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SIR THOMAS HEWETT AND THE NEW JUNTA FOR ARCHITECTURE

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It has long been clear, thanks to the work of Ilaria Toesca and Elizabeth Kieven, that if you are interested in early-18th-century architecture in Ireland, you will be led sooner or later to investigate an obscure clique of amateurs and architects in England known as the New Junta for Architecture.¹ The second edition of Colvin's Dictionary, in the entry for Alessandro Galilei, lists them: Robert, 1st Viscount Molesworth; his son John, the 2nd Viscount; Sir Thomas Hewett; Sir George Markham; and Galilei himself. Colvin accurately characterises the aim of this group (which was active in the years around 1717) as that "of steering British architecture in a neo-classical direction, before Lord Burlington's Palladian revival".

Let me begin by dwelling on the Irish connexions of the New Junta. I want to do this because one of the suggestions I shall be making at the end of this talk is that their ideas were directly influential on Ireland's greatest 18th-century architect, Edward Lovett Pearce.

The moving spirits behind the New Junta, the Molesworths, were Irish. They had an English estate, at Edlington in Yorkshire; John Molesworth was British envoy in Florence and, later, Turin; Robert Molesworth led a busy life in London in Parliament, at the Royal Society, and socially; he was an intimate of Godolphin and Shaftesbury. But Ireland was home. Their principal seat was not the Yorkshire one, but at Breckdenstown, just outside Dublin. And Robert articulates a familiar Anglo-Irish commitment when he writes to his son John in 1722:

you must not despise an Irish Estate. I was once such a fool as to do so, through my knowledg, and Expectation of better things: but I have found ye folly of doing so, & find it to be ye sheet Anchor of ye family, as experience will convince you²

The second facet of the Irish connexion of the New Junta was Galilei's Irish career. John Molesworth met Galilei in Florence and induced him to return with him to England in 1714, perhaps impressed as much by Galilei's knowledge of hydraulics and fountains, as by his then untried architectural qualifications. The Molesworths, father and son, forwarded Galilei's interests in England, but when it became clear that Galilei was not making much of a mark, they took him to Ireland in 1718. There he fared little better, though he produced designs for Castletown, Co. Kildare, which may have been used in the erection of the house four years later. He stayed in Ireland only a few months, and in the following year, 1719, returned to England and thence to Italy.

So far, so familiar. What I want to do in this paper is to enlarge on the architectural programme of the New Junta, filling out the details of Colvin's characterisation of their pre-Burlingtonian neo-Classicism. I want to examine Sir Thomas Hewett's role in this circle; and to identify others who might have been sympathetic to this programme. I believe, for instance, that the New Junta were the direct and conscious heirs to Lord Shaftesbury's architectural principles, and (as I have already suggested) that the world of the New Junta is the world from which Edward Lovett Pearce emerged as architect. Both conclusions have implications for our view of Lord Burlington, who is often seen as the sitting tenant on the Shaftesbury intellectual estate, and also as the dominant influence on Pearce.

First, let us look a little closer at the architectural interests of the members of the New Junta, and because I have very little to say about him, I am going to start with the most obscure of them, Sir George Markham, the dedicatee of a plate in the second (1717) volume of *Vitruvius*

Britannicus, of the York House Water Gate. In a manner consistent with the social and political picture I will draw of the New Junta, he was acquainted with the radical Whig intelligentsia and, through people like Sir John Cropley, was close to Lord Shaftesbury's most intimate circle. He was appointed along with other cronies of Shaftesbury, such as Peter King and Thomas Micklethwaite, to the Commission for Building Fifty New Churches in 1715. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society. The only Irish connection I can establish for Markham is that he had Irish nephews, whom he hated.

I suppose Sir Thomas Hewett is the key witness I want to call. And, as if to confirm my hunch that the New Junta has a peculiarly Irish significance, it was in Ireland that an important collection of Hewett papers recently came to light. These are found in an uncatalogued collection of Howard papers in the National Library of Ireland. On January 12, 1725 Hewett writes to his close friend the painter Hugh Howard of Co. Wicklow, then settled in London (Hewett left his estate in Nottinghamshire to Howard, on condition that Howard changed his name to Hewett). In this letter Hewett gives away a lot, not least that he is secretive, intemperate and has a nice sense of invective:

I intend to send you . . . a Plan, upright & section, of my little House, which you may shew Sr. Robert Walpole . . . If he sees it, I desire he may be alone unless he hath a mind the Ladys should see it. I have imitated the ffine Greek tast the best I know or could guess att. I know this most excellent manner (according to the Rules of Arts & Sciences, proportions & good sense) is out of fashion, & I must own I hate the present Italian manner, which is a poor mixture of Gothicq & Roman the monstrous Ditterlin maner & the strange Bulky Buildings Composed of Towers, Breaks, Rustick Key stones etc [?] out of all maner of proportion & reason; Our Great publick Buildings are neither Palaces Castles or Hospitalls, but of a strange Hodge podge mixture loaded with stone without any propriety relating to their Use; Foreigners are all of the same opinion. A Certain Great Wise Man hath introduced Cubes, double Cubes, Doors two diametres in height & Venetian Windows as the greatest perfection in Building; Cubes are sometimes good, but very rarely, and ought to be thoroughly considered & properly placed. Venetian Windows are abominable exploded by the Romans & indeed not used by the Venetians but of necessity. There will be a Time when men will wish there had been no such Empericks in Building & curse Hawksmoor who was servant to a Countrey Justice in this county the most illeterate magotty & dishonest Fellow living, & others of his school. I cant forbear telling you I have a very mean opinion of that illetorate whimsical Fellow Inigo Jones; notwithstanding he is so much cry'd up. There is not one Building of his extent, tollerable without great Faults. Covent Garden was a Copy; and many of the good things as York house Water Gate & c were not his, but Nicholas Stones, who was the Greatest Man wee ever had but I must stop short . . . I have not yet recd. the L'anfitheatro flavio for the Roads are so bad . . . You may shew the Drafts to whom you please except Architects & Builders . . .³

For good measure here is Hewett on Vanbrugh: "Sr. J- V- nether doth or knows anything, arbitrary, without regarding right or wrong, negligent to the last degree and cares not what he doth to carry on his Interest & support his Creatures"⁴; and on Ripley: he is "ignorant illeterate and can't spell scarce his own name, no genious or Qualifications for an architect; all he can pretend to is a Carpenter's trade . . ."⁵

There is a lot of indiscriminate vituperation here, an old man's "curse on all your houses". But there is more to it than this, as we can see when his criticisms are connected with other actions and circumstances. That he should be anti-Baroque, in 1725, is unexceptional. That he

should be opposed to Burlington's cubes, double cubes and Venetian windows, is interesting, and consistent with other evidence of a rift between Hewett's circle and Burlington's. That the surveyor general should be opposed to Inigo Jones in 1725 is surprising and shows (I shall argue in a moment) the influence of Shaftesbury.

Hewett's interest in the fine Greek taste, though not in any way unique for the 1720s, reflects a central principle of New Junta thinking. Vertue tells us of the "greek Tempietto lind with Marbles, pillasters of 3 greek Orders" in Hewett's gardens at Shireoaks;⁵ and in 1720 Hewett assures Galilei that he would approve of the work Hewett has planned for Kensington "which will be exactly done according to the Grecian tast . . . "; and he asks Galilei (then back in Italy) to visit Rome "& there very exactly take the Dimensions of the antique buildings especially those of the Grecian & best Taste" Hewett's scholarship, of course, would not have satisfied a Stuart or a Revett. But we are on safe ground in identifying his underlying principles as neo-Classical.

The next witness, after Markham and Hewett, to the New Junta's view of architecture is Alessandro Galilei. His background was of course that of the Italian Baroque. He was sensitive to sculpture and, in particular, to gardens and fountains. On a tour of Roman buildings in 1713, when he was in his early twenties, he admired Bernini and Borromini, and perhaps we can regard as no more than routine his praise for the antique triumphal arches ("bellissimi") or for the Corinthian order of the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli which he described as the most beautiful he had ever seen.⁸ Once in England, however, his neo-Classical taste was much reinforced. His designs for London churches (remember Sir George Markham was on the Fifty New Churches Commission) are divided into two groups. One group shows the oval and undulating plans of the Italian tradition. Others are startlingly neo-Classical: vast peripteral temples to hold congregations of 3,000 and more. And whether they are rectangular in plan, or square, or circular, they are dominated on the exterior by colonnades of free-standing columns, in the antique fashion. None of these was erected, but his severe portico at Kimbolton survives as evidence of his antique tastes at this time. Galilei's biographer Elizabeth Kieven traces the Classicism of Galilei's later Italian architecture to the stimulus of his English visit.⁹ Clearly this stimulus was provided by the New Junta.

We can, I think, pin down Galilei further as a non-Palladian like Hewett. As late as 1726 John Molesworth gave him advice as to what he should do in preparation for a proposed return visit to England: "You must diligently Copy all the noted fabricks of Palladio, for those very drafts would introduce you here, & without them you may despair of success."¹⁰ In other words, in response to fashion, take up (now in 1726) what has not interested you in the past, namely the architecture of Palladio.

It is clear that the architects of the New Junta, Hewett and Galilei, were not alone, in the years coming up to 1720, in their neo-Classical interests. Galilei's peripteral temples join a number of others designed at much the same time by Gibbs and Hawksmoor. Indeed, Hawksmoor's Hellenism went a lot further than Hewett's, as in his Tower of the Winds designs for Worcester College, Oxford, or his Greek portico for All Souls. But it is worth drawing attention to the neo-Classicism of the New Junta, because it was part of a coherent and ambitious if — in the British context — ineffectual philosophical programme. This is implied by Elisabeth Kieven when she writes:

More important for Galilei than his reaction to English contemporary architecture was the artistic philosophy of Lord Shaftesbury, with its demand for a return to Greek art . . . He learned of this philosophy from Molesworth who was a friend of Shaftesbury's.¹¹

Kieven in fact is talking here of the New Junta. And to develop her suggestion we need to know more about the Molesworths.

Robert Molesworth was an important figure in radical Whig circles in the late 17th century. His *Account of Denmark* of 1694 is a key text in post-Revolutionary Whig literature. It brought him to Shaftesbury's notice, and initiated a friendship, which Shaftesbury himself described as passionate, and which lasted till Shaftesbury's death. Here is Shaftesbury to Molesworth:

where I have once given my Heart (allow a Lover to speak in Lover's language) I can easily intrust my Interest. You have long had my Heart . . . you may believe it no extraordinary transition in me, from making you in truth my Oracle in publick affairs, to make you a thorough Confident in my private.¹²

And when Shaftesbury retired to Naples, to prepare illustrations for his *Charcteristicks*, to compose his *Letter concerning design*, and (in fact) to die, John Molesworth was envoy in Florence where he received Shaftesbury, and was assured that he was heir to the affection Shaftesbury had for his father. (We may note in passing that it was Henry Trench, the butt of Lord Burlington's cruelty and later Thomas Hewett's protégé, who was employed by Shaftesbury in Naples on the illustrations for *Characteristicks*.)

There can, therefore, be no doubt of the close Molesworth-Shaftesbury sympathy. Politically, the bond was not just Whig, but radical Whig. Even the name New Junta for Architecture has echoes of the Whig Junto around Lord Somers, to whom Shaftesbury's *Letter concerning design* is dedicated. And in terms of aesthetic principles it is worth while re-examining Shaftesbury's writings in the context of what we have just established about the attitudes of the New Junta, and with the confidence that Robert Molesworth — Shaftesbury's oracle and thorough confidant — was fully informed about them.

Not surprisingly, Shaftesbury applauds the ancients, though (less conventionally) he forcibly prefers the Greeks to the Romans. He calls for simplicity and correctness, and rejects "wit" and "fancy". He demands a rational basis for judging good from bad, and rejects what he calls the *je ne sais quoi* reliance on subjective likes and dislikes. He admires Raphael and the Laocoon, and disapproves specifically of Wren, Talman and (implicitly) of Blenheim. He values art for its morally improving influence, and rejects pleasure as the proper quest for the *virtuoso*. In other words, his preferences are what we would call "neo-Classical". He recommends learning from the best of the Italians and reprobates everything French.

His real interests are moral, and moral-cum-political; they are not primarily visual. And this is probably why he refrains from prescribing the character of the national style of architecture for which he campaigns. This is the vacuum which, it is often claimed, was appropriately filled with Colen Campbell's prescription in *Vitruvius Britannicus*, for a neo-Jonesian, neo-Palladian national style.

But Shaftesbury's reticence is not complete vacuum. He does not want the Baroque; that much he makes explicit. And I think that it is not going too far to say that in his *Letter concerning design* he shows that he does not want, either, a revival of the work of that architect to the Stuart court, Inigo Jones. If we can show that Shaftesbury refuses to approve of Inigo Jones, we can no longer claim that Campbell in 1715-17 was merely taking up where Shaftesbury left off.

Shaftesbury has, for a start, no time for "court architects": that is the term he chooses with which to abuse Wren; and elsewhere he writes "Tis not the Nature of a Court to improve but rather [to] corrupt a Taste."¹³ More significantly, he finds nothing in the British architectural tradition on which to build his national style. In fact, Britain is lucky, he says, in having an artistic *tabula rasa*; she is lucky to be able to begin on what he calls a "new foot". In literature he looks back and, while reprimanding the imperfections of Shakespeare, acknowledges his genius. With the arts, however, he goes so far as to say that Britain "has her models yet to seek". He looks forward to the building of a royal palace, and of a Parliament House, as opportunities for display-

ing the new national style. But if, for Whitehall, Britain has her models yet to seek, it seems clear that he is not prepared to follow the lead of Inigo Jones.

We have, therefore, an anti-Baroque, pro-Greek, and apparently anti-Jonesian, Shaftesbury, displaying a set of attitudes that is remarkably close to Hewett's. And Shaftesbury is politically at one, and personally intimate with, those who later become the leading figures of the New Junta. The architects of the New Junta, Hewett and Galilei, not only shared Shaftesbury's stylistic leanings, but devoted themselves actively to one of Shaftesbury's ideal schemes, the design of a new royal palace: with its forecourts and gardens, Galilei's royal palace was to stretch from Whitehall to Chelsea, and — in the other direction — from Westminster Abbey to St James's Square.¹⁴ The first mention of the New Junta is when Robert Molesworth forwards Galilei's designs for the palace to Lord Stanhope, listing the members of the New Junta, who are anxious to meet Stanhope to discuss the palace designs.¹⁵

Galilei's palace designs are lost. But it is more than likely that they were un-Jonesian (perhaps even competitively so): Jones was a stranger to Galilei; Hewett took charge of the drawings after Galilei's final departure from England; and Robert Molesworth spoke of Galilei as one "whose skill, & tast in Architecture farr excells any person's who has yet bin in Britain".¹⁶

It was Wittkower who first cast Burlington in the role of Shaftesbury's heir. Wittkower asserted, rather than argued, Burlington's debt to Shaftesbury.¹⁷ Burlington was — to quote Wittkower — "no doubt influenced by Shaftesbury's Neo-Platonism"; "There cannot be any doubt [asserted Wittkower] that Burlington wanted to make true what Shaftesbury propagated". "It is almost needless to point out", Wittkower continued, "that Shaftesbury had been a Whig and that Burlington identified himself with Whig ideology". Wittkower admitted that Shaftesbury's crucial *Letter concerning the art or science of design*, though written in 1712, was not published until 20 years later, but gets over the difficulty of this late date of publication by merely asserting that "there is little doubt that it was well known before". But who more likely to know it well in manuscript form than Shaftesbury's "Oracle" and "thorough Confident", Robt. Molesworth?¹⁸

The New Junta achieved very little in bricks and mortar in Britain. But if Kieven is right, and I believe she is, they were of influence on Galilei's Italian career. And I have no doubt that — as I have argued elsewhere — they provide the context for the emergence of Edward Lovett Pearce as architect in Ireland. He was a kinsman of the Molesworths, and stayed in Turin with John. He corresponded with Galilei and designed not only a royal palace but that other Shaftesburian project, a Parliament House, which indeed he built. He is neo-Palladian, yes, perhaps capitulating (as John Molesworth himself had done when advising Galilei) to the force of popular fashion in the late 1720's, by which time both Molesworths, and Hewett, were dead. But he is a most uncomfortable Burlingtonian. Years of research have failed to yield a single instance of direct connection between Pearce and Burlington. Such negative research has its own force. Pearce was not Burlington's man in Ireland. When he talks, at the Dublin Parliament House, of his Greek exedra and his Greek peristyle he is applying the language of Shaftesbury and the New Junta to a great public building which did indeed initiate a national style of architecture in Ireland.

NOTES

1. Elizabeth Kieven, "Alessandro Galilei", in Adolf Placzek (ed.), *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, New York, 1982, II, 145-49 and Ilaria Toesca, "Alessandro Galilei in Inghilterra", in Mario Praz (ed.), *English Miscellany*, Rome, III, 1952, 189-220.
2. Robert Molesworth to John Molesworth, October 20, 1722, National Library of Ireland, microfilm p 3753.
3. Sir Thomas Hewett to Hugh Howard, January 12, 1725, National Library of Ireland, Howard of Shelton Abbey papers, PC 227.

4. Sir Thomas Hewett to Hugh Howard, October 2, 1725, National Library of Ireland, Howard of Shelton Abbey papers, PC 227.
5. Sir Thomas Hewett to Hugh Howard, April 9, 1726, National Library of Ireland, Howard of Shelton papers, PC 227.
6. *Walpole Society*, XX, 1931-32, 36.
7. Sir Thomas Hewett to Alessandro Galilei, February 21, 1719/20, Florence, Archivio di Stato, Carte Galilei/Filza V/no.1/24, quoted by Toesca, 1952, 217-18.
8. "1713 Notizie di Roma scritte dal Sige Alesdo Galilei", Florence, Archivio di Stato, Carte Galilei/Filza O/no.1, ff 64r, 67v.
9. Kieven, 1982, 147.
10. John Molesworth to Alessandro Galilei, January 13, 1725/6, Florence, Archivio di Stato, Carte Galilei/Filza V/no.1/189, 190, quoted by Toesca, 1952, 220.
11. Kieven, 1982, 146.
12. *Letters from . . . the late Earl of Shaftesbury, to Robert Molesworth . . .*, London, 1721, 26.
13. Benjamin Rand (ed.), *Second characters or the language of forms by the . . . Earl of Shaftesbury*, Cambridge, 1914, 23, 24.
14. A sketch of the palace is illustrated in Toesca, 1952, fig. 1.
15. Robert Molesworth to Lord Stanhope, October 5, 1717, Kent Archives Office, U1590,C9/35.
16. *Ibid.*
17. For the remarks quoted here see Rudolf Wittkower, *Palladio and English Palladianism*, London, 1974, 103, 179, 180, and 218 note 13.
18. In the discussion following this paper, John Harris pointed out that Lord Somers, the dedicatee of Shaftesbury's *Letter concerning design*, had been Burlington's tutor.