



# THE GEORGIAN GROUP

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# THE ARCHITECT AS SURVEYOR

Giles Worsley

**S**urveying may not have a glamorous image — it is hard to get excited about measuring the dimensions of rooms, checking bills and making sure that the gutters are clean — but most 18th-century architects would have found that it loomed larger in their lives than did the creative task of design. Few of them, whether leading members of the profession or little-known men in the provinces, would have been without some sort of surveying post or work, for it was the regular income from surveyors' fees and salaries that provided architects with their bread and butter, and the introduction to many of their most important commissions.

The role of the surveyor in the 18th century was multifarious, and a book could easily be written on the subject, but in this paper I hope to give an idea of the sort of tasks that were carried out by a surveyor and of the impact surveying had on the architectural profession. To give focus in so large a subject I have concentrated my examples on two representative surveyors, chosen not because they are exceptional but because they are both typical and relatively well-documented. These are Stiff Leadbetter (c1705-66), a builder based in London and at Eton who had an extensive country house practice in the Thames Valley and ended up as Surveyor of St Paul's Cathedral; and John Johnson (1732-1814), the County Surveyor of Essex, who was also based in London and had a large country house practice, principally in Essex. Examples of other surveyors will be used to fill in the story where appropriate.

In the 18th century surveying was essentially about the control of property through professional supervision, in particular overseeing the erection of new buildings and the maintenance of old ones. It was not a closed profession — very few people would have described themselves solely as surveyors, at least until the end of the century — and was generally carried out by men who were also builders or architects, or indeed both. Moreover, the boundaries of what was considered the job of the building surveyor were indistinct, and in particular crossed with the world of the land surveyor. Large land surveys were generally carried out by land surveyors but architects were quite capable of doing smaller surveys, such as measuring the amount of land needed for a building project. For example the survey Leadbetter made in 1758 of the 37 acres north of Foley House in Marylebone, which the Duke of Portland proposed to lease to Lord Foley, survives in the Public Record Office,<sup>1</sup> while Johnson surveyed and measured the King David's Fort estate in Stepney for the trustees of the Revd. Charles Phillips, before it was laid out according to his plan in 1802-08.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes indeed building surveyors took on jobs which had nothing to do with building at all: Leadbetter was responsible for carrying out a survey of the Archbishop of Canterbury's woods in Kent.<sup>3</sup> Flexibility was the key to earning a living in the 18th century, and only the grandest and most successful in the architectural profession could afford to take a purist approach to their work.

Not that the flexibility was only on one side, land surveyors were not averse to taking on the odd architectural commission. Samuel Driver, a London surveyor and nurseryman, was employed as a landscape gardener at Adlestrop House, Gloucestershire, but also designed the alterations to the house in 1749. His sons Abraham and William, although principally surveyors and land agents, also called themselves architects, while their successor George Neale Driver exhibited some architectural designs at the Royal Academy between 1813 and 1820.<sup>4</sup>

Working out dimensions, whether of an undeveloped plot of land, an urban site or of an individual building, was a fundamental part of the surveyor's work, and plenty of survey

drawings survive to illustrate these three different areas. Mapping undeveloped land — which tended to be carried out as a preliminary to development — I have already mentioned. Establishing the accurate boundaries of urban property was essential if such property was to be managed effectively, if correct rents were to be charged, encroachments prevented and redevelopment carried out efficiently. Accurate surveys of individual properties were needed if alterations were to be made and could prove a valuable tool in the maintenance of property. Thus when the Bishop of London decided to alter his rambling medieval palaces at Fulham he first employed Leadbetter to measure up the site and produce a detailed plan, which was then used as the basis on which to plot alterations.<sup>5</sup> On a smaller scale, when the Haberdashers' Company decided to redevelop the site of a shop they owned in Fish Street Hill East their first step was to employ John Baker, a little-known surveyor working in the City of London, to survey the site and then to make a plan of each floor and all the principal timbers.<sup>6</sup> Baker's drawings are now in the RIBA Drawings Collection and make an interesting comparison with a volume of drawings there dated 1811 made by the surveyor John Tasker. This contains the plans of 14 London houses, setting the dimensions of every room on every floor together with the details of when the houses were built, the name of the original leaseholder and the date when the lease would fall in.<sup>7</sup> Thus in one volume Tasker had all the information he needed to manage this small estate. Tasker's volume is too large to carry about and would have stayed in his office, but surveyors would often have found it useful to consult a copy of the ground plan of a building on site, and this seems to have been the reason for a smaller pocket book with plans of buildings which is now also in the RIBA Drawings Collection but which was owned by John White the surveyor to the Portland estate in Marylebone. This includes plans of buildings for which White was responsible such as the Marylebone Infirmary.<sup>8</sup>

It was also important to measure a building's condition, and structural surveys were a common feature of the surveyor's life, whether commissioned by a concerned owner or carried out to accompany the transfer of property. A typical example of the former occurred in October 1743, when Benjamin Timbrell, one of the leading London carpenters and master builders of his day, was paid £3 3s by the Duke of Portland for two days work surveying the roof of Bulstrode House, Buckinghamshire. His report must have caused concern as Leadbetter was subsequently paid £900 for putting a new roof on the house.<sup>9</sup> A structural survey was also an obvious first step in putting a value on a property before it was sold, hence Leadbetter surveyed Beaufort House for the Duchess of Beaufort in 1761 before it was sold to the Duke of Cumberland,<sup>10</sup> while in 1773 Johnson was employed by the Middlesex Justices to survey the old Clerkenwell Bridewell for valuation.<sup>11</sup> Such structural surveys were particularly important where properties held by life tenants, notably clergymen, were handed over to the next incumbent. When this happened dilapidation surveys were made to ensure that the property had been kept in good order and to put a financial value on any repairs that needed to be done. Leadbetter, for instance, carried out dilapidation surveys of Hartlebury Castle, Worcestershire, in 1760, Fulham Palace in 1761 and 1764, and the Bishop's Palace at Peterborough in 1764.<sup>12</sup> Several such surveys for Fulham Palace survive in the Lambeth Palace Library going slowly through every room itemising any defects, a broken window, decaying panelling, defective floor boards, and listing a price for repair beside each of them.<sup>13</sup>

Structural surveys lead on to the supervision of repairs, alterations and new work. Here the world of the surveyor, architect and builder tend to become confused. It is one of the roles of the architect to supervise the erection of a building carried out to his design, but surveyors were sometimes called in to supervise buildings where the architect simply provided the plans. They might also act as outside consultants to check that work had been correctly carried out and to value time and materials used. On the other hand a surveyor might be responsible, wearing his builder's hat, for carrying out the work he had recommended, as Leadbetter was at Hartlebury

Castle and Fulham Palace.<sup>14</sup> Because of surveyor's privileged position this was not an infrequent occurrence, but when he did so he ceased to act as a surveyor, for the surveyor's job is supervisory. His role, particularly when holding public office, was to keep building costs down by examining the estimates and reducing them if necessary. Thus Johnson reduced the estimate for rebuilding Battlesbridge at Rawreth in Essex from £55 to £25 in 1793.<sup>15</sup> When work was finished the surveyor was responsible for checking the bills and making sure the work had been carried out properly. Michael Searles's first duty as surveyor of the Rolls estate in south London was to check the bills from contractors for Union Crescent in 1783.<sup>16</sup>

Measuring land and working out the plans of buildings, establishing their condition and supervising repairs or new work was the core of all surveyors' lives, but the practice varied widely. Much surveying work was done on a one-off basis, with a surveyor brought in to advise on a single project, but there were also a whole host of permanent surveyors' positions. These could be for an individual building, for an urban estate or for a collection of dispersed buildings owned by one body. The post of Surveyor of St Paul's Cathedral, which Leadbetter held from 1756 to 1766, is a typical example, and his carefully defined duties give a good idea of what was expected from all such surveyors. He was to survey the whole of the building every six months and any part of it when occasion required or the dean and chapter directed. He was then to agree with proper workmen, who had to be approved by the dean and chapter, to make necessary repairs and order them accordingly. The dean and chapter had to be informed of any payments over £10. Workmen's bills were to be examined and paid every six months, having first been laid before the dean and chapter. Typical of this sort of work was the agreement Leadbetter entered into with William Matthews, paviour, to keep in good repair the highway round the cathedral, together with the pavement of the cathedral and chapter house, for £40 per year for 21 years. The surveyor was also to appoint a deputy whose duty was to inspect the upper and lower vaults, the stairs, leads, gutters, pipes, etc once a week and keep them in good repair on a salary of £10 or £20.<sup>17</sup>

Surveyors employed to look after blocks of urban property, whether by private individuals like the aristocrats who developed the West End, or bodies such as charities or the livery companies, played a slightly different role. Their primary function was not the maintenance of property but the control of new development. We have already seen that Johnson was responsible for laying out and overseeing the development of the King David's Fort estate in Stepney, and this was repeated innumerable times by different surveyors. A well documented example concerns the Foundling Hospital Estate in Coram's Fields. The surveyor here was S. P. Cockerell who presented the governors with a comprehensive plan of development in 1790. In fact the governors chose the plan drawn up by the hospital's secretary Thomas Merryweather, but Cockerell was then responsible for laying this out and supervising the work of the speculative builders. To this end he prepared in 1791 a "general principles of regulation . . . in respect to height, materials, and substance for the buildings to be erected". To ensure that this was followed, as he explained to the building committee, he "considered it as my particular duty to attend the execution of the works and buildings there, and am usually there every Tuesday, as well as at all other times when the business of the estate requires my attendance".<sup>18</sup>

Urban landlords were anxious to ensure that the quality of building was high so that the long-term value of their estates was maintained, and to this end leases allowed surveyors to examine work carried out and have it corrected if necessary. However, this was often easier said than done, particularly when times were hard and builders forced to cut corners — at such times to have enforced leases fully would have driven builders to bankruptcy and brought development to a halt. At least that was Cockerell's argument when challenged by the Foundling Hospital Building Committee with reports of walls collapsing, vaults falling in and bricks

subsiding.

The role of such surveyors did not end when construction was complete. Landlords wanted to be sure that buildings stayed in good repair, and so leases on the Bedford estate declared that houses were to be examined by the surveyor twice a year with any defects found repaired within three months of written notification.<sup>19</sup> It was to this end that Tasker made his survey volume which I have already mentioned. Sometimes at this point the role of the surveyor crossed with that of the steward or specialised rent collector, particularly on small estates. When a surveyor was looking after the physical condition of a group of buildings it often made administrative sense for him also to collect the rent. Thus Leadbetter was paid £50 a year by the trustees of the 4th Duke of Beaufort to manage their London property and in particular to collect the rents of Beaufort Buildings off the Strand which he was also responsible for keeping in good repair.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Johnson collected rents from Newman Street and a house in Henrietta Street for Sir Herbert Mackworth from 1786 to 1791, when the task was taken over by his son who received two and a half percent commission on what was collected. He also dealt with the renewal of leases and insurance.<sup>21</sup>

The role of the district surveyors appointed for groups of London parishes under the 1774 Building Act “for the further and better regulation of buildings and party walls; and for more effectively preventing mischief by fire . . .” was not dissimilar to that of estate surveyors. District surveyors were empowered to force defective buildings to be amended or demolished and to impose fines of 50s for every work executed contrary to the act. However, in practice it was even harder for district surveyors to enforce good workmanship than it was for estate surveyors.<sup>22</sup>

District surveyors should not be confused with county surveyors. Although both were employed by local authorities, their work was very different. While district surveyors were enforcing building regulations on others, county surveyors like Johnson were looking after the county’s own stock of buildings, in particular gaols, magistrates’ courts and bridges. These positions grew in importance as the century went on.

The most important source of surveying posts was the Office of Works, headed by the Surveyor General. These were of two sorts, the clerkships of individual royal buildings such as the Royal Mews at Charing Cross or the Queen’s House at Greenwich, and the posts on the board such as the Master Carpenter or Comptroller. Nearly every architect of significance in the first half of the 18th century and most in the second was employed by the board, some making their career in it, like Henry Flitcroft who began as Clerk of Works at Whitehall, Westminster and St James’s in 1726, to which he added the clerkship of Kew and Richmond in 1728. Then he became in succession, Master Carpenter of the Works in 1746, Master Mason and Deputy Surveyor in 1748 and Comptroller of Works in 1758. He was also Surveyor of St Paul’s Cathedral from 1746 to 1756.<sup>23</sup> But as well as the Office of Works there were a whole host of government-inspired surveyorships, like the Surveyors to the 50 New Church Commissioners, the Excise Board or the Board of Customs, the Royal Mint, or those employed by the Ordnance Board. Local government surveyorships have already been mentioned, but to these should be added an increasing number of surveyors appointed by commercial bodies, such as the Bank of England, the East India Company, the New River Company or the insurance companies which became particularly important around the turn of the century.

Some architects could run up remarkable numbers of surveyorships. John James was Store-keeper and Assistant Clerk of Works and then Joint Clerk of Works at Greenwich; Master Carpenter, Assistant Surveyor and then Surveyor at St Paul’s; Surveyor to the 50 New Church Commissioners; Surveyor to the Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey and Surveyor of the Fabric at Westminster Abbey. George Sampson was Clerk of Works at the Tower of London and Somerset House; then Surveyor to the Bank of England, the Fishmonger’s Company, and St

Thomas's and Guy's Hospitals. Sir Robert Taylor was Surveyor to the Bank of England; Architect to the Board of Works; Master Carpenter and then Master Mason and Deputy Surveyor; and Surveyor to Greenwich Hospital, the Foundling Hospital, Lincoln's Inn, the Duke of Grafton's estate and General Pulteney's estate. S. P. Cockerell was District Surveyor to the Parish of St George's, Hanover Square; Clerk of Works at the Tower of London and at Newmarket; Inspector of Repairs to the Admiralty; Surveyor of the Foundling and Pulteney estates, to the Victualling Office, the East India Company, the Sees of Canterbury and York and St Paul's Cathedral.<sup>24</sup>

Surveyors' posts could form the basis about which an entire could be built, as in the case of John James or S. P. Cockerell, but they could also be invaluable starting posts for one of the advantages of being a surveyor was that it required no capital. Nearly all the leading Palladian architects started with a minor clerkship at the Office of Works, but with the subsequent spread in the number of surveying posts this became less important. C. R. Cockerell returned to England in 1817 with a reputation as a classical archaeologist but with little architectural experience. His career was helped by his father who managed to have him appointed Surveyor of St Paul's in his place.<sup>25</sup> George Basevi established his career on his return from Greece in 1819 by gaining the surveyorship of the newly formed Guardian Assurance Company. To this he subsequently added the surveyorship of Smith's Charity estate in Brompton and later the adjoining Thurloe estate.<sup>26</sup> George Taylor was happy to give up an unsuccessful attempt to establish a private practice and take up the post of Surveyor of Buildings to the Admiralty in 1824.<sup>27</sup> G. G. Scott founded his career on the ruthless pursuit of surveyorships of various of the new workhouse unions around where he lived using connections with former friends of his father.<sup>28</sup>

Surveyors were paid in two ways, through a salary where they held an official post, and through a percentage of the value of work executed. From 1746 George Dance received a regular salary of £50 from the City of London as well as fees.<sup>29</sup> When Leadbetter was appointed Surveyor of St Paul's in 1756 he was paid a salary of £50 and received the interest of the fund for maintaining the fabric, for which he had to account annually. In return he had to give a £600 security to the dean and chapter and received a salary of £50. When the terms of the surveyor's post were discussed the Dean of St Paul's argued against a high salary for fear that it would attract candidates who were only interested in this and not prepared to carry out the work.<sup>30</sup>

The terms of Johnson's appointment as Essex County Surveyor were specified in July 1783: "For every Journey after the rate of 1s 3d a mile out . . . For surveying and drawing of Plans Estimates and other Works at and after the rate of five pounds Per Cent upon the money expended therein and for his Attendance at every . . . Quarter Session . . . the sume of two guineas". The 5% could bring in substantial sums. Nancy Briggs has shown how the workload of the county surveyor increased during the last quarter of the 18th century. Between 1773 and 1791 over £41,000 was spent on public buildings in Essex, which would have brought in surveyor's fees of £2,050. In the same county £7,000 was spent on bridges between 1785 and 1791, an average of just over £1,000 a year worth £56 in fees. By comparison, the average annual expenditure on bridges in Essex at the beginning of the century was £350. Accounts also give an idea of what payments were made for unexecuted schemes. Johnson was paid 3gns in 1800 for designs for the Chelmsford House of Correction.<sup>31</sup>

The results were often very lucrative. Roger Morris's post as Master Carpenter to the Office of Ordnance from 1734 brought him work worth £2-3,000 a year at Woolwich and elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> Dance's annual income from his City surveyorship was £1,500 a year.<sup>33</sup> According to James Noble the St Katharine's Dock Company arranged to provide their surveyor George Aitchison, appointed in 1827, with an office and clerk and a salary of £500 for preparatory work, together with 1¾% on the estimated £700,000 to be spent, which was expected for three to four years to earn him £3,000 a year.<sup>34</sup>

Nor were the rewards of surveying only to be found in salaries and fees. Surveyors sometimes benefitted twice, once from supervising work and once from being paid for materials and workmanship. The Essex Magistrates had no objections to John Johnson employing his own workmen or his son's building firm on county business.<sup>35</sup> Holding a position as surveyor could also mean that an individual had a distinct advantage in any development. John White was employed to lay out the Portland estate in Marylebone from 1787, but he was also one of the principle speculators on the estate and made a fortune out of property.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, it was often through holding surveyorships that architects received their most important commissions. George Dance, for instance, was given the commission for the Mansion House in London against fierce competition primarily because he was Clerk of Works to the City of London. His son, the younger Dance, benefitted similarly on succeeding his father in 1768 by the commission for Newgate Prison, his greatest work.

Surveying may appear dull, but it was a key part of the 18th-century architect's life.

## NOTES

1. PRO, C12/35/31.
2. Nancy Briggs, *John Johnson 1732-1814, Georgian Architect and County Surveyor of Essex*, Chelmsford, 1991, 154.
3. J. S. Macauley and R. W. Greaves (ed.) *The Autobiography of Thomas Secker, Archbishop of Canterbury*, Lawrence, 1989, 41.
4. Howard Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects*, London, 1974, 275.
5. Lambeth Palace Library, Terrick 19/1, 7, 8.
6. Giles Worsley, *Architectural Drawings of the Regency Period*, London, 1991, 142-43.
7. *Ibid.*, 140-41.
8. *Ibid.*, 52.
9. Nottingham University Library, Portland London Collection, box 29, account of John Lucas, 1742-56.
10. Badminton Archives PB 2/1; Fm T/B 1/2/7 (38). Information from Mrs Margaret Richards.
11. Briggs, 1991, 3.
12. Lambeth Palace Library, Terrick 18, Hayter 2; R. O. Walker, *Hartlebury Castle, Worcestershire*, Hartlebury, 1987, 10-11.
13. Lambeth Palace Library, Osbaldeston 2; Hayter 2.
14. Walker, 1987, *op. cit.*; Lambeth Palace Library, Terrick 18.
15. Briggs, 1991, 58.
16. W. Bonwitt, *Michael Searles, A Georgian Architect and Surveyor*, London, 1987, 12.
17. Lambeth Palace Library, Herring Volume 2 f160-63; MS 2027 f48.
18. Donald J. Olsen, *Town Planning in London*, London, 1982, 75-77, 81.
19. Andrew Byrne, *Bedford Square, An Architectural Study*, London, 1990, 38.
20. Badminton Archives, PB 3/18, 19. Information from Mrs Margaret Richards.
21. Briggs, 1991, 154.
22. Dan Cruickshank and Peter Wyld, *London: the Art of Georgian Building*, London, 1975, 2, 29, 41.
23. Colvin, 1974, 309-10.
24. *Ibid.*, 452, 711-12, 815, 226.
25. *Ibid.*, 222.
26. *Ibid.*, 93.
27. Worsley, 1991, 16.
28. *Ibid.*, 17.
29. Colvin, 1984, 248.
30. Lambeth Palace Library, Herring Volume 2, f160-63, 206.
31. Briggs, 1991, 56, 58, 60.
32. Colvin, 1974, 560.
33. Catalogue of the Drawings Collection of the RIBA C-F, Farnborough, 1972, 59.
34. Worsley, 1991, 16.
35. Briggs, 1991, 60.
36. Colvin, 1974, 882.