

J. Alfred Gotch

*The English Home
from Charles
I. to George IV*

J. Alfred Gotch

The English Home from Charles I. to George IV

Its Architecture, Decoration and Garden Design



Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4064066420802

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[I INTRODUCTION](#)

[II THE CHANGE IN STYLE](#)

[III INIGO JONES](#)

[IV THE DRAWINGS OF INIGO JONES AND JOHN WEBB
WEBB'S OWN WORK](#)

[V THE TRANSITION IN MINOR BUILDINGS AND INTERIORS](#)

[VI SIR CHRISTOPHER WREN](#)

[VII SOME FURTHER WORK OF THE TIME OF CHARLES II](#)

[VIII GREAT HOUSES AND GARDENS OF THE EARLY
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY](#)

[IX GEORGIAN HOUSES](#)

[X SMALLER HOUSES, TOWN HOUSES, EXTERIOR FEATURES](#)

[XI INTERNAL FEATURES \(EIGHTEENTH CENTURY\)](#)

[APPENDIX I Sir Roger Pratt](#)

[APPENDIX II The Architects of Coleshill, Berkshire](#)

[INDEX TO ILLUSTRATIONS AND TEXT](#)

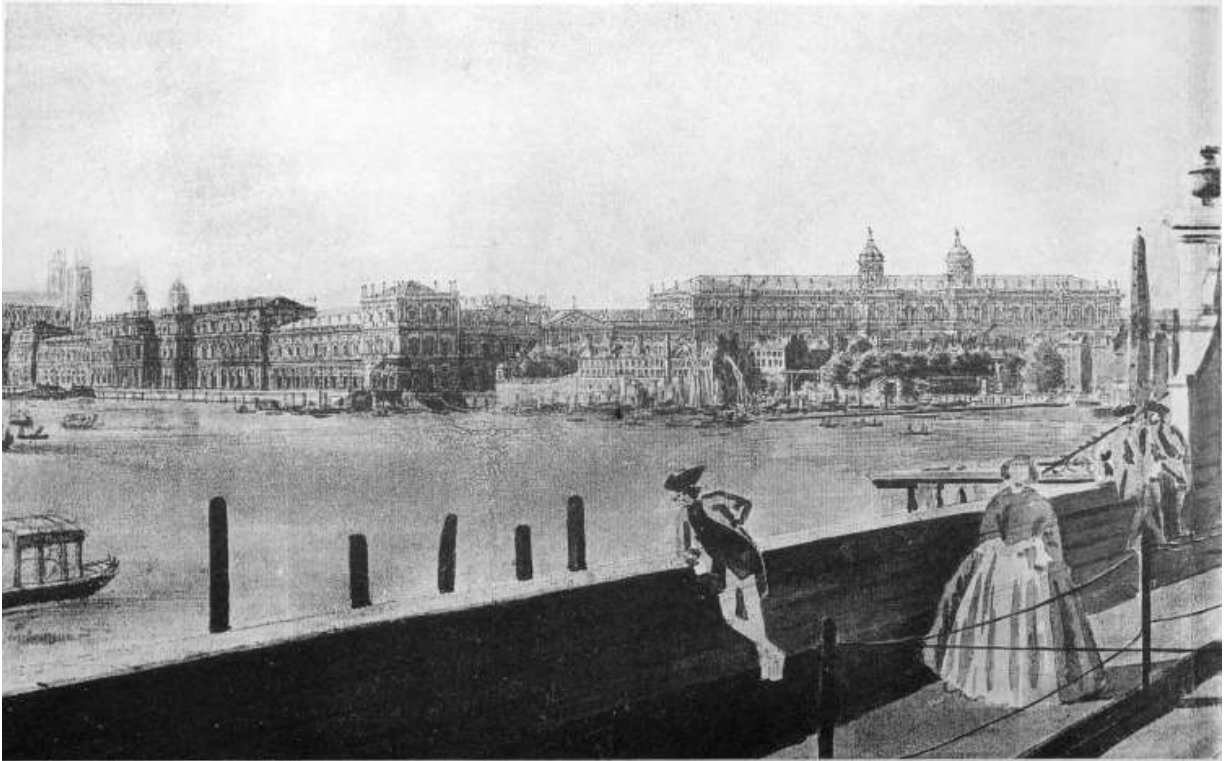


FIG. 1.—VIEW OF WHITEHALL PALACE AS IT WOULD HAVE APPEARED IF COMPLETED.

(from a water-colour drawing by Thomas Sandby, R.A.)

THE ENGLISH HOME FROM CHARLES I. TO GEORGE IV.

I INTRODUCTION

[Table of Contents](#)

In England, more than in any other country, the affections of people in all ranks of life have clung round their homes; and to learn something of how those homes have changed in disposition and appearance with the changing times is an occupation not only fascinating in itself, but one which leads into regions of that personal interest which lends life and colour to the pictures of the historian.

So far as our present conception of a home is concerned, the time of Elizabeth may be held to have seen its birth; for, although the English house has an ancestry which goes back to the Conquest, yet it was in Elizabeth's days that houses were first built almost exclusively for pleasure and delight. Hers was a great age of house building. Peace, wealth, and security from serious turmoil led men in all parts of the country to reconstruct their old homes or to build new ones; and records remain, either in actual buildings or in old plans, of houses of every size, from the great palaces of Burghley or Hatton wherein they entertained their sovereign, down to the little house, not forty feet square, which was devised for Sir Walter Raleigh in St James's. Much pains and great skill were expended in contriving these houses so that they should be convenient and well-looking. The planning of them was in the nature of a new experiment, for there was no precedent, either of

extent or disposition, which was exactly to the point. The treatment of the exterior—in other words, their style of architecture—was also something fresh; for it became the fashion, gradually increasing in extent, to seek inspiration in this direction from Italy, a country which for more than a century had produced most marvellous buildings, both as to conception and as to the lovely detail with which they were embellished.

This new demand in regard to style was partly met by inviting foreign workmen to this country, and partly by sending English designers to study in Italy; but the knowledge thus acquired was utilised by our native craftsmen in their own way. It influenced them, but did not enslave them. At first it puzzled them, with the result that much hybrid work was done which would have astonished both their Gothic forefathers and their Italian contemporaries, but which nevertheless has an attractive piquancy of its own.

This tentative stage lasted well into the seventeenth century, until the knowledge and genius of Inigo Jones, most ably seconded by John Webb, gradually wrought a revolution, and English architecture freed itself from the pleasant inaccuracies of its earlier exponents.

It is at the time when the old order was beginning to give way to the new that the story of the English House is taken up in the following pages. It will be pursued through the next two centuries. We shall see how the crude ideas of Elizabethan and Jacobean architects were mellowed under the influence of Inigo Jones; how John Webb carried on his master's teaching through the disturbed years of the Civil

War; how wealthy men, following the lead of the Earl of Arundel, indulged their growing taste for collecting antiques, pictures, and other works of art. Houses will be described and pictured in which Evelyn and Pepys must have watched many of the events which they record in their pages.

In due course will come the great homes of the great nobles of William and Mary, of Anne and the Georges; homes which express in a vivid way the social distinctions of the times, and indicate the vast interval which lay between the duke and the merchant—more particularly in the opinion of the duke. It was at this period that domestic architecture reached the zenith of its splendour, aided, as it was, not only by the patronage of noblemen like Lord Burlington, but by their participation in the work of design. That they were able so to participate was largely owing to the publication of books on architecture, both ancient and modern. The point of view from which architecture was then regarded, largely determined by this literature, is of great historical interest, although the march of events has been adverse to its continued acceptance.

Contemporary with these great efforts in design were innumerable smaller houses, essentially English in expression, and charmingly simple. In them lived men and women who helped to make the eighteenth century famous—Addison and Cowper, Reynolds and Garrick, Mrs Thrale and Frances Burney. But all through the eighteenth century the artificiality which marks much of its sentiment becomes every now and then apparent in its houses and their lay outs, wherein are sometimes to be found manufactured ruins and strange attempts at Gothic temples. Yet always is

perceptible an earnest attempt at design. If in architecture itself the sense of design became somewhat dulled, it was still acute in the smaller matters of decoration, of furniture, and of articles for household use; the ornament which prevailed towards the close of the long period under review is quite admirable of its kind.

Such, very briefly indicated, is the ground to be traversed in the following inquiry. Some of it must be trodden with a light and hasty step; but it is hoped that the journey may not be without interest, and may perhaps induce the reader to explore at his leisure parts of the country of which here he will possibly catch but a glimpse. In the meantime let us return to our starting-point, where the old order began to give way to the new.

The history of English houses, from the time of James I. onwards, is a record of development on lines that were laid down in the time of Elizabeth. It was in her days that the great change from mediævalism took place, and houses were built for comfort and pleasure without any serious thought of defence. Such houses are still habitable; there are plenty of people living to-day in Elizabethan houses, but the enthusiasts are comparatively few who live from choice in the ill-lighted, vaulted rooms of the Middle Ages. Spaciousness, cheerfulness, dignity, and often magnificence, were the qualities aimed at in houses of the end of the sixteenth century; and these qualities are appropriate in the present day. Convenience is another matter; it is a relative term, and its significance varies with the varying wants of mankind, changes with their changing habits and customs.

An Elizabethan house provided admirable rooms for the common use of the family and guests—reception rooms as they would be called now. It also provided an adequate number of bedrooms. Further, so long as the great hall was the customary place for eating, the kitchen was conveniently situated, and the food was cooked within a reasonable distance of where it was consumed. In these respects, therefore, a house of that period fulfilled some of the chief requirements of the present day. The direction in which it failed when measured by modern standards was in its sanitary arrangements, which, indeed, judged by our own ideas, did not exist at all. But we must be careful not to argue backwards, and conclude that because things were lacking which we consider essential, therefore houses were found uncomfortable at the time. The better way is to accept what existed as satisfying the wants of the period, and to argue from that, if we please, how vastly we have improved in our own habits upon those of our ancestors.



FIG. 2.—ASTON HALL, NEAR BIRMINGHAM (FINISHED 1635).

In tracing the changes which took place in the arrangement and disposition of rooms during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, therefore, it will be found that not much was done which made houses essentially more comfortable, according to modern notions, than they had been in the late sixteenth century. Indeed, during much of the time comfort was very little studied, and it is one of the reproaches levelled at the architects of the early eighteenth century, more especially those who were concerned with houses of vast size, that their first thought was for display and their last for comfort. Pope's exclamation about Blenheim palace, "'Tis very fine, but when d'ye sleep and where d'ye dine?" crystallises much of the criticism that might be bestowed upon the large houses of that period, which, however, only reflected the spirit of the age. In these houses the most striking change that occurred was the abolition of homeliness. When the great Elizabethan house was planned, the household was in the nature of a large family. It is true that the members of the actual family grouped themselves in one wing and the servants in another, but the great hall was their common meeting ground, and the relations between the heads of the household and their servants were more affectionate than they became in later years. All the rooms, moreover, were intended for daily use, however finely they were decorated. The whole effect was one of stately homeliness. When the Queen Anne mansion was planned, much of it was devoted to state functions as a first consideration, and was intended for occasional use only; apartments suitable for this purpose

having been provided, the rest of the space was allotted to the ordinary use of the family, and the servants were relegated to the basement (which they sometimes shared with their employers) or to a detached wing. Stateliness, not homeliness, was now the keynote. The nobleman stood on a pedestal of grandeur, round which his dependants grouped themselves as best they could, and among them struggled the parson, the poet, and the man of letters. The glorification of the individual found expression in his house and his gardens which were all designed with theatric magnificence.

The changes here indicated will be dealt with at length in subsequent chapters; the first step towards them was taken when the hall ceased to be a living-room and became a vestibule, as the result of an alteration in domestic habits, an alteration which rendered easy the adoption of a house-plan more closely related than was formerly possible to those Italian models to which architects had been approximating their designs for half a century. So far, the models had been copied but halfheartedly, partly because of the conservatism of English habits, partly from incomplete knowledge of Italian methods of design. But as knowledge increased, both from the study of books and from the first-hand investigations of travelling students, so was the Italianising of English buildings accelerated; and a great obstacle to this progress was removed when the ancient use and position of the hall—which had a tradition of three centuries behind them—were no longer preserved. The movement indicated was by no means regular; it was quicker in some places than in others, and in some hands

than in others: much depended upon the architects employed. Those who were learned, those who had travelled, and again those who were influenced by the cultured few, departed more completely from old-fashioned ways than did those who had not enjoyed the same advantages. The main stream of architectural development is fairly well marked and continuous; but there are innumerable backwaters in which the impetus of the current is hardly perceptible. As a consequence there are to be found as late as the end of the seventeenth century buildings which look almost contemporary with those of the beginning.

The man who did more than anyone else to bring learning to bear on design, and to introduce into England a true and correct knowledge of Italian detail, was that great artist, Inigo Jones. His first architectural work of importance was the Banqueting House at Whitehall, which was finished in 1622. It has no trace of traditional English design about it (see Fig. 22). To us it appears a beautiful building, but by no means abnormal, because we can see many others of the same type. But to those who saw it when it was just built, it was something entirely novel, something in which they sought in vain for any of the customary devices for producing architectural effect. Doubtless it was a stimulant, but it did not revolutionise English architecture. Indeed, it was only Inigo Jones, and after him his pupil John Webb, who could pretend to work on such learned lines. The ordinary surveyors—of whom there must have been a large number, although their names have not survived—still worked in the hybrid style in which they had been trained, with the result

that such a house as Aston Hall, near Birmingham, which was completed in 1635, is thoroughly Jacobean in character (Fig. 2), although of sufficient importance to have warranted the adoption of the latest ideas in design, had they been at all widespread.

There is one point, however, in which Aston Hall shows the impending change in house-planning, and that is the disposition of the great hall. It is entered in the middle of one side, instead of through screens at the end, thus making a large vestibule of it instead of a living-room. The same treatment is to be found in some of the plans of John Smithson, an eminent architect of the time; and an examination of his drawings will presently be undertaken, in order to illustrate the steps which led from the Jacobean style to the more fully developed classic.

Nothing illustrates this change more aptly than a comparison between Smithson's drawings and those of Inigo Jones and John Webb. The first are Jacobean, the second are classic. In the Jacobean are seen efforts to sever the ties which ancient traditions still imposed; a striving after Italian detail, which was never thoroughly achieved; a mixture of a little old-fashioned romance, with a little new-fashioned learning. In the classic are seen an ignoring of tradition; a mastery of Italian methods; a mixture of sound knowledge with a feeling for good proportion. As an illustration of the first large building in England conceived in the fully developed classic style, nothing could be better than the drawing made by Thomas Sandby about the middle of the eighteenth century, showing how the great palace designed for Charles I. would have appeared (see Fig. 1). It is also

interesting in connection with the inquiry into the Jones and Webb drawings, which will be fully dealt with in Chapter IV.

Incidentally a study of the drawings by Jones and Webb forces the inquirer to reconsider the relations of those two men as hitherto accepted, and compels him to readjust his ideas as to some of the work he had been taught to attribute to Jones.

With the seventeenth century we get into much closer touch with the designers of buildings than was possible in earlier times: in many cases we can get behind the buildings to their architects. But the chief purpose of the following pages is to trace the changes that took place in the houses themselves and their accessories, and although it would be neither possible nor desirable to omit all mention of the architects, the latter will be subsidiary to the main theme, and will be dealt with not so much biographically as by way of showing how their training, their opportunities and their idiosyncrasies affected the buildings with which they were concerned.

The present and immediate purpose is to give a brief and broad outlook over the period dealt with in detail in subsequent chapters; and to that end a series of houses has been selected, separated from each other in point of date by intervals of some twenty or thirty years.

The first of the series is Aston Hall (Fig. 2), which may be considered an example of how the old order lingered on. It has all the characteristics of Jacobean design, with its two pronounced wings, its curved gables, its fine chimneys, and its mullioned windows: not to mention an open arcade and a forecourt with garden houses at the two

outlying corners. These characteristics were gradually to disappear from houses. The plan became more compact, and wings were discarded, except that version of them which became fashionable later on, and which consisted of a separate block on either side of the main building, connected to it by a colonnade. Gables disappeared, the only approach to such features being the flat pediments which were often employed as central ornaments to the façades. Chimney-stacks became plainer, and the flues were massed into solid blocks, instead of rising in separate shafts from a common base. Mullioned windows lingered on for some years, but the mullions were of wood, and were insignificant compared with their stone predecessors. They were merely part of the wood window frame, and they disappeared almost entirely after the advent of the sash-window in the last quarter of the seventeenth century.

In the meantime, greater attention was paid to the cornices which made the circuit of the buildings; more especially was the topmost cornice emphasised—that from which the roof sprang. The general proportions of the building were more closely studied, and in particular the proportion of the window openings to the plain wall space.



FIG. 3.—Broadfield Hall, Hertfordshire.

From a Drawing by Buckler, 1832.

Broadfield Hall, in Hertfordshire (Fig. 3), illustrates the advance along these lines. There are no wings and no gables. Stone mullions are still retained; a bold cornice marks each story, the boldest being that on which the hipped roof rests. The flues are massed in two large stacks, and their existence is duly acknowledged, no attempt being made, as was sometimes the case in later times, to conceal them among irrelevant ornament. The dormer windows rise from the roof, and are no longer placed in portions of the main wall carried up for their reception. The unbroken cornice at the eaves necessitated this change. The old love

of light still shows itself in the size of the windows, which are not yet subordinated to the claims of proportion.

The exact date of this house has not been ascertained, but the style is characteristic of the middle of the seventeenth century, a period when no great amount of building was undertaken, owing to the disturbed state of the country consequent upon the Civil War. The time of Shakespeare is marked by a distinct style represented in hundreds of houses, but no such wealth of illustration enriches the time of Milton.



FIG. 4.—Moyles Court, Hampshire.

With the return of Charles II. a more settled state of affairs came about, and once more the stream of architecture flowed steadily onwards. Such houses as Moyles Court, in Hampshire (Fig. 4), were built in considerable numbers. There is nothing pretentious about them; they depend for their effect upon the regular spacing of the windows, and upon the strong shadow cast by the eaves cornice. The intermediate cornices of Broadfield have given way to a plain string. The windows are, many of them, sashes; but it would be rash to assert definitely that originally they were all so, because sashes had only recently been introduced. The chimney-stacks are large, and have a certain amount of character about them. This particular example has two projecting wings, which may indicate that the house followed the lines of an earlier one, or they may merely be a survival of old ways; in either case they are not of the essence of the period. The date of the house is not recorded, but it was probably built between 1670 and 1680, by that Dame Alice Lisle who suffered death in 1685 at the hands of Judge Jeffreys for sheltering a Nonconformist minister and a fugitive from Sedgemoor.



FIG. 5.—HANBURY HALL, NEAR DROITWICH, 1701.

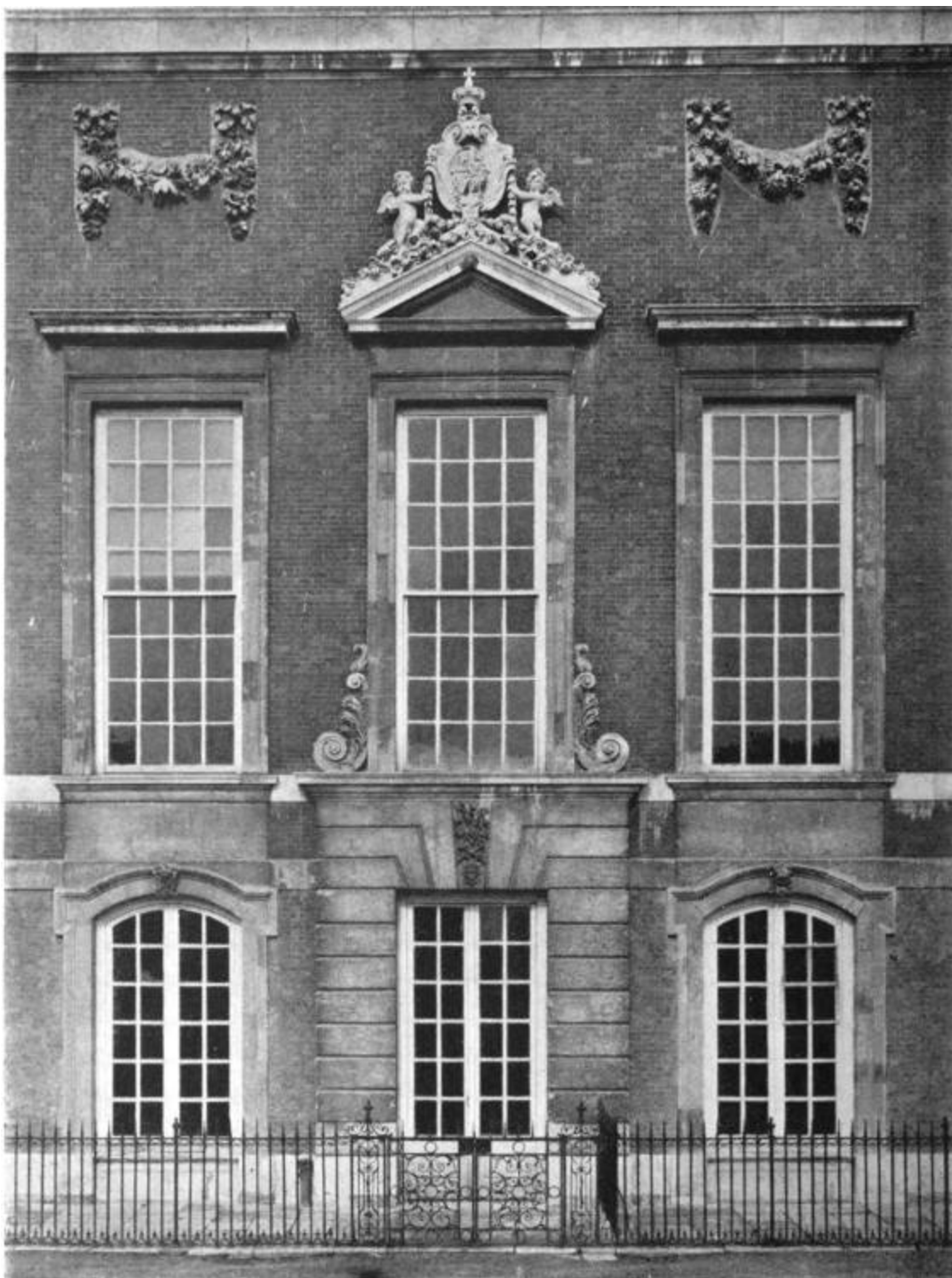


FIG. 6.—HAMPTON COURT.

PART OF THE RIVER FRONT, 1689.

Of much the same character, but loftier and more dignified, is Hanbury Hall, near Droitwich, built in 1701 for a certain Thomas Vernon (Fig. 5). The façade is here emphasised by a pediment, which professes to be partly carried on two columns. Ornament goes but a little way towards producing the pleasing effect, which, in fact, is obtained by the windows (including the dormers), the quoins, and the bold eaves cornice. The cupola adds a note of interest; it is a feature which had been used by Inigo Jones, and before him, although designed on other lines, by Jacobean architects.

But a greater figure than the men who designed Moyles Court or Hanbury Hall occupied the stage at this time. This was Sir Christopher Wren, the greatest architect that England has produced. His work, however, lay for the most part outside the scope of the present inquiry which is chiefly concerned with domestic architecture. It was largely the city churches, and especially the noble cathedral of St Paul, that occupied and developed Wren's uncommon powers. Of ordinary domestic work, but little can be put to his credit with certainty. However, at the palace of Hampton Court (Fig. 6), he showed the same strong hand, the same virility of design which appear in his churches. Wren had mastered the medium in which he worked, and he used it with freedom, unfettered by slavish obedience to the rules which kept his less gifted successors in leading strings, and induced them to tread the paths of safety rather than those of adventure.

There was, perhaps, one exception to this slavery in the person of Sir John Vanbrugh, who had a singular gift for

grandiose design. Kings Weston, near Bristol (Fig. 7), is one of his simpler and more restrained efforts, but even here the scale is large and the detail verging on coarseness. But it is neither the personal note nor the minutiae of design which concerns us at present. Kings Weston is advanced as illustrating, not so much Vanbrugh's style, as the complete departure from the old ways which architectural design had by this time taken. The date of Kings Weston is about 1715. It is not only in the external appearance that this departure is noticeable, but also in the plan, and in the internal embellishments. These points will be dealt with fully in due course, but even on looking at the outside of Kings Weston, it is obvious that it is disposed on lines widely different from those of a Jacobean house.

These differences are still more apparent in the next illustration of the series, Wolterton Hall, in Norfolk (Fig. 8). This house is attributed to Ripley, and its date is put at 1736. It is staid and eminently respectable, but there is none of the picturesqueness of the Jacobean methods about it, none of those unexpected human touches which help us to condone the ignorance of classic detail exhibited by Jacobean designers; no "accident," as Sir Joshua Reynolds puts it, which might lead to variety or intricacy. In making the circuit of its walls, the visitor knows exactly what he is likely to find. The appeal is to narrower sympathies than of old, to sympathies which spring from an acquired feeling for proportion, and are not merely roused by quaint personal incidents attractive to all alike, whether trained in architecture or not. The dignified effect is produced by the stone base, the proportion of the windows in relation to the

wall space, and the bold cornice at the eaves. The chimneys are symmetrically placed, but they have had no design worthy of the name bestowed upon them.

At Fonthill House, in Wiltshire, built about 1760 (Fig. 9), there is a reversion to a type of plan which had almost died out, a central block, namely, with detached wings connected to it by curved colonnades. This type had been frequently adopted in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, and was still advocated in some of the text-books on house design. But its obvious inconveniences in dissipating the forces of domestic service instead of concentrating them, so far outweighed the advantages of stateliness and grandeur which it bestowed, that it fell into disuse. Fonthill House was built by Alderman Beckford in succession to a house which was burnt in 1755, and it is doing the alderman no injustice to suppose that he strove to make his new house a very splendid affair, and accordingly adopted a striking, if inconvenient, plan. He succeeded to such an extent that the result of his labours has been referred to as "Fonthill splendens." His son, the author of "Vathek," is said to have been born at Fonthill in 1759, possibly in the new house, but there is no record of the actual date of its erection. The son eventually sold it for £9,000, a mere bagatelle in comparison with its cost, which was nearly a quarter of a million. He was then, about 1795, building on a vast scale, with the help of Wyatt, one of those freaks in which the late eighteenth century delighted, a mansion in the guise of a sham abbey, costing another quarter of a million. This wonderful edifice had but a short life, for in 1825, two years after he had sold the estate, the great tower fell and started

the decay of the whole structure. So famous were Fonthill Abbey and its contents that half England had flocked to the sale, filling every inn for miles around, and eating the countryside bare. Beckford the younger, like many of his contemporaries, was a man of great wealth and of considerable culture; a great collector of art treasures, and one who spent large sums in building in an ancient style of which neither he nor anyone living knew the rudiments. Reynolds, however, may be held to have countenanced the practice, for he says that the imagination being affected by the association of ideas, and we having naturally a veneration for antiquity, whatever building brings to our remembrance ancient customs and manners, such as the castles of the barons of ancient chivalry, is sure to give delight.



FIG. 7.—KINGS WESTON, NEAR BRISTOL, *cir.* 1715.



FIG. 8.—WOLTERTON HALL, NORFOLK, 1736.

It is often very difficult to determine the date of old country houses; no records of the building of them survive, or if they do they are stowed away in unexplored muniment rooms. Tradition is vague or unreliable. Additions may have been made from time to time of which no precise account remains. The lapse of years may have toned everything down to the same antique appearance, rendering the disentanglement of the various periods a laborious task, and the results uncertain. The work of a later period may, perhaps, predominate to such an extent as to overwhelm

what remains from an earlier, and cause the whole house to be dated half a century later than it ought to be. This is the case at Normanton Park, in Rutland, where such considerable alterations were made about 1780 that the house is held to be of the Adam period, whereas its main disposition was almost certainly settled fifty years before that time. Enough of the earlier work remains in various parts to support this idea, and to show that the plan adopted—that of a central block with detached wings connected by colonnades—was the production of the beginning of the century rather than of the end. At the later period, however, many of the external walls must have been recased if not rebuilt, and the garden front (Fig. 10) is a good example of the time. The circular bay is a characteristic feature, and so are the attic stories of the wings, although the placing of a plainly treated attic over a more majestic substructure was by no means a novelty. The real touch of the Adam period is to be found in the detail, which has all the delicacy and refinement connected with the name of the accomplished brothers Adam. That it is useless to argue about matters of taste is a dictum as old as the time when thoughts were usually expressed in the Latin tongue. Whether the delicacy of Adam or the vigour of Vanbrugh is to be preferred is a matter of individual liking. Some people admire Ganymede, others regard Hercules as a finer type; yet others admire both. With such predilections we need not be concerned; all that is necessary at present is to point out the change that had taken place in architectural treatment during the course of the eighteenth century.

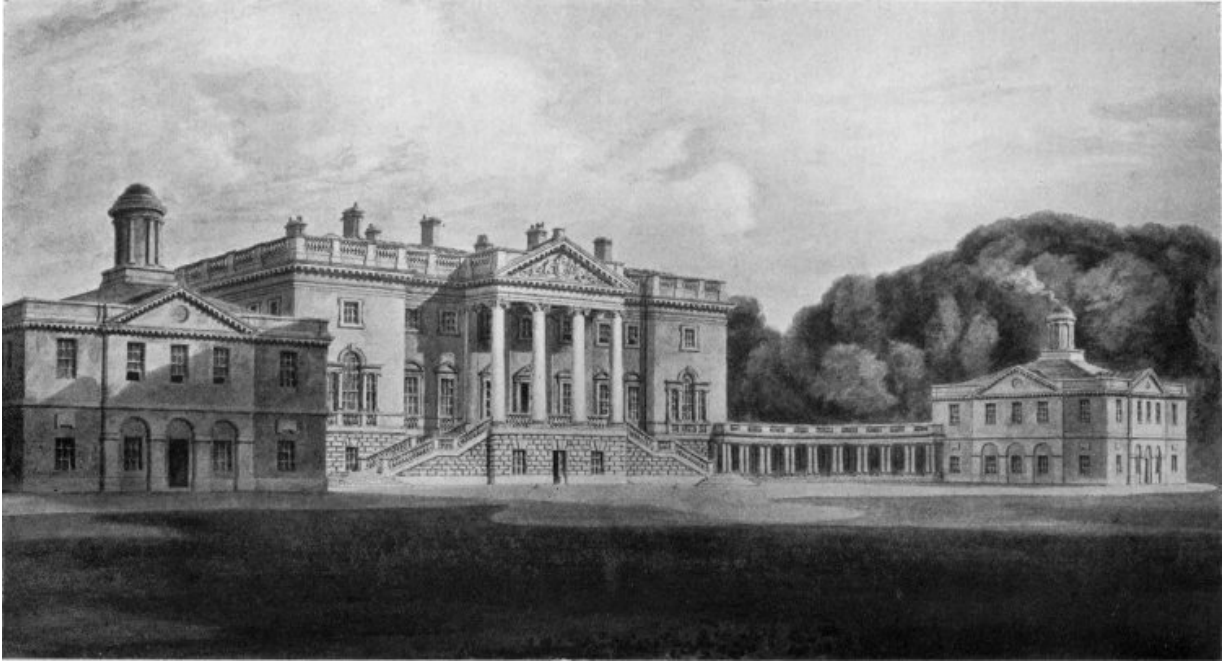


FIG. 9.—FONTHILL HOUSE, WILTSHIRE, *cir.* 1760.



FIG. 10.—Normanton Park, Rutland, *cir.* 1780.

As the century grew older the severance from the traditions of mediæval times grew wider. Those traditions, indeed, were lost, and although a few attempts were made—by Horace Walpole and others—to revive the late Gothic style, they only served to show how superficial was the current knowledge of Gothic architecture, and how futile it is to apply imitations of a departed style, merely by way of ornament, to buildings which have no affinity to those from which inspiration is sought. These attempts at revival were not numerous, they lay outside the normal course of design, which steadily followed the classic lead which had been first

given whole-heartedly by Inigo Jones. But the virility of Jones, Wren, and Vanbrugh had gradually declined, and domestic architecture had become correspondingly tame. It was highly respectable, much of it was refined, all of it was safe and rather uninteresting. To us it is so correct and well-meaning that it escapes the fate of much that succeeded it—the exciting of violent dislike. Indeed, after the lapse of more than a century, interest in it is reviving, and it bids fair to acquire enthusiastic admirers. It was otherwise when it was in full possession of the field, for in spite of its excellent qualities it roused the fury of Pugin and his followers, and was overwhelmed by the Gothic revival.