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THE GENTLEMAN-PROFESSIONAL

Giles Worsley

In a well-known passage in his unpublished architectural notes, Sir Roger Pratt advised those who were thinking of building themselves a house to “get some ingenious gentleman who has seen much of that kind abroad and been somewhat versed in the best authors of Architecture: viz. Palladio, Scamozzi, Serlio, etc. to do it for you, and to give you a design of it in paper, though but roughly drawn, (which will generally fall out better than one which shall be given you by a home-bred Architect for want of his better experience as is daily seen)”.¹ The ideal Pratt was putting forward bore an uncanny resemblance to himself. Six years on the Continent avoiding the Civil War and a detailed study of the “best authors of Architecture” had left him one of the best qualified architectural theorists of his day. His cousin Edward Pratt was quite right when congratulating him on his appointment to the commission to repair St Paul’s Cathedral in 1666 to declare that “they [his fellow commissioners Hugh May and Christopher Wren] will get more secrets of your art brought from Rome, & so from Athens, then you from them”.² But while Pratt may stand in a long tradition of architectural writers who consider themselves the ideal, had his words been published they would have struck a chord with potential patrons, for the second half of the 17th century saw the emergency of a new figure in British architecture, the gentleman-professional, of which Pratt is an exemplar.

In a symposium on the role of the amateur it may seem a little strange for me to entitle my paper “The Gentleman-Professional”, but, as Howard Colvin’s paper makes clear, the amateur in English architecture in the 17th and 18th centuries is a rather moving target. What I want to look at is that small group of men, gentlemen by birth, who were not trained as architects nor brought up as builders or surveyors, and yet who dominated English architecture in the half century after the Restoration of 1660. They can be found on public commissions and handing out unremunerated advice, as well as designing buildings and often supervising their construction. What they did not do is execute those buildings, either as contractors or craftsmen. For some such as Christopher Wren (1632-1723) architecture became a full-time career, and he was by any definition a professional architect. But for most it was one interest, of varying significance, among many, a passion, an intellectual diversion or a way of bolstering their income, but not a full-time career. It is for this reason that it makes sense to discuss them in a conference on amateurs. Henry Aldrich (1648-1710), Thomas Archer (*c.* 1668-1743), Henry Bell (1647-1711), George Clarke (1661-1736), John Evelyn (1620-1706), Robert Hooke (1635-1703), Thomas Machell (1647-1698), Roger North (?1653-1734), Roger Pratt (1620-1685), Richard Jones, Earl of Ranelagh (?1638-1712), William Samwell (1628-1676) and William Winde (? - 1722) are certainly among this latter group. I suspect Hugh May (1621-84), William Talman (1650-1719) and John Vanbrugh (1664-1726) are too. In age they cover a good two generations — the oldest of them, Pratt, was born in 1620, the youngest, Archer, in about 1668; Samwell died in 1676, Archer in 1743 — but as an architectural force they effectively came to an end with Vanbrugh’s death in 1726. One could also add to their number Sir William Bruce (*c.* 1630-1710) who fits well into the tradition of the gentleman-professional, though working on the other side of the Border.³

The emergence of this group of men in the years immediately following the Restoration is remarkable, for they seem to have no immediate predecessors. Earlier, the practical business of architecture appears not to have appealed to, or seemed appropriate for, gentlemen. There is no evidence, for instance, that Sir Henry Wotton, former ambassador to Venice who published

The Elements of Architecture in 1624, the first significant English treatise on architecture, ever designed a building, although I doubt that he would have been so restrained had he lived after the Restoration. Sir Roger Townshend was heavily involved in the design of his house at Raynham in Norfolk but his role was that of an informed patron and he cannot really be described as its architect. I sometimes wonder whether Sir John Danvers designed his innovative Serlian villa at Chelsea as he seems to have done the garden, but the evidence is lacking.

Instead architecture was a world for craftsmen. Inigo Jones, who dominated the first half of the century, was a painter by training, as was Balthazar Gerbier, but the conventional way into architecture was through surveying, as in the case of John Thorpe, architect of the gallery on the south front at Belvoir Castle, Leicestershire, or the building trades, particularly stone masonry or joinery. Thus Nicholas Stone, architect of the gates to the Botanical Gardens at Oxford and of the Goldsmiths' Hall in London, was a sculptor and master mason. Peter Mills, architect of Thorpe Hall, Cambridgeshire, was apprenticed as a tyler and bricklayer. After the Restoration the master builder remained an essential element of the architectural scene, men like Matthew Banckes, master carpenter; John Oliver, glazier by trade, surveyor by profession; and Captain Richard Ryder — a Civil War rank — master carpenter. But the direction of architecture had passed into the hands of the gentleman-professional.

This might have been very different had the French professional model been followed in which architectural practice was strictly controlled by the crown. There the Academie Royale d'Architecture served as a training ground for the Batiments du Roi, with all architects elected to the academy holding the title of *architecte du roi*.⁴ Thus there was no role for English amateurism. But Stuart tendencies towards absolutism were curbed, no architectural academy was ever founded and the Office of Works remained very different to the Batiments du Roi. In these years the only two professionally-trained architects as we would recognise them — men who designed buildings and supervised their erection but were not involved in contracting for them — were John Webb and Nicholas Hawksmoor. They were trained in the Office of Works, but privately through working for the Surveyor-General.

The architects to whom I am referring differ from conventional amateur architects of the 18th century in that while they were gentlemen they were generally not eldest sons nor landowners. Lord Ranelagh is of course an exception, and in many ways he has more in common with 18th-century amateurs. Henry Aldrich's father was auditor to the Duke of York; Thomas Archer was the youngest son of Thomas Archer of Umberslade in Warwickshire; Henry Bell was the son of a King's Lynn merchant; George Clarke's father was Secretary at War to Charles II; John Evelyn was second son of Richard Evelyn of Wotton in Surrey; Robert Hooke's father was curate of Freshwater in the Isle of Wight; Thomas Machell was the second son of Lancelot Machell of Crackenthorpe Hall, Westmorland; Hugh May was the seventh son of John May, a Sussex gentleman; Roger North was the sixth and youngest son of the 4th Lord North; Roger Pratt was the son of a younger of the Pratts of Ryston in Norfolk; William Samwell's father was the fourth son of Sir William Samwell of Upton Hall in Northamptonshire; William Talman was the second son of William Talman who owned a small estate at Eastcott in Wiltshire; John Vanbrugh's grandfather had been a Dutch merchant and his mother was the youngest daughter of Sir Dudley Carleton of Imber Court in Surrey; William Winde's grandfather held land in Norfolk, had been knighted by James I and was Gentleman of the Privy Chamber to Charles I.

Thus, unlike most 18th century amateur architects, gentleman-professionals did not come to architecture through building for themselves, as they were not in a position to do so. Instead, they acted for others. Significantly, those architects who established themselves as landed gentlemen, either through inheritance or purchase, tended to retire from actively practising architecture. Although they might continue to build for themselves, they give up acting for others.

Pratt's example is the most dramatic. After building only four, but highly influential, houses, he inherited the family estate at Ryston from his cousin Edward Pratt in 1664 and retired as an architect. Thereafter, although he served as one of the commissioners appointed by the King after the Great Fire of London, the only house he designed was his own at Ryston. Archer designed very little after buying an estate at Hale in Hampshire in 1715, although he did build himself a new house and rebuild the chancel and add transepts to Hale church. Roger North, who tasted for the first time "the joys of designing and executing known only to such as practise or have practised it" after the fire which destroyed the Temple in 1679, might have done rather more than design the Great Gateway into Fleet Street in 1683-84 and assist his brother at Wroxton Abbey, Oxfordshire, had he not bought Rougham in Norfolk in 1690, where he slowly remodelled the house and added a library to the church. Perhaps John Evelyn would have done more than simply "contrive, & survey, & employ workmen" to build an apartment in Whitehall for Sidney Godolphin — in which he was assisted by Robert Hooke — and help Hugh May design the chapel at Cornbury Park, Oxfordshire, if he had not owned Sayes Court, which came to him through his wife, the only daughter of Sir Richard Browne. However, it does seem that William Samwell, in many ways the most shadowy of all those I have been describing, continued to give architectural advice after purchasing the manor of Watton in Norfolk. It is also noticeable that while 18th-century amateurs tended almost — but not entirely — to concentrate on country houses, the gentleman-professional was involved with every sort of building, from churches to colleges to hospitals to houses.

As I have suggested, for most of these men architecture was only one activity among several. Quite at what stage they should be considered professionals is hard to tell for they represent a broad spectrum of architectural involvement, which often varied at different times in individual cases. Nevertheless, the difference is one of degree for they can be distinguished as a group from other architectural practitioners. Even Wren began as an enthusiastic amateur like many of the others, an academic dabbling in architecture, designing a chapel for his uncle the Bishop of Ely at Pembroke College, Cambridge, and an assembly hall, the Sheldonian Theatre, at his own university, Oxford. It was only with the Great Fire of London, and subsequently with his appointment as Surveyor-General of the Office of Works, that virtually all his time was devoted to architecture.

The most significant divide is that between those who held senior posts in the Office of Works and those who did not. (Here, in contrast to 18th-century officers, gentleman-professionals went straight in at the top as political appointees instead of working their way up.) Wren was Surveyor-General from 1669 to 1718; May, Paymaster from 1660 to 1669 and then Comptroller as well as Comptroller of the Works at Windsor Castle from 1669 until his death in 1684; Talman and Vanbrugh were both Comptrollers, from 1689 to 1702 and 1702 to 1726 respectively. But even these were not full-time posts, nor did the position necessarily mean that the holder was an architect, as the case of Sir John Denham shows. We tend to think of Vanbrugh as a full-time architect. Kerry Downes describes his acceptance of the Comptrollership as showing "his wholehearted acceptance of architecture as a career"⁵, but I wonder whether Vanbrugh would have seen it as such. He had many other strings to his bow which must have taken up his time as, variously, a playwright, theatrical entrepreneur, senior herald and Surveyor of Gardens and Waters, as well as active builder on his own estate at Greenwich. The actual process of building, except in his official position as surveyor to Blenheim Palace, seems to have taken up a relatively limited amount of his time, although as a civil servant his position as Comptroller of the Works and subsequently as Surveyor of Greenwich Hospital was obviously a heavy commitment.

For the others, Aldrich was a busy academic, Dean of Christ Church from 1689, Vice-Chancellor from 1692 to 1695. Archer held the prosperous position of Groom Porter, which

apparently brought him £1,000, as well as the sinecure comptrollership of customs at Newcastle. Bell was a merchant producing and exporting linseed oil and other commodities and served as alderman and subsequently mayor of King's Lynn. Clarke was an MP from 1685 and held a succession of high political posts including Secretary at War and subsequently Lord of the Admiralty, although the bulk of his architectural work came after the death of Queen Anne when he retired to Oxford and resumed his position as a Fellow of All Souls. Hooke was curator of experiments at the Royal Society, Professor of Geometry at Gresham College and for a while Secretary to the Royal Society. Machell was Rector of Kirkby Thore in Westmorland. May was Clerk of Recognizances at the Court of Common Pleas and King's Bench and Inspector of French and English gardeners at Whitehall, St James's, Greenwich and Hampton Court. Ranelagh was Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer and subsequently Paymaster of the Army. Talman was Deputy Superintendant of Royal Gardens. Winde was a serving soldier, although promotion eluded him. Interestingly, in England, unlike Ireland, servicing officers, particularly engineers, were not major forces in architecture.⁶

One of the features of the gentleman-professional was the way he straddled the architectural divide. Although he designed and supervised the erection of buildings, he often appeared on commissions — with fellow commissioners who were not necessarily architects — supervising the work of others. Wren, Pratt and May were the three commissioners concerned with repairs to St Paul's Cathedral before the Great Fire and were again appointed by the King as commissioners for rebuilding the City of London after it. Archer and Vanbrugh were both on the Commission for Building Fifty New Churches, while Vanbrugh was a member of the Board of Directors of Greenwich Hospital for 13 years before he was made Surveyor. Bell was a commissioner for rebuilding Northampton after it was devastated by fire. Evelyn was Treasurer of Greenwich Hospital. Ranelagh was Treasurer of Chelsea Hospital and briefly appointed "Superintendent generall of oure Buildings & of our works in our parks" by William III.

Similarly, the gentleman-professional's role was often that of a consultant rather than architect. In 1710 Sir Edward Hannes left £1,000 for the building of Westminster School dormitory "in the contriving whereof he desired Sir Christopher Wren and Dr Aldrich should be consulted". Dr Clarke was often consulted by those in charge of building works at Oxford. Lord Ranelagh was named as the arbitrator in the event of any dispute between the Earl of Rochester and the builder for the earl's new house at Petersham and is known to have given advice to Lord Conway in connection with his buildings at Newmarket and Hagley.

Not that being only part-time architects meant that they were unproductive. Talman is credited by Colvin with 25 works, Hooke and Vanbrugh with 24 works each, Archer 16, May 11, Winde 9, Samwell 7.

That the gentleman-professional had the necessary architectural skills is not in doubt. Vanbrugh may have needed Hawksmoor's practical knowledge on his first building when he came to turn his designs for Castle Howard into reality, but in general gentlemen-professionals were not dilettanti underwritten by an amanuensis in the way that some 18th-century gentlemen were. Indeed, it was their practical knowledge, their ability to control the workmen, that appealed to patrons. This role was well defined by Vanbrugh: "Tis most certain the good Husbandry of the Money is the Most Essential and Significant part, lys as entirely upon the Surveyor, as the Designing of the Building: All that comes in the Way of a Comptroller, or a Clark of Works is to See, That the Prices are right, And that there is no more work allowd for than is done: And with the first of these, the Surveyor is chiefly intrusted, the Comptroller being only an Assistant to him writ so that in this part of the good Husbandry I am at least of Equall Service with those joind with me, But in the great Article of Management, they have no sort of Concern Which is in so casting things in the Execution of the Building, And disposing the Materialls that nothing may be Superfluous, or Improperly Apply'd; But that the Appearance of

every thing may exceed the Cost: Tis upon this that a Surveyor is reckon'd frugall or Lavish."⁷

Pratt's notebooks reveal a close and critical study of buildings and books; a developed theoretical approach to architecture; and a firm grasp of constructional detail. "No man", he declared, "deserves the name of an Architect, who has not been very well versed both in those old ones of Rome, as likewise the more modern of Italy and France etc."⁸ Aldrich was an accomplished draughtsman, as shown by two volumes of drawings preserved at Christ Church, although only a few architectural drawings in his hand have been identified. Archer was a "competent (if hardly elegant) draughtsman". Clarke was "clumsy and inelegant, but he could convey an architectural idea to paper well enough to make it comprehensible". Hooke was a competent draughtsman, a number of drawings which seem to be by him survive in the British Library. Nothing is known of May's skill. North was a particularly fine draughtsman as can be seen from the drawings reproduced in the published version of his writings. If the surviving drawing of Kingston Lacy, Dorset, is in Pratt's hand he too was an accomplished draughtsman. Talman and Vanbrugh were both spirited draughtsmen.

The relationship between the patron and the gentleman-professional was undoubtedly different from that with workmen, even those as distinguished as Hawksmoor. Vanbrugh moved on terms of easy familiarity with his clients, and the same would have been true of most of the others. In an age when extended family links were important these often led to commissions, as Kerry Downes has shown was the case to a remarkable degree with Vanbrugh.

I suspect that the difference in relationship extended to payment. It is revealing that when Vanbrugh wrote to Lord Carlisle setting out terms for building Castle Howard he mentions no fee for himself but states that Hawksmoor should have £50 per annum plus £60 for each visit. Nevertheless, as Vanbrugh's evidence in the case between Carlisle and Talman showed, he did believe that drawing should be paid for: "That for Designs only drawn imperfectly, by way of proposition for a house, nothing ought to be reckon'd, any more than if a shopkeeper shew'd you his goods, which if you buy you pay for, but not for looking on 'em. But that when a Design was chosen and follow'd the Drawings that wou'd be necessary for carrying on and executing it must be paid for, being things that took up a vast deal of pains and time."⁹ We know that Talman was paid 50gns and expenses for his first visit to Henderskelfe and when subsequently offered 40gns stated that he never stirred for less than 50.¹⁰ In Vanbrugh's case, however, what he was paid is rather obscure. His account book from 1715 to his death in 1726 is remarkable for the lack of payment for architectural services. While he receives regular payments for his government posts as Comptroller of the Office of Works and as Surveyor of Greenwich Hospital, and rather less regular payments as Surveyor of Blenheim Palace, the only entry that seems to refer to architectural work is a posthumous payment made to his widow in July 1726 of £275 "Recd of Mr Dodington what was due to Sir John." This was presumably George Bubb Dodington for whom Vanbrugh had been building Eastbury Park, Dorset. It may be that Vanbrugh's architectural payments were separately recorded, but Kerry Downes considers the account book to be largely complete.¹¹ One possibility is that Vanbrugh and other gentlemen-professionals did not necessarily receive specific cash payments for designing houses, but were instead paid with gifts such as venison and plate, or indeed with more vague promises of patronage, as may well have been the case with Vanbrugh's key patron the Earl of Carlisle. I very much doubt that any form of payment was made to men like Aldrich and Clarke, powerful men in their own university. Presumably what satisfied them was the influence they were wielding.

Why did the second half of the 17th century see the emergence of the gentleman-professional and why does he largely disappear early in the 18th century? An important factor must be that practising architecture had become a fit subject for gentlemen could partake in. The years after the Restoration were years of dramatic intellectual advance, particularly associated with the Royal Society of which Wren, Hooke, Evelyn and Winde were all fellows. As part of this

intellectual milieu architecture ceased to be a trade best left to craftsmen. It is not surprising that several gentlemen-professionals were closely involved in the development of other branches of knowledge. Wren was by training a scientist and never lost his interest in the subject, while for Hooke science remained the more dominant interest. John Evelyn, who was instrumental in establishing the Royal Society, not only translated Freart's *Parallel of the Ancient Art with the Modern*, adding a supplementary *Account of Architects and Architecture*, his *Sylva* remained one of the key books on trees for many years and he was responsible for other works as well. Aldrich's writings included editions of Greek and Latin texts, ecclesiastical tracts and books on logic, mathematics, heraldry and music as well as architecture. Seldom can architecture have been so firmly established at the heart of English intellectual life.

At the same time the spread of a purer Classicism meant that architecture as practised fell closer to the Classical subjects considered appropriate to a gentleman, and also introduced a style in which most builders were not skilled. It was an imported style and Aldrich, Archer, Evelyn, Pratt, May, Vanbrugh, Winde and Vanbrugh had all travelled abroad, at a time when few other architects had, given them a distinct advantage as Pratt notes. That there was considerable dissatisfaction with the skills and knowledge of builders is clear in Pratt and Evelyn's writings. Pratt hoped to "reestablish the *Art* on its genuine *Principles*, and original purity from whence those licentious *compositions* of our late *Workmen* have so exceedingly perverted it."¹² Evelyn's declared intention in translating Freart was to improve the taste of English workmen — who when criticised retorted that they were not prepared to be taught their trade — by overcoming the problem of the "few assistances which our *Workmen* have of this nature".

By the first decades of the 18th century the situation had changed significantly. A solid knowledge of Classical architecture could now be taken for granted from craftsmen across the country. No longer did patrons have to turn to the gentleman-professional to be sure of a fashionable, accurate Classical building. Architecture was now respectable enough for many landowners to dabble in it themselves instead of relying on a gentleman-professional among their friends or relatives. At the same time a new generation of professional architects, often trained in Rome, began to appear such as Campbell, Gibbs, Kent. It was these architects who now tended to occupy the higher reaches of the Office of Works, and it was they, together with a handful of amateurs such as Lord Burlington, who now led the profession. The gentleman-professional did not entirely disappear. Sir James Burrough played the role of Aldrich and Clarke at Cambridge until his death in 1764; Theodore Jacobsen, who died in 1772, stands out from the general trend of 18th-century landed amateurs as a merchant who engaged in architecture as a sideline. Where 18th-century amateurs tended to stick to country houses, most of their work was urban, at Cambridge colleges, the Foundling Hospital, Trinity College, Dublin, and designs for the Bank of England. But they were now exceptions. By the mid 1720s the world of architecture had left the gentleman-professional behind.

NOTES

1. *The Architecture of Sir Roger Pratt* ed. R.T. Gunther, Oxford, 1928, 60.
2. *Ibid.*, 11.
3. This paper relies heavily on Howard Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1640*, London, 1978, and unless otherwise indicated sources will be found there.
4. See David Watkin, "Architectural Education, Practice and Patronage in Ancient Regime France", in Giles Worsley (ed.), *Georgian Architectural Practice*, London, 1992, 18-23.
5. Kerry Downes, *Vanbrugh*, London, 1977, 34.
6. For a comparison see Rolf Loeber, *A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Ireland 1600-1720*, London, 1981.
7. Charles Saumarez-Smith, *The Building of Castle Howard*, London, 1990, 83.
8. R.T. Gunther (ed.), *The Architecture of Sir Roger Pratt*, Oxford, 1928, 23.
9. Downes, 22.
10. *Ibid.*, 22.

11. *Ibid.*, 180-233.

12. Roland Freart, *A Parallel of the Antient Architecture with the Modern*, London, 1664, 99.