



THE
GEORGIAN
GROUP

Alastair Laing, 'Foreign Decorators and Plasterers in England', *The Rococo in England*, Georgian Group Symposium, 1984, pp. 21-45

FOREIGN DECORATORS AND PLASTERERS IN ENGLAND

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The title of this paper is deliberately evasive. For just as I cannot imagine that the author of that admirably succinct chapter 'Concerning snakes' in *The Natural History of Iceland*: 'There are no snakes to be met with throughout the whole island' – would have been invited to address a Congress of Scandinavian Herpetologists, so too I rather doubt that a paper entitled 'Italian stuccadors and the Rococo in England', which would have had to argue that these Italians played at most a peripheral role in the dissemination of that style, would have been regarded as a very welcome contribution to the present symposium.

There have of course been those who have thought otherwise about Italian stuccadors and the Rococo, starting with the fantastic confusion of Peter Nicholson's *Practical Masonry, Bricklaying, and Plastering* of 1830. He wrote before the concept of the Rococo as a style had evolved, and when no distinction was yet made between Louis XIV and Louis XV, in a chapter entitled: 'Of the French Style of Ornament':

'In the reign of Louis XIV, a peculiar and fantastic style of ornament came into general use for the decoration of the interiors of buildings. It consists of a great profusion of foliage twisting round mouldings, and emanating from heads, shells, shields, trophies, &c; the line of foliage throughout being invariably maintained with an exquisite degree of freedom and spirit.

The Italian stucco-workers, Catizi [by whom he meant Cortese], Philip Danielli, and Franconi [by whom he meant the Francini], being no doubt on their route through France to this country, struck with the beauty of this style, were the first workers of it to any extent in England ...'¹

1. [Peter Nicholson], *Practical Masonry, Bricklaying, and Plastering, both Plain and Ornamental, etc.*, London, 1830, p. 177.

Nicholson has the excuse that not only the word *rococo*, but also the very periodisation of the post-Renaissance into styles had not evolved when he wrote. Nevertheless, his conception of what had happened was tenacious, and in 1914 we can still find George Bankart in *The Art of the Plasterer* writing:

'After Wren's death all English plasterwork deteriorated rapidly. . . . Sir John Vanbrugh . . . also employed other plasterers whose work is very much inferior to that of [Grinling] Gibbons [who, he imagined, had made plaster ceilings at Chatsworth]; rococo is the word for it.'²

2. George P. Bankart, *The Art of the Plasterer*, London, [1914], p. 279.

And:

'With the advent of William III, Italian workmen who had been in France renewed their visits to England, and the fashion of the French Court (Louis XIV and Louis XV) became the style of the day. . . . James Gibbs . . . left his plasterwork chiefly in the hands of Bagutti and Artari, two Italians of whose work he seems to have been proud, although it was of a very rococo character.'³

3. *Ibid.*, p. 282.

And even as recently as 1955, despite Margaret Jourdain's judicious restriction of rococo decoration to: 'ornament in which rockwork – *rocaille* – appears as a distinctive motif',⁴ Bryan Little's *Life and Work of James Gibbs* could still call Artari and Bagutti's ceilings in 11, Henrietta St (now in the Victoria & Albert Museum) and St Martin-in-the-Fields 'rococo'.⁵ It might be thought anachronistic to insist upon the distinction between the essentially Baroque character of the Italian stuccadors up until the 1740s, and the true Rococo already found in, say, James Paine's designs for the stucco of the Mansion House in Doncaster or Nostell Priory, which was only brought about through the influence of French ornamental engravings and illustrations to architectural treatises; but that France – and not Italian stucco – was perceived as the real source of the Rococo at the time is amply demonstrated by the repeated laments of Isaac Ware, in his *Complete Body of Architecture*, published in 1756.

4. Margaret Jourdain, *English Interiors in Smaller Houses . . . 1660–1830*, London, 1923, p. 36.

5. Bryan Little, *The Life and Work of James Gibbs, 1682–1754*, London, 1955, pp. 49 and 75.

To take but two of many citations:

'The French have furnished us with abundance of fanciful decorations for these purposes [i.e. ceiling designs], little less barbarous than the

Gothick . . . We should . . . have declared for banishing whatever came under the denomination of *French* ornament; but, now we see it over, the art will be to receive these ornaments with discretion . . .⁶

And later on:

‘A cieling stragled over with arched lines, and twisted curves, with X’s, C’s, and tangled semicircles, may please the light eye of the *French*, who seldom carry their observation further than a casual glance; but this alone is poor, fantastical, and awkward . . .⁷

Never does Ware breathe a syllable of reproach against the Italian stuccadors, and this was not merely because their heyday was over. It was also because, however much their ornament too embodied a good measure of fantasy and irregularity, it was largely composed of rationally apprehensible elements from the natural world and from the traditional repertoire of architectural ornament. At the same time, it also contained such time-honoured symbolic features as references to the Four Seasons, Four Elements and Four Continents, and busts of gods, goddesses, emperors and sages, whilst drawing heavily on Ripa’s *Iconologia* and engravings after the classic masters for its main figurative sculptures and reliefs.

Thus, although I believe it can be demonstrated that the Italian stuccadors, in England as in Central Europe, were belated and often awkward employers of Rococo ornament, and that it was provincial craftsmen who took the lead – in England, most conspicuously, with Perrit and Rose in Yorkshire, Thomas Roberts in Oxfordshire, and Stocking and others in the West Country – I do not think that it would be very profitable to devote this paper to demonstrating that negative. Instead, I believe that it is worth studying the Italians for their own sake, because the Italian stuccadors certainly were responsible for introducing to England not merely a new vocabulary of ornament, but also a novel element of fantasy in this vocabulary, and for an ambitious extension of its scope to walls, chimney-pieces and doorcases. Furthermore, they merit attention, not least because several important questions about them remain unsolved, and sometimes barely even put. There is, in particular, an inter-related group of problems that I

6. Isaac Ware, *A Complete Body of Architecture*, London, 1756, p. 521.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 522.

8. Geoffrey Beard, *Craftsmen and Interior Decoration in England, 1660-1820*, Edinburgh, 1981, pp. 150, 244 and 276. Both here and subsequently, as will be seen, I am enormously indebted to the archival researches of Geoffrey Beard, as published in a number of books and articles, from his 'Italian Masters of Stucco', *Country Life*, 24 November, 1960, onwards. It is only to be regretted that even his latest publication fails to incorporate all the information of his previous publications together in dictionary form.

9. James Gibbs, *A Book of Architecture*, London, 1728, p.v.

10. Geoffrey Beard, *Decorative Plasterwork in Great Britain*, London, 1975, p. 53.

11. Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England*, vol. II, Feltham, 1970, p. 256. Jacob Simon is, however, rightly sceptical about the dated dome model of 1710 having been painted in connection with St Paul's, in view of its patently Roman Catholic iconography (exh. cat. *English Baroque Sketches*, Marble Hill House, Twickenham, 1974, no. 69). It is perhaps worth mentioning here that a lively frieze reincorporated in Culford Hall, Suffolk, when it was enlarged for the 5th Earl Cadogan from 1890, must be a survival of the work for the 1st Earl that occasioned Pellegrini's second visit to England in 1719.

should like to tackle: who brought them to England, or how and why did they come here? Who employed them here, and whose designs did they follow when they were here?

It seems to be fairly generally agreed that the first pair of Italian stuccadors to come to England were Giovanni Bagutti and a certain Plura, who were employed at Castle Howard from 1710 to 1712.⁸ Because of Bagutti's subsequent partnership with Giuseppe Artari, and because of the employment of these two by James Gibbs, and the puffs that he gives them in his *Book of Architecture* – including the celebrated statement that the ceiling of St Martin-in-the-Fields was: 'enrich'd with Fret-work by Signori Artari and Bagutti, the best Fret-workers that ever came into England'⁹ – it is sometimes assumed that it was Gibbs who brought them over. This has quite rightly been challenged by Geoffrey Beard, particularly insofar as Artari is concerned, on the grounds that he would have been too young for Gibbs to have brought him with him on his return from Italy in 1708/9, whilst Gibbs's employment of both of them was not until some years later;¹⁰ Bagutti's first recorded employment, on Castle Howard, was in fact on a fabric of Vanbrugh's. It does, nonetheless, give one pause for thought that both Gibbs's master, Carlo Fontana, and Bagutti should have been born in the Ticino, and that Gibbs' and Bagutti's arrival in England should have been so close.

Bagutti and Plura were not the only Italians to be employed on the decorations of Castle Howard; more illustrious than either of them was the Venetian painter Gianantonio Pellegrini.¹¹ Pellegrini had been brought to England in the train of the returning Ambassador Extraordinary to Venice, the Duke of Manchester (for whom he was to work at Kimbolton), and it is possible that, as Beard has suggested, Bagutti was also introduced to England by the Duke. However, there is not only no evidence for this, there is also nothing to suggest that Bagutti was employed at Kimbolton, nor even any indication of Bagutti's prior employment in Venice; and Venice in fact was never a particularly hospitable place for Comasque stuccadors such as Bagutti and

Plura.¹² Much more probable is it that Bagutti and Plura's employment at Castle Howard was, like Pellegrini's a windfall commission, and that their eyes, like his, were on the real main chance, that of decorating the dome of St Paul's.

It was on 3 March 1709 that the Commissioners to the Fabric decided to have the dome painted, and Pellegrini was one of the first artists who brought their designs to the Chapter House on 5 April.¹³ There was no necessary reason to suppose that these paintings would have a stucco setting – and in the event of course, they were to be executed without one, by a native artist (James Thornhill), and in monochrome. Nonetheless, we know both from the presence of four foreign artists submitting designs in April 1709, and from Talman the Younger's letter from Rome of November 1711, of the keen interest that the project of decorating the dome of St Paul's aroused abroad. Thus for peripatetic Comasque stuccadors such as Bagutti and Plura, it might well have seemed a gamble worth taking to come to England, and seek other commissions whilst angling to be associated with a painter on St Paul's; all the more so in that England was thus far virgin territory for them and their ilk. The fact that, after the termination of their employment on Castle Howard in 1712, we do not hear of Plura again, and we hear of Bagutti once more only about 1720, by which time he had begun his association with Artari, suggests that, once it was clear that there was nothing to be expected from St Paul's, they both forsook these shores.

It must be admitted that this hypothesis about the reason for the presence in England of Bagutti and Plura is pure speculation. We do not know where either of them had been before, and Plura disappears from the record thereafter. The one thing that we do know about Bagutti – and can be fairly sure of in the case of Plura – is that they were Comasques, that is, they were from the barren mountain valleys around Lake Como and Lake Lugano. This area was already renowned for sending out itinerant masons in the Middle Ages – the *Magistri Comacini* – and later sent out whole teams of craftsmen to construct and decorate buildings,

12. The wholly unpredictable emergence of a Venetian school of fresco-painting in the 18th century meant that such spectacular schemes of Comasque stucco-decoration as those in the *palazzi* Albrizzi, Sagredo (whose *Sala dell'alcova* is now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York), Barbaro and Widmann-Foscari had fewer successors than might have been expected. For such work as there was, see G. Mariacher, 'Stuccatori ticinesi a Venezia tra la fine del '600 e la meta del '700', in *Arte e Artisti dei Laghi Lombardi*, ed. Edoardo Arslan, vol. II: *Gli Stuccatori dal Barocco al Rococo*, Como, 1964, pp. 79–91.

13. Exh. cat. *English Baroque Sketches*, Marble Hill House, Twickenham, 1974, 'Thornhill at St Paul's, 1709–21'.

14. For their inconsiderable work in part of their homeland, see Luigi Simona, *L'Arte dello Stucco nel Cantone Ticino*, Bellinzona, vols. I (1938) and II (1949). For their extraordinary radiation abroad, cf. above all the two volumes resulting from the Congresses organised by Aristide Calderini for the Società Archeologica Comense in Como in 1956 and 1957, *Arte e Artisti dei Laghi Lombardi*, vols. I (1958) and II (1964). Further insights into their widespread activity may be gleaned from the *Atti del Convegno promosso dalla 'Magistri Intelvesi'* held in the Villa Monastro, Varenna, in 1966, published as a special number of *Arte Lombarda* XI/2 (1966), and from two in particular of the numerous publications by Giuseppe Martinola: *Lettere dai paesi transalpini degli artisti di Meride e dei villaggi vicini (XVII-XIX)*, 1963, and *Le Maestranze d'arte del Mendrisiotto in Italia nei secoli XVI-XVIII*, 1964. I am most grateful to Geoffrey Beard for the gift of these last two, not otherwise very accessible, publications.

15. The two documents throwing light on the age of the Carlo Giuseppe Plura who worked in Turin yield a birth-date of either c. 1665 or c. 1677 (cf. *Schede Vesme*, Turin, 1968, vol. III, p. 842). Even granted the notorious imprecision about age in the era before birth certificates, it thus

above all in Central Europe, from the 16th to the 18th centuries.¹⁴ Their peculiar skills lay in their mastery of the revived art of stucco. These masons and stuccadors came from territory that had passed partly to the Duchy of Milan, and partly to the Swiss Confederation (the Ticino), but they all maintained a historic orientation towards Italy, and kept up the peripatetic traditions and solidarity of the *magistri comacini*, which justifies the extension of the term *Comasque* to cover them all.

Giovanni Bagutti was born at Rovio above Lake Lugano in 1681, whilst Plura probably came from Lugano itself. It might well be he, rather than the woodcarver settled in Turin whose son was later to operate in England as a sculptor, who should be identified with the Carlo Giuseppe Plura who was born in Lugano in 1655.¹⁵ In the absence of any recorded prior career for either Bagutti or Plura, it is also difficult to place their work at Castle Howard within any particular strand of the Comasque traditions. The fleshy cartouche, volutes, shellwork, and grotesque terms of the overmantel in the hall chime quite well with the vocabulary of other Comasques operating in the Holy Roman Empire, though the whole composition has a boldness and a prominence given to the shellwork, for which it is hard to find parallels at so early a date.¹⁶

Even harder to match at this date is the vocabulary and organisation of the ornament of the overdoors and ceiling of the High Saloon, before it was lost in the disastrous fire of 1940.¹⁷ For the ceiling employed corner medallions and axial cartouches in a way prefatory of French Régence and Rococo ceilings (which would however, have had no painting in the middle, but only a central stucco rose). Furthermore the cartouches themselves already employ a crude form of *rocaille* – not just shelly flanges, as in the overmantel in the Hall downstairs, but ambiguous, asymmetrical ornament that can no longer be straightforwardly described as shellwork. So utterly is this without parallel in England – or even on the Continent – at this date, as also are the overdoors resembling Genoese or Turinese work of a couple of decades

later,¹⁸ that I am tempted to wonder whether all this is not the product of some remarkable 19th century *pasticheur*, called upon to produce a setting appropriate to Pellegrini's transformed murals. The curiously inorganic relationship of the walls and cornice to the ceiling, the rather 19th century dado, the visions of empty sky through the fictive arches, and the incorporation of an apparently late 18th century chimneypiece, ought all to give us pause for thought before accepting the stucco unhesitatingly as the work of Bagutti and Plura in 1710–12. Further work in the archives as to what else, apart from the refitting of the Chapel, Lord Lanerton did to the house in 1875–78, might resolve the matter, since alas, the decoration is no longer in existence for narrower inspection. The very location of this grandiose High Saloon, in an upper room off the dome, is decidedly bizarre when Vanbrugh had created his suites of State rooms on the ground floor; and it is tempting to wonder whether the Pellegrinis were not originally painted for one of the pavilions with twin painted domes at the ends of the South front, that were swept away by Sir Thomas Robinson in the 1750s.¹⁹

What is probably the next occasion on which we hear of Italian stuccadors in England, again concerns a pair of Comasques, Artari and Vassalli. This is as executants of the stucco in Duncombe Park.²⁰ Unfortunately, not only was the house, built by William Wakefield about 1713, gutted by fire in 1879 without any record having been made of the interiors,²¹ but we also only have Horace Walpole's word for the employment of Artari and Vassalli, and no documentation, so we do not know the exact dates of their involvement.²² One would normally expect it to have been close to that of the construction of the house, but since we do not otherwise have any record of Artari's presence in this country until 1720, or of Vassalli's until 1723,²³ stucco may well not have been introduced into the house until some time after its construction.

Walpole associates no Christian name with either stuccador, but whereas there was only one Vassalli who worked in England –

does not seem reasonable to identify him with the Carlo Giuseppe Plura whom Luigi Simona found in the Lugano baptismal records for 1655, as John Fleming does ('The Pluras of Turin and Bath', *Connoisseur*, November 1956, p.175, n. 2). Since the Turin sculptor could scarcely have been employed to execute stucco at Castle Howard, not only because he was by profession an *intagliatori*, but also because he was elected *priore* of the Compagnia di San Luca in Turin in 1709, it seems a reasonable hypothesis to identify this older Carlo Giuseppe Plura with the Plura of Castle Howard.

16. The closest parallels that I can find for the combination of grotesque terms, volutes, cartouches, flowers, *mascarons*, and shell-work are in the ceilings of the Novitiate and the *Audi-enzzimmer* of the Abbot's Winter Lodgings at Ottobeuren, which were the first rooms to be stuccoed by Andrea Maini and his troupe in 1717–19 (cf. Tilmann Breuer, 'Italianische Stukkatoren in den Stiftsgebänden von Ottobeuren', *Zeitschrift des deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft*, vol. XVII (1963), pp. 234ff. – misnaming this room the *Schlafzimmer*). The affinity is a suggestive one, in view of the subsequent parallels that I draw between the ceiling of the Moor Park hall and those of the *Kaisersäle* in Fussen and Ottobeuren, which are also

by Maini and his troupe (*vide infra*, p. 40). Maini's whereabouts between his employment under Bartolomeo Lucchese on Schloss Meiningen in 1704-06, and his appearance as Court Stuccador in Mecklenburg-Schwerin in 1715 (cf. Helga Baier-Schröcke, 'Zur Situation der lombardischen Stuckateure im östlichen Deutschland während der Renaissance und des Barock', in *Arte e Artisti dei Laghi Lombardi*, vol. II, Como, 1964, pp. 102, 108 and 111) are unknown; he could always have gone to work under Plura. Disappointingly, the chimneypiece in the *Audienzzimmer* (or 'Tagzimmer') at Ottebeuren reveals no particular affinity with that in the Hall at Castle Howard (cf. Hugo Schnell, *Ottebeuren*, Munich/Zurich, 1971, p. 42 and Geoffrey Beard, *Stucco and Decorative Plasterwork in Europe*, London, 1983, fig. 106).

17. James Lees-Milne, *English Country Houses: Baroque, 1685-1715*, Feltham, 1970, p. 161 and Figs. 252-54.

18. It must, however, be admitted that there are striking similarities between the curvilinear overdoor of the smaller door, and those of the *Audienzzimmer* at Ottebeuren.

19. Charles Saumarez Smith has very kindly informed me that two 18th century descriptions of Castle Howard, from which it is impossible unfortunately to

quote, suggest that the gilded stucco of the High-Saloon was already in place by 1725.

20. Michael McCarthy, 'The Building of Hagley Hall', *Burlington Magazine*, April 1976, p. 224, n. 69, quoting Horace Walpole's ms. *Book of Materials*.

21. Bankart, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 285, says that Duncan [i.e. Duncombe] Park 'contained some plasterwork in the rococo style of his [Wakefield's] master [Vanbrugh]'; but we have seen what an unreliable guide to style Bankart is! Bankart can hardly have remembered the decoration from before the fire, so that it is possible that there were fragments or depictions of the original decoration to show how it had looked. Certainly the decoration of the hall, despite its reduction to a square when the house was rebuilt in the 1890's, would appear, as Kerry Downes suggests, to preserve some reminiscences of at least the lower areas, to judge by the putti on volutes over the chimneypiece and doors (cf. Kerry Downes, *English Baroque Architecture*, London, 1966, p. 92 and Fig. 323, and the gallery of the hall of Moor Park, *ibid.*, Fig. 295).

22. Giles Worsley kindly informed me since the Symposium, that he has found payments to Vassalli of £30 in Michaelmas, 1734 and 6gns in June 1736 in the fragmentary Feversham

Papers in the North Yorks. County Record Office. As he says, the size of the former payment might be associable with the stuccoing of the ceiling of the Doric Temple at Duncombe, which must date from about that time. However, the only mention of disbursements for plaster for a specific room is a surviving account-book for 1732-38, referring to the Hall, in 1732-33. What is more, the plaster was supplied by 'Phillip Daniel', which is the first confirmation that I have found of the existence of the 'Philip Danielli' mentioned by Peter Nicholson as working in the North of England as well (cf. note 1). Whether Danielli and Vassalli were in partnership, or whether the latter succeeded the former, is unclear. Walpole's remark re Duncombe (cf. note 20): 'The stucco work there by one Vassalli, & some better by Altari' does suggest work at two different periods, rather than a collaboration, in which their hands would not normally have been so distinguishable.

23. When he was presumably the 'Sig. Vassalli' to whom Sir John Dutton paid £209s. for 14 busts (Rupert Gunnis, *Dictionary of British Sculptors, 1660-1851*, revised ed., 1968, p. 408).

24. The dates given by Beard for the employment of Comasque stuccadors on the Continent need check-

ing and sometimes revising, since they are not always taken from the most reliable sources. For G. B. Artari and F. Vassalli, the most convenient table of dates is supplied by B. L. Döry, 'Die Tätigkeit italienischer Stuckateure in Westdeutschland', *Arte e Artisti dei Laghi Lombardi*, vol. II, Como, 1964, pp. 129-51, esp. p. 138.

25. My table of work for the Francesco Vassalli who came to England is an attempt to shape a coherent sequence out of the discrepant accounts presented by Döry (*loc. cit.*) and Ernst Guldán ('Quellen zu Leben und Werk italienischer Stuckatoren des Spätbarock in Bayern', *ibid.*, pp. 280-81). I believe that the gap between 1694 and 1710, and between locations in the oeuvre set out by the latter, indicate the existence of two Francesco Vassallis, but I agree with Guldán and differ from Döry in seeing Francesco rather than Tommaso as the stuccador of the *Rathaus* in Aachen, and thus of the *Dom* as well. A letter of 12 May 1711 indicates that Francesco 'guadagna assai dinari' on Bensberg (cf. G. Martinola, *Lettere*, no. 216, p. 125). This was the superb hunting-lodge (though the term diminishes its scale) built for Jan Wellem, the Elector Palatine, the employer of many other artists who came to England, including Leoni, Pellegrini, Bellucci and Damini; a flow of talent that merits further investigation.

Francesco – Artari could have been either the father, Giovanni Battista, or one of his sons, Giuseppe or Adalberto, or even some combination of these. Given the probable date of the work, Adalberto is the most likely, but even were it to survive, we should find it difficult to say for certain. The collaborative nature of stucco-work makes it far more feasible and fruitful to distinguish between different teams of stuccadors, than between individual hands among them. I think it is in fact likely, since Giovanni Battista and Giuseppe had satisfactory employment in the Empire, that they were preceded to England by Adalberto. The important thing is that with the Artari and Vassalli, England was at last brought within the orbit of stuccadors who had worked on major buildings in Europe. The father, Giovanni Battista Artari, had been employed at Fulda between 1707 and 1712, especially on stuccoing the vaults and altars of the abbey church.²⁴ His skills were above all figurative, and they were to be inherited by his son Giuseppe. The character of his ornament is still thoroughly Baroque, making vigorous use of massive cartouches, like his fellow-Comasques throughout the Empire.

The Artaris and Vassalli almost appear to have been working their way to the westernmost outposts of the Empire, before leaping over the Low Countries and coming to England. A Francesco Vassalli, who would appear to have been the same as ours, is recorded as working in Mannheim in 1710, Bensberg in 1711, Liège in 1717 and after, and Aachen in 1719.²⁵ The father, Giovanni Battista Artari interrupted his employment at Fulda to work in Rastatt in 1720, which accounts for his son Giuseppe receiving a payment on his behalf in Fulda in the same year.²⁶ Because of their recorded employment on these commissions in Germany, it was therefore perhaps the other rather shadowy son, Adalberto, or ‘Albert’, Artari who executed the stucco in the Octagon of Secretary Johnston’s house at Twickenham with Bagutti in 1720.²⁷ He certainly collaborated with Vassalli on the stucco of Sutton Scarsdale in 1724, and we have seen that the early date of Duncombe makes it probable that he was Vassalli’s

26. Döry, *loc. cit.*

27. Beard, *Craftsmen*, p. 243, confidently places the Octagon in Giuseppe’s work list, but I am unable to see whence he gets this certainty over which Artari Gibbs was referring to in his *Book of Architecture*.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 242. Unless he was crippled, it seems curious that there should be no further record of Adalberto Artari until the death of someone of that name in 1751.

29. Victoria and Albert Museum Print Room, E.3615 - 1913. It is significant that the preliminary design for the Octagon, which is also in the Print Room (E.3620 - 1913; exh. cat. *James Gibbs Architect, 1682-1754*, Orleans House Gallery, Twickenham, 1982, no. 107, p. 33 and plate on p. 42), offers no design for the interior, despite which Terry Friedman appears to ascribe the essential responsibility for this to Gibbs, seeing in it, rather bizarrely 'a remarkable forecast ... of the English taste for rococo' (*ibid.*, p. 34).

collaborator there as well. This collaboration with Vassalli also makes it likely that he was one of the two 'Mr Artare's' paid for work at Ditchley Park in 1725, after which he vanishes from the record, presumably dead, although Geoffrey Beard has found an Adalberto Artari who only dies in 1751.²⁸

Regrettably, none of the work of Vassalli or the younger Artaris prior to their coming to England appears to be securely identifiable amongst surviving stucco, so that one cannot say exactly what its character would have been. Nevertheless, there is sufficient consistency in the character of the work that they did after coming to England to make it clear from their first extant work, the stucco in the Octagon of 1720 (now part of the Orleans House Gallery), that they were for the most part executing their stucco to their own designs, rather than to those of the architect - in this case James Gibbs.

At first blush this might appear to be contradicted by the evidence of Gibbs's sectional drawing of the Octagon in the Victoria and Albert Museum.²⁹ This is, however, not a drawing made for submission to the client, but one done to be engraved in Gibbs's *Book of Architecture*, so that it is a record of a design rather than the design itself, like most of those in the Victoria and Albert Museum and in the Gibbs Collection at the Ashmolean. Nothing in Gibbs's career as an architect so far prepares us for this, neither the vault of St Mary-le-Strand, with its coffering inspired by that of his master Carlo Fontana in SS Apostoli in Rome, nor the relatively austere hall at Sudbrooke. Many of what were to be regular elements of the future vocabulary of the Artari and Bagutti are, by contrast, already to be found: the allegorical women and the putti perched on the pediments of the chimney-piece and doors, the profile medallions set into cartouches over the latter, and the large cartouches in the vault. It is these cartouches that above all declare the Comasque ancestry of this scheme of interior decoration. It should be said, however, that their slight relief and somewhat sprawling shape is not entirely typical of subsequent work; but they do have a parallel in the

destroyed ceiling of the Entrance Hall at Sutton Scarsdale, which is recorded by a contemporary lead plate as the work, between 1724 and 1728, of: 'Albert Artari, gentleman, and Francis Vessali, gentleman, Italians who did the stuke work'.³⁰ This for me is an additional reason for seeing Albert rather than his brother Joseph as the stuccador of the Octagon.

But if Gibbs was not responsible for making the designs for Artari and Bagutti's stucco in the Octagon, he rapidly saw its and their potential, and became the principal employer and promoter of one or both of them thereafter. The Octagon was followed by St Martin-in-the-Fields, the Senate House at Cambridge, St Peter's Vere Street, Ditchley, the Radcliffe Camera, and Ragley. What is more, when he employed them, he generally seems to have continued to give them their head and allowed them to work to their own designs, rather than to have imposed his own upon them.

The consistency of their style when working for Gibbs or for most other architects, such as Smith of Warwick or Leoni, is in striking contrast to the *gravitas* of such emphatically 'Antique' ceilings as those of the Stone Hall at Houghton, which Joseph Artari did to the designs of William Kent in 1726, or of the White Drawing Room at Moor Park. The latter room appears such a curious interloper in that building that one is reluctant to credit Thornhill or Leoni with the invention of it and to wonder whether Styles too might not have gone to Kent for the design of this one room.

Now at this point – if not long before! – I begin to sense the objection: 'Ah! but what about all the Gibbs drawings in the Gibbs Collection in the Ashmolean? Surely these prove beyond peradventure that it was Gibbs who was making the designs for his stuccadors? – Look at the ceiling-design for Gubbins!' Well, my own inspection of the drawings in the Gibbs collection has led me to a quite different conclusion: namely that – just as one might in fact expect – these include not merely drawings by Gibbs himself and by the draughtsmen in his office, but also drawings that he invited from craftsmen outside it.

30. Margaret Jourdain, 'Sutton Scarsdale', *Country Life*, 15 February, 1919, p. 171.

31. Gibbs Coll., II. 10. William Wrighte Crandall, Jr., in his ms. catalogue of the Collection drawn up for his B.Litt. in 1933, a copy of which is deposited in the Print Room of the Ashmolean, had already suggested that the two designs on this page might have been submitted to Gibbs by a craftsman.

32. Gibbs Coll., II. 104. (This inscription does not appear to have been previously noticed or deciphered.)

Were the evident differences in handling between many of the drawings itself not enough, there is the fact that one of them³¹ has the annotation in Italian: '*25 senza gli materiali*' and I hope that no-one will attempt to say that this is Gibbs attempting to communicate with his stuccadors in his remembered Italian, when it is so clearly a tender by the latter – whilst another³² has on the back not merely the pencil draft of such a tender, but even the name of the stuccador making it: '*Per questi doi Soffitti Secondo Sono disegnato / prometto di farli pr. il prezzo de – Lire / ottanta cinque Sterline, mettendo Io li / materiali, ma Il Padrone dere mettere Li palchy a sua Spesa Paolo Lafranc^{hin}*'. This is splendid corroboration of the two payments discovered by Geoffrey Beard

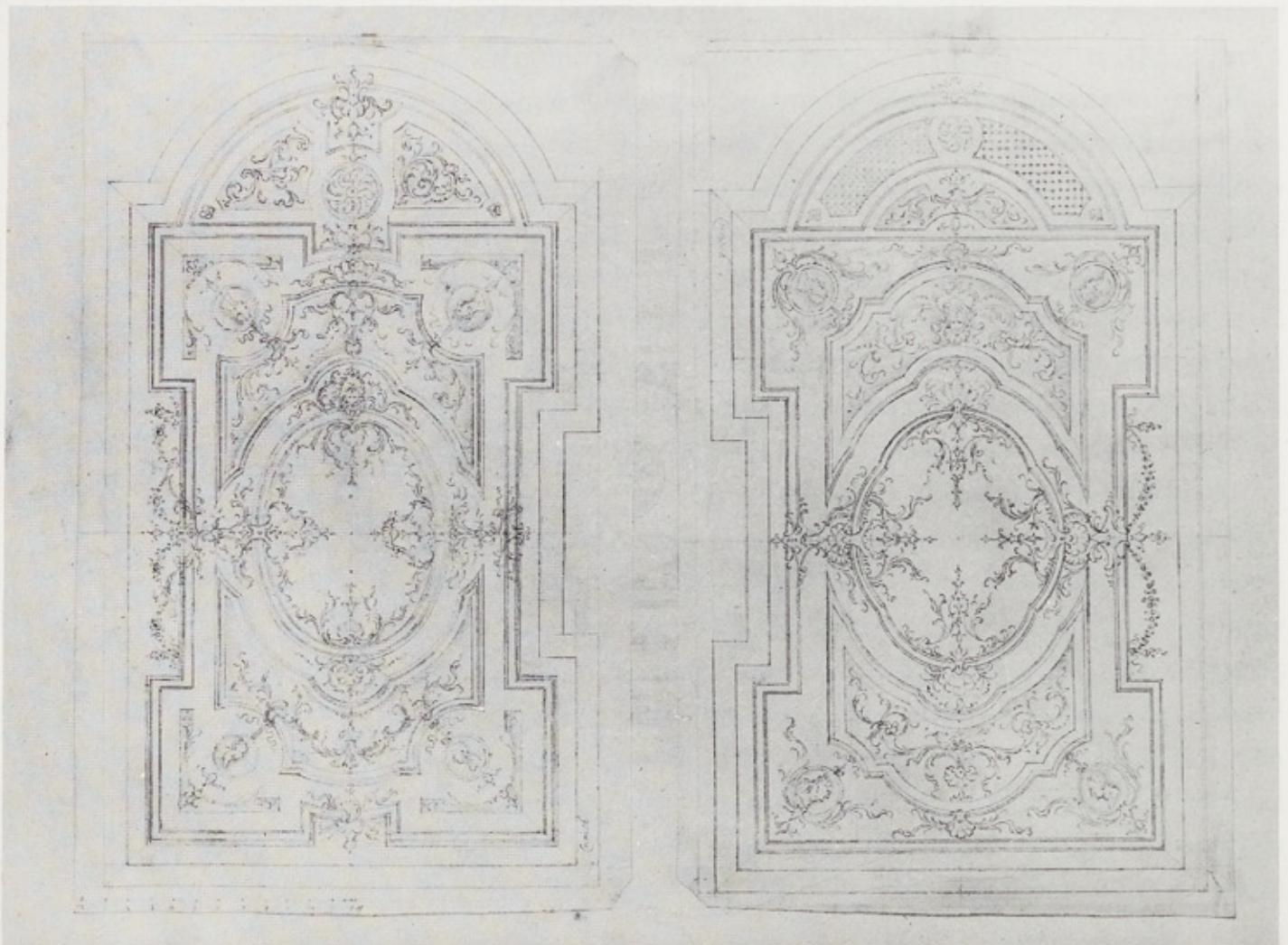


FIG. 1 Pair of ceiling designs in pencil, here attributed to Paolo Francini and probably for James Gibbs's Park House, Gateshead (reproduced by courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).

in Gibbs's account with Drummonds in 1731 and 1736 to 'Mr La Franchino',³³ who was to become better known in England and Ireland as one of the brothers Franchini or Francini. If the tender goes back to 1731, it was very possibly for Gibbs's Park House, Gateshead,³⁴ thus inaugurating the Lafranchini's exclusive employment in the North of England, before they emigrated to Ireland.

Now of course it might still be maintained that Lafranchino was making his tender on the reverse of a design made by Gibbs, although I think it would be hard to do so in view of the differences between this slight, sensitive design in pencil, and the more laboured designs, usually in pen, or in ink and wash, by Gibbs or his draughtsmen. Again, these differences might be ascribed to the medium, although I see them as also extending to handling. But it so happens that this drawing (Fig. 1) is one of a pair of pencil designs for ceilings of rooms of the same shape that have a pair of counterparts in ink for the same rooms.³⁵ The latter are denoted as being for two rooms above one another by their respective inscriptions: *The ceiling for y^e under room* (Fig. 2) and *Ceiling for y^e upper room*. The contrast between the two pairs of designs is flagrant: on the one hand, in the ink designs, we have traditional English ceilings of the compartmented type, with a rose in the centre and acanthus-ribbon ornament as infill. On the other, in the pencil drawings, we have much more flowing, freely composed Italian drawings, with curvilinear mouldings and ornaments, bust-medallions in the corners, and cartouche-shapes and clamps (incidentally, in the later, lighter manner that is more characteristic of the Lafranchini than the Artari).

There is no other instance of alternative designs by Gibbs himself and his stuccadors for the same ceilings, but there is one other very instructive comparison that can be made, between two designs for ceilings that happen to be directly adjacent to one another in the 4th volume of the Gibbs Collection. One is an ink and wash drawing (Fig. 3) inscribed: *Ceiling of y^e New Room at Fairlawn in Kent y^e seat of Ld. Vane*³⁶, and the other is the much-

33. Beard, *Craftsmen*, p. 259.

34. Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1600-1840*, London, 1978, p. 341.

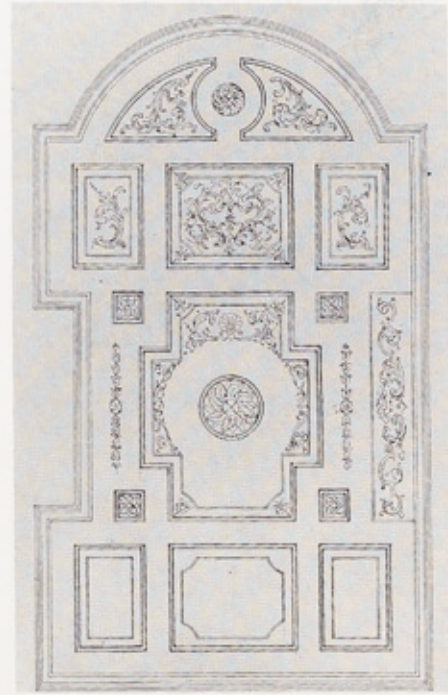


FIG. 2 Gibbs's design for 'The ceiling of y^e under room', probably for Park House, Gateshead (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).

35. Gibbs Coll., II. 105.
This observation was also first made by Crandall.

36. Gibbs Coll., IV. 41.

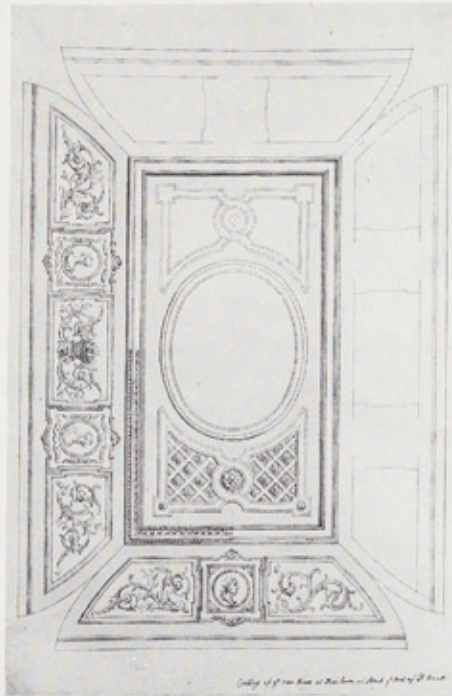


FIG. 3 Drawing for the ceiling of the New Room at Fairlawn (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).

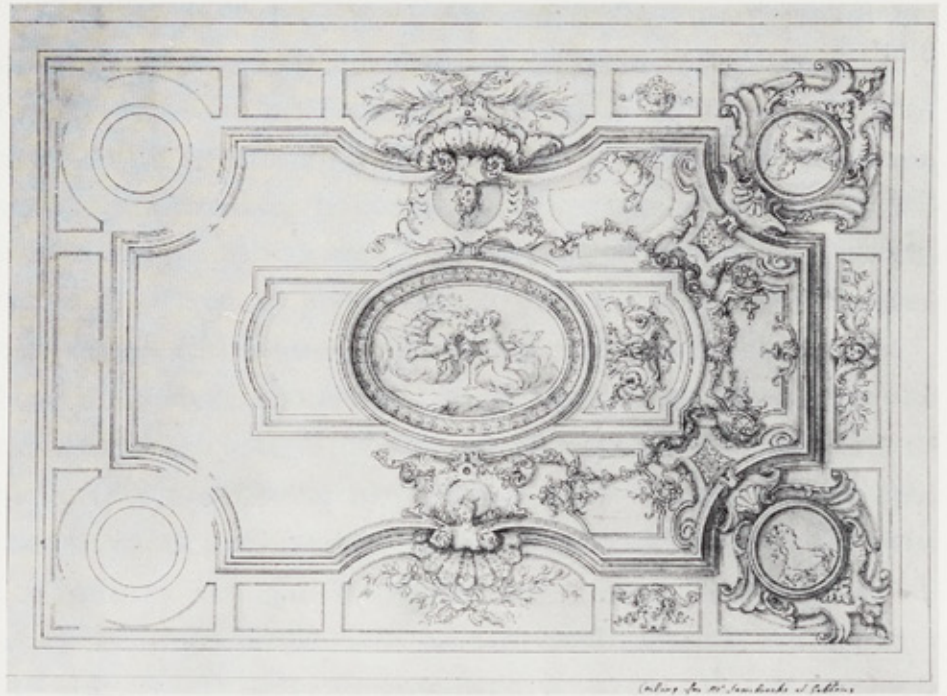


FIG. 4 Drawing for a ceiling for Gubbins (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).

37. Gibbs Coll., IV. 40.

38. Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 342.

39. The original ceiling was only obliterated c.1895; from the evidence of the old photograph, it is entirely possible, as Christopher Hussey suggested, that Artari and Bagutti were responsible for replacing Gibbs' acanthus tendrils with fleshier, Brunnetian ornament (cf. 'Fairlawne, Kent', *Country Life*, 30 October 1958, p.1000, Fig.6, and letter of 27 November 1958, p.1247).

reproduced ink and wash drawing (Fig. 4) inscribed in the same hand: *Ceiling for M^r Sambrooke at Gubbins*.³⁷ The hand of those inscriptions is, I take it, Gibbs's, but if so, it is the only place where it is to be found on this second sheet. The wildly differing character of these two designs cries out to be recognised – yet the Gubbins design is always given to Gibbs, because he is known to have added a large room to Gubbins for Jeremy Sambrooke,³⁸ and because the handwriting appears to be inscribed by him and is to be found in his collection. The composition of the ceiling is, however, utterly Italianate, and it can probably best be compared with those of the saloons at Ditchley and Clandon. Ditchley was of course also built by Gibbs, and there is no documentary evidence for who the stuccadors were at Clandon, but the stylistic coherence of these and of a whole group of other ceilings makes it evident that they are all by the Artari and Bagutti troupe. The contrast with the stiff compartmented English type of ceiling designed – I should suppose – by Gibbs himself for Fairlawne could not be more apparent.³⁹

I have not otherwise come across the originals of any drawings by any of the Artaris or Bagutti to determine irrefutably in which of their hands this design for Gubbins might be, but I should at this point like to bring in a remarkable discovery most generously communicated to me by John Harris. This is of a sketch-book which was acquired by Bredo Grandjean some years ago. As I have implied, I have not seen this in the original, nor has it been photographed, but John Harris has lent me a complete photostat of it. This is not safe enough ground on which to identify hands, and I have not so far succeeded in pinpointing any of the designs as having been made for a particular commission, but there is enough other evidence from which to draw conclusions about its authorship.

Not that this is too difficult, since the fly-leaf has the name *Artari* on it, and although this might have been an annotation similar to others on the page, it and they would all appear to be in the same hand as the receipt by Giuseppe Artari for work done at Ditchley, reproduced in Geoffrey Beard's *Decorative Plasterwork in Great Britain*.⁴⁰ That Giuseppe was the maker of this sketch-book is further borne out by the evidence of the writing and sketches in it.

To begin with the fly-leaf. This has a fascinating sequence of addresses upon it, above Artari's name. The first reads *More Park near* (a half obliterated name = Rickmansworth?) *in Harford Sheire*. This corroborates – were further corroboration to have been needed – Sir Edward Gascoigne's statement that Giuseppe Artari and his father were employed there,⁴¹ as well as Bagutti, whose involvement is known from the envelope addressed to him there by Gibbs.⁴² (Incidentally, if I may be permitted an aside here, that letter ought not to be taken as evidence that Gibbs supplied a design for Bagutti to use at Moor Park: the sheet of paper has the ink and wash plan and four walls of a room with a Venetian window (something not found at Moor Park) on one side, and a pencil drawing of stairs and Bagutti's address in ink on the other. There is no text, the letter is not franked, and these facts – together

40. Beard, *Decorative Plasterwork*, Fig. 53.

41. Elisabeth Done, 'Sir Edward Gascoigne, Grand Tourist', *Leeds Arts Calendar* no. 77 (1975), p. 10, drawing on her transcription of Gascoigne's travel diary in the Leeds City Archives, done for her B.A. dissertation at Leeds University in 1975, which I have not had the time to consult.

42. Gibbs Coll., IV. 24.

43. Mark Girouard, 'Coffee at Slaughter's', *Country Life*, 13 and 27 January, and 3 February 1966.

44. The challenge was not taken up by any furniture historian at the Symposium, but David Paton came up with the interesting information that John Law or Laws, appears to have doubled as a picture dealer, if the joiner (and thus presumably frame-maker) is the same as the man who sold the supposed Guido Renis of *The Toilet of Venus* and *Persus and Andromeda* now in the National Gallery to George I in 1723 (cf. *Vertue Notebooks*, vol. III, *Walpole Society XXII* (1934), p. 19: '1723 the King bought 6 Large paintings of Mr Laws. Venus a dressing with her Nymphs of Guido. Andromeda of Guido. Two other of Rubens & two besides for all which he paid 4000 pounds. Many more paintings was brought over by Mr Laws').

45. *The History of Parliament*, Romney Sedgwick, *The House of Commons 1713-1734*, London, 1970, vol. I, p. 445.

46. David Verey, *The Buildings of England, Gloucestershire: The Vale and the Forest of Dean*, Harmondsworth, 1970, p. 294.

47. I offer, for what it is worth, my own inadequate transcription of this: [Gen] Naino | 1738 diciamo Libro di Mo Frances^{ca} Ma - Cantone | dato dij Giuseppe[?] Artari[?] | Niong St - catore.

with the presence of this sheet in the Gibbs Collection – show that this was not something sent to Bagutti, but a letter that had been addressed to him being used to make drawings on instead).

The next address is *L[eg] off Mutton and fowl in King Street Golden Square London*. King Street is now Kingly Street, and this was presumably a tavern, but I do not know if it was the alcoholic equivalent of the address at the bottom of the list: *at Slaughters Coffee House in St Martin's Lane London*. To find this last, long since identified by Mark Girouard as the hob-nobbing place of dissenters from the Palladian dictatorship of the day,⁴³ in Artari's list of addresses is particularly gratifying.

Underneath the 'Leg of Mutton' is: *at M^r John Laws Joyner – House in Oxford Road Opposite to Swallow Street End London*. Oxford Road is now Oxford Street and that end of Swallow Street has survived the engulfment of the rest of it by Regent Street, as Swallow Passage. I have not found John Laws in Geoffrey Beard's *Dictionary of Craftsmen*, but perhaps some furniture historian knows more about him.⁴⁴

The last address: *To Benj: Bathurst Esq^r att Lisney near Newneham in Gloucestershire* adds a new name to Artari's list of patrons, but not unfortunately a surviving house. Bathurst was the younger brother of the dilettante 1st Earl Bathurst, but a much extremer Tory. He was M.P. successively for Cirencester and Gloucester, and his seat was at Lydney (not Lisney).⁴⁵ The early 18th century house that Artari may well have been called upon to adorn was swept away for a new house designed by C. H. Howell in 1877.⁴⁶

Whereas the fly-leaf has a list of English addresses, a couple of nearby pages contain writing relating to Artari's work on the Continent, and it is unfortunately – for our purposes – to works there that most of the designs in the book appear to relate. There is first of all, in an apparently different hand and inks, an inscription dated 1738 identifying this (?) as the book of another stuccador with an indecipherable name.⁴⁷ But flanking this, apparently in Artari's hand, are the measurements of Cologne Cathedral, and a note about doing the four Elements in the form of putti. On

another sheet are scales comparing the inches of Genoa and France, and the palms of Genoa and Aachen. Giuseppe Artari stuccoed the rotunda of Aachen Cathedral with his father in 1729–30 (work which was inevitably stripped off in the 19th century purification), and did two rooms in Falkenlust for the Elector of Cologne in 1732–33.⁴⁸ Why he should have taken Genoese and French measurements as points of comparison I am unable to say.

Most of the drawings in the sketch-book are, as I said, for continental ceilings and suchlike: they are busier and more all-over in treatment, and a number of the items are devotional and Catholic. The ceilings have many of the same elements as English ones of the 1720s, and they belong to no later than that decade in continental terms, so that I suspect that the 1738 inscription with another stuccador's name simply indicates a change of ownership. There are however one or two designs that do look English, notably a ceiling-design with most rigid compartmentation and one of those typical profile bust medallions (though these are found in Continental stucco long before). Also early on in the sketchbook is a sheet with a design for a pair of stucco drops incorporating similar medallions. I am sure that in time it will be possible to point to specific employment of at least some of the designs, but one would need a better archive of photographed material than I have available to do it.

To revert to the Gibbs Collection, there is one final drawing that calls for treatment. That is the superb large design for the vault of St Martin-in-the-Fields⁴⁹ (Fig. 5). It leaps to the eye at once as being by a different hand from the generally pedestrian drawings for vaults and ceilings in the collection, and as being by a different hand above all, from the design of the vaults as executed,⁵⁰ though the comparison may not be quite fair, since this drawing was patently prepared for the engraving in Gibbs's *Book of Architecture*. Nevertheless, the fine larger drawing seems generally to be given to Gibbs without question, despite not only the difference of hands and the divergence from the scheme as executed, but also despite the fact that the scenes from the life of

48. Döry, *loc. cit.* (note 24); Ludwig Schreiner, 'Das Jagdschloss Falkenlust', in *Aus Schloss Augustusburg zu Brühl und Falkenlust*, ed. Walter Bader, Cologne, 1961, pp. 209ff.

49. Gibbs Coll., IV. 31; exh. cat. *Rococo*, B6.

50. Gibbs Coll., I. 5.

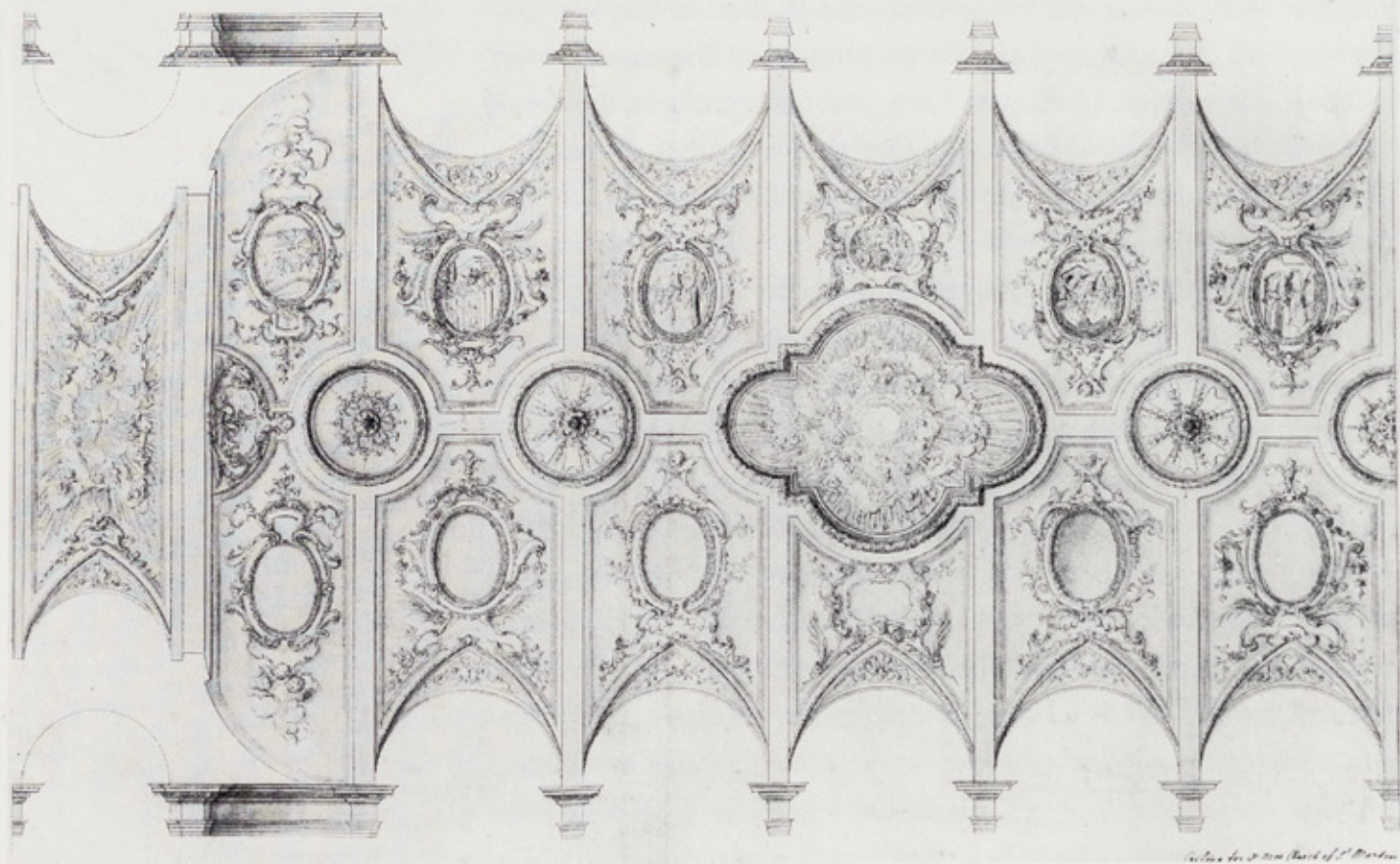


FIG. 5 Drawing for the proposed ceiling for St Martin-in-the-Fields (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).

51. Cf. his celebrated letter of March 1748, giving his reasons for refusing to work as the 'Compagno' of Morsegno, reproduced in the *Bonner Jahrbücher*, vol. C (1896), pp. 101-2.

Christ framed by the upper row of cartouches are not only drawn more spiritedly than Gibbs ever could have, but are also unthinkable in an Anglican church of the period. Gibbs, the covert Catholic, would never have committed such a solecism; his stuccadors were quite capable of it. I am very tempted to see in this design a drawing made for Gibbs by Artari, who prided himself on his abilities as a draughtsman,⁵¹ in which case we should at last have a design from his own hand. What it is certainly not is one of the two designs laid by Bagutti before the Commissioners in 1724, since – as I learn from the catalogue of the Rococo exhibition – the design chosen, by him and Artari, was the richer of the two submitted (Fig. 6).

There is one other question of design that I should like to consider, and that concerns the decoration of the Hall of Moor Park. There are three well-known drawings by Thornhill, one for

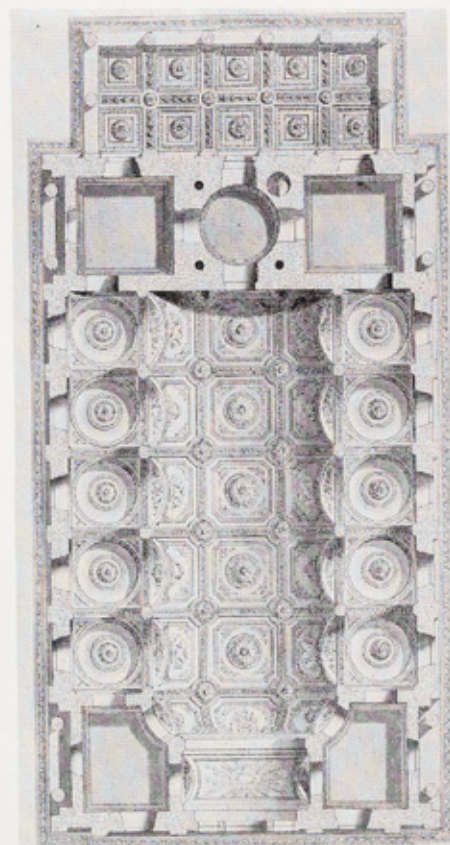
the ceiling (Fig 7), and a pair for one of the upper and one of the lower walls, in the collections of Sir Brinsley Ford and the V & A respectively, that show the stucco more or less as executed by Artari and Bagutti between 1725 and 1728, with Thornhill's paintings, before they were swept away by the rancorous Styles, and others by Amigoni and Sleter substituted.⁵² It is very reasonably proposed in the catalogue of the exhibition of *English Baroque Sketches* that Thornhill designed the stucco, not simply because he made this drawing, but also because it contains (top and bottom), a pair of alternatives for the form of the corner cartouches and the shape of the central painting – the bottom alternative being the one that was, in the event, adopted. However, whilst certain elements – notably the captives chained to trophies, actually a commonplace of Baroque imagery – were a part of



FIG. 7 Drawing of the hall ceiling of Moor Park by Thornhill (Sir Brinsley Ford, CBE, FSA).

52. Exh. cat. *English Baroque Sketches*, nos. 57, 58 and 60.

FIG. 6 Drawing of the ceiling as executed for St Martin-in-the-Fields (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).



53. Breuer, *art. cit.* (note 16), pp. 244-46; Alfons Kasper, *Kunstwanderungen im Ostallgäu*, Bad Schussenried, 1970, pp. 107-13.

54. Serena is only specifically recorded as one of the three stuccadors who made the stucco-marble doors in the *Vorsaal* or *Heiligkreuzkapelle* in 1728-30, after Maini had left (Norbert Lieb, 'Die barocke Architektur und Bilderwelt des Stifts Ottobeuren', in the *Festschrift Ottobeuren*, Augsburg, 1964), but he had apparently previously been, like the others, a member of the Maini troupe (Hugo Schnell, *Ottobeuren*, Munich/Zürich, 1971, p. 26).

55. Beard, *Georgian Craftsmen*, pp. 27 and 188.

56. Döry, *art. cit.* (note 24), p. 143; Beard, *Craftsmen*, p. 284 (in which Cavendish Square needs removing from Francesco's work-list to Carlo's).

57. A selection of those in the V. & A. is illustrated in Edgar de N. Mayhew, *Sketches by Thornhill*, London, 1967. It is possible that Thornhill could have been influenced by some of the ceilings in Paul Decker's *Fürstlicher Baumeister*, Augsburg, 1711ff., notably that in part I, pl. 31, which might also have had some influence on the hall ceiling at Clandon, but the affinity is in structure rather than detail.

Thornhill's standard decorative repertoire, the corner cartouches were most certainly not. Not only are they a new departure for Thornhill, so is the very idea of this combination of painting and stucco, since his preferred device had always been illusionistic *quadrature* that embraced walls and ceiling in a single scheme. It might plausibly be argued that in the present case it was the wishes of the client that prevailed but that would still not really answer the question as to how it was that Thornhill appropriated the vocabulary of the Italian stuccadors so completely. Not only can features such as the paired allegorical females perched on the pediments of the lower doors, or the putti holding portrait medallions over the upper ones, be paralleled in their other English work, but the giant cartouche frames adorned with putti in the ceiling can be matched by slightly anterior work of the early 1720s by a troupe of their fellow-Comasques led by Andrea Maini in the *Festsaal* of Füssen (1721-22) (Fig 8) and the *Kaisersaal* of Ottobeuren (1723-27).⁵³ It is thus peculiarly appropriate that the stuccadors in the Maini troupe at Ottobeuren should have included a certain Francesco Serena,⁵⁴ and that at Ditchley, the commission that he undertook shortly before Moor Park, Giuseppe Artari should have been joined by a Francesco Serena.⁵⁵ Serena was no doubt tempted to come and try his luck with Artari in England by the fact that his brother Carlo, who also came to England to work with Artari, had worked alongside the Artari at Fulda.⁵⁶

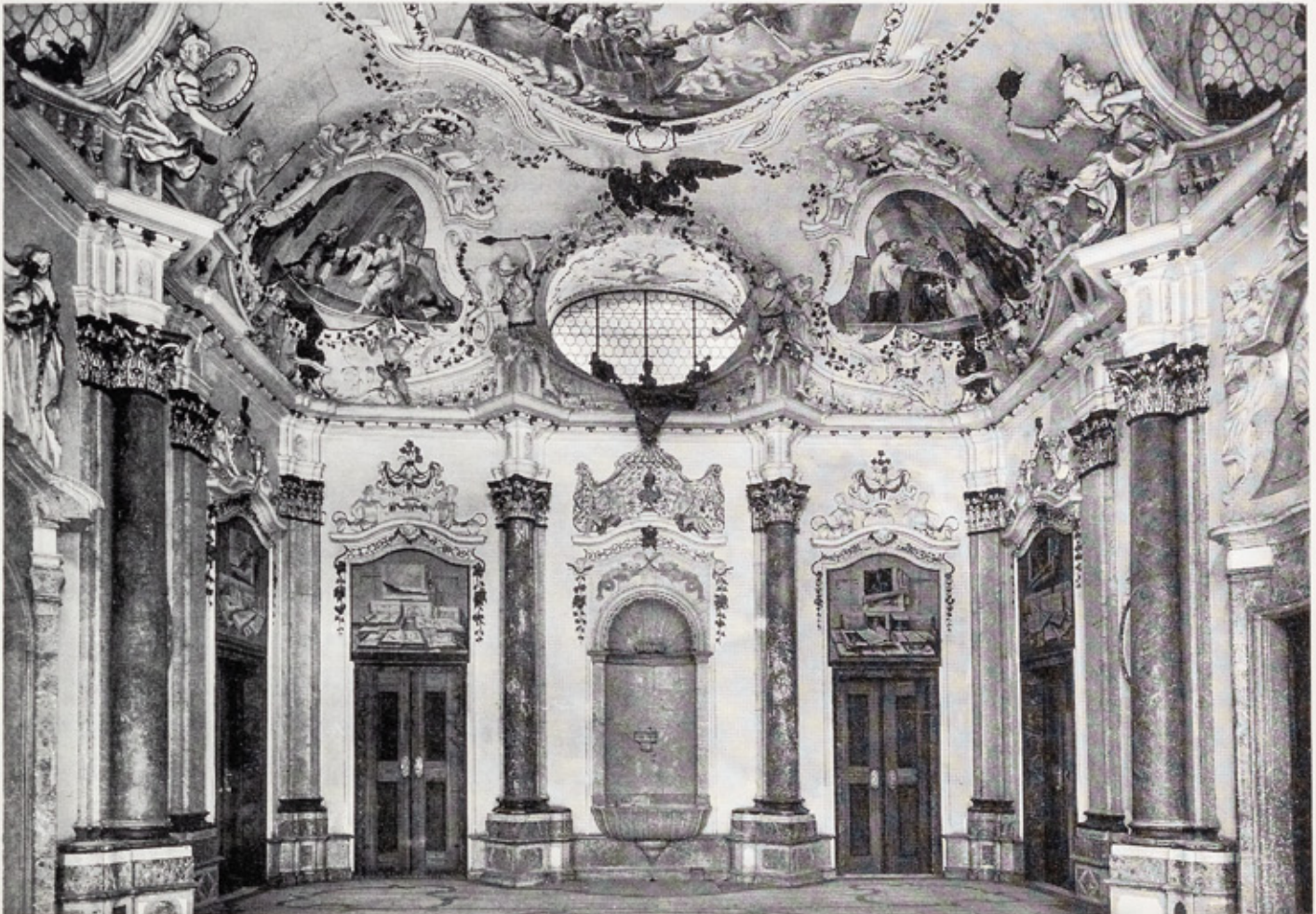
None of Thornhill's usual models, in the shape of the engravings of French or Italian decorative schemes, could have inspired him to produce a design quite like that for the hall at Moor Park.⁵⁷ Indeed, it might even be said to have gone rather against the grain of his generally tectonic treatment of both decoration and architecture. I should therefore like to propose that in these very careful presentation drawings, Thornhill was incorporating prior designs by Artari or Bagutti, and that these in turn reflected some of the most advanced work being done by their fellow-Comasques in the great abbeys of the Empire. Were Thornhill ever to have

been regarded as the author of the whole decorative scheme, it would seem surprising that Styles was prepared to retain the stucco whilst obliterating his paintings. The present feeble quadratura paintings let into the ceiling show how far Styles was prepared to go in cutting off his nose to spite his face. Thornhill never worked again after Moor Park, so we cannot tell if it would have betokened an enduring change in his approach to decoration. We only have a design for an unidentified ceiling framing *The Fall of Phaethon*,⁵⁸ which appears to show him taking up the Italians' favourite motif, the cartouche, and stretching it beyond the bounds of realisation in stucco, in such a way as to reassert the primacy of the painter.

The last conundrum that I wish to consider finally confronts us with the Rococo. It ought in fact to be a stale chestnut, since

58. Mayhew, *op. cit.*, pl. 28.

FIG. 8 The Festsaal at Füssen.



59. Despite the evidence of Lady Luxborough's correspondence with William Shenstone, excerpts from which are reproduced here, and Dr Richard Pococke's observation in 1756 that: 'the whole church above and on the sides is richly adorn'd with papier-maché gilt in imitation of the finest carvings' (*The Travels through England of Dr Richard Pococke*, ed. J. J. Cartwright, *Camden Society N.S. XLIV*, vol. II (1889), p. 230), the idea that Lord Foley bought the stuccoed ceiling at Canons and somehow transported it, or mouldings of it, to make a perfect fit in the pre-existent Chapel at Great Witley has persisted (cf. most recently, Beard, *Craftsmen*, p. 38, n. 41, and his alternative explanation in the caption to Fig. 77: all this in the face of his own quotations from Lady Luxborough's letter of 13 February 1750/1).

60. Edward Croft-Murray, *Decorative Painting in England*, vol. II, Feltham, 1970, pp. 17, 19, 170-71 and 277.

61. C. H. Collins Baker and Muriel I. Baker, *The Life & Circumstances of James Brydges, 1st Duke of Chandos, Patron of the Liberal Arts*, Oxford, 1949, plan of north offices and chapel on plate facing p. 125.

62. V. & A. 2216.34; exh. cat. *James Gibbs*, no. 28 (not reproduced).

63. The earliest reference that I have found to a novel form of papier-mâché sub-

most of the elements of the solution to it are already known, but they have never been properly presented together, and as a result, confusion still appears to reign.⁵⁹ It was and is a celebrated fact that, when the Chapel of Timon's Villa – the Duke of Chandos's great house of Canons – was demolished with the house in 1747-48, Bellucci's paintings in the vault, and the windows painted by Joshua Price after *modelli* by Sleter, were bought by the 2nd Lord Foley and installed in his chapel at Great Witley.⁶⁰ Folk memory of what actually happened appears subsequently to have fused with art-historical speculation of the most anachronistic kind, to create the myth that at the same time squeezes were taken in papier-mâché of the original stucco, and that these too trundled their way over the rutted roads of England (not much improved so far as the access road to Great Witley is concerned!) to recreate the original setting of the paintings. Apart from the inherent implausibility of this, there are two major flaws in the myth. On the one hand, the two chapels are of a different shape (that at Canons was of five bays and had no transept;⁶¹ that at Great Witley is of four bays with a transept), and on the other, the ornament is palpably Rococo – a sheer impossibility at the date of the construction of the Chapel at Canons, between 1716 and 1720.

The myth, whose hold is very tenacious, would appear to rest however, on two facts that do go some way to justifying it. The first is that the present ceiling at Great Witley, whose overall design is indeed old-fashioned for its actual date of installation (between 1747 and 1750), is based upon a design by Gibbs which would appear to draw in turn from Artari and Bagutti's original ceiling in Canons. Gibbs's design was identified by Michael Snodin amongst the anonymous ceiling designs in the V & A Print Room as being for Great Witley, and was exhibited by Terry Friedman in his Gibbs exhibition at Orleans House in 1982.⁶² (Fig. 9). The organisation of this design is exactly that of the present vault. The only way in which it differs is in its more copious use of cartouches (in which, I suspect, it imitates the original vault), and in its

complete innocence of one key element of the present vault; *rocaille*.

This is no less than we should expect of Gibbs, most of whose career had, after all been passed in another era, whilst the cartouches would not have been of his own original devising. But what then intervened between his design and the executed ceiling, to bring it so much up to date, and who was he making his design for? It is here that we stumble across the second anchorage of the myth in fact.

The present ceiling is not made up from squeezes, but it is of papier-mâché. It is indeed the star creation in this new medium, which had only begun to be adopted in England as a substitute for stucco in the 1740s.⁶³ We know this not only from the evidence of the recent restoration of the ceiling, but also from a remarkably detailed exchange of correspondence, which appears never to have been quoted in full. It seems worth doing so now, so as to illustrate not only the way in which papier-mâché was acquired and applied, but also the attitudes behind its adoption. The extracts come from the 1775 edition of Lady Luxborough's *Letters*. The first letter from Lady Luxborough is dated the 13th of February 1750/51:⁶⁴

'The proposal for stuccoing my little passage [at Barrells] makes it come also to more than I expected. Moore [a 'stucco-man' based in Warwick], (who has lately been at London) talks to me of a sort of stucco-paper, which I had never heard of; and says Lord Foley has done his Chapel in Worcestershire with it (the ceiling at least). By his description, the paper is stamped so deep as to project considerably and is very thick and strong; and the ornaments are all detached, and put on separately. – As suppose, for example, it were the pattern of a common stucco-paper, which is generally a mosaic formed by a rose in kind of octagon: it seems, in this new way one of these roses is to be bought singly; so you have as many in number as the place requires, which are pasted up separately, and then gilt: the ornaments for the cornices are likewise in separate pieces, and, when finished, cannot, I suppose, be known from fretwork. The difficulty, and consequently the expence, must be in putting up these ornaments, which, as I understand, must be done by a man whom the Paper-seller sends on purpose from London. ...'

stitute for stucco is in a letter from Lady Hertford to Mrs Knight (the later Lady Luxborough) of June/July 1742, about a pavilion at Percy Lodge that was: 'fitted within with paper in imitation of stucco; the ceiling is of the same, and appears like fretwork (H. Sard Hughes, *The Gentle Hertford*, 1940, pp. 154–55). An earlier reference in a letter of hers to Lady Pomfret of 19 February, 1741/2 about 'bespeaking a paper ceiling' is slightly ambiguous, but probably refers to the same thing. By the third quarter of the century, there were numerous suppliers of papier-mâché ornaments, including Peter Babel, Augustin Berville, Thomas Bromwich, Crompton & Spinnage, René Dufour, Thomas Fuller, Prince Hoare, James Lovell, Masefield, and William Wilton. The trade-card of Dufour, Mrs Delany's 'famous man for paper ornaments' claimed that he was the 'original maker of papier-mâché', but Mortimer's *Universal Director* (1763) was no doubt right in claiming that it was 'an invention ... imported by us from France', if not that it was 'of modern date', since *carton pierre* was already being employed for similar purposes in France and England in the 17th century.

64. *Letters written by the late Right Honourable Lady Luxborough to William Shenstone Esq.*, London, 1775, letter LIX, 13 February 1750/51, pp. 236–37.

65. *Ibid.*, Letter LIII, called a 'second letter' of 5 September 1750, p. 223, but it is clear that this is one of the two letters (the first was Letter LXVII of May 27, *ibid.*, pp. 261–70) that provoked Shenstone's reply of 14 June 1751 (Letter CXXVIII in the edition of *The Letters of William Shenstone*, edited by Marjorie Williams, Oxford, 1939, pp. 313–15) because he responds not merely to these remarks about papier-mâché, but also to her request in the same letter to design something using Bristol stones.

66. *The Letters of William Shenstone*, ed. Williams, Letter CXXXIX of 6 June 1752, pp. 338–39. He reveals, *inter alia*, that a 'Pine-Apple from the middle of my Cieling' and 'four corner Ornaments' or 'Spandrells' cost about eight shillings. He also stipulates that: 'They should be painted with flake white and thin starch ... The whole Cove (except the Moulding) should be washed with Oker'.

This was followed by a second letter from her ladyship, which was placed by her editor under 5 September 1750, but – because of Shenstone's reply to this and to another point in her letter dated 14 June 1751 – must have been written in the same June:⁶⁵

'I am assured that the paper carvings are quite as beautiful, and more durable, than either wood or stucco; and for ceilings infinitely preferable, especially as they may be moved, being only fastened up with tacks. They adorn chimnies and indeed whole rooms with them, and make picture frames of them. The paper is boiled to mash and pounded a vast while, then it is put into moulds of any form; – but farther I know not; only that when it is tacked up, you either paint it white, or gild it, as you would do wood. Several Ladies take the trouble of making this themselves: but it is to be bought in single ornaments, so much a piece or a dozen. So Lord Foley's Chapel-ceiling was bought (Fig. 10).

Curiously, Lady Luxborough failed to obtain, or forgot, the name of the manufacturer of these papier-mâché ornaments, and she had to get it from her correspondent a year later. Shenstone was himself by then an authority on the subject, and sent her the name of Thomas Bromwich, the celebrated paper-stainer and paper-hanger 'at the *Golden-Lion, upon Ludgate-Hill*'.⁶⁶ It is not credible that Bromwich – if it was he – should have had all the moulds for the ornaments of the Great Witley ceiling in stock; many of

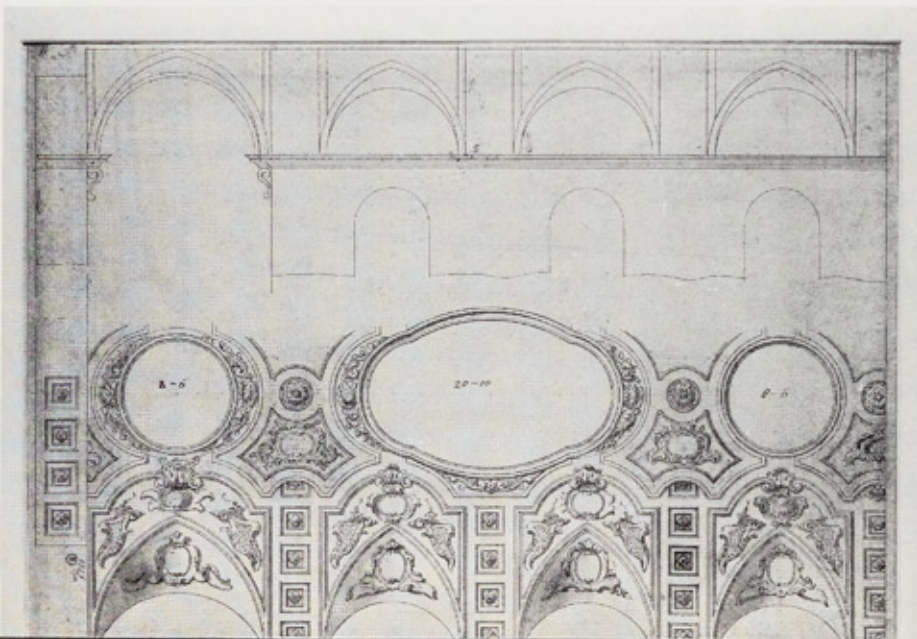


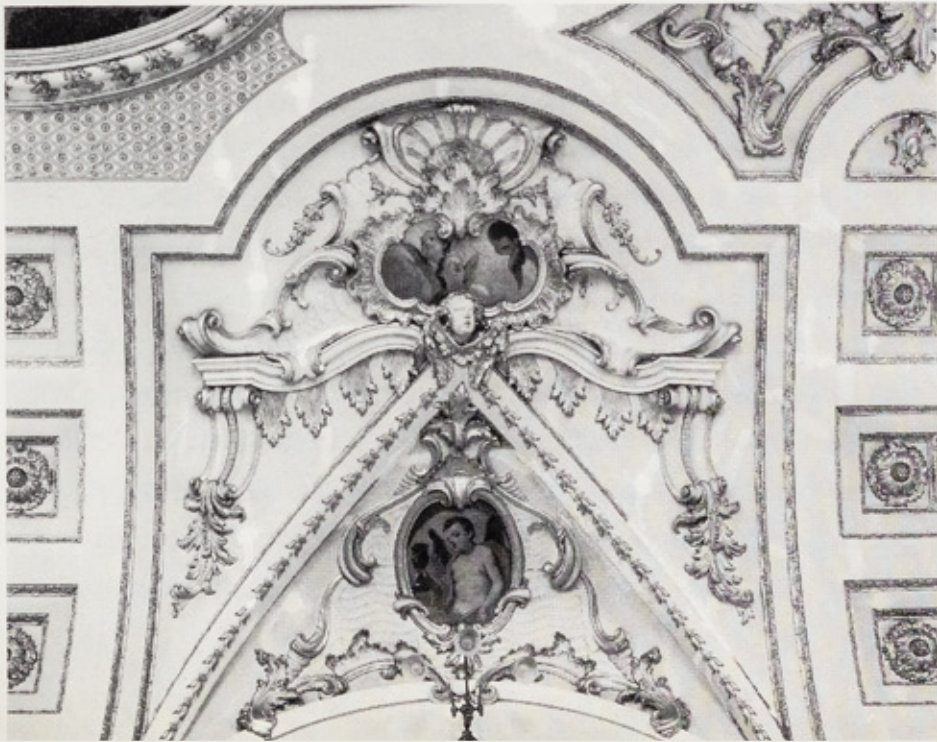
FIG. 9 James Gibbs's design for the Chapel ceiling at Great Witley, Worcestershire.

them must have been specially made for the commission, which was no doubt prestigious enough and large enough *in toto* to justify the expence. The ornaments must have been made to conform to the design by Gibbs – and quite possibly one of the Italian stuccadors was employed as modeller. The *rocailles* that so distinguish the executed ceiling from Gibb's design may, however, have been precisely the elements that Bromwich could supply from stock – albeit he would have been most used to making them up into mirror-frames and the like.

It is an amusing irony that Lady Luxborough should then have been inspired by Gibbs's refitting of the Chapel at Great Witley to adorn her own little *ferme ornée* of Barrells with papier-mâché ornaments. For a couple of years earlier she had written to Shensstone to agree with his disparagement of Gibbs, saying that she:

'never yet could admire his taste in architecture. The monument for the late Duke of Newcastle gives a specimen of it; and even his genteelest things he disgraces commonly with some awkward ornament'.⁶⁷

But then – as I hope to have shown – all too frequently these ornaments were not of his own devising.



67. Letter XXXVII of 8 November 1749 (*Letters*, p. 139), in reply to Shensstone's letter of 3 November (ed. Williams, Letter CI, p. 227; the dating is supplied by Duncan Mallam in his edition, Minneapolis, 1939, pp. 167–69).

FIG. 10 Detail of the Chapel ceiling at Great Witley, Worcestershire (Courtauld Institute of Art).