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THE EARLIEST ENGLISH BOOKS ON ARCHITECTURE

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ONE APRIL AFTERNOON IN 1663, the best known Englishman of his day, best known that is, to us rather than at the time, walked back to London from Deptford, deep in a book. Every now and then he pulled out of his pocket a small ruler with which to compare what he was reading. The book appears to have been the newly published *Description and Use of the Carpenter's Rule*, by John Browne and the man, of course, was Samuel Pepys.¹

This incident illustrates problems which face an attempt to review the use of architectural books in mid-seventeenth-century England. The bulk of the sources refer us constantly to the habits and interests of the literate minority and particularly to patrons, rarely to architects themselves. Thus we know about the libraries of the Earl of Northumberland at Petworth and Syon at the start of the century or of that belonging to John Evelyn at the end, all of which had holdings of architectural books. Luckily, the libraries of Sir Christopher Wren, or of Robert Hooke can be reconstructed from auction catalogues, and part of that of Inigo Jones survives intact. But what *were* the books, lying about in what John Smythson described his 'Library' at Bolsover when he died in 1634, and what were the titles of the 'Books' which, along with his 'Quarrie tooles, plotts, compasses [and] moldes' which the Northamptonshire master-mason Arthur Grumbold left to his son when he died in 1670?² Any attempt to look at architectural books in the age of the Artisan Mannerists ought to attempt to recover the titles of books belonging to men such as these. They took them entirely for granted. This is well illustrated by the slightly later case of John Bastard of Blandford, who itemized his property after the fire of 1731. He mentioned the poetry books of Waller and Cowley by name, but otherwise all he described were, in the counting house, '4 books of architecture . . . [and] a collection of prints and drawings in Trade', or, in the parlour 'about 40 carvings and models of different things'.³

The Pepys episode also took place in London. Time and again the sources direct our attention to the capital, not least the architectural books which were published there. About the distribution and use of such books in the provinces we know very little indeed. What books, for example, did the Corporation of Newcastle have in mind when they contracted with Robert Trollope of York in 1655 to perform their Exchange and Guildhall 'according to the best Authors now in English'?⁴ If they were thinking of anything specific, it was more likely to refer to matters of measurement than to matters of design, but the process by which in the provinces printed books replaced personal records like John Smythson's London sketch-book of a generation earlier is altogether invisible. This was a period in which provincial architectural traditions retained both variety and vitality, two characteristics which the spread of printed books and patterns did much to erode.

The beginnings of an answer to these questions can be made by looking at what books, either foreign or English were actually available around 1660. A final answer the shortage of detailed inventories makes impossible. But we should not expect too much.

Book-ownership was itself uncommon among the craftsmen of mid-seventeenth-century England, and where they did possess books it is likely that these were popular chapbooks rather than manuals of their craft. In Canterbury, in the period 1620–40, only 36% of building tradesmen owned any books at all, and the type of book is rarely mentioned, and the same is true of the printed inventories of the masons in Banbury.⁵

The most obvious reason for this scarcity of architectural books was their cost. At the beginning of the century, the 9th Earl of Northumberland could afford £1 for a copy of De Caus' *Perspective*, and later on a young gentleman like Roger Pratt pay 15s. for 'ye statehouse of Amsterdam' of Jacob van Campen, but this was a huge price for an artisan.⁶ Even the small books published in the 1660s and 1670s and intended specifically for craftsmen, such as Richards's edition of Palladio cost 7s. and Pricke's folio Francini 10s. It is extremely difficult to be sure of wage rates in this period, especially with the growing use of piece work, but it is unlikely that even the best masons and carpenters in the early seventeenth century received more than 18d. a day, *when they worked*. By this standard even the humblest manual of the orders might cost as much as a week's wages. The great 1611 translation of Serlio may have cost as much as £5; the equivalent of sixty-six days work.

Many of the surviving references to specific books occur in situations which imply their rarity. When people travelled abroad they were likely to be asked to get hold of these rare objects, as was, for example, Nicholas Stone jnr in Rome in 1639. Not only did he buy, on his father's behalf, Vignola's *Perspective*, Vitruvius and Alberti, as well as what he entitled 'the fountains of Rome' and a 'little book of sights', but he was also acting for the London master-mason Edmund Kinsman (one of those involved in the construction of the tower of Goudhurst church, Kent) in buying Domenico Fontana's 'booke of Archytecture'. This must have been the *De Obelisco* of 1590 which, besides dealing in brilliant detail with the transportation of the Vatican obelisk, included also very large and useful plates of window designs made by Fontana for other buildings such as the Lateran Palace.⁷ Stone added in his diary that this book was 'very scarsly to be found' although we know of at least one other English copy at the time. Thus Wren was doing nothing very unusual, but rather making a necessary preparation when wrote of his intention to bring back, from his brief trip abroad, 'almost all France in Paper'. Nor is it surprising in the circumstances that a principal source of architectural information for artisan builders was the libraries of their employers, be they Sir Edward Pytts of Kyre Park, Sir Roger Townshend of Raynham, or Sir Godfrey Copley of Sprotborough, from whom the York mason John ETTY asked to borrow 'Marot's book' while laid up with an injured leg.

Such books, all of them of European origin, that we actually know of by name, and others the use of which can be inferred from drawings, like John Thorpe's which borrow from them must form the bulk of the printed architectural literature available in mid-seventeenth-century England. How big the iceberg was of which it forms the tip is impossible to know. And not all of it was readily available to practitioners: even the most interesting collection of all, that of Inigo Jones, was taken out of circulation when Webb retired. As one correspondent wrote, 'Mr. Webbe . . . pretends to have good Schemes and Models of [Architecture] to ye value of some thousands Stirling but these he reserves for additions to his daughters' portions.'⁸

It was in the 1650s that the publication in England of books intended for the practice of architecture first got underway. There were several distinguished precursors of course, from Shute's *First and Chief Groundes of Architecture* 1563 to Wotton's *Elements of Architecture*, including the slim and much reprinted version of Blum's manual of the orders and the massive translation of Serlio of 1611. But it is only in the 1650s that any consistent stream of publications develops, and even then it is narrow and faltering, only gathering momentum at the end of our period in the 1660s and 1670s. Indeed, as was suggested by Godfrey Richards in

the preface to his translation of part of Palladio in 1664, a major stimulus to this development was 'the scarcity of Books of Architectur in English, and the zeal which I find our Ingenious Artists have to entertain anything of that subject'.⁹ It is also probably the case that the expansion of the printing trade in mid-seventeenth-century London made an increased volume of publication on this and many allied subjects possible for the first time.

The first English books on architecture were not, in general, written by people we would describe as architects. Land-surveyors, mathematicians, lawyers, craftsmen all contributed. Publishers occupied a central role throughout. The translation of Serlio's treatise, out of a Dutch edition into English, was organized by Robert Peake, who admitted that his only part in the making of the book had been 'the great adventure of the Charge', that is, in putting up the capital. It was Robert Peake's grandson of the same name who published the third edition of Blum in 1635 and he appears to have travelled, perhaps in search of foreign architectural books, for he met Nicholas Stone jnr when the latter landed in Dieppe in 1638.

Many of these early works were translations. Generally they were made, not from the original work, but from a popular abbreviation: that of Scamozzi was in Dutch, that of Palladio and Vignola was French. Vignola was probably the most popular authority of the details of the orders at this time, the first English version having appeared in 1642 in Amsterdam. This was followed by Joseph Moxon's translation of Le Muet's handy French edition in 1655. Moxon took from Le Muet not only Vignola's famous systematization of the orders, but also a dozen extra plates of doorways and chimney-pieces, some of which were by Vignola, but others were Le Muet's invention. Despite the tiny size of this book, its patterns were copied, and the popularity of Vignola ensured a third, much grander version in 1669, by the London surveyor, John Leake.

Intriguing light on the activities of a publisher who was interested in architecture can be seen in the case of Godfrey Richards, the publisher of Palladio. In 1676 Robert Hooke went to Richards's shop where he met the classical scholar Christopher Wase and 'Discoursed about Vitruvius'. He clarifies this by saying 'Demanded £50 for translation, £5 for each book'.¹⁰ This seems to suggest that a scheme for the translation of the great classical treatise was being devised by the three men, perhaps with Richards putting up the capital, Wase providing the lexicographical skills — he had published a Latin-English dictionary, leaving Hooke as the architectural expert to wrestle with the ambiguities of the text. The problem is actually more complicated than that, for Wase had already translated the whole text five years previously, had secured the help of Evelyn in the organization of publication and of Wren himself in the provision of architectural notes. This project, which got as far as a printed prospectus and specimen text, like that of Hooke and Richards, never appeared.¹¹ Neither would have competed, for those sufficiently scholarly to wish to study Vitruvius in any case, with the magisterial French edition of Claude Perrault, which appeared in 1672.

The 'paper' to which Wren referred as the plunder of his visit to France in 1665 meant particularly the single sheet or suites of engravings which were the most common as well as the most ephemeral means of visual communication in the period. Some English printsellers were beginning to issue these; an early and now extremely rare example is the *XXX. Pieces of Architecture, taken out of the famous Author Vincent Scamozze*, a mixture of plates of Scamozzi's orders and designs of the Louvre, which seems to have appeared in the late 1650s. With French titles to the plates and designs of French buildings the only clue that this was produced in London at all is the decorative head-and-tail-piece to the preface, and this type of wholesale borrowing was widespread. Noone adapted this practice to architectural works more fully than Robert Pricke, an engraver and printseller active in Cheapside between 1669 and 1698. Pricke republished a number of French and Italian pattern books such as the *Book of Architecture* of Francini, first published in 1631, often changing nothing but the title-page which he replaced with a loquacious one of his own. These advertised his stock of 'other

books of Architecture, also Maps, Copy Books, Italian, French and Dutch prints'. Robert Hooke, working at the nearby Bethlehem Hospital in 1675, dropped into Pricke's shop and noticed also 'Palladio Englisht', that is Richards's edition for sale. Besides individual works Pricke also put out works like the *Architect's Storehouse* which contained plates from a variety of French and Italian sources. Of the simple suites of engravings, often produced without any printed preliminaries, there are few English examples; one was the 'Designs for Freizes' published perhaps as early as 1640 by Edward Pierce snr and intended as much for the use of painters like himself as for architects. It was reissued after the Restoration by the well-known printseller John Overton. It is quite possible that other suites like this one were issued but have disappeared without trace.

The books so far mentioned, in which the role of the publisher was crucial, often involved the production of a substantial number of engraved plates. If one wishes to see books where the author owes slightly less to the publisher it is with small and unillustrated books that one should start. One area of building for which such cheap manuals were designed, in many cases to help fellow practitioners at a critical stage in operations, was measuring. It may perhaps be that craftsmen in seventeenth-century English towns were, like the inhabitants of Renaissance Florence possessed of a far sharper ability to estimate dimension, area and weight than we do now. Nevertheless, upon the exact measurement of artificer's work the performance of contracts, and therefore payment, depended. Similarly critical was the surveying of sites before building — a task which became dramatically prominent in the months after the Fire of London when sites had all to be surveyed and their boundaries, often controversial, agreed upon. Although books on surveying had existed in English for a century, in the late 1650s the number specifically directed to the measurement of building materials began to proliferate, and the explosion of building after the fire meant that they were frequently reprinted.

One example of this was John Brown's books which so fascinated Samuel Pepys. Brown himself was a mathematical instrument maker and his book was published by William Fisher who later combined it with a digest of Scamozzi's sixth book on the orders an abbreviated version of Wotton's *Elements* and a handful of chimney-piece designs to create a useful compendium of architectural information. More interesting is John Darling's *The Carpenter's Rule Made Easie*. In a subject that tends to be dominated by the needs of the capital it is noteworthy that this book was printed for a bookseller in Darling's native city of Worcester. Darling's preface illuminates the way in which manuals like this were used when he implies that copies of his work had been passed round in manuscript before he was prevailed upon to have it printed, and at one point he says that he is bearing in mind the needs of those who cannot read. His text is very unexciting, consisting mainly of instructions how to calculate the area and volume of pieces of timber and much of it is simply a multiplication table. No hint is given of the form of buildings for which these calculations were necessary; as with many of the early books, technique was a more urgent matter than style. Darling's book appeared in 1658. Together with the *XXX Pieces* of Scamozzi, Moxon's *Vignola* a reissue of part of Serlio and a few other manuals it precedes the Restoration. The group would have been greatly enhanced had 'The ffour bookes of Architecture of Palladio now newly translated into english by H. L. Esq.' ever appeared. This was submitted to Stationers Hall in 1655, but nothing more is known of it.¹² This publishing activity supports the work of Webb, Mills, and others unknown to show how building activity was picking up before the return of the monarchy.

Apart from the measuring books, all the works so far mentioned were heavily dependent on foreign originals. Nothing as yet shows an Englishman grappling for himself with the theory, or even much of the practice of architecture. Bacon's noble essay 'Of Building' had been followed by Sir Henry Wotton's *Elements of Architecture*, written when the ex-ambassador was between jobs in 1623. This did acquire immense authority, was incorporated

in other manuals, and was reprinted more than any other English work on the subject. But in no sense was this an exhaustive study, and its authority depended much on its pithy expression of what he called 'other mens stuffe'. There was nothing here approaching the combination of scholarly knowledge of the past and mastery of practice that was to distinguish Blondel's *Cours* published in 1675, or the Magisterial *Treatise* of Sir William Chambers a century later.

The tradition stemming from Bacon and Wotton, of cultivated and travelled amateurs, was decisively developed by John Evelyn. In 1664 Evelyn published *A Parallel of the Ancient Architecture with the Modern*. Its architectural contents fell into two parts. The principal section was a translation of the remarkable treatise of Roland Fréart de Chambray, first published in 1650 and which Evelyn had begun to work on in the mid-1650s. The *Parallel* was typical of a thread of post-renaissance classicism in mid-seventeenth-century France, and sought to compare the various modern authors who had sought to prescribe rules for the orders of columns with each other, and with the acknowledged masterpieces of antiquity. The diagrammatic plates comparing the authors two by two were accompanied by a detailed discussion of the variations. As Sir John Summerson has said, it was a book of pronouncedly Palladian prejudice. To this translation Evelyn added a lengthy essay of his own designed primarily to clarify the abstruse technical language of classical architecture for users of the *Parallel*. This fits in with the aim shared by several of his fellow members of the Royal Society to explain the useful arts to his countrymen. His definitions were not organized, as were subsequent builders' dictionaries, in alphabetical order, but in the sequence of building operations from the foundations to the roof. The main diversion from this scheme was a criticism of the attitude of the British artisan, disadvantageously compared with his French counterpart. Evelyn felt they were either complacent with the inadequacies of apprenticeship or else too willing to make a fast buck to care with the details of building, and he hoped that the 'reformation and improvement' which had already occurred in some crafts, like locksmiths or cabinet-makers might soon transform the building industry. When, thirty years later, Evelyn consented to the persuasion of his publisher to issue another edition of the *Parallel*, he proudly reported in his dedication to Wren how, 'going to St. Paul's, to Contemplate that August Pile . . . some of your Chief Work-men, gratefully [acknowledged] the Assistance [the *Parallel*] had afforded them'.¹³

Evelyn's work answered specific need. He was well aware of what he left out. He saw the place above all for a 'more intire Treatise of the whole art than is yet extant among us.' This, he hoped would deal with the 'Matter and Form of Buildings', and he hoped that the author would not just rely upon what had been written by the usual authorities but to 'advance upon the principles already established and not so acquiesce in them as if there were a Non Plus Ultra engraven upon our Columns like those of Hercules, after which there remained no more to be discovered'.¹⁴ By the time of his revised edition, in the 1690s, Evelyn pointed to the example set by Blondel, D'Aviler and Perrault: England would have to wait for another fifty years.

Fragmentary signs suggest that attempts at such an 'intire treatise' as Evelyn wished to see were being cogitated in England in the mid-seventeenth century, and by the person perhaps best able to write it. Among the manuscripts at Worcester College, Oxford are pages of what appear to be an architectural treatise, written by John Webb. There are many notes of subjects such as windows which were perhaps awaiting organization, but most interesting of all are drawings of the orders so finished as to suggest that they were prepared for an engraver to copy.¹⁵

More complete than the notes of Webb are those of Sir Roger Pratt, but here much text and no drawings survive. Planned at least as early as July 1660, the organization of Pratt's intended treatise may owe something to de l'Orme's *Architecture*, but just as clearly it reflects

his own experience of the architect's role, as the consultant to others of his class, concerning site and layout of the house in general, the detailed organization of building materials and the settlement of worker's rates, as well as the technicalities of construction.¹⁶ Two books were to be devoted to interior decoration — floors, ceilings, be they 'plain, figured, painted, corniced, with wreathes of oak, laurel, fruttages . . . and of painting and stucchio', chimney-pieces and stairs, as well as moveable items like tapestry, and pictures. The final book was given over to the topical but Sisyphean task of 'adorning old buildings, and making them regular convenient and beautiful', something which, as Roger North was later to write 'none can do tollerably, without long and perfect acquaintance, which a surveyor will not give himself time to have'.¹⁷

Pratt's voluminous notes go some way to show how he intended to deal with some of these topics but neither the experience of his final few years as an architect nor the leisure of his subsequent retirement brought the treatise to completion. England saw no indigenous 'intire Treatise' in this period; much more importantly, the austere Italianate civilization of Inigo Jones made no stake to establish itself against the flood of designs from other sources.

If we take together both foreign books known to be used by Englishmen, and the native production, and my coverage of both these categories has inevitably been cursory, obvious characteristics are apparent. The bulk of available literature was certainly foreign, and it included treatises and plates for architectural decoration, while the English production is of a more limited scale and often covered areas of the architect's responsibility least concerned with the process of design. English and foreign books are about equally represented among the two dozen or so architectural books belonging to Robert Hooke, a collection which, as befits one of the surveyors appointed by the City of London in October 1666, had a particularly full group of books on surveying. In Wren's library, it is foreign books which predominate. What was most significantly missing from the English books and indeed was poorly represented among the foreign ones was a book on what Evelyn called the 'Matter and Form of building', in other words that staple of eighteenth-century architectural publishing, the book of house patterns. Two books in particular were used during the period, but their influence is hard to assess. Rubens's *Palazzi di Genova*, published in 1622, was widely owned and may have provided a source for the tall flat-fronted squarish houses such as Chevening, dating perhaps from the 1630s or Thorpe Hall of the mid-1650s. Another equally popular book which provided many elevation patterns was Le Muet's *Maniere de bien bastir* of 1623, copies of which appear in the libraries of Sir Justinian Isham of Lamport, Sir Abel Barker of Lyndon in 1657, Pratt's copy cost him 10s.; translated as the *Art of Fair Building* by Pricke in 1670, Hooke bought a copy in 1675. Although evidently much used, it is difficult to see how the particularly Parisian qualities of its designs were employed by either urban or country-house builders in England. From the end of the previous century, one can point to the use of ideas from continental pattern books such as Du Cerceau or indeed Palladio, but the overall layout of the English house was the result more of traditional features than of pattern-book ideas. Sir Roger Pratt's verdict was particularly damning, if only for the most honest plagiarist: He felt though pattern books 'may be of some use to preserve the memory of the originals in those who have heretofore seen them . . . yet certainly as to instructing the ignorant, they can be but of very small advantage'.

Where pattern books can be seen helping to expand the vocabulary of architects time and again through the century is in details of decoration. At the beginning the exuberant riot of detail in the *Architectura* of Dietterlin has been shown on the frontispiece of Bramshill, and Francart's *Livre d'Architecture* (1616) one of several books solely concerned with gates, can be seen in use in London (and Oxford) within the next decade. Mark Girouard has shown that the diamond rustication on the gate to the Riding School at Bolsover is taken from Francini's *Architecture*; whether this happened before or after its publication in England in 1669 is

uncertain. Le Muet's *Vignola*, with its miscellany of gate designs is the source of the unconventional application of keystones on the entrance of Upper School at Eton, from before 1675, and Moxon's frequent editions of this may provide a source for the bulging rustification of the unusual gates at Nunnington, Yorkshire, of the mid-1680s, just as Pricke's edition of Barbet of 1670 is undoubtedly the source of the hall chimney-piece which has been adapted to fit the arms of its builder, Viscount Preston. In case this sequence should give the impression that it was always a recent book which sparked off the imagination, it is worth saying that, on a visit last weekend to the Vyne, I noticed that one of the chimney-pieces which Edward Marshall carved there in 1654 seemed to be based on de l'Orme's idiosyncratic designs for the orders, published as long ago as 1567. There is no need to imagine Marshall as a collector of antiquarian books; a copy of de l'Orme's *architecture* belonged to John Webb, under whose direction he was working.

Source spotting at this level, however enjoyable, is a bit beside the point in the mid-seventeenth century. As Serlio reminded his English readers, his designs 'may be used by the learned workman . . . and may be altered according to the accidents that shall happen'.¹⁸ When Evelyn urged architects not to treat the orders as if they were as impassable as the Pillars as Hercules, he echoed the idea of his contemporary Thomas Wilsford who concluded his little book *Architectonice* of 1659 by saying 'Architectors are not bound by these Pillars by authority . . . but to vary as their own imaginations inform them or the conveniency of the place admits of'.¹⁹ The degree of latitude allowed to practitioners was, by the standards of the next century, almost enough to ensure that every man was his own pattern book. And in one respect this was still true. We should remember that Arthur Grumbold's bequest to his son had included, alongside those unknown books, his 'moldes'. These profiles, or cross-sections of mouldings, like those drawn by John Thorpe at the start of his book of designs were another part of the artisan designer's stock in trade and, as several cases confirm, these designs might have received endorsement from authoritative judges, such as Pratt, for Edward Pearce at Horseheath, or Winde at Combe Abbey.²⁰ No contemporary English Book, however, invaded this area in the way that James Gibb was to do fifty years later.

Books formed only part of the means of stylistic dissemination in this period. The presence of London artisans outside the capital, Richard Ryder at Cranbourne in the 1640s, Anthony Ellis at Althorp in the mid 1660s, is another way in which stylistic ideas permeated England. And the grand houses had their own local impact. Felbrigg has been shown to be a reflection of Blickling; Raynham may be a distant echo of Jones's work at Newmarket. The process is harder to identify in the 1650s, when such diverse ideas were available. Cotterstock Hall, Northants, built by a Protectorate gentleman in 1657, has three significant artisan mannerist houses within ten miles of it, dominated by the remarkable Thorpe Hall.²¹ But neither in its traditional H-plan, nor its clumsy gables does it respond to its fashionable neighbours. Three chimney-pieces, with their variety of moulded rather than carved surrounds are directly reminiscent of Thorpe, and the cramped semicircular porch is perhaps descended from a Dutch pattern, but in general the house shows little reaction to metropolitan ideas at the provincial level.

In the half century after 1680 England saw a decisive change in the production of books on architecture, so that by the mid-eighteenth century books played an integral part in all the operations of architecture, and stylistic ideas were decisively mediated by them. For this, a growth in range, scale, and sophistication of the publishing industry and its means of distribution was as important as the ideas of individual booksellers or the desire of architects for self-advertisement. During the age of Inigo Jones however, England lagged behind France, the Netherlands, and Italy as a centre of book publishing. In seeking to understand why the mid-seventeenth century saw no influential treatise which was wholly indigenous, why the influence of Jones himself, curtailed as it was in any case by wars and the eclipse of his

courtly patrons was not more widespread, and why the books in the workshops of mannerist artisans remained few, thin and mostly foreign, it is perhaps to the structure of the publishing industry as well as to the character of English architecture that we should address our attention.

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