

THE CHATSWORTH STABLES: ARCHITECT, JAMES PAINE (1716–1789)

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The Great Stables at Chatsworth House rightly should be numbered amongst the finest buildings of their kind erected during the 18th century (Plate 1); yet they have not always been appreciated. That well known itinerant, the Reverend William Bray, even in 1777, considered them to be heavy, cumbrous and overwhelming.¹ But the passage of time has seen the erection of Wyattville's lofty extension (1820–40) to the mansion and this together with arboreal encroachment has left the stables sufficiently subordinated to pass often unremarked by the casual visitor to the estate. However, the stables large as they are, formed a relatively small part of one of the improvement episodes in the history of Chatsworth House, and a brief dilation on this aspect would not be inappropriate. Today, the house stands positively yet serenely amongst the trees and it is indeed hard to believe that the great dignified classical block was built piecemeal. When the 1st Duke of Devonshire came into possession of the property about 1686 he found a mansion, essentially Elizabethan, disposed round four sides of a courtyard. Initially, his ideas on improvement were tentative: first one side was rebuilt in the classical style, then a second, then after a pause, a third and, finally, the remaining side. The resulting mansion in 1707 whilst expressing a solid baroque exterior had nevertheless a hollow core with a reactionary and inconvenient plan. The 3rd Duke, deciding that further amendments were needed, called in James Paine, the highly successful architect,² for advice but his death in 1755, left the 4th Duke and Paine to effect a remarkable transformation over a period of less than ten years. Paine, in his large and popular book, *Plans Elevations and Sections of Noblemen and Gentlemen's Houses* (1767), explained that the principal object was to gain an uninterrupted view to the west 'into one of the noblest valleys perhaps in Europe ...'. Capability Brown was consulted, and the conglomeration of ponds, parterres, service buildings and the old approach roads to the west was swept away. Even the line of the river was adjusted. The main entrance on the west of the mansion was transferred to the north side displacing the kitchens, and a great new service wing, 366 ft by 60 ft, containing new kitchens, audit rooms for stewards, dairies, wash houses, laundries and stables was stretched out to the north lining a new main approach from Baslow. To this northern complex another approach road was contrived sweeping in from the west over a new landscape bridge by Paine finishing near to the site of the new stables planned high above the mansion.³ Why the stables should have been sited in such an elevated and distant position is problematical—possibly smell and noise had something to do with it—although we can cite several precedents for even greater separation, for example, the stables at Houghton, Norfolk. At any rate, their detachment freed Paine from the constraint of having to harmonise with the rather utilitarian service wing, and gave him the opportunity of creating a masterpiece, an opportunity which he seized with both hands.

Paine's original sketch drawings for the stables, still at Chatsworth, are limited, there being only an elevation and two sections drawn in rather feminine fashion in ink and ink wash contrasting with the masculinity of the actual building (Plates 2–4). They show essentially the design as erected with the exception of minor modifications to the towering gateway centrepiece and most interestingly to the finish of the stone wall. The latter is depicted, not in the expected classic regular courses but in random rubble, altogether a curious concession to romanticism. Maybe the technical difficulties of integrating the rough masonry with the ashlar dressings, columns, quoins and so on, were too great and wiser counsels prevailed: the walling went up in orthodox horizontal courses.

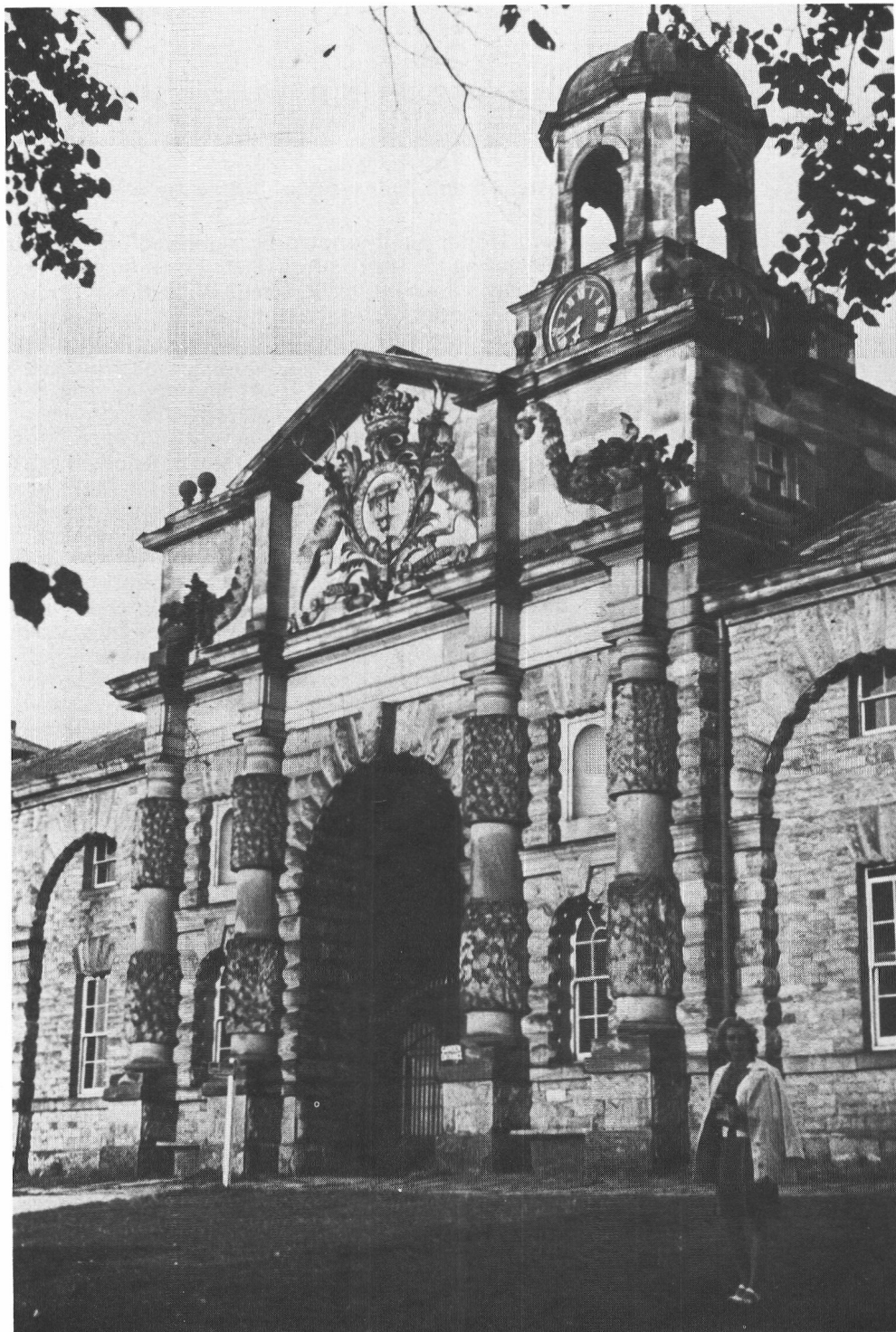


Plate 1 Chatsworth Stables: main entrance.

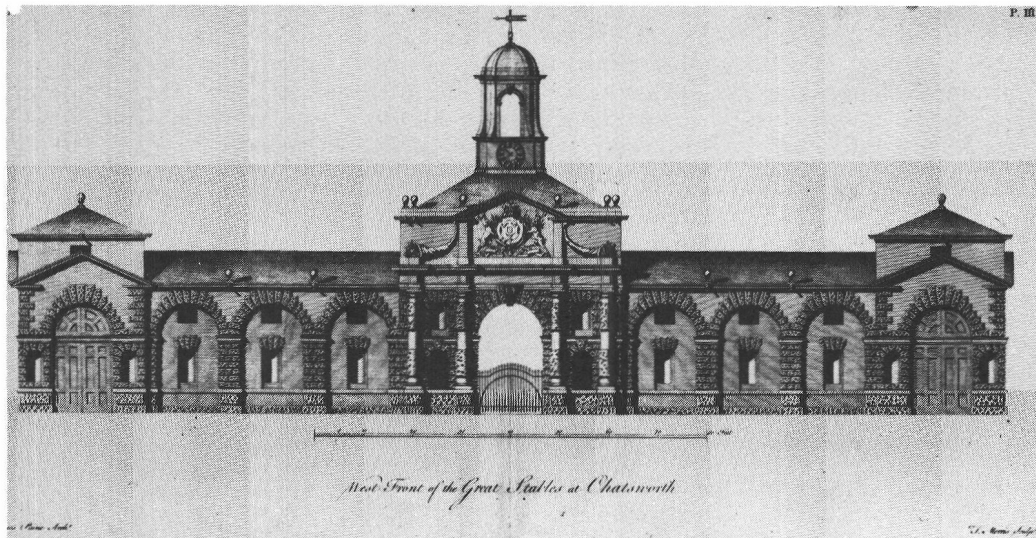


Plate 2 Chatsworth Stables: the West Front (from James Paine, *Plans, Elevations and Sections of Noblemen and Gentlemen's Houses*, 1767).

The accounts of the steward, Alexander Butler, are not remarkable for their lucidity.⁴ Payments for building works are given in one long list often without reference to particular activities so that it is impossible to determine how much was spent on an individual project or to be confident as to the exact date of its construction. We can say that work started generally on the new service wing to the north in 1756 and died out about 1762, that the new bridge rose over the river about 1760–62, and that between 1761 and 1764 various garden works, new walls, a new mill and a weir were completed. As to the stables, foundations were being dug in 1758 and in the same year, judging from the contents of a letter,⁵ written by Paine to the Duke in May, work was progressing rapidly. The architect discussed amongst other things the fitting up of the stables 'now in hand' and recommended the provision of 'Tralaces and Shutters' instead of 'Sashes and Glass' to the windows of the courtyard as they were 'the cheapest and most durable'. The accounts indicate that floors and roofs were being constructed in 1760 and, rather

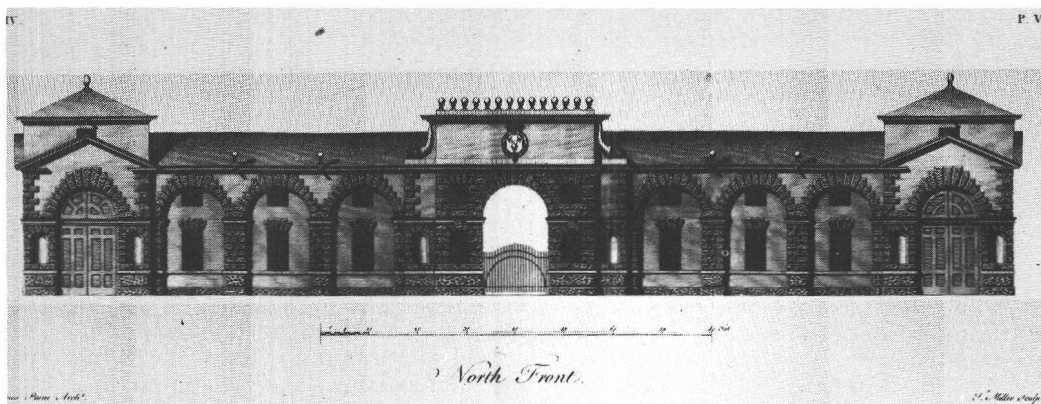


Plate 3 Chatsworth Stables: the North Front (from James Paine, *Plans, Elevations and Sections of Noblemen and Gentlemen's Houses*, 1767).

tardily, that woodwork was being painted in 1762, by which time we could infer that the stables were nearly finished. But there were subsequent entries. For example, on 4 January 1764, Walkers of Rotherham were paid for the 'Rolled Iron' (wrought iron) standard supporting the weather vane over the main gateway and James Weldon received a payment for further painting between April 1763 and September 1764. Then, in August 1765, there was a general clearance of outstanding bills including one to the main contractor:

Jas Booth Mason his bill of measured work at the Great Stables examined and signed by Mr. Paine.
£1178 5s. 10½d.

And at the same time another payment of particular interest was made to the well known carver from Heanor:

Henry Watson,⁶ his bill for the arms over the West Gateway in ye New Stables, Mason's work carving and putting them up.
£154 17s. 8d.

From all this it would appear that the stables were virtually completed in 1764.

The finished stables have a directness, a classic simplicity which betoken the work of an educated man (Plates 2–4). Yet Paine came into the profession as the pupil of a little known architect, Thomas Jersey, without having had the experience of overseas study.⁷ Clearly the lack of an academic background was an embarrassment to him. In the preface to his book, previously mentioned, he damned with faint praise the efforts of those who, having travelled overseas, brought back details of Grecian works which, so he said, were 'only valuable for the ornaments'. The examples left by the Romans and their interpreters Palladio and Inigo Jones should provide the basis for architectural designing but their buildings, he averred, had already been measured 'a century or two ago'. A gentleman certainly could go abroad for an education but surely an architect in foreign parts would only run the risk of acquiring details inappropriate to the English climate and to the English mode of living! Then Paine, possibly excusing his own lack of scholarly adherence, pointed out that no two authors had the same views regarding classical proportion. 'Mankind think differently and what one approves, another condemns; in this they are guided by what is called taste ...' And so, he inferred, a competent individual, provided he had taste and judgement—and it was implicit that he himself was thus endowed—could design with freedom. Lesser mortals could copy the works of Palladio, Scamozzi, Vignola and others but he warned them not to expect consistency from the masters: none of them 'were able by demonstration, to fix a standard of architecture'. Briefly, he preached independence from pedantic restraint, a surprising text for his label has always been 'Palladian', though admittedly of the second generation, with all the rigid implications of the designation.

Let us again return to the stables. The building, outside dimensions 202 ft by 202 ft, is formed round a perfect square which should perhaps tell us something of the architect's philosophy, for the stables are built on a hillside and a rectangle would presumably have been a more practical shape (Plate 5). Clearly Paine considered that the complete nature of the square, a renaissance ideal, had over-riding significance. The east side—the back range pressing into the slope—contained the service rooms such as the brewhouse and workshops for the plumbers, glaziers and joiners whilst the other three sides provided accommodation for coach horses, stallions, hunters, ordinary horses, coaches, farriers' shop and quarters for the servants. Surrounding the courtyard is a rusticated arcade where horses were exercised in bad weather. Its ceiling of strongly defined quadripartite vaulting extends formidably into the arched main entrance on the west giving to the whole the sombre air of a small scale conception by Piranesi. Indeed, it foreshadows the neo-classicism exemplified in Dance's highly original Newgate Gaol of 1778. The external elevations to the park have similar strength and distinction being firmly held together by the unusually heavy rustication defining quoins, voussoirs, plinths and other salient parts of the design (Plate 2). Here Paine followed his own precept of taking an elevational detail, rustication, and using it in a new and personal way.

But undoubtedly the most telling feature is the grand entrance on the west—surely,

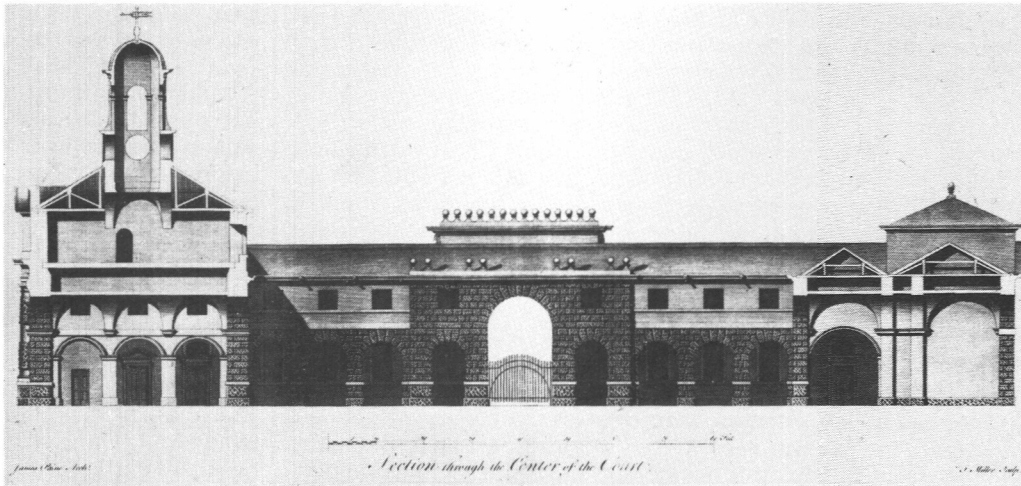


Plate 4 Chatsworth Stables: section (from James Paine, *Plans, Elevations and Sections of Noblemen and Gentlemen's Houses*, 1767).

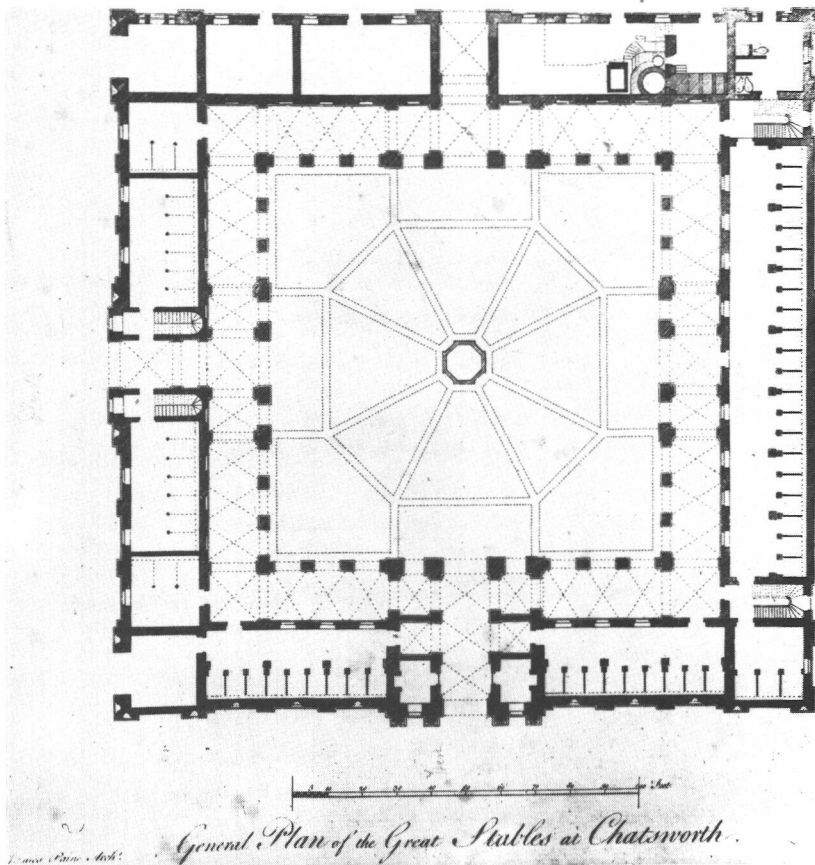


Plate 5 Chatsworth Stables: plan (from James Paine, *Plans, Elevations and Sections of Noblemen and Gentlemen's Houses*, 1767).

we thought, the most original stable gateway in England. The Roman triumphal arch motif had been used in varying interpretations by architects from the earliest days of the Renaissance. In this country many examples can be found including the Citadel Gateway, Plymouth (c. 1670), albeit artisan-like in conception, and by contrast Hawksmoor's superb baroque centrepiece to the orangery (c. 1705) at Kensington Palace. At first we assumed that Paine in his Chatsworth gateway was making his own distinctive contribution directly from the 'antients'. But similar characteristics to those of the Chatsworth gateway are noticeable in the rather clumsy yet imposing entrance to the almost contemporary stables (1755–8) to Harewood House—designer unknown but with John Carr of York as supervising architect—which suggests that for both buildings at least there was a 'model' from which both gateways were derived.⁸ In fact, we submit, that there were two sources.

The first occurs in Colen Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus*, Vol. III (1725), Plate 25, the entrance gateway to Burlington House, (Plate 6), designed by the author himself c. 1718, for Lord Burlington, and figuring in Hogarth's lampoon 'The Man of Taste'. As Campbell and Burlington were the two main progenitors of the Palladian manner in England, the gateway represents a most authoritative statement, obviously accepted by Paine. The Chatsworth doorway although not identical in detail, has a similar general form including the distinctive, long cinctures to the columns. The principal differences are the replacement of the Campbell Doric entablature—metope and triglyph frieze—by something plainer of Paine's own devising, the extension of the attic to cover the whole composition, and finally the addition of a pyramidal roof topped with octagonal cupola. For the latter, and for the gateway itself, there is a second source which, like the Burlington entrance, is not well known having been demolished, in 1830, to make way for the National Gallery. We refer to the Royal Mews, Charing Cross, designed in 1732 by William Kent (Plate 7). As Kent's mentor was Master of the Horse, Lord Burlington, the Mews could also be described as an authoritative Palladian, or Burlingtonian statement. (Incidentally the building demonstrates the Burlingtonian conception of articulating the wings with a central motif as opposed to the more usual practice of defining the ends, vide the stables at Studley Royal, Houghton, Harewood, Chatsworth, etc.) However, at Chatsworth, Paine abjured the duality of the Royal Mews with its twin towers over the flanks and placed a single cupola over the entrance, greatly augmenting its dominance (Plate 2a). The cupola in detail is surprisingly similar to the two by Kent but, being attenuated, has greater refinement. Kent's doorway displays the unusual rusticated cinctures already noted in Campbell's design and, moreover, is covered across its whole width by an attic storey. Indeed it is possible that Paine owed as much to Kent's production as he did to that by Campbell.

Seemingly, Paine practised what he preached: he was quite prepared to take as his model the work of an acknowledged master and by using his intelligence or judgement improve on the original, thus creating something new. The buildings given in his book illustrate the point and not merely in general conception but in detail. For example, at Chatsworth, the Cavendish coat of arms is skilfully provided with space whereas at the Mews the royal insignia were crowded under the pediment. Also his imaginative approach to wall treatment led him to experiment in the Chatsworth sketch design with random rubble, later adjusting to an equally novel application of rusticated dressing.

Paine, then, can be looked upon in two ways: firstly as a reactionary in his use of Palladian moulds and secondly as an innovator contributing in his interpretations to a forward movement in architecture. His Chatsworth gateway shows the way to other triumphal derivatives: for illustration Adam's remarkable neo-classical southfront (c. 1760) at Kedleston Hall and even to Soane's facade to Pitzhanger Manor (c. 1800).

This apart, Paine certainly had respect for his Chatsworth employer even suggesting that the Duke, in improving his domain, was in effect making a benevolent gesture: some of the hundreds of families so employed would not otherwise have found jobs and in consequence would have become 'burthensome to others'. Paine did not mention what happened to them on completion of the works! But by then it was no longer the concern of the 4th Duke. Travelling on the continent he fell sick and died at Spa in October,

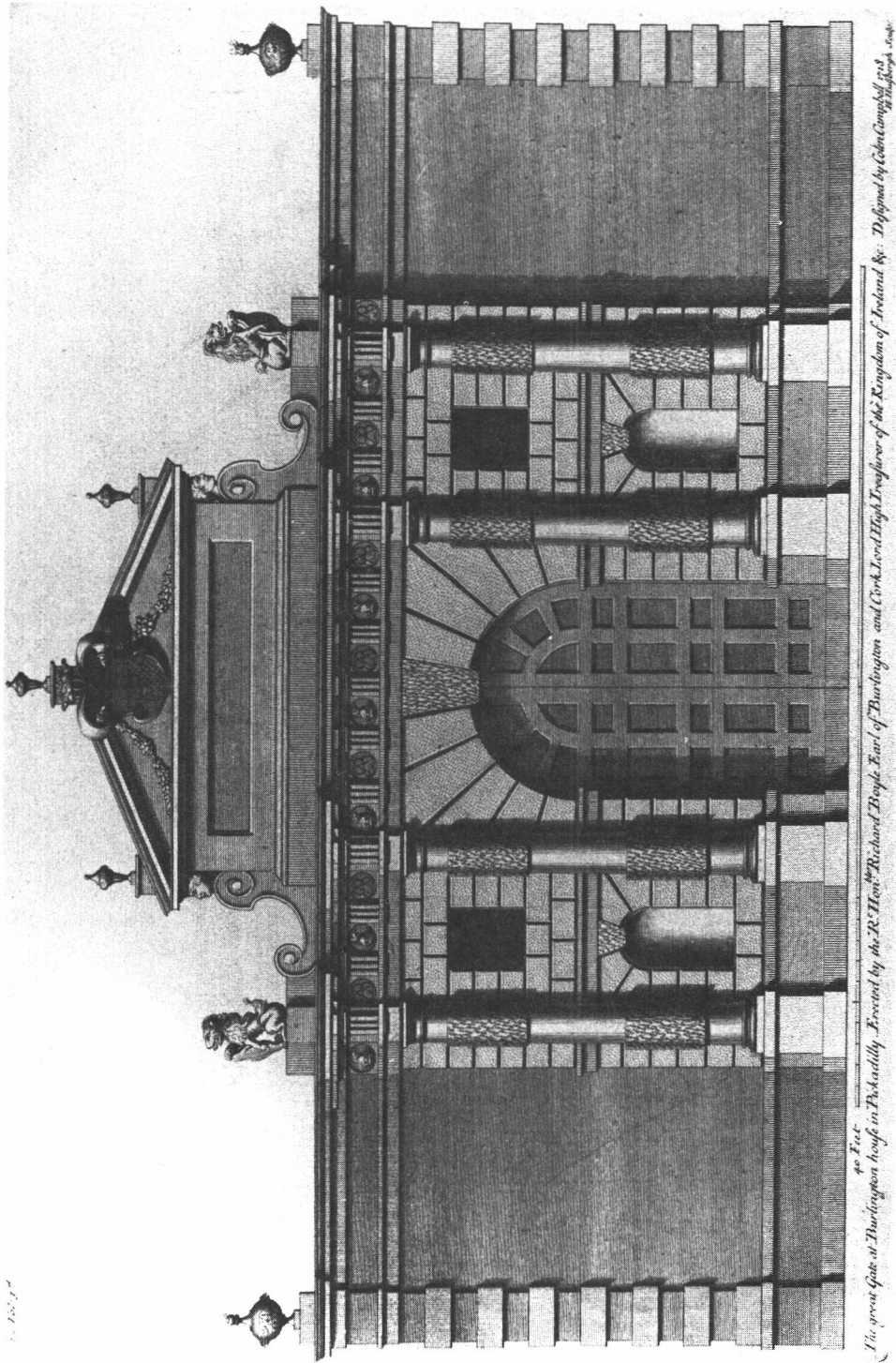


Plate 6 The gateway to Burlington House, Piccadilly (from Vitruvius Britannicus III, 1725, plate 25).

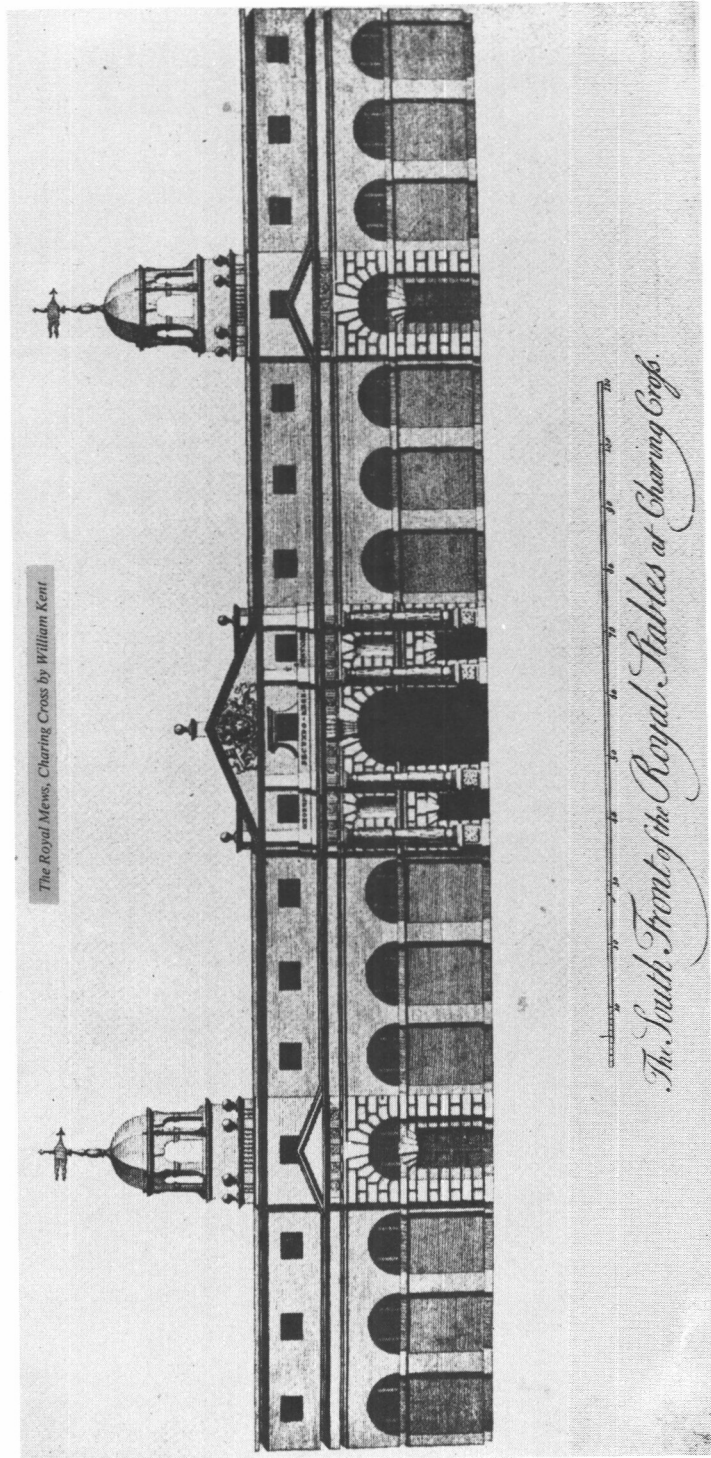


Plate 7 The Royal Mews, Charing Cross (from W. Maitland, *History and Survey of London*, 1756).

1764. Hearing the news, the usually waspish Horace Walpole wrote 'There's a chapter for moralising! but five-and-forty, with forty thousand pounds a year, and happiness wherever he turned him! My reflection is, that it is folly to be unhappy at anything, when felicity itself is such a phantom'.⁹

REFERENCES

- ¹William Bray, *Sketch of a Tour into Derbyshire* (1777).
- ²James Paine c. 1716–1789. Gwilt's edition of the *Decorative Part of Civil Architecture* (1825), xlix: 'Paine and Sir R. Taylor divided the practice of the profession between them till Robert Adam entered the lists, and distinguished himself by the superiority of his taste in the nicer and more delicate parts of decoration'.
- ³A view by Paul Sandby, dated 1775, shows the mansion sitting benignly and informally in the middle of a Brunonian Park with the great stables to the northeast, detached and at a higher level, in the background.
- ⁴Chatsworth House Archives, accounts of Alexander Butler, steward, 1755–6, 1756–7 and vol.C21.
- ⁵Chatsworth House Archives, correspondence of the 4th Duke of Devonshire, 561.0.
- ⁶Rupert Gunnis, *Dictionary of British Sculptors 1660–1851* (revised ed.), 414.
- ⁷H. M. Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of English Architects 1660–1840* (1978), 607.
- ⁸Annual report of the York Georgian Society 1978/9, 65–73.
- ⁹Peter Cunningham (ed.), *Letters of Horace Walpole* (1906), iv, 277.

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