Shobdon Church, Herefordshire, c.1755, both of which almost exactly reproduce plates in *Ancient Architecture*, these buildings’ door casements illustrate how different elements from Langley’s plates were combined to create new designs in his ‘bastard’ style.⁷

ENDNOTES

- 1 W.S. Lewis, A. Dale Wallace, Robert A. Smith, and Edwine M. Martz (eds.), *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, vol. 35 (London, 1973), p. 233.
- 2 For Strawberry Hill, see especially Kevin Rogers, ‘Walpole’s Gothic: Creating a Fictive History’, in *Horace Walpole’s Strawberry Hill*, ed. Michael Snodin (London, 2009), pp. 59–74; and Michael Snodin, ‘Going to Strawberry Hill’, in *Ibid.*, pp. 15–57.
- 3 Charles Locke Eastlake, *A History of the Gothic Revival* (London, 1872), p. 54. A more complete summary of the reception of Batty Langley’s Gothic and his publication, *Ancient Architecture*, can be found in Peter N. Lindfield, ‘Serious Gothic and “Doing the Ancient Buildings”’: Batty Langley’s *Ancient Architecture* and Principal Geometric Elevations’, *Architectural History* 57 (2014), pp. 141–46, 168–69.
- 4 I. and J. Taylor, *A Catalogue of Modern Books on Architecture, Theoretical, Practical, and Ornamental* (London, 1793), p. 3.
- 5 Clare Hartwell, Matthew Hyde, and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Lancashire: Manchester and the South-East* (2004), p. 349.
- 6 For Shobdon, see, Howard Colvin, ‘Henry Flitcroft, William Kent and Shobdon Church, Herefordshire’, in *Essays in Scots and English Architectural History: A Festschrift in Honour of John Frew*, ed. David Jones and Sam McKinstry (Donington, 2009), pp. 1–8.
- 7 The Bramham Park Temple reproduces Pl. LVII, Gothick Temple, and the Shobdon Church chimney-piece reproduces Pl. XLIII, Chimney Piece.