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LORD BURLINGTON AND THE OFFICE OF WORKS

by Howard Colvin

In 1718, when Sir Christopher Wren was dismissed from the Surveyorship of the Works, the Office of the King's Works had for nearly half a century been the centre of diffusion of the Anglo-baroque architecture which we associate with the names of Vanbrugh, Hawksmoor, Talman and Wren himself. By the 1730s it had become just as closely identified with the Palladian revival of which Lord Burlington was the guiding spirit. How was this revolution in both taste and personnel achieved, and what part did Lord Burlington himself play in the transformation?

In order to answer these questions it is necessary first of all to appreciate that the Civil Service as we know it today is a creation of the 19th century. The laissez-faire government of the 18th century was conducted by a miscellaneous and uncoordinated collection of offices, many, like the Exchequer, medieval in origin and still largely medieval in their operations, others, like the Excise Office or the Lottery Office, the product of more recent financial or administrative expedients. Some were necessary and efficient, others totally useless and anachronistic. Many, but by no means all, were sinecures, and the rewards of office were more often in virtue of the fees and perquisites pertaining to the post than of the nominal salaries attached to it. Those posts that were remunerative were generally given to political place-men, who appointed deputies to perform their duties. Whether well-paid or otherwise, absentee or fulfilling his functions in person, the 18th century servant of the Crown was not normally expected to attend more than a few hours a day, a few days of the week, and was free to earn what he could by personal service or private practice. Appointment was by patronage, exercised by the Crown and its ministers in respect of the superior officers, by the superior officers themselves in respect of their underlings.

The Georgian Office of Works was a typical example of this antique but not wholly inefficient bureaucracy. Its responsibilities were limited to the royal palaces, the Houses of Parliament and one or two other buildings, but it was by far the largest and most prestigious concentration of architectural expertise in the country; in fact, since the time of Inigo Jones it had been the heart of the English architectural establishment, and would continue to be so until it fell into disrepute at the hands first of James Wyatt and then of John Nash. Nominally at the head of it was the Surveyor-General of the King's Works, since 1715 invariably a political place-man and the fortunate recipient of an income of some £500; increased in 1726 to £900 a year. The other principal sinecures connected with the Works were the Paymastership, the Surveyorship of the King's Private Roads and the Surveyorship of Gardens and Waters. The real work

was done by the Comptroller, the Deputy Surveyor and the Clerks of the Works, one for each palace or group of palaces. The routine of the Office was conducted by a Board consisting of the Surveyor (normally represented by his Deputy), the Comptroller, and the Master Mason and the Master Carpenter. It was this body that corporately set in motion any works demanded by the Crown through the Treasury or the Lord Chamberlain, that procured the design, engaged the necessary workmen and eventually passed the bills. None of its members were, strictly speaking, professional architects; it was not until 1761 that the existence of an emergent architectural profession was recognised by the appointment of two joint Architects of the Works: William Chambers and Robert Adam. But in the 1720s, the period with which we are concerned, the Comptroller was Sir John Vanbrugh, the Deputy Surveyor was Westby Gill, the Master Mason was Nicholas Dubois, and the Master Carpenter was Thomas Ripley: all in practice men of considerable architectural knowledge if not all as able designers as Vanbrugh.

Vanbrugh was of course a survivor from the great days of Sir Christopher Wren and in no sense a Palladian. But Nicholas Dubois was the translator of Palladio (in Leoni's pioneering edition of 1715-16) and Westby Gill's few recorded architectural works can only be classified as 'Palladian'. Gill certainly, and Dubois probably, owed his place to Sir Thomas Hewitt, Surveyor of the Works from 1719 until his death in 1726. Hewitt, himself an amateur architect, was one of the 'new junta for architecture' which was already trying to steer British architecture in a neo-classical direction before Lord Burlington took charge, so Dubois and Gill were as it were a Palladian advance guard within the Board.

When Vanbrugh and Hewitt both died within a fortnight of one another in 1726 there was, as Hawksmoor told Lord Carlisle, 'prodigious pressing (of) Sir Robert Walpole; by my Ld. Devonshire, Lord Burlington, and many others' on behalf of their own candidates. The man to whom Walpole gave the surveyorship was the Hon. Richard Arundell, the owner of the Allerton Mauleverer estate in Yorkshire. Arundell had many influential friends, and he did not necessarily owe his promotion to Burlington's good offices. But he would certainly have had Burlington's support, for it was to Burlington to whom he was indebted for his seat in Parliament as Member for Knaresborough (he held it from 1720 to 1758). Not only was Arundell a beneficiary of Burlington's patronage. He was a close connection and intimate friend of the 9th Earl of Pembroke, well known as 'the Architect Earl'. He himself was regarded as something of a pundit in matters architectural, and subscribed to works by Leoni, Kent and Ware. So no appointment could have been more favourable to the Palladian cause than Arundell's: and interest and inclination both ensured that he would do his best to oblige Lord Burlington in the exercise of his own patronage within the Office.

As for the Comptrollership, 'Great Endeavours' were made to secure it for William Kent, but Walpole had reserved this place for a protege of his own, Thomas Ripley, the carpenter who had married one of his servants, and who had supervised the building of Houghton. Still, Houghton was a Palladian mansion and Ripley could be counted on as a stylistic fellow-traveller, even if he was a poor substitute for Kent. Moreover Ripley's promotion left vacant the post of Master Carpenter, and this was now offered to Kent. Arundell, anxious to have Kent on the Board of Works, wrote to Burlington to beg him to allow Kent to accept this lesser post: 'They have made my Employment so good by adding 500 pds. per An. to it, that it's impossible for me to decline it & without Kent, that I can depend upon, it will not be very agreeable'. Kent, of course, accepted with Burlington's approval. So by the end of 1726 the entire Board of Works was in the hands of men either actively in favour of Palladianism or at least sympathetic to it.

There remained the Clerkships of the Works. These were in the Surveyor's own patronage; minor posts, it is true, but ones that carried with them modest salaries and official residences and, of course, the expectation of eventual promotion to one of the more prestigious posts on the Board. Eight of them fell vacant in the course of Arundell's surveyorship, which lasted from 1726 to 1737, and six of them went to men who were sound Palladians. Chief of these was Henry Flitcroft, 'Burlington Harry' as he was called, who in 1726 was given the key Clerkship of the Works at Whitehall, Westminster and St. James's. In due course he rose to be Master Carpenter (1746), Master Mason and Deputy Surveyor (1748) and finally Comptroller (1758). But in 1726 Flitcroft was still an obscure ex-joiner who had been taken in hand by Burlington and whose architectural experience was almost entirely limited to acting as his patron's draughtsman. Now the date of Flitcroft's appointment was 4 May 1726 - the same as Arundell's own. But the Clerkships of the Works were normally in the Surveyor's gift, and as we know from a letter written by Arundell to Burlington that he was already in touch with Walpole about another vacancy in the Office (the Comptrollership) some weeks before his own formal appointment, it seems likely that Burlington suggested Flitcroft's name to Arundell and that Arundell then mentioned it to Walpole. Whatever the precise mechanism of patronage may have been in this case, there can be little doubt that it was Burlington who got Flitcroft into the Office of Works, probably with Arundell's help. The same must be true of the appointment in 1727 of Daniel Garrett as Labourer in Trust - a kind of foreman - at Richmond New Park Lodge, where his immediate superior, the Clerk of Works, was none other than Roger Morris. Roger Morris was, of course, the architectural adjutant of Arundell's friend the Earl of Pembroke, and the Lodge itself (the 'White Lodge') had just been built to Pembroke's designs under Morris's direction. But Garrett was another of Burlington's architectural assistants who in 1727 had no independent work to his credit. In 1736, when proposing to bring Garrett to Castle Howard, in order to

give advice on the completion of the Mausoleum, Sir Thomas Robinson wrote to Lord Carlisle that 'My Ld. Burlington has a much better opinion of Mr. Garrett's knowledge and judgment than of Mr. Flitcroft or any person whatever, except Mr. Kent, he lives in Burlington House and he has had care and conduct of . . . all my Lord's designs he ever gave'. In due course Garrett might have risen to a clerkship of the works, but in 1737 he was dismissed for 'not attending his duty'. By now he had begun to build up an architectural practice of his own in the north of England which no doubt proved incompatible with the performance of his duties at Richmond in Surrey.

A scrutiny of the personnel of the Georgian Office of Works shows the names of two other Palladian stalwarts: Isaac Ware and John Vardy. Ware's career in the Office of Works began in 1728 when he was appointed Clerk Itinerant, Vardy's in 1736 when he became Clerk of Works at the Queen's House at Greenwich. As Ware had been apprenticed to Ripley, the Comptroller, in 1721, it is likely that it was the latter who was instrumental in getting him into the Office, but Ware himself is said to have told Roubiliac that he owed his architectural career to a benevolent gentleman who, walking down Whitehall, found him sketching an elevation of the Banqueting House on the pavement with a piece of chalk. Even if the identification of the unknown benefactor with Lord Burlington is probably apocryphal, there are some circumstances in Ware's career that suggest a more elevated mentor than Ripley. We cannot, however, attribute Ware's entry into the Office of Works to Burlington's direct influence, nor can we do so in the case of Vardy, who had close links with William Kent, and was too young to have been a beneficiary of Burlington's patronage.

The exercise of patronage is, of its nature, imperfectly documented. It was a matter of private confabulation, of reciprocal obligations, of tacit but unpublicised understandings. There can, however, be no real doubt that the entry into the Office of Works of all Burlington's architectural proteges, Kent, Flitcroft, Garrett and perhaps Ware, formed part of a deliberate campaign to infiltrate, with Arundell's help, what I have called the heart of the English architectural establishment. From Burlington's point of view the advantages were two-fold: on the one hand he was obtaining posts for his proteges, thus providing them with honourable and remunerative but not unduly onerous employment; on the other he was ensuring that future royal buildings would be designed by proved Palladian architects. The Royal Mews at Charing Cross, the Treasury Building in Whitehall, the Queen's Library at St. James's, the Horse Guards, were his rewards. All of these buildings were designed by Kent in the Palladian style that Lord Burlington advocated: and as Kent lived in Burlington's household for most of his life it is unlikely that they were designed without his patron's knowledge and approval. There was one other great architectural prize which Burlington nearly secured, and that was a new Palace of Westminster. All through the 18th century the idea of rebuilding the Houses

of Parliament on a monumental scale was kept alive, and early in the 1730s it came very near to fulfillment. In contemporary journals Lord Burlington's name is repeatedly mentioned in connection with this project, and although the surviving drawings are all in Kent's hand, there can be little doubt that Burlington was in the background, advising and criticising, if not actually drawing.

But in 1733, hurt, it seems, at the King's failure to give him a promised 'white staff' (the symbol of high office in the royal household), Burlington resigned all his posts at Court and went in effect into political opposition. From now on his influence would be at an end. But by 1733 his purpose had been achieved. Palladians to a man, the personnel of the Office of Works no longer needed his tutelage. Secure in their posts and confirmed in their adherence to Palladian principles, they were architects not only to King George II, but to half the aristocracy of England as well.

Clerks of the Works appointed during the Surveyorship of the Hon. Richard Arundell (1726-1737):

1726	Whitehall, Westminster & St. James's	Henry Flitcroft
1727	Richmond New Park Lodge	Roger Morris
1728 (?)	Richmond and Kew	Henry Flitcroft
1729	Windsor Castle	Isaac Ware
1730	Greenwich (Queen's House)	L. Wooddeson (d.1733)
1733	Charing Cross Mews	Joseph Phillips
1733	Greenwich (Queen's House)	Isaac Ware
1736	Greenwich (Queen's House)	John Vardy