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# FOR KINGS AND SENATES FIT

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The 3rd Earl of Burlington's architectural masterpiece, Chiswick House (Fig. 1), mystified his contemporaries. Sir John Clerk of Penicuik, who went there in 1727, echoed the sentiments of many visitors when he found it 'rather curious than convenient'.<sup>1</sup> Lord Burlington has come down in history as a remote aesthete and staunch Whig, who dedicated his life and fortune to the Arts, and his 'curious' house, which was not lived in during his lifetime, has been explained away as an abstract architectural exercise. If this view is accepted many aspects of Burlington's life, and of the artistic and literary tributes made to him, demand explanation.

The Earls of Burlington owed their title to Charles I's Queen, Henrietta Maria, who decided to confer the honour on the 3rd Earl's great-grandfather when she arrived, alone, at Burlington Bay with arms and money during the Civil War.<sup>2</sup> The 1st Earl's loyalty to the House of Stuart appears never to have wavered. He did not die until the 3rd Earl was four years old. Burlington's mother was a member of another Royalist family, the Noels. Both the Boyles and the Noels played a part in the restoration of Augustus in the form of Charles II, and it seems that the restoration of Augustus in the form of James III, and later his son, Prince Charles Edward, was a major concern of 'Burlington Architectus'. Some of the evidence for this is presented in an article in *Apollo*.<sup>3</sup>

If this Royalist view of Lord Burlington is considered, a possible interpretation of Chiswick House, and one which reveals it as extremely 'convenient', is that it was conceived as a symbolic miniature palace, waiting for the King who never came: a temple to the restoration of Augustus in the form of the House of Stuart, personified by the huge family portrait of Charles I, Queen Henrietta Maria and their children, which dominated the central Tribune.

After the failure of the 1715 rebellion, 1717 was a year of renewed hope for the English Jacobites. The Whig party was split in two and the opposition group joined forces with the Tories to form the party 'of the Pretender'.<sup>4</sup> Since voting against the Repeal of the Triennial Parliaments the previous year<sup>5</sup> Lord Burlington had been one of the disaffected Whigs, and

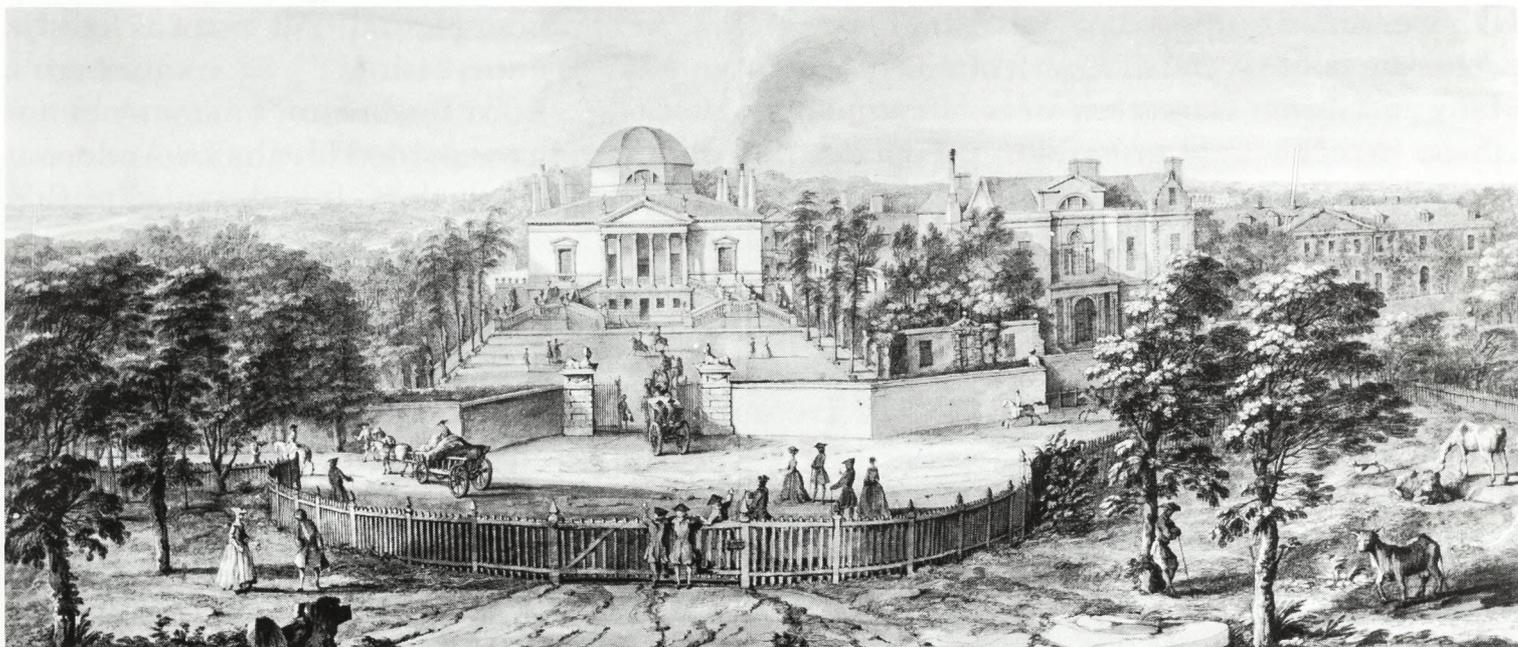


Fig. 1. Chiswick House in 1733 by Jacques Rigaud. Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth. Reproduced by courtesy of the Chatsworth Settlement Trustees.

one whose movements were followed with intense interest by the government. 'Burlington goes to France',<sup>6</sup> wrote George I's Private Secretary Robethon to Lord Stair, British Ambassador in Paris. Stair attempted to persuade Burlington to talk to his opposition friends when he got home and 'to point out to them the danger they place their country in'.<sup>7</sup> The young architect's visit to Paris was also of vital concern to Fanny Oglethorpe and the Earl of Mar, both of whom were deeply involved in a plan for another Stuart invasion at this time. In a breathless note to the Earl, giving him a few pieces of vital information, she scribbles as a post-script, with the ink running dry, 'Lord Burlington is here'.<sup>8</sup> 1717 was the year in which Burlington's first building at Chiswick, the Casina, was planned. It was also a landmark in the history of Freemasonry, being the year in which Grand Lodge was formed. That Lord Burlington was an important mason is evident from the first edition of Dr James Anderson's *Constitutions*, which was commissioned in 1721.<sup>9</sup>

Then in our songs be justice done  
To those who have enrich'd the Art,  
From Jabal down to Burlington  
And let each Brother bear a part  
Let noble Masons' Healths go round  
Their praise in lofty Lodge resound.<sup>10</sup>

Anderson prefaces his *Constitutions* with a history of the 'Royal Art' of architecture from Jabal down to the Earl of Burlington, 'who bids fair to be the best Architect of Britain (if he is not so already)'.<sup>11</sup>

This history, seen through the eyes of 18th century freemasons, is a mixture of fact and fancy, of history and legend. It stresses the importance of 'the glorious Augustus' who became 'Grand Master of the Lodge at Rome' and of his patronage of Vitruvius, the remains of whose buildings 'are the Pattern and Standard of true Masonry in all future Times'.<sup>12</sup> For Dr Anderson the Stuarts were of major importance. James I and Charles I, being Mason Kings, were responsible for restoring the 'Augustan Stile' through 'the great Palladio and the glorious Inigo Jones'.<sup>13</sup> Anderson was a Scot himself, son of the former Secretary of the Lodge of Aberdeen.<sup>14</sup>

Freemasonry as practised in the early 18th century, with its roots in Scotland and its inextricable associations with the Stuart cause, was viewed with suspicion by the Hanoverians. After the failure of the Atterbury Plot to overthrow George I in 1722, and the Grand Mastership of the Jacobite Duke of Wharton which ended in 1723, Grand Lodge became officially Hanoverian. At this point Jacobite Freemasonry went underground. All records of the proceedings of Grand Lodge from its inception in 1717 to June 24th 1723 have vanished.<sup>15</sup> Many authorities claim they were burnt in a private Lodge. Lord Burlington's name does not appear in subsequent proceedings. To judge by the importance accorded him by Dr Anderson it seems likely that he was associated with Grand Lodge in its early days. It is also possible that he had his own private Lodge in the Casina at Chiswick.

The three degrees of Craft Masonry, as practised by members of Grand Lodge (the Blue Masons),<sup>16</sup> were open to Jacobites and Hanoverians alike. In order to establish an exclusively Jacobite branch of masonry after 1723, higher degrees were added, with their own rituals and ever more stringent oaths of secrecy. These were the Red Masons.<sup>17</sup> Every mason, were he Catholic or Protestant, Jacobite or Hanoverian, had to go through the three degrees of Craft Masonry. From there the Jacobite progressed to a higher Order which eventually became the Royal Arch Degree, and from thence he could progress to a degree modelled on the ancient Knights of the Crusades, the Templars and Hospitallers. Jacobite masons saw their Cause as a Crusade. The complicated rituals and symbols were clearly very important in themselves, but the practical use to which all this was turned was even more so; it provided a hermetically sealed network through which it was safe to carry money, arms and messages all

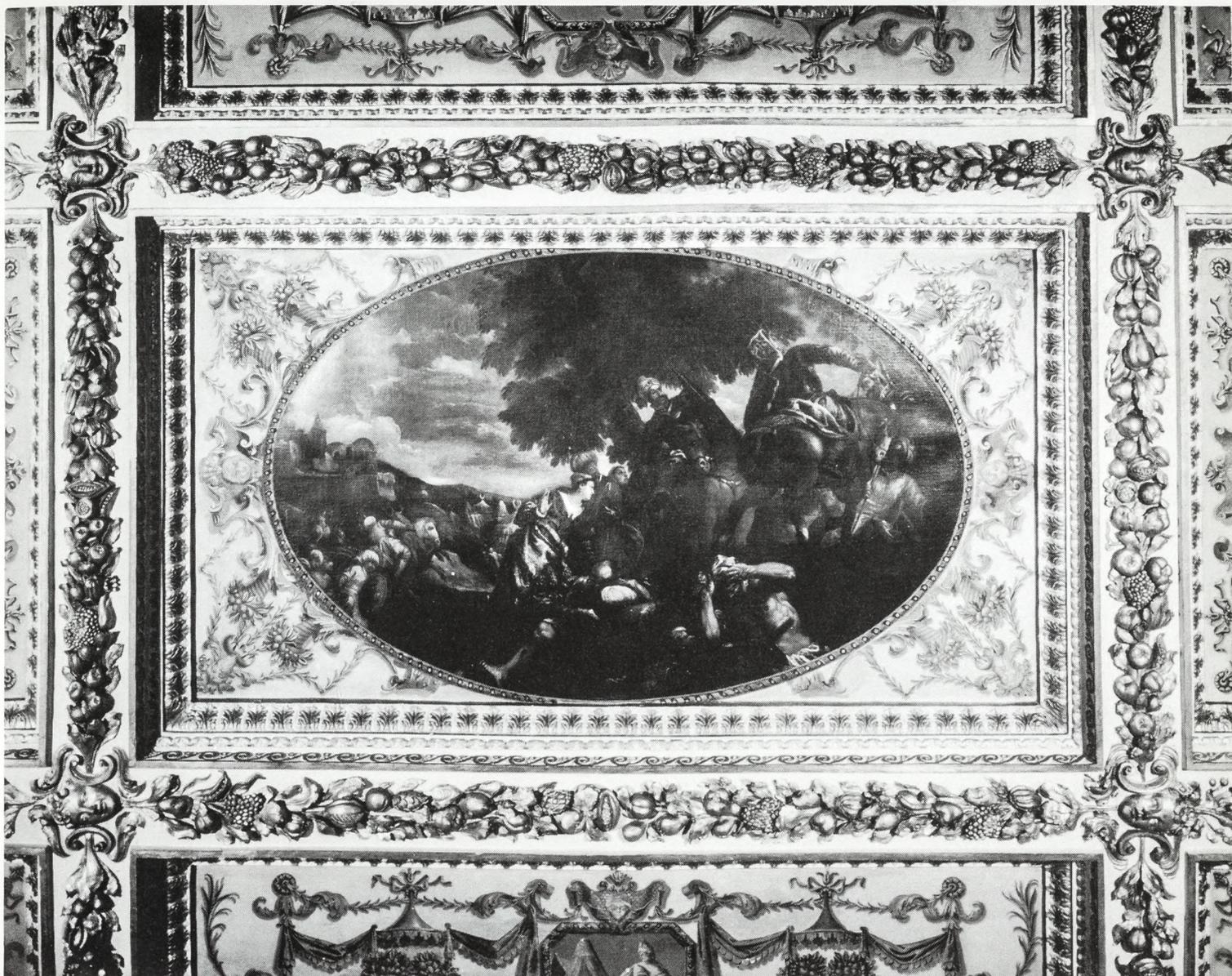


Fig. 2. The Relief of Smyrna, Gallery ceiling, Chiswick. Reproduced by courtesy of English Heritage.

over Europe.<sup>18</sup> A Jacobite messenger arriving at Chiswick House, which was built between about 1723 and 1729, would be admitted to the ground floor, from which he would ascend by a narrow, winding staircase (itself of masonic significance)<sup>19</sup> to the Blue Velvet Room and he would progress from there to the Red Velvet Room and on to the Gallery, with its ceiling painting of the *Relief of Smyrna* (Fig. 2), an event of great importance in the history of the Knights Hospitaller.

The allegory of architecture, 'The Royal Art', in the Blue Velvet Room, (Fig. 3) is presumably what any Blue Mason would have expected to see. The Red Velvet Room, with its far more complicated symbolism, is perhaps the original Royal Arch Lodge. Most masonic historians agree that the earliest evidence of the Royal Arch occurs in York and Youghall, Yorkshire and Cork respectively being where the Burlington estates lay. The main theme of the Royal Arch Ritual is that of resurrection and restoration. One of the components that went into early Scottish Freemasonry was the cult of Hermes and the study of Hermetic philosophy with its 'striving for enlightenment and spiritual rebirth of mankind, based on secret knowledge and secret societies'.<sup>20</sup> Other components were Rosicrucianism and Second Sight. A much-quoted poem, *The Muses Threnodie*, written around 1630, may account for the strange portrait of Lord and Lady Burlington by the Scot, Aikman, in which Lady Burlington is dressed as a Sybil<sup>21</sup> and both sitters stare into space (Fig. 4).

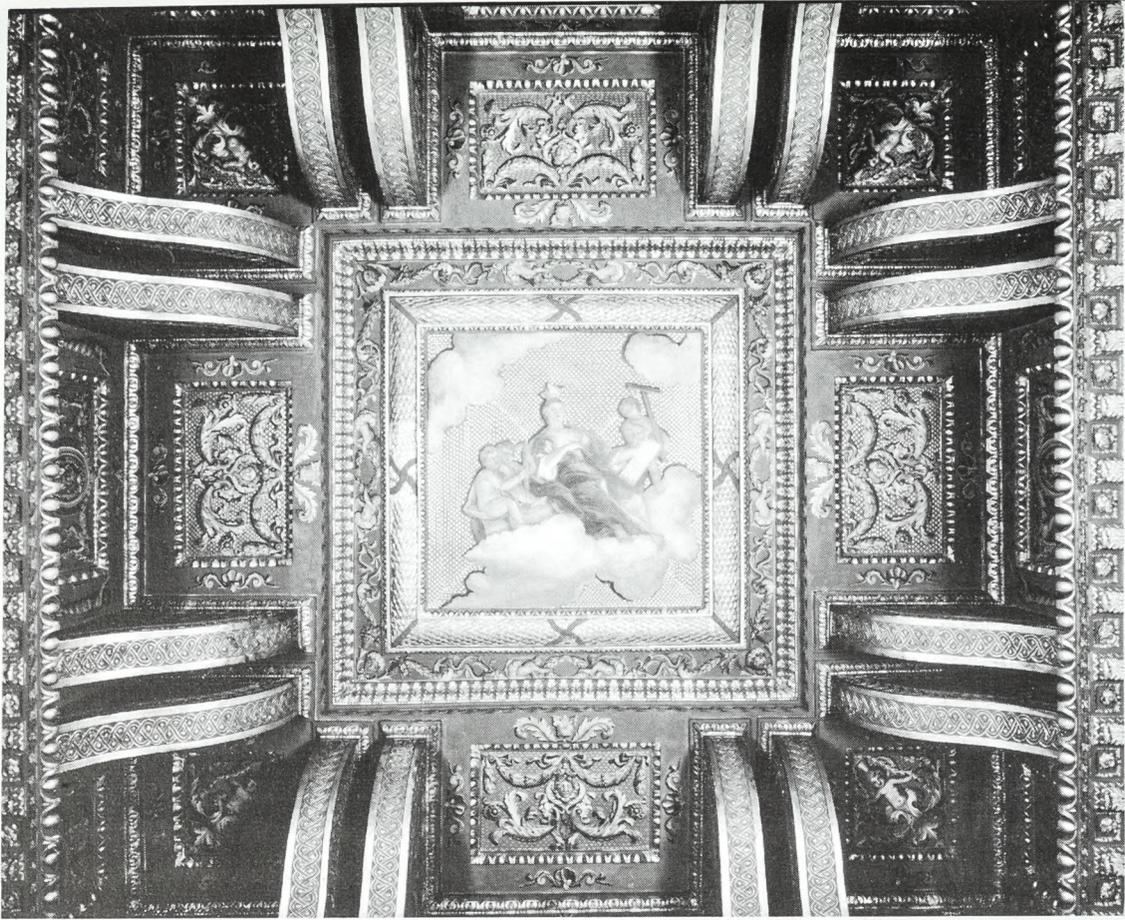


Fig. 3. Ceiling of the Blue Velvet Room, Chiswick. Reproduced by courtesy of English Heritage.



Fig. 4. Lord and Lady Burlington by William Aikman (1723). Reproduced by kind permission of the Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston.

For what we presage is not grosse,  
For we be brethren of the rosie cross;  
We have the mason-word and second sight,  
Things for to come we can foretell aright,  
And shall we know what mystery we mean,  
In fair acrosticks *Carolus Rex* is seen.<sup>22</sup>

Burlington would have been familiar with these aspects of Freemasonry through his great-uncle, Robert Boyle.<sup>23</sup>

The central painting in the Red Velvet Room portrays the resurrection of the arts (civilisation) by Hermes (Fig. 5). The Heavenly Bodies in the upper half are separated from those in the lower half by a Royal Arch. Architecture is represented by a fallen bust of Inigo Jones and Painting by an oval portrait, thought to be of William Kent, who features along with Burlington in *The Freemason's Pocket Companion* of 1736.<sup>24</sup> Kent appears to be having the scarlet veil of the Royal Arch removed from his eyes. The architect's tools, mallet, compass and square, which were symbols of masonry, are all present. The painting is dominated by Hermes, who appears in the upper half accompanied by two putti, one holding a cornucopia (another masonic symbol) and the other a jewel, perhaps the first ever Royal Arch jewel. The signs of the Zodiac appropriate for Hermes, Virgo and Gemini are on either side. The central panel is surrounded by other signs of the Zodiac with their Gods. The study of the stars was an important aspect of Hermetic philosophy and a key to secret knowledge. The Zodiac became part of the symbolism of the Royal Arch Degree. Portrait busts of Pope and Burlington occupy the two central end panels. Pope's *Universal Prayer* is quoted in the *Ceremonies of Pure and Antient Masonry*.<sup>25</sup>

In the centre of the ceiling is what appears, at a superficial glance, to be the Garter Star, but what on closer examination is clearly a star composed of equilateral triangles, one of the most important masonic symbols. It is perfectly possible that a reference to the Garter Star is intended. Elias Ashmole, one of the earliest known freemasons, described how this star, 'as it is usually called' was 'assumed' by Charles I, 'upon the Sun's appearance like three Suns, which suddenly united together into one, immediately before his fortunate Victory at the Battle of Mortimer's Cross, an occasion, which he thought himself much oblig'd to perpetuate'.<sup>26</sup> Whether it is intended to represent a star or a sun (both equally important in masonry) is perhaps immaterial in the face of the fact that Charles I's portrait hangs in the next room, where another eight-sided star graces the floor.

An important aspect of Royal Arch masonry is an adapted version of the return of the exiled Israelites under Joshua and the building of the Second Temple.<sup>27</sup> This must have symbolised, in the early days, the restoration of the exiled Stuarts. An old masonic tradition existed in which the crossing of the River of Jordan by an ancient bridge was part of the ritual.<sup>28</sup> Shortly after 1727 Burlington turned the canal at Chiswick into a serpentine river and built a bridge to the Casina from the new western entrance he made on Burlington Lane. He also built a rear porch on the Ionic Temple to give direct access from the water. Was Burlington, perhaps, the mysterious 'Joshua of the Red Masons'?<sup>29</sup>

Egyptian symbolism in masonry, which had its roots in the Hermetic tradition, also manifests itself in the garden. The traditional guardians of the Masonic Temple, 'the Egyptian sphinx',<sup>30</sup> guarded the secrets of Chiswick House. Two presided over the front entrance and three watched over the northern face. Two obelisks, masonic symbols the world over, occupied circular spaces, one at the western entrance and one in front of the Ionic Temple (Fig. 6). Obelisk chimneys crowned the roof of the villa (Fig. 7). The significance of the point within the circle in masonry is explained by John Coustos, a London mason who was tried by the Inquisition in Portugal in 1742. 'There is also a compass in this Lodge, whose signification is applicable to the Master, giving him thus to understand that in the same way as the Compass

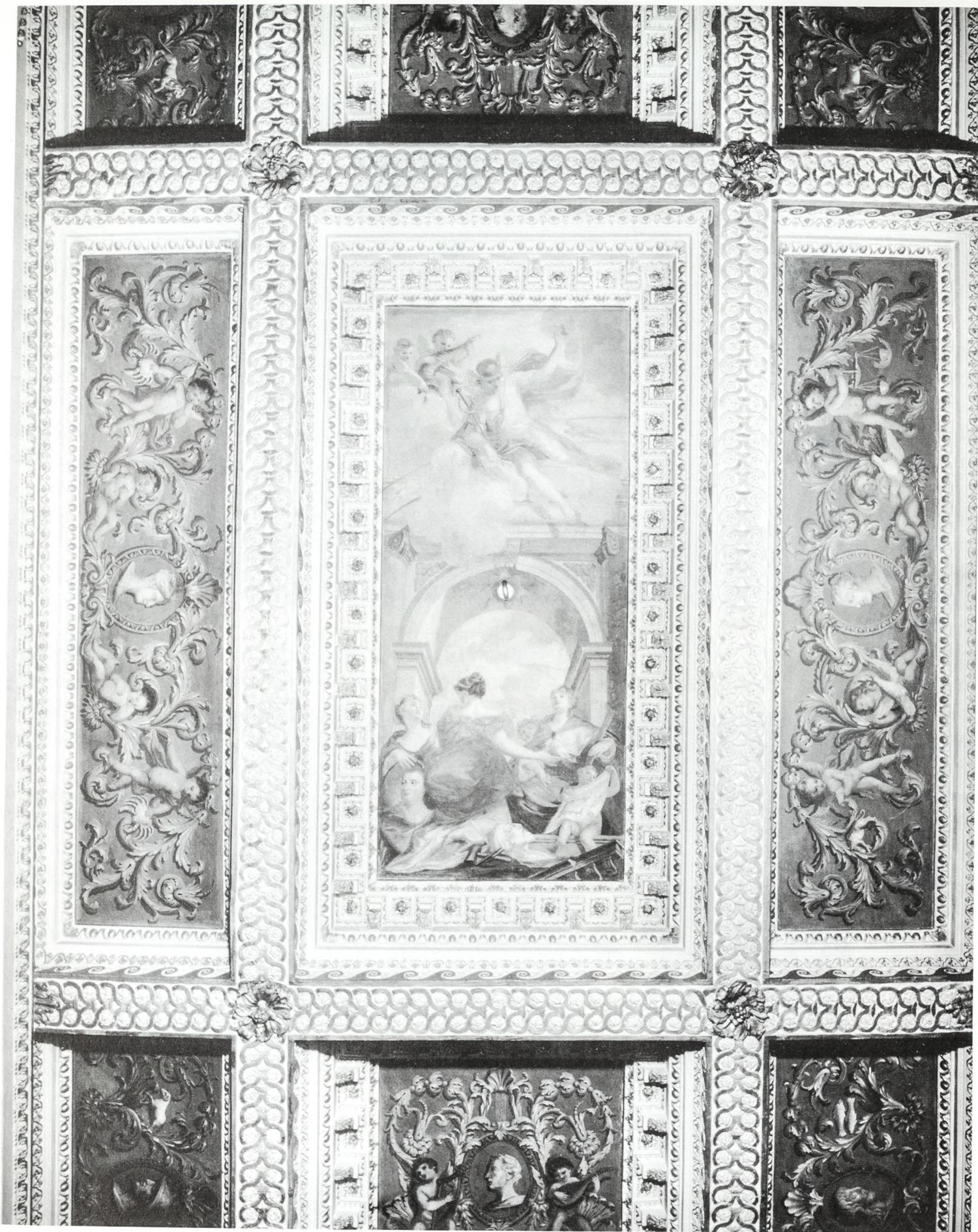


Fig. 5. Ceiling of the Red Velvet Room at Chiswick. Reproduced by courtesy of English Heritage.



Fig. 6. The Obelisk Pond and Temple. Peter Andreas Rysbrack. c.1728. Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth. Reproduced by courtesy of the Chatsworth Settlement Trustees. Photo: Courtauld Institute of Art.

being placed with one of its points on the ground cannot fail in the correctness of the circle which the other point describes, thus also the Master should circumscribe his actions so that they be without fault, and by thus complying set a good example to others'.<sup>31</sup> There may be a connection here with the compasses held by Burlington in his portrait attributed to Jonathan Richardson (Fig. 8), painted soon after 1717, showing the unfinished Casina in the background, and with those in the Aikman portrait already mentioned.

Quite what part Freemasonry played in the first Stuart exile and the restoration of Charles II seems difficult to determine and most masonic historians, naturally, refute all the

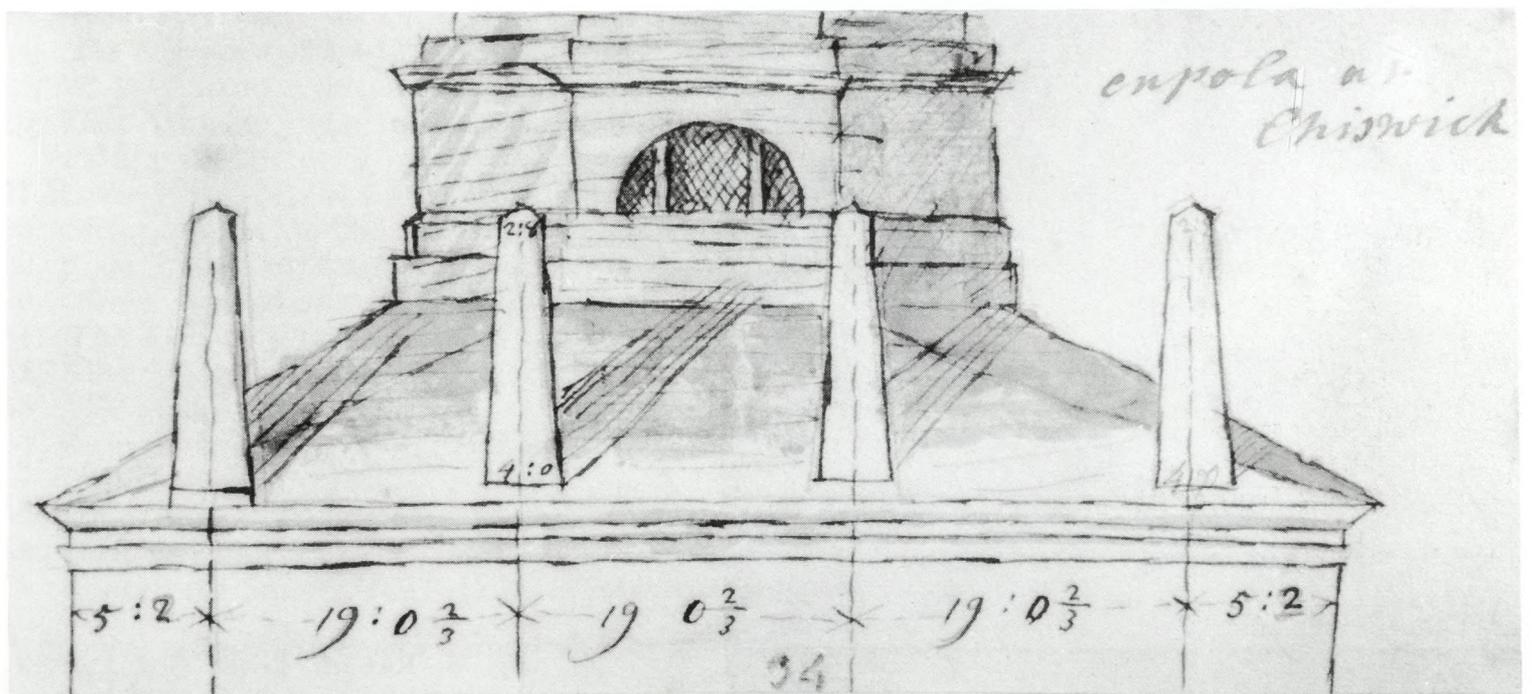


Fig. 7. Design for the cupola at Chiswick showing chimneys. Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth. Reproduced by courtesy of the Chatsworth Settlement Trustees. Photo: Courtauld Institute of Art.

evidence. However, it does look as though the 'Invisible College' of Rosicrucians, which included Robert Boyle, and the 17th century freemasons, among whom was the fervent Royalist Elias Ashmole, were deeply involved. Continental masons, whose evidence provides a truer picture of Jacobite masonry since they had nothing to hide, maintained that the restoration of Charles II was aided by these men under cover of scientific investigations. The man responsible for trying to divorce masonry from politics was Sir Christopher Wren,<sup>32</sup> which could explain Burlington's hatred of that architect, particularly if he changed sides. Continental masons also state that the murder of Hiram Abif, architect of Solomon's Temple, symbolised for Jacobites the execution of Charles I.<sup>33</sup> If the building of Solomon's Temple and the Hiramic legend were symbolic of the first Stuart exile, and eventually became the Grand Lodge Ritual in 1717, it seems only natural that the building of the Second Temple should be adopted by the Jacobites who were working on the second restoration.

Was Chiswick House this Second Temple? As can be seen, it was ideally suited as both spiritual and practical centre of operations. But two rooms still remain to be considered, the Green Velvet Room and the Bedchamber. The Bedchamber was richly furnished and the walls lined with tapestries. The plasterwork in these two rooms is particularly elaborate, and in the Bedchamber Prince of Wales feathers and oak leaves are used. The oak leaf was especially important to the Stuarts since Charles II hid in Boscobel Oak. Green, the colour of eternal hope strengthens the supposition that these rooms were planned as State Apartments.

Burlington's architectural preoccupation was with ancient values and he simply used later architects as conveyors of information.<sup>34</sup> Architecture itself was a symbol for civilisation



Fig. 8. Richard Boyle, 3rd Earl of Burlington, attributed to Jonathan Richardson, c.1717–19. National Portrait Gallery, London.

and for Burlington it symbolised the Restoration of Augustus. That initiated contemporaries understood this can be inferred, once the reader is initiated.

Lo! Numerous Domes a Burlington confess:  
For Kings and Senates fit the Palace see!  
The Temple breathing a religious awe.<sup>35</sup>

Lord Burlington may have been one of those 'wise Jacobites' who 'continued to waste their lives and their fortunes'<sup>36</sup> on an ideal that was doomed to fail, but Chiswick House must be one of the most perfect embodiments of an ideal ever to be executed.

## NOTES

1. Quoted in John Fleming, *Robert Adam and his Circle*, London 1962, p. 26.
2. I am indebted to Dr T. C. Barnard for this information.
3. Article by the author, 'The Mysterious Mr Buck', *Apollo*, Vol. CXXIX No. 327, May 1989, pp. 317–322.
4. Scottish Record Office, Stair MSS. GD135/141.11. No page. Robethon-Stair, July 1717.
5. Historic Manuscripts Commission. Stuart MSS. Vol. 2, p. 122.
6. SRO. GD135/141.12. f. 49. Robethon-Stair. 10 September (NS) 1717.
7. British Library. Stowe MSS. 230. f. 251. Stair-Robethon. 16 October (NS) 1717.
8. RA SP 22/119 (All quotations from the Royal Archives, Stuart Papers, are given with the gracious permission of Her Majesty The Queen).
9. James Anderson. *Constitutions of the Freemasons*. 1784, p. 208.
10. *Ibid.* 1723. p. 83. 'To be sung and played at the Grand Feast'.
11. *Ibid.* p. 48.
12. *Ibid.* p. 25.
13. *Ibid.* p. 39.
14. David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry*, Cambridge 1988, p. 231.
15. Henry Sadler, *Masonic Facts and Fictions*, London 1887, p. 13.
16. J. M. Roberts, *The Mythology of the Secret Societies*, New York 1971, p. 40.
17. *Ibid.* p. 96.
18. J. E. S. Tuckett, 'The Origin of Additional Degrees', *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, Vol. XXXII, 1919, p. 16.
19. George Oliver, *The Freemason's Treasury*, London 1863, p. 254.
20. David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry*, p. 85.
21. John Wilton-Ely, 'Lord Burlington & the Virtuoso Portrait', *Architectural History*, Vol. 27: 1984.
22. Henry Adamson, *The Muses Threnodie*, Perth 1774, p. 84.
23. David Stevenson, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
24. *The Freemason's Pocket Companion*, 1736, p. 11.
25. W. J. Williams, 'Alexander Pope & Freemasonry', *A.Q.C.* Vol XXXVIII. 1925, p. 113.
26. Elias Ashmole, 'The Institution, Laws and Ceremonies of the Most Noble Order of the Garter', 1672, p. 216.
27. Leslie J. Biddle, 'The Principal Characters in the Royal Arch Story', *A.Q.C.* Vol. 79, 1966.
28. Oliver, *op. cit.*, p. 243.
29. F. de P. Castells, *English Freemasonry in its Period of Transition*, London 1931, p. 123.
30. Oliver, *Signs & Symbols*, London 1857, p. 88.
31. 'The Trial of John Coustos by the Inquisition', *A.Q.C.* Vol. 66, 1954, p. 114.
32. Oliver, *Freemason's Treasury*, p. 25.
33. Alec Mellor, *Our Separated Brethren*, London 1964, p. 100.
34. Richard Hewlings, in Boris Ford (Ed.) *The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain*. Vol. 5. 1990, forthcoming.
35. James Thomson, *Liberty*, 1734–6, V, 690–2.
36. Lord Cornbury. Quoted in Eveline Cruickshanks: 'Lord Cornbury, Bolingbroke and a Plan to Restore the Stuarts, 1731–1735', *Royal Stuart Papers*, XXVII, 1986.

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