



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
PADERBORN

The Works Of Horatio Walpole, Earl Of Orford

In Five Volumes

Walpole, Horace

London, 1798

Chap. XVIII. Architects and other Artists in the Reign of George I.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-59965](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-59965)

C H A P. XVIII.

Architects and other Artists in the Reign of GEORGE I.

THE stages of no art have been more distinctly marked than those of architecture in Britain. It is not probable that our masters the Romans ever taught us more than the construction of arches. Those, imposed on clusters of disproportioned pillars, composed the whole grammar of our Saxon ancestors. Churches and castles were the only buildings, I should suppose, they erected of stone. As no taste was bestowed on the former, no beauty was sought in the latter. Masses to resist, and uncouth towers for keeping watch, were all the conveniencies they demanded. As even luxury was not secure but in a church, succeeding refinements were solely laid out on religious fabrics, till by degrees was perfected the bold scenery of Gothic architecture, with all its airy embroidery and penfile vaults. Holbein, as I have shown, checked that false yet venerable style, and first attempted to sober it to classic measures; but not having gone far enough, his imitators, without his taste, compounded a mungrel species, that had no boldness, no lightness, and no system. This lasted till Inigo Jones, like his countryman and cotemporary Milton, disclosed the beauties of ancient Greece, and established simplicity, harmony, and proportion. That school however was too chaste to flourish long. Sir Christopher Wren lived to see it almost expire before him; and after a mixture of French and Dutch ugliness had expelled truth, without erecting any certain style in its stead, Vanbrugh with his ponderous and unmeaning masses overwhelmed architecture in mere masonry. Will posterity believe that such piles were erected in the very period when St. Paul's was finishing?

Vanbrugh's immediate successors had no taste, yet some of them did not forget that there was such a science as regular architecture. Still there was a Mr. Archer, the groom-porter, who built Hethrop*, and a temple at Wrest;

* St. Philip's church at Birmingham, Cliefden-house, and a house at Roehampton (which as a specimen of his wretched taste may be seen in the *Vitruvius Britannicus*) were other works of the same person; but the chef-d'oeuvre of his absurdity was the church of St. John, with four belfries, in Westminster.

and one Wakefield, who gave the design of Helmsley; each of whom seemed to think that Vanbrugh had delivered the art from shackles; and that they might build whatever seemed good in their own eyes. Yet before I mention the struggles made by the art to resume its just empire, there was a disciple of sir Christopher Wren that ought not to be forgotten: his name was

NICHOLAS HAWKSMOOR.

At eighteen he became the scholar of Wren, under whom during his life, and on his own account after his master's death, he was concerned in erecting many public edifices. So early as Charles's reign he was supervisor of the palace at Winchester; and under the same eminent architect assisted in conducting the works at St. Paul's to their conclusion. He was deputy-surveyor at the building Chelsea-college, and clerk of the works at Greenwich; and was continued in the same post by king William, queen Anne, and George the first, at Kensington, Whitehall, and St. James's; and under the latter prince was first surveyor of all the new churches and of Westminster-abbey from the death of sir Christopher, and designed several of the temples that were erected in pursuance of the statute of queen Anne for raising fifty new churches: their names are, St. Mary Woolnoth, in Lombard-street; Christ-church, Spital-fields; St. George, Middlesex; St. Anne, Limehouse; and St. George, Bloombury; the steeple of which is a master-stroke of absurdity, consisting of an obelisk, crowned with the statue of king George the First, and hugged by the royal supporters. A lion, an unicorn, and a king on such an eminence are very surprizing:

The things, we know, are neither rich nor rare,
But wonder how the devil they got there.

He also rebuilt some part of All-Souls college*, Oxford, the two towers over the gate of which are copies of his own steeple of St. Anne, Limehouse. At Blenheim and Castle-Howard he was associated with Vanbrugh; at the latter of which he was employed in erecting the magnificent mausoleum there when he died. He built several considerable houses for various persons, particularly Easton-Neston in Northamptonshire; restored a defect in the minister of Be-

* Dr. Clarke, member for Oxford, and benefactor to that university, built three sides of the square called Peckwater at Christ-church, and the church of All Saints in the high-street there.

verley

verley by a machine of his own invention*; repaired in a judicious manner the west end of Westminster-abbey; and gave a design for the Ratchiffe library at Oxford. His knowledge in every science connected with his art is much commended, and his character remains unblemished. He died March 25, 1736, aged near seventy. The above particulars are taken from an account of him given in the public papers, and supposed by Vertue to be drawn up by his son-in-law Mr. Blackerby. Many of the encomiums I omit, because this is intended as an impartial register of, not as a panegyric on, our artists. When I have erred on either side, in commending or blaming, I offer but my own judgment, which is authority to nobody else, and ought to be canvassed or set right by abler decisions. Hawksmoor deviated a little from the lessons and practice of his master, and certainly did not improve on them; but the most distinguished architect was

JAMES GIBBS,

who, without deviating from established rules, proved, what has been seen in other arts, that mere mechanic knowledge may avoid faults, without furnishing beauties; that grace does not depend on rules; and that taste is not to be learnt. Virgil and Statius used the same number of feet in their verses; and Gibbs knew the proportions of the five orders as well as Inigo; yet the Banqueting-house is a standard, and no man talks of one edifice of Gibbs. In all is wanting that harmonious simplicity that speaks a genius—and that is often not remarked till it has been approved of by one. It is that grace and that truth, so much meditated, and delivered at once with such correctness and ease in the works of the ancients, which good sense admires and consecrates, because it corresponds with nature. Their small temples and statues, like their writings, charm every age by their symmetry and graces, and the just measure of what is necessary; while pyramids and the ruins of Persepolis only make the vulgar stare at their gigantic and clumsy grandeur. Gibbs, like Vanbrugh, had no aversion to ponderosity, but, not being endued with much invention, was only regularly heavy. His praise was fidelity to rules; his failing, want of grace.

He was born at Aberdeen in 1683, and studied his art in Italy. About the year 1720 he became the architect most in vogue, and the next year gave the

* Of that machine, by which he screwed up the fabric with extraordinary art, there was a print published.

design



A. Bannerman Sculp.

JAMES GIBBS.

design of St. Martin's church, which was finished in five years, and cost thirty-two thousand pounds. His likewise was St. Mary's in the Strand, one of the fifty new churches; a monument of the piety more than of the taste of the nation. The new church at Derby was another of his works; so was the new building at King's-college, Cambridge, and the Senate-house there; the latter of which was not so bad as to justify erecting the middle building in a style very dissonant. The Ratcliffe library* is more exceptionable, and seems to have sunk into the ground; or, as Sarah duchess of Marlborough said of another building, it looks as if it was making a curtsy †. Gibbs, though he knew little of Gothic architecture, was more fortunate in the quadrangle of All Souls ‡, which has blundered into a picturesque scenery not void of grandeur, especially if seen through the gate that leads from the schools. The

* At the opening the library, Gibbs was complimented by the university with the degree of master of arts.

† Of her own house at Wimbledon, built for her by Henry earl of Pembroke, mentioned hereafter; but it was her own fault. She insisted on the offices not being under ground, and yet she would not mount a flight of steps. The earl ingeniously avoided such a contradiction by sinking the ground round the lower story.

‡ In the late publication of A. Wood's History and antiquities of the colleges and halls in Oxford, I am justly corrected for attributing the new buildings at All Souls to Gibbs, though in another place I had rightly ascribed them to Hawksmoor. It is very true. I confess my mistake and strange negligence; for I made those contradictory assertions within very few pages of each other. I am told too that there was no blunder in the style of the building, which was intentional; the library being built in conformity to the chapel, and it being the intention of the architect of the new buildings to build them in the same style, viz. in the Gothic. It was undoubtedly judicious to make the library consonant to the chapel, and the new buildings to both, which the editor says are Gothic. If the new buildings are just copies of Gothic, it is I who have blundered, not the architect—but I confess I thought the architect had imitated his

models so ill, and yet had contrived to strike out so handsome a piece of scenery, that what I meant to express, was, that he had happily blundered into something, which, though it missed the graceful and imposing dignity of Gothic architecture, has yet some resemblance to it in the effect of the whole. When Hawksmoor lived, Gothic architecture had been little studied, nor were its constituent beauties at all understood: and whatever the intention of the architect or of his directors was, I believe they blundered, if they thought that the new buildings at All Souls are in the true Gothic style. I was in the wrong to impute that error to Gibbs; but I doubt Hawksmoor will not remain justified, if, as it is said, he intended to make the new buildings Gothic, which I presume they are far from being correctly, as they might rather be taken for a mixture of Vanbrugh's and Batty Langley's clumsy misconceptions. Should the university be disposed to add decorations in the genuine style of the colleges, they possess an architect who is capable of *thinking* in the spirit of the founders. Mr. Wyatt, at Mr. Barrett's at Lee near Canterbury, has, with a disciple's fidelity to the models of his masters, superadded the invention of a genius. The little library has all the air of an abbot's study, except that it discovers more taste.

assemblage of buildings in that quarter, though no single one is beautiful, always struck me with singular pleasure, as it conveys such a vision of large edifices, unbroken by private houses, as the mind is apt to entertain of renowned cities that exist no longer*.

In 1728 Gibbs published a large folio of his own designs, which I think will confirm the character I have given of his works. His arched windows, his rustic-laced windows, his barbarous buildings for gardens, his cumbrous chimney-pieces, and vases without grace, are striking proofs of his want of taste. He got 1500*l.* by this publication, and sold the plates afterwards for 400*l.* more. His reputation was however established; and the following compliment, preserved by Vertue, on his monument of Prior in Westminster-abbey, shows that he did not want fond admirers:

While Gibbs displays his elegant design,
And Ryfbrack's art does in the sculpture shine,
With due composure and proportion just
Adding new lustre to the finish'd bust,
Each artist here perpetuates his name,
And shares with Prior an immortal fame. T. W.

There are three prints of Gibbs; one from a picture of Huyfing, and another from one of Schryder, a Swiss, who was afterwards painter to the king of Sweden, and the third from Hogarth. Gibbs was afflicted with the gravel and stone, and went to Spa in 1749, but did not die till August 5, 1754. He bequeathed an hundred pounds to St. Bartholomew's hospital, of which he was architect and governor, the same to the Foundling hospital, and his

* It is the same kind of visionary enchantment that strikes in the gardens at Stowe. Though some of the buildings, particularly those of Vanbrugh and Gibbs, are far from beautiful, yet the rich landscapes occasioned by the multiplicity of temples and obelisks, and the various pictures that present themselves as we shift our situation, occasion surprize and pleasure, sometimes recalling Albano's landscapes to our mind, and oftener to our fancy the idolatrous and luxurious vales of Daphne and Tempe. It is just to add,

that the improvements made by lord Temple have profited of the present style of architecture and gardening. The temple of Concord and Victory presiding over so noble a valley, the great arch designed by Mr. T. Pitt, and the smaller in honour of princess Amelia, disclosing a wonderfully beautiful perspective over the Elyfian fields to the Palladian bridge, and up to the castle on the hill, are monuments of taste, and scenes, that I much question if Tempe or Daphne exhibited.

I

library



J. Breckler sculp.

CHARLES CHRISTIAN REISEN.

library and prints to the Ratcliffe library at Oxford, besides charities, and legacies to his relations and friends*.

COLIN CAMPBELL,

a countryman of Gibbs, had fewer faults, but not more imagination. He published three large folios under the title of Vitruvius Britannicus, containing many of his own designs, with plans of other architects; but he did not foresee with how much more justice that title would be worn by succeeding volumes to be added to his works. One has already been given. The best of Campbell's designs are Wanstead, the Rolls, and Mereworth in Kent; the latter avowedly copied from Palladio. Campbell was surveyor of the works at Greenwich hospital, and died in 1734.

JOHN JAMES,

of whom I find no mention in Vertue's notes, was, as I am informed, considerably employed in the works at Greenwich; where he settled. He built the church there, and the house for sir Gregory Page at Blackheath, the idea of which was taken from Houghton. James likewise built the church of St. George Hanover-square, the body of the church at Twickenham, and that of St. Luke, Middlesex, which has a fluted obelisk for its steeple. He translated from the French some books on gardening.

— CARPENTIERE, OR CHARPENTIERE,

a statuary much employed by the duke of Chandos at Canons, was for some years principal assistant to Van Ost, an artist of whom I have found no memorials, and afterwards set up for himself. Towards the end of his life he kept a manufacture of leaden statues in Piccadilly, and died in 1737, aged above sixty.

CHARLES CHRISTIAN REISEN,

the celebrated engraver of seals, was son of Christian Reisen of Drontheim in

* There is a farther account of Gibbs in the European Magazine for September 1789.

Norway *, who had followed the same profession, and who with one Stykes were the first artists of that kind who had distinguished themselves in England. The father died here, leaving a widow and a numerous family, the eldest of which was Charles Christian; who though scarce twenty had made so rapid a progress under his father's instructions, that he became the support of the family, and in a few years equalled any modern that had attempted the art of intaglia. He was born in the parish of St. Clement's Danes, and on account of his extraction was recommended to prince George; but, being little versed in the language of his family, does not appear to have been particularly encouraged by his royal highness. The force of his genius however attracted the notice of such a patron as genius deserved, and always found at that time, Robert earl of Oxford, whose munificence and recommendation soon placed Christian (by which name he is best known) on the basis of fortune and fame. In the library and museum of that noble collector he found all the helps that a very deficient education had deprived him of: there he learned to see with Grecian and Roman eyes, and to produce heads after the antique worthy of his models; for, though greatly employed on cutting arms and crests, and such tasteless fantasies, his excellence lay in imitating the heroes and empresses of antiquity. I do not find that he ever attempted cameo. The magic of those works, in which by the help of glasses we discover all the beauties of statuary and drawing, and even the science of anatomy, has been restricted to an age that was ignorant of microscopic glasses; a problem hitherto unresolved to satisfaction. Christian's fame spread beyond the confines of our island, and he received frequent commissions from Denmark, Germany, and France. Christian, as his fortune and taste improved, made a collection himself of medals, prints, drawings and books; and was chosen director of the academy under sir Godfrey Kneller. On the trial of bishop Atterbury, on a question relating to the impression of a seal, he was thought the best judge, and was examined accordingly. Vertue represents him as a man of a jovial and free, and even sarcastic temper, and of much humour; an instance of which was, that being illiterate, but conversing with

* The father, on his voyage to England, had been driven by a storm to Scotland, and worked at Aberdeen for one Melvin, a goldsmith, for two years before he came to London, where he arrived on the second day of the great fire in September 1666. Here he first began to engrave seals, having been only a goldsmith before. Afterwards he was confined in the Tower for four years, on suspicion of engraving dies for coining, but was discharged without a trial.

men of various countries, he had composed a dialect so droll and diverting, that it grew into a kind of use among his acquaintance, and he threatened to publish a dictionary of it. His countenance harmonized with his humour, and Christian's mazard was a constant joke; a circumstance not worth mentioning, no more than the lines it occasioned, but as they fell from the pen of that engaging writer, Mr. Prior. Sir James Thornhill having drawn an extempore profile of Christian, the poet added this distich,

This, drawn by candle-light and hazard,
Was meant to show Charles Christian's mazard.

This great artist lived * chiefly in the neighbourhood of Covent-garden, so long the residence of most of our professors in virtù. He died there of the gout, December 15, 1725, when he had not passed the forty-sixth year of his age, and was buried in the church-yard on the north side next to the steps. He appointed his friend sir James Thornhill one of his executors, and, dying a bachelor, left the bulk of his fortune to a maiden sister who had constantly lived with him, and a portion to his brother John.

CH A P. XIX.

Painters in the Reign of King GEORGE II.

IT is with complacency I enter upon a more shining period in the history of arts, upon a new æra; for though painting made but feeble efforts towards advancement, yet it was in the reign of George the second that architecture revived in antique purity; and that an art unknown to every age and climate not only started into being, but advanced with master-steps to vigorous perfection: I mean the art of gardening, or, as I should choose to call

* He had a house too at Putney; a view of which, under the satiric title of Bearfdenhall, was published about 1720. Vide Brit. Topogr. vol. ii. p. 280.

it,