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CONCLUDING REMARKS BY JOHN NEWMAN

The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, in his Letter concerning the Art, or Science of Design written in 1712, expressed the belief that after British military success and with growing economic prosperity, the time was ripe for the arts to flourish. But the health of the arts depended on public taste and interest: " without a Publick Voice knowingly guided and directed, there is nothing which can raise a true ambition in the Artist. "

It is tempting to suppose that the Third Earl of Burlington consciously set himself to be the guide and director of the arts for whom Shaftesbury called. Burlington's interest in the arts was wide and his personal involvement exceptional; he took into his house a painter, a sculptor and a musician, and would have taken in the leading poet of the day had he been able; his own estate at Chiswick was the testing ground for crucial new ideas in gardening and of course he practised architectural design, in this last respect going well beyond the bounds of contemporary convention.

Yet a closer scrutiny of Burlington's artistic activities suggests a lack of planning and even of long-term objectives. His attempt to popularise Italian opera ran aground on the rivalry of Handel and Bononcini, Guelfi his sculptor proved a disappointment and William Kent demonstrated outstanding talents not as a painter, but in the very field where Burlington was most active. In other ways too Burlington's architectural involvement seems not to have been as carefully controlled as one might have expected. Dr Connor here suggests that Burlington's architectural book publishing was less than systematic, and in particular that Fabbriche Antiche was hardly more than a nobleman's toy. Nevertheless in William Kent's Designs of Inigo Jones (1727) and Isaac Ware's translation of Palladio (1738) Burlington did assist at the birth of the most authentic publications of the period devoted to the two great exemplars of the new taste. How clear, one asks, was Burlington's concept of the market for architectural publications, and how far in fact did he consciously attempt to influence public taste in architecture?

Pope's Epistle of 1731 is the one coherent statement in Burlington's own lifetime, which, though not in his own words, must closely reflect his ideas and ambitions. It deserves the most careful reading. The emphasis laid by Pope on the importance of public works is striking - harbours, roads, churches, bridges, though not admittedly those darling projects, a new Whitehall or a new Houses of Parliament. Here too Burlington's own practice is oddly disappointing. Westminster Dormitory and the York Assembly Rooms were certainly complete realisations of his intentions; but why, if Burlington really considered public buildings so important, did he let those two other public commissions, the Town Hall for Chichester and the school and almshouses at Sevenoaks, fall so tantalisingly through his fingers ?

Even when we review Burlington's executed architecture we must ponder whether at the end of his life he looked back with satisfaction or with disappointment at what he had achieved. Why after little more than a decade of activity, designing for himself and his relatives and at the request of fellow peers and landowners, did he in the early 1730s, when barely forty years old, largely abandon architectural design and settle down to the more normal patrician role of architectural adviser ?

Burlington's buildings derive their force from their directness, from their unswerving fidelity to the models found in Antiquity, in Palladio and in Inigo Jones. Yet, although his compilations from these models, in particular at York, resulted in buildings of revolutionary novelty, one can hardly say that Burlington assimilated his sources or even learnt to compose freely for himself. To return to an example discussed by Miss Kingsbury, a comparison of Palladio's flexible plasticity in handling the pilasters at the inner angles of the nave of S. Giorgio Maggiore contrasts almost painfully with Burlington's schematic treatment of the clerestorey angles of the York Assembly Rooms, a diagram rather than a work of art.

With William Kent's development to maturity in architecture in the early 1730s, Burlington could afford to step back behind his protege. Kent had the pictorial sense which even Burlington's richest jewel, Chiswick Villa, does not really show. We should respect Burlington for realising this. William Kent's great public works of the 1730s, The Royal Mews, The Treasury, The Horse Guards and the designs for the new Houses of Parliament are in a real sense the crown of Burlington's architectural activities. But this was only possible because of Burlington's exercise of patronage in the previous decade, whereby the Office of Works was packed with budding Palladian architects. Here, as Mr Colvin demonstrates, Lord Burlington, adopting the traditional aristocratic role as protector and placer of talent, had a success more total and effective than any other he achieved as a patron of the arts.