



THE
GEORGIAN
GROUP

Howard Colvin, 'What we mean by amateur',
The Role of the Amateur Architect Georgian
Group Symposium, 1993, pp. 4-6

WHAT WE MEAN BY AMATEUR

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Of the prevalence and importance of the amateur architect in 18th-century Britain there can be no doubt.¹ In his book on *The Present State of the Arts in England*, published in Paris in 1755, the Swiss J.A. Rouquet asserted that “in England more than in any other country, every man would fain be his own architect”. It is not difficult to think of examples that bear out the truth of his statement, from the English Earl of Burlington or the Scottish Earl of Mar to that David Gansel, a gentleman of Huguenot origin, whose self-designed house found a place in Colen Campbell’s *Vitruvius Britannicus*, or the Buckinghamshire squire William Freeman who designed his own mausoleum in Fawley churchyard near Henley.

Without much difficulty I have compiled a list of a dozen or so men who were their own architects in the sense that they designed their own houses or other buildings on their property, and if we include others like John Brewster of Aldby Park in Yorkshire or John Scudamore of Kentchurch Court in Herefordshire who had themselves painted with a plan of their house in their hands, and sometimes with rule and dividers too, the list would be considerably longer. The prevalence of such pictures is itself an indication that it was as socially acceptable to be portrayed as the architect of one’s own house — for that is presumably the intention — as to be shown hunting, riding or surrounded by one’s family.

If we extend the list to include amateurs who designed buildings for others rather than just for themselves — men like Col Moyser, Dr George Clarke or Sanderson Miller — the list can be enlarged to about 80 names, and if we analyse this list of some 80 amateur architects active between say 1680 and 1820, we find that 14 were titled aristocrats (Lords Bingley, Burlington, Camelford, Digby, Fauconberg, Ferrers, Grantham, Mar, Montagu, Newborough, Pembroke, Ranelagh, Strafford and Trevor), eight were in holy orders (Dean Aldrich and the Rev Daniel Augustus Beaufort, Heneage Dering, Alexander Edward, James Griffith, Thomas Machell, John Pridden and Sir John Thoroton), and all the rest were landed gentry with the exception of Henry Bell, Theodore Jacobsen and Robert Dingley, who were wealthy merchants.

The clergy form a less distinctive group than one might expect. Henry Aldrich, Dean of Christ Church, designed college buildings in Oxford and All Saints Church in the High Street there; Alexander Edward was Sir William Bruce’s architectural amanuensis and as such was concerned in country house building in Scotland. The Rev Thomas Machell, the rector of a Westmorland parish, saw it as his mission to design Classical houses for the Cumbrian gentry; the Rev Heneage Dering made an unexecuted design for Aldby Park in Yorkshire and was involved in alterations to Bishopsthorpe Palace for the Archbishop of York, while the Rev Sir John Thoroton supervised the rebuilding of Belvoir Castle for the Duke of Rutland after the fire of 1816. Only one of them, the Rev Daniel Augustus Beaufort, designed a church of which he was himself the incumbent (at Collon in Northern Ireland). In short, most of the Georgian clergy who were amateur architects fulfilled a role similar to that of the gentlemen architects of their time, designing country houses rather than churches. It was not until 19th-century ecclesiology made Gothic architecture almost an article of faith that clergy such as the Rev William Carus-Wilson (1791-1859) and the Rev John Parker, vicar of Llanyblodwel in Shropshire (1799-1860), began to take church building seriously, and by then the professional architect had to a large extent made the role of the amateur a thing of the past.

So our list of amateur architects proves to be above all a list of aristocratic or gentlemen architects. But how, at a time when the architectural profession itself was still in an embryonic

state, do we distinguish between the gentlemen architect on the one hand and the professional on the other? If there were no real professionals can we properly speak of amateurs? Even if we can see clearly enough that James Gibbs, with his Italian training under Carlo Fontana, was a true professional, whereas Sanderson Miller was a gentleman amateur, how are we to categorise Sir John Vanbrugh, a gentleman by birth who became a salaried officer of the Royal Works, or Thomas Archer, another gentleman, who designed three large churches, two of them paid for by government funds, as well as several country houses for private owners?

According to Rees's *Cyclopaedia* of 1803 the word "*Amateur* is a foreign term introduced and now . . . current amongst us, to denote a person understanding and loving or practising the polite arts of painting, sculpture, or architecture, without any regard to pecuniary advantage". We may therefore take remuneration as one way of distinguishing the amateur from the professional. Throughout the 18th century an agreed percentage — often but by no means always 5% — of the outlay was the established way of remunerating an architect for his professional services. We may suppose that one gentleman would probably not pay another in cash for services rendered on a friendly basis. He would be more likely to use his influence in favour of the architect when the occasion arose, or make him a present of wine or game. Capt William Winde, an officer and very much a gentleman, was Lord Craven's godson. When he acted as Lord Craven's architect at Hamstead Marshall, Combe Abbey and elsewhere, he may or may not have been paid, but it was through Lord Craven's influence that he was pardoned for accidentally killing a soldier in his regiment. Any monetary reward that Lord Carlisle may have offered Vanbrugh for designing Castle Howard (and none is recorded in Vanbrugh's accounts) mattered less than the Comptrollership of the King's Works which Carlisle, as Lord Treasurer, was in a position to offer him. In the same way the Rev Heneage Dering could expect preferment for the services, partly secretarial, partly architectural, that he rendered to Archbishop Sharp of York, and in due course he found himself a Prebendary of York and Dean of Ripon. With a small estate of his own and no political ambitions, Sanderson Miller sought no office for himself in return for the designs he made for his friends in Warwickshire and elsewhere, and presents of venison, invitations to dinner and such-like civilities were probably Miller's only reward. But for James Gibbs, who as a Catholic was debarred from public office, payment in money for his architectural services was normal, as it no doubt was for Robert Adam, Roger Morris, John James or Henry Keene, who were not born gentlemen, even if some of them did eventually attain a degree of gentility. So the form of remuneration is a useful indication of amateur status — or would be if we knew what form it took, which in most cases we do not.

Another possible test is the ability to draw. Every professional can draw, but not necessarily every amateur, who may employ an amanuensis, as Sir William Bruce did Alexander Edward, or Lord Burlington Henry Flitcroft and Daniel Garrett. Sanderson Miller was not much of a draughtsman so far as we know, and the architect John Sanderson was certainly employed to draw out his designs for Hagley, as well as those of Theodore Jacobsen for Trinity College, Dublin. However, the employment of draughtsmen was a perfectly normal feature of a professional architectural practice, and does not in itself imply amateur status. The fact that Dean Aldrich was an accomplished draughtsman does not put him into the ranks of the professionals, nor does Hugh May's apparent dependence on draughtsmen mean that the Comptroller of His Majesty's Works and Surveyor of Windsor Castle in the reign of Charles II must be regarded as an amateur.

How Dean Aldrich learned to draw so beautifully I do not know, but the ability to draw was normally the result of a professional training. Draughtsmanship could be learned by apprenticeship to a practising architect, but in Italy and France it could also be learned in academies which offered facilities for teaching the arts of design and draughtsmanship that were not available in this country until the foundation of the Royal Academy in 1768. Only perhaps in a

country devoid of such opportunities for professional training could amateurs flourish in the way they did in Georgian England.

A third test concerns the relationship between design and execution. There were very few 18th-century architects who were not involved in building, either as contractors for buildings they had designed, or as speculative developers. The brothers Adam, who scornfully rejected the designation of builder, were nevertheless the promoters of one of the biggest speculative developments in Georgian London: the Adelphi. And the great majority of 18th-century architects were of course primarily builders — masons, carpenters or bricklayers — and only secondarily architects. But no amateur — certainly no gentleman architect — would act as a building contractor, something that would rank him with tradesmen and mechanics.

So gentlemen who act as architects can be defined as amateurs partly because of their social status, partly because they are remunerated by gifts or favours rather than by fees, and above all because they do not contract for the buildings they design. If, in addition, they are poor draughtsmen, then they are amateurs in every sense of the word.

But in the last resort we have to admit that “amateur” and “professional” are modern terms that we are trying to impose on the past. The word “amateur” is not to be found in Dr Johnson’s *Dictionary*. As we have seen, it was not introduced into the English language until the last years of the 18th century. Strictly speaking, its use in relation to Georgian England is an anachronism. My conclusion is that what we are going to discuss is best defined not as the role of the Amateur but rather that of the Gentleman Architect.