

‘The First Architect of the World’ in Brighton

ROBERT ADAM, MARLBOROUGH HOUSE, AND MRS FITZHERBERT

by Chris Miele

This article considers the third Duke of Marlborough’s house on the Steine in Brighton, and its remodelling by the architect Robert Adam in 1786–87 for William Gerard Hamilton (1729–96). This elegant neoclassical house, which has been known as Marlborough House since the 19th century, was easily the finest piece of architecture the fast-developing resort town had yet seen, with the exception, that is, of Henry Holland’s exactly contemporary Marine Pavilion for the Prince of Wales. This article contextualizes Adam’s design, setting it against the backdrop of Brighton’s history and building culture. The author also chronicles the circumstances of the Hamilton commission, analyzes the design and layout, and then identifies what survives of the earlier house on the site (built 1765–69).

Adam’s only other Brighton commission, an unbuilt scheme for Mrs Fitzherbert, is also discussed. The author maintains that the Fitzherbert design was worked up in spring 1787 and that it was intended for a long narrow plot immediately north of Marlborough House. The Adam drawings for the Fitzherbert commission also record an earlier building which was to be incorporated into the new design, a building which was itself of two phases: a modest cottage with a much grander, mid-18th-century addition. Thus quite unintentionally Adam left us with the best record so far discovered of how an ordinary Brighton dwelling was extended to provide accommodation for the increasing number of seasonal visitors.

These two commissions for adjacent sites passed through the Adam office in quick succession, and yet the architect gave them totally different stylistic expressions. This illustrates the range of the architect’s talents in this last phase of his great career.

In 1786 the third Duke of Marlborough sold a small property on the west side of the Steine in Brighton to William Gerard Hamilton (1729–96), a former Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer. John Donowell’s 1778 *Perspective View of the Steyne* (Plates 1 & 2) shows it to have been a substantial building: five bays wide, three storeys high, and having a small front garden facing the Steine.¹ Documents fix the date of construction at somewhere between 1765 and 1769, but these details and other circumstances relating to the Duke’s first Brighton house will be discussed in due course.

For the moment we should consider that first

Marlborough House (Plate 2). Though it had served a duke as a seasonal retreat for 15 years, it was solidly bourgeois rather than grand. In Bath, Epsom, or Tunbridge Wells, it would scarcely have attracted any notice. Perhaps this was a measure of the informal style of life which even someone of exalted rank could enjoy in Brighton, a place which had no tradition of status building. Donowell did his best to lend the Duke’s house and its handful of smart neighbours a dignified appearance, yet he could not alter the fact that this backdrop to the town’s most fashionable promenade was actually rather a motley assortment of inns, rooming houses, cottages, and barns. Of course there was only one Bath, that



Plate 1. John Donowell, *A Perspective View of the Steyne at Brighthelmstone*, 1778, pen, ink, watercolour, and wash. (Source: Brighton & Hove Council, Preston Manor.)

paragon of Roman regularity. Still, one could be forgiven for expecting something more of Brighton. By 1778 the place had been booming for close to 30 years.

Hamilton, for his part, could not have rated the third Duke's old residence too highly. Before 1786 was out the former chancellor of the Irish Exchequer had commissioned Robert Adam to rebuild it (Colour plate 1 & Plate 3). Adam's additions, which were finished in 1787 or possibly 1788, gave Brighton the most elegant and sophisticated piece of architecture it had yet seen. Only Henry Holland's 1787 design for the Prince's Marine Pavilion could match it. Indeed, in 1791 Hamilton's house — which would come to be known as Marlborough House in the 19th century — had a higher rateable value than any other property, including Richard Scrace's manor house to the south and Grove House, the Duke of Marlborough's later residence.² Hamilton's was a thoroughly superior residence, head and shoulders above anything the town had so far seen. This comes across in a letter which the retired chancellor wrote

to his architect in the first weeks of 1787. After explaining how his petition to appropriate a small stretch of waste ground to the Steyne had been opposed by neighbours, Hamilton remarked on their ingratitude. Surely they should have been thanking him. Had he not, after all, brought 'one of the first Architects in the world to ornament their Fishing Town'.³ This was, as we shall see, typical of Hamilton, but it was also fair comment.

'THE RUINS OF A LARGE FISHING TOWN'

Brighton was in a sorry state at the opening of 18th century. One observer described the streets and houses as 'deserted'. According to another there had been no new building for years. Existing houses were said to be much in need of repair and some on the verge of collapse. John Whaley, writing in 1735, at the very moment when Brighthelmstone's fortunes were about to turn, summoned up the image of ghost town; 'the ruins of a large fishing town' was

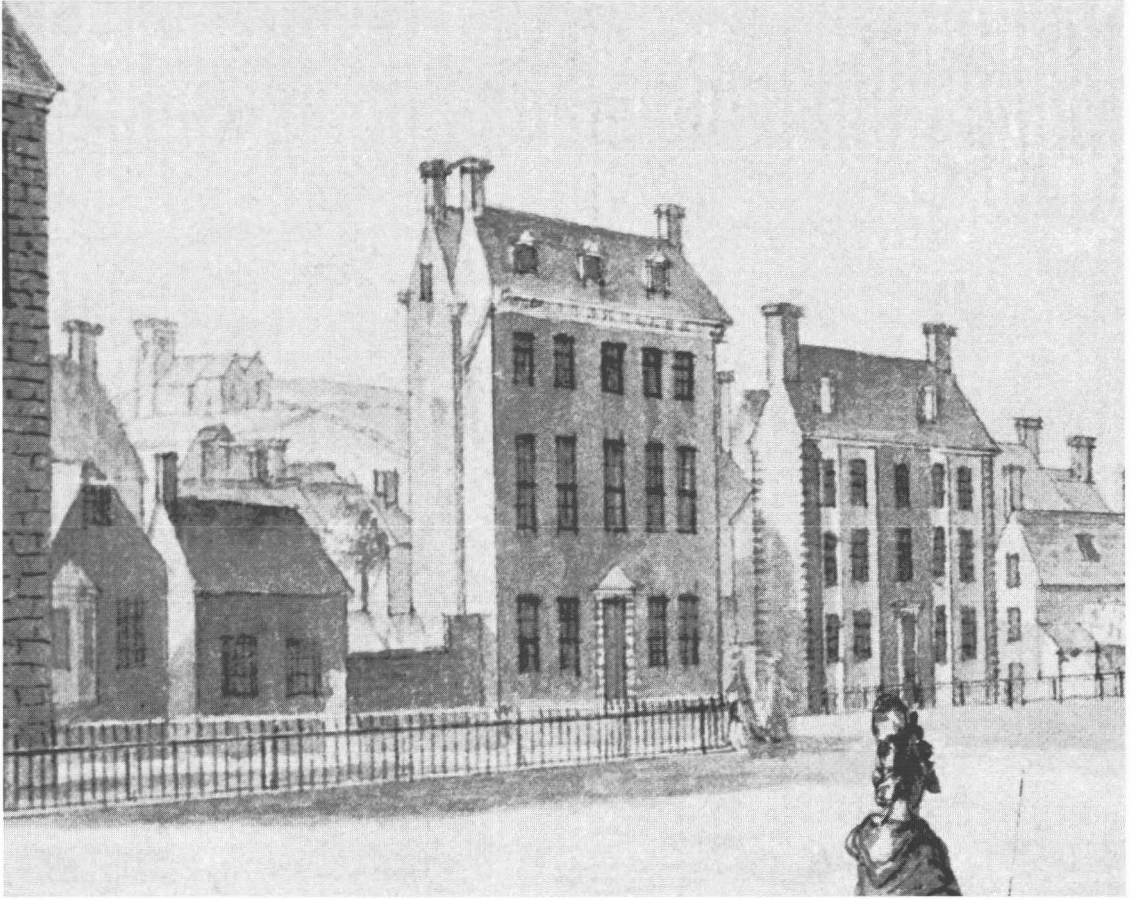


Plate 2. Detail from Donowell's *A Perspective View of the Steyne at Brighthelmstone*, showing the house, labelled 3, purchased by the third Duke of Marlborough in 1771, and roughly half of which is incorporated into the present-day Marlborough House. Thomas Philcox's house is to the right, or north.

how he put it. Things had not always been so bleak. The town's population had increased rapidly between 1570 and 1660, when, after Chichester, it was the largest town in Sussex, besting both Lewes and Hastings. Fuelling this growth was a thriving maritime economy, North-Sea fishing principally, and after that ship-owning and cargo carrying. Explaining its steep decline around 1700 is not easy. The town might have fallen victim to a Europe-wide decline in the fishing industry, but it seems just as likely that Brighton fortunes fell foul of the sea itself. The foreshore eroded, and wealth washed away apace, so that by the turn of the century the parish was barely able to support its poor.⁴

The gist of what Pevsner wrote about Brighton's building culture before Adam, Holland, and the

Prince remains broadly true.⁵ There is no evidence of any high-status timber-framed, brick or stone construction. Probate inventories from the first half of the 18th century give a good idea of the modest circumstances in which most inhabitants lived. The bulk of the housing stock had two inhabited floors and measured about 16 feet wide. There was one room on the ground floor. In some cases there is mention of a second smaller room to the rear opening into a yard. The average number of hearths in the 18th century was small, even when measured against Hearth Tax returns from a century earlier. Local trade was dominated by seafaring, and there were no places to buy luxury goods such as clocks, curtains, prints and books. Coopers, saddlers, or tanners, all trades one would find in wealthier

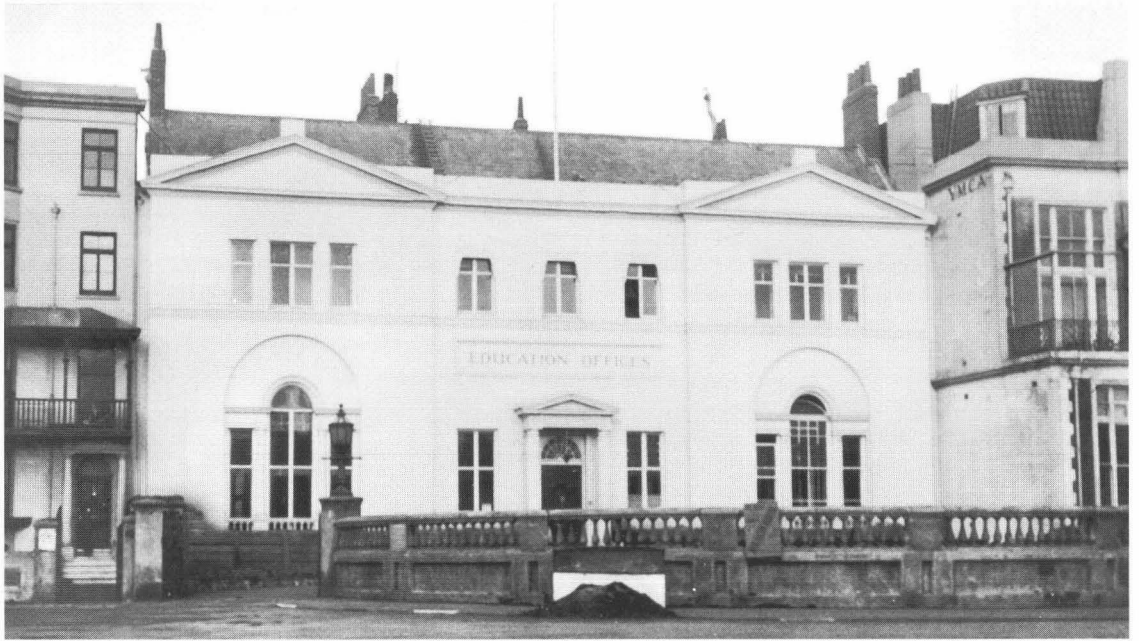


Plate 3. Steine view of Adam's Marlborough House in c. 1950. (Source: National Monuments Record. Crown Copyright.)

towns, were not much in evidence either.⁶

The collapse in the local economy at the end of the 17th century meant that by the time the fashionable set were beginning to make their way to Brighthelmstone for sea-bathing in the 1740s, the town was still compressed within its medieval boundaries, the rough square formed by the sea, East, West and North Streets. The contrast between locals and visitors from Lewes and later from London must have been striking. There was no local gentry with whom to mingle, nor even many professionals. Luxury goods and their consumers were carted down, and then crammed into ordinary cottages. It is extraordinary to think of Royalty ever resorting to the place.

By the end of late 18th century things had certainly changed. What is now known as 'Old Town' was then fast developing to service the new resort function. Butting up against an increasingly fashionable Brighton was farmland, much of it unenclosed and still retaining its older pattern of ownership. The latter, as is well known, influenced the layout of the speculatively built terraced housing north of North Street and east of the Steine after 1780. The Steine itself, an irregular piece of land opening towards the sea, was the town common or

waste. The word is of Flemish origin and said to derive from the fact that the area along the seafront was 'skirted, or edged . . . by chalk rocks', the remnants of a badly eroded beach and cliff area.⁷ Apart from the mending of nets and boat-building, the Steine was used for the sale and storage of 'coals, waggons . . . wheels, carts, and lumber of every description'.⁸

The change in the town's fortunes came through sea-bathing, which was promoted by the famed Dr Richard Russell (1687–1759), a physician from Lewes, who in 1750 published an account of the beneficial effects of sea water on glandular disorders, the fruit of more than 20 years of observations.⁹ These benefits were said to be increased by the drinking of it, and the more the better.¹⁰ John and Sue Farrant have shown that Brighton was not quite the overnight sensation that has traditionally been assumed.¹¹ People had been coming for the bathing, probably as early as the 1730s, and Russell was sending patients in the 1740s. In this decade the local economy began to stir. The records of land transactions show a marked increase in building activity. This fits the national picture as both Margate and Scarborough also date their development as sea resorts from this time. Brighton's

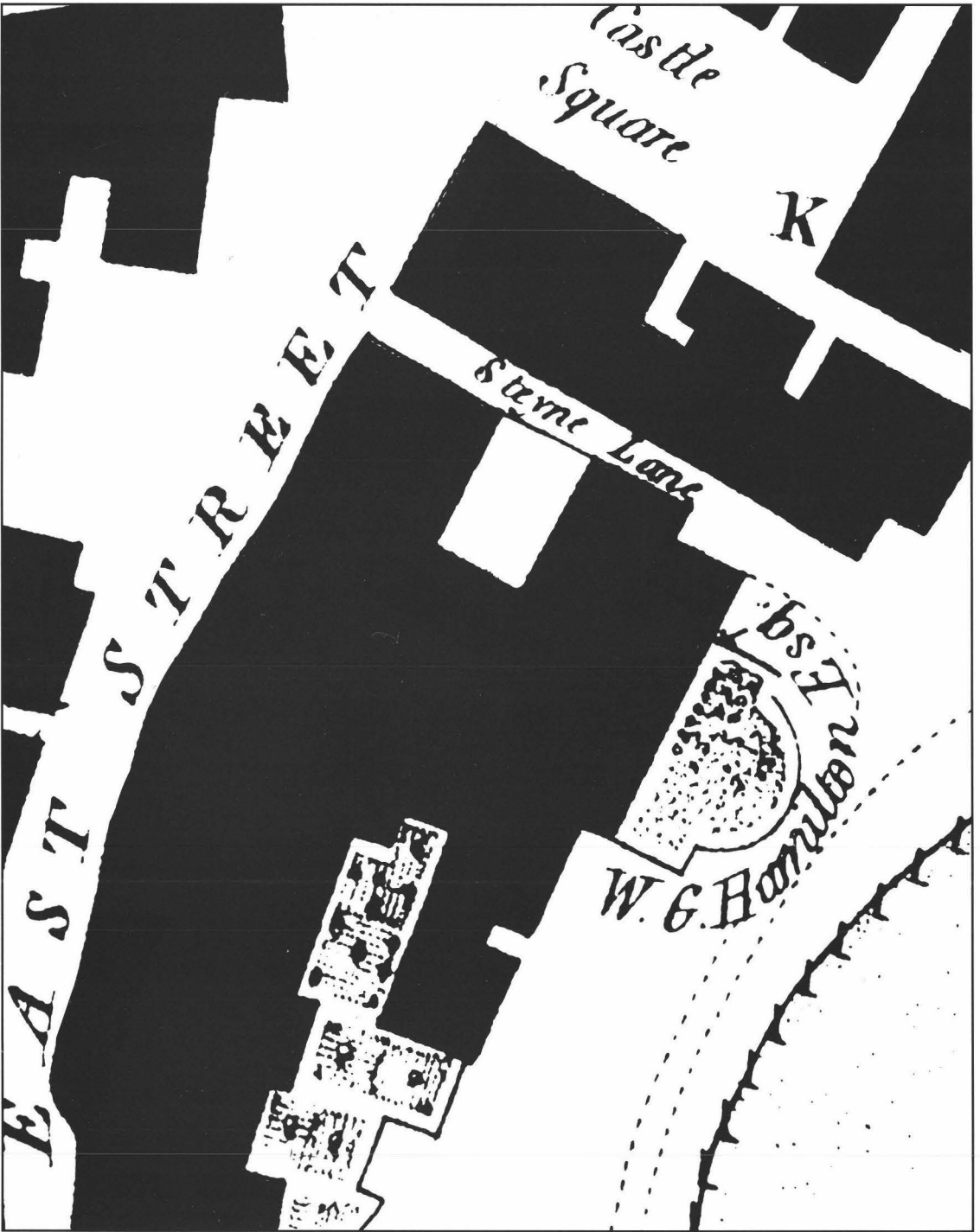


Plate 4. *The New Plan . . . of Brighton*, T. Budgen, 1788. (Source: British Library, K.42.16.)

boom of the fifties and sixties was, then, a consolidation of these earlier trends, augmented by the newly established pastimes of hunting and racing.¹²

Later 18th-century commentators saw a real improvement in the appearance of the town as local inhabitants began to exploit the commercial opportunities brought by seasonal visitors. In 1761 Dr Anthony Relhan, one of Russell's successors, observed that:

The merit of the situation of this town has within these few years attracted a great resort of the principal gentry of this kingdom, engaging them in summer residence here. [. . .] The town improves daily, as the inhabitants, encouraged by the late great resort of company, seem disposed to expend the whole of what they acquire in the erecting of new buildings, or the making of old ones more convenient. And should the increase of these, in the next seven years, be equal to what it has in the last, it is probable there will be but few towns in England that will excel this in commodious buildings.¹³

There is more than a little exaggeration here. Relhan after all had an interest in persuading more people to come to Brighton for treatment. He himself noted that many of the new buildings were made of the rough flints that were near to hand rather than of smarter brick. He also admitted to seeing some irony in the fashion for designating as 'squares' what were essentially left-over spaces in the medieval town plan.

The structure of landownership and the nature of this early resort trade worked against comprehensive development. Most of the tenements in the Old Town were copyhold tenure divided among six manors. The court-books show that the parties to land transactions in the 1750s and 1760s were local people buying and selling plots contiguous to their residences in order to form larger building parcels. Often this meant renting out the resulting extra rooms in season.¹⁴ During the 1740s mortgages were largely granted by Brighton residents, tradesmen in Lewes, and farmers in the nearby countryside. In the next decade the number of resident mortgagors increased, and Sussex farmers from further afield were drawn into Brighton property. Only two locals, Thomas Kent and Richard Tidy, seem to have speculated in land, though they were minor players relative to what was going on

elsewhere in the country. There are no instances of building leases on the London model, and no one ventured to develop the strip fields bordering the town speculatively. But whereas the documentary record is rich in detail about land transaction, little is known about the sorts of houses being constructed or adapted, either in the form of building accounts or written descriptions.¹⁵

The tendency was for already small plots to be subdivided further, particularly along East Street (the backdrop for Marlborough House). By 1800 many of the dwellings here had become shops. A lower grade of housing and commercial premises, even more densely packed, was to be found in the centre, lining Middle Street as well as Black Lion Street, North Street, and East Cliff. Prestige building was pushed to the fringes, particularly the Steine. Without the guiding influence of an aggressive estate, a building speculator, or even a town commission (before 1773), the look of it all was patchy and irregular. And as plots decreased in size tenements got taller and narrower, giving the principal streets, and especially East Street, the focus for this activity, a mean, pinched, and hodgepodge look.¹⁶ The heterogeneity of East Street today, though it was largely rebuilt after 1790, gives a sense of the sort of messy vitality that would have greeted the Duke of Gloucester on the occasion of the first Royal visit to the resort in 1765.

ARCHITECTURE COMES TO BRIGHTON, 1753 AND AFTER

There were some bright spots amidst this dark mass of building, first and foremost Dr Russell's own house of c. 1753. By 1760 there was a subscription library on the Steine. Run by a bookseller from Tunbridge Wells, Edward Baker, it was a single-storey, timber structure with an arched verandah. For years it was the only building on the east side of the Steine. In 1767 Woodgate's set up in competition on the south side of the Steine and not far from Dr Russell's house. It was a touch grander, having two storeys and a diminutive Doric colonnade.¹⁷ In that year the Old Ship Inn received a suite of Adam-style Assembly Rooms designed by a London architect-surveyor, Robert Golden (c. 1738–1809).¹⁸ Samuel Shergold added additional Assembly Rooms to the Castle Inn, which he had purchased in 1752. In 1766 John Crunden (c. 1741–1835), another Londoner, provided an impressive suite of rooms in a tall brick

extension to the Castle. The ballroom was said — and allowances must be made for Brighton hyperbole — to be one of the grandest in the country.¹⁹ By this date there was in addition a regular packet service to Dieppe.²⁰ Discussions on the formation of a turnpike trust to improve connections with London had also got underway.²¹

Unquestionably the best of the new generation of houses were built along the southern half of the Steine with its unobstructed view of the sea and the downs (Plates 1 & 5). The Manor House is thought to have been the first to be rebuilt (1750–54). Richard Scrace, one of the joint lords of the manor of Brighton, lived there until 1792.²² The house of Thomas Philcox also dates to the fifties. It stood immediately north of Marlborough House, and was replaced by Mrs Fitzherbert's Steine House, designed by the Prince of Wales's architect William Porden in 1803. Philcox's had a pair of full-height canted bays, features which would become a kind of Brighton signature in the early part of the next century (Plate 2). Thomas Willard's house further north was of the same vintage. To the south of Marlborough House was an astylar Palladian villa with the classic one-three-one bay rhythm. It is plausible that it was built

just before Lambert's 1765 *Perspective View* (Plate 5) though the builder of this house has not yet been identified.

Dr Russell's was one of these early houses on the Steine. He purchased a site on the southernmost part of the Steine (now occupied by the Albion Hotel) in 1753 and shortly thereafter built a house for himself. The location was dramatic, closing the view at the bottom of the Steine and backing directly onto the sea. Eleanor Ley's 1788 view of this part of the Steine shows it to have been symmetrical about a pedimented projection.²³ The door had a classical surround, apparently rusticated, and on the eastern side was a canted bay. Interestingly, the plan seems to have been one room deep. This suggests that Russell may have adapted an older group of tenements, refurbishing rather than building anew as so many others were doing.²⁴ Or, equally, if Russell's house was all of one build, the unusual plan may have been adopted to afford each room a view of the sea. Russell is known to have boarded patients, and they might have appreciated having a view of the Channel. Houses facing the sea and intended for temporary accommodation are not unknown from this time. The Rev. Jeremiah Milles described

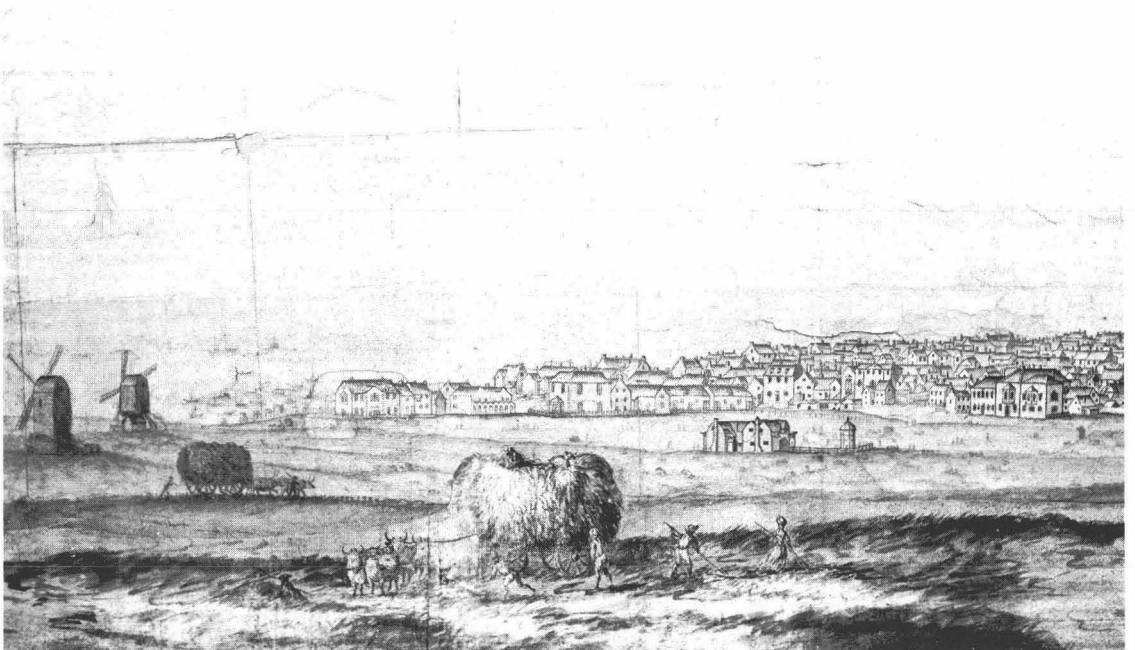


Plate 5. James Lambert, section of *A Perspective View of Brighthelmstone and the Sea Coast as far as the Isle of Wight*, 1765. (Source: Sussex Archaeological Society. Russell's house is furthest to the left.)

several at Eastbourne in 1743. They were commonly known by the name of sea houses, where gentlemen generally choose to bait, on account of the agreeableness of the situation and the good entertainment one meets with there.²⁵

Lambert's *Perspective* (Plate 5) shows just how unprepossessing Brighton's 'grand' promenade was on the eve of the Duke of Gloucester's visit. In Donowell's *View* (Plate 1) things have improved somewhat, yet the low, vernacular dwellings of the Old Town are visible through the large gaps in the run of smart building. The new houses were suburban to the extent that they turned their back on the increasingly overcrowded precincts to the west, yet the prospect was irregular. Some progress to uniformity was made in 1788 when two terraces on the east side of the Steine were built. These are shown on Budgen's plan of the town published in that year (Plate 4).

THE FIRST MARLBOROUGH HOUSE

The first Marlborough House (Plate 2) was built by Samuel Shergold, the innkeeper of the Castle, very probably just after 1765. Before coming to Brighton Shergold had been a wine merchant in Lewes. In 1773 he was appointed to the Town Commission, and should be seen as something of a leading citizen.²⁶ He had certainly finished it by 1769, when its existence is noted in connection with the acquisition of a small piece of property near the Pool.²⁷ It seems likely that Shergold built the house to capitalize on the need for high-class accommodation.²⁸ Judging from Donowell's view it had a double pile plan with an 'M-shaped' roof and three dormers. There were two stacks in each end wall. The entrance probably opened into a stair bay which ran up the centre of the house at the rear. The tall first-floor windows indicate status rooms, perhaps even a single grand room. Further investigation of the standing fabric to the rear is needed to determine the original method of construction, but short stretches of exposed fabric in the basement and at the back of a first-floor cupboard suggest it was a mixture of brick and flint. The principal elevation would likely have been entirely of brick.

The property itself can be tracked through the court-books of the manor of Brighton.²⁹ In 1765 Thomas Fuller, a butcher, bought a quite extensive

site in East Street, including a barn, butcher's shop, and slaughterhouse, from Richard Tidy who, as noted above, had been party to many transactions in the previous decade. Fuller immediately sold the site of the barn and some land to Shergold but retained the business premises. In 1771 George Spencer-Churchill, third Duke of Marlborough, bought the land, now the site of a 'capital message', along with a piece of land near the Pool from Shergold. In the same year the duke became the mortgagee of the butcher's premises, which he bought from its owner in 1774, thus effectively reuniting Tidy's East Street holding.³⁰

According to Bishop, the late Victorian chronicler of Brighton, the Duke of Marlborough caused something of a sensation, since his retinue, consisting of 40 people, was larger and grander than any which had been seen in the town previously.³¹ He had been coming regularly since 1767, following in the footsteps of that earliest royal visitor, the Duke of Gloucester, younger brother of George III, who had first graced Brighton in 1765. In 1766 the Duke of York followed in his train, and, then, in 1771 came the Duke of Cumberland, who, ultimately, was responsible for attracting the Prince of Wales to the seaside resort.

Marlborough is reputed to have been a lavish entertainer:

'Tis incredible to think what a deal of money his Grace expends there, and the help he is to the poor. We are well assured that he buys half a bullock at a time, a whole calf, and his mutton by the carcase, so that, by the overabundance of his tables the poor have joints given them hardly touch'd, which is prodigious relief to numbers who at this dear time cannot afford to purchase butcher's meat; a noble example and worthy of imitation.³²

And when he was away from Brighton, the duke was said to have let the rooms of the house to visitors, up to 50 at any one time, again according to the *Lewes Journal*, although it hardly seems possible that the house could have accommodated that many people under any circumstances.³³

Sadly we know very little else about the house during the duke's tenure. There is nothing amongst the Marlborough Papers at the Blenheim Estate Office or in the British Library to shed any light on his time at Brighton. Later, after he had settled into Grove House, the duke did take an interest in local improvements. In 1792–3 he and the prince made

an arched sewer along the Steine in order to prevent its periodic flooding. At about this time they also paid for the Steine's levelling and turfing. In consideration of these works the lords of the manor allowed them to enclose a small part of the Steine adjoining their houses so long as they never built on or 'encumbered it with any thing that obstruct[s] the prospect'.³⁴ The spirit of improvement had been on the march since 1773, when a commission was formed to oversee lighting, cleansing, the removal of nuisances, the regulation of the market, and, importantly, the building and repair of the town groyne. These works were paid for by tax on coal, which was at that time still being landed on the beach opposite the Steine.³⁵

HAMILTON REBUILDS THE DUKE'S HOUSE, 1786–1787

The Duke of Marlborough sold Shergold's house to William Gerard Hamilton (1729–1796) in 1786. The duke himself then purchased Grove House to the north of the modest cottage which Holland was about to transform into the prince's first marine pavilion.³⁶ It seems likely that Hamilton would have visited Brighton previously, but we know little about his personal circumstances, except that he never married.³⁷ He left government service in 1784 in exchange for a pension (£2000), so Adam's design should be seen as a villa built to serve his retirement. He had a house in Upper Brook Street (no. 27) in the years before his death. As a younger man he enjoyed a grace-and-favour residence at Hampton Court.³⁸ Hamilton struck all who knew him as capable and attractive. He was born in London and admitted as a student to Lincoln's Inn in 1744, intending to take up the profession of his father, who was said to have been the first Scot ever to plead at the English bar. When the esteemed elder Hamilton died in 1754 his son changed tack. In that year he entered Parliament as Member for Petersfield and in 1755 showed particular acumen by offering his services to Fox, whose alliance with Newcastle led to places being offered to the former's supporters, Hamilton among them. He was made a lord of Trade in 1756. By this point Walpole was admiring his 'voice, manner, and language', noting furthermore that he was a clear, persuasive speaker; Dr Johnson's opinion was also favourable. Great things seemed to lie in store when in 1761 Hamilton was made secretary to Lord Halifax, then newly appointed lord

lieutenant of Ireland. Hamilton imagined a career across the water played out over decades.³⁹ In the short term he worked hard to obtain the sinecure of chancellor of the Exchequer of Ireland, which he had won by 1763. But this promising start was wrong-footed by Hamilton himself. In May 1764 he had lost his precious posting at the Exchequer, having been dismissed for showing contempt to the people of Ireland. He later returned to Ireland, but even in England he seems to have reserved the highest regard for himself, decrying members of the Commons as limited in their abilities almost to a man. He has come down through the literature tarred by the unfortunate nickname 'Single Speech', though whether this was actually used in his lifetime is hard to say.⁴⁰ In any case, Hamilton declined the post of secretary for war offered by Lord Shelburne in 1782 and two years later started to draw his Irish pension. When the end came twelve years later, he seems not even to have had this. His death on 16 July 1796 came just in time 'to save him from absolute poverty' according to the *History of Parliament*.⁴¹ The point is worth making because Adam's drawings for the Marlborough House commission which survive in the Soane Museum suggest that the client was seeking to cut costs wherever possible.

Hamilton's Irish career may well explain how he came to Brighton. In his final years at the Irish Exchequer he met Thomas Pelham, Earl of Chichester (1756–1826), who was chief secretary to the lord lieutenant in 1783–1784, and whose family seat, Stanmer House, is just outside Brighton. The two corresponded on at least one occasion in 1783,⁴² and a letter from Hamilton to John Hely-Hutchinson (1724–1794) refers to their acquaintance.⁴³ There is no firm evidence to suggest how he came into contact with Robert Adam. True, the architect's brother William and Hamilton had crossed paths in the Commons, but they were in different camps, at least in the mid-1780s, by which point Hamilton had given up Fox for Pitt. This was typical of Hamilton's later political career, which was marked by opportunism. By 1786 William's architect brother was so well established among the *beau monde* that Hamilton would certainly have come across his work, and so have needed no introduction.

The documentary evidence surrounding the commission is, it must be said, slight. The court-book entry for 1786 notes that Hamilton had taken a mortgage for £1900 at 5 per cent from one William

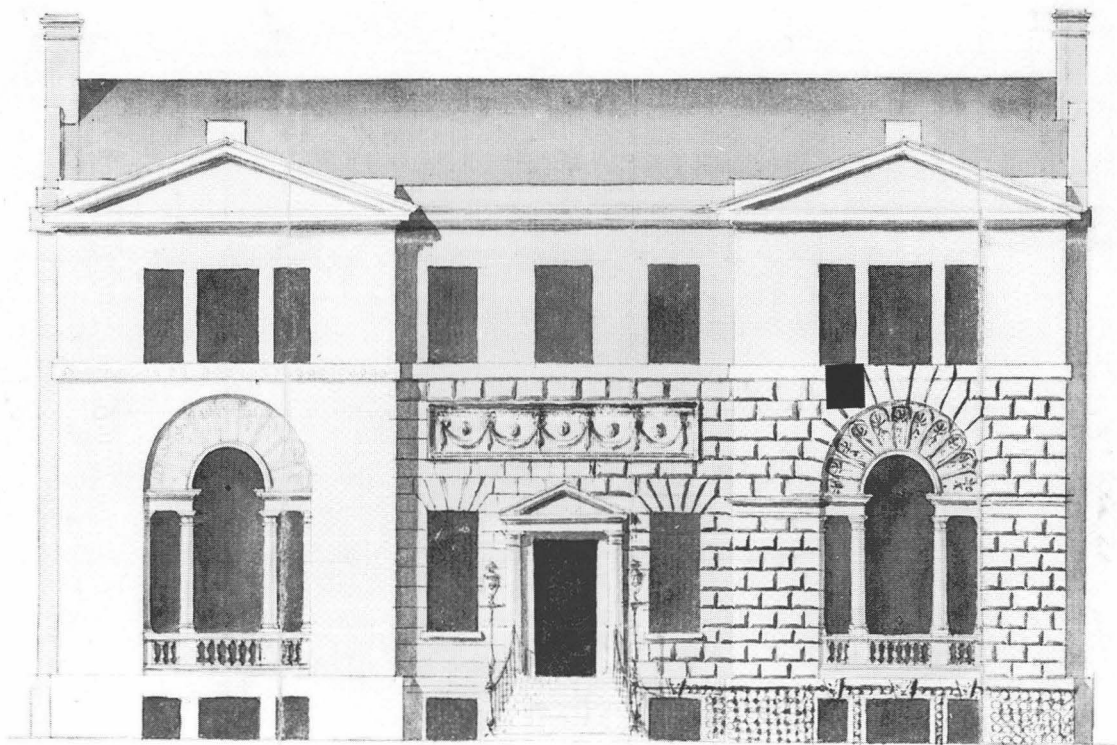


Plate 6. Robert Adam, elevation of Marlborough House, 1786, pen. (Source: Sir John Soane's Museum.)

Pitcairn, a physician at St Bartholomew's in London. On 31 December 1786 Hamilton wrote to Hely-Hutchinson from London, inviting him to stay with him at Brighton:

. . . a post-chaise and a pair of horses will convey you from Pall-Mall to Brighton between nine in the morning and four in the afternoon . . . If you adopt the plan which I propose, and will give me early notice of it, I can make my escape from where I am now residing, under pretence of seeing the progress of a house which I am [*now or new deleted*] rebuilding at Brighthelmstone.⁴⁴

This is not especially helpful, but it does suggest that the carcass of the house was at least under way, which is confirmed by Hamilton's letter to Adam. A week later Hamilton returned to London.⁴⁵ If all

went well the better part of the work could have finished by late summer or autumn. In 1787 Hamilton received a grant of waste land in front of the mansion for what would become his garden. This is shown clearly on the excellent early 19th-century view of the house now hanging in the Pavilion. The dimensions of this grant were 84'6" north to south and 78'1" east to west. The appropriation excited some local opposition, but it had to be done, because Adam's solution to adapting the old house was to build out to the full length of the property. To gain just that little bit more room Hamilton also acquired a slip or small piece of land of two-and-a-half feet wide on the south side of the Duke of Marlborough's parcel.⁴⁶

The relationship between Shergold's house of 1765 (Plate 2) and Adam's additions of 1786–7 (Plate

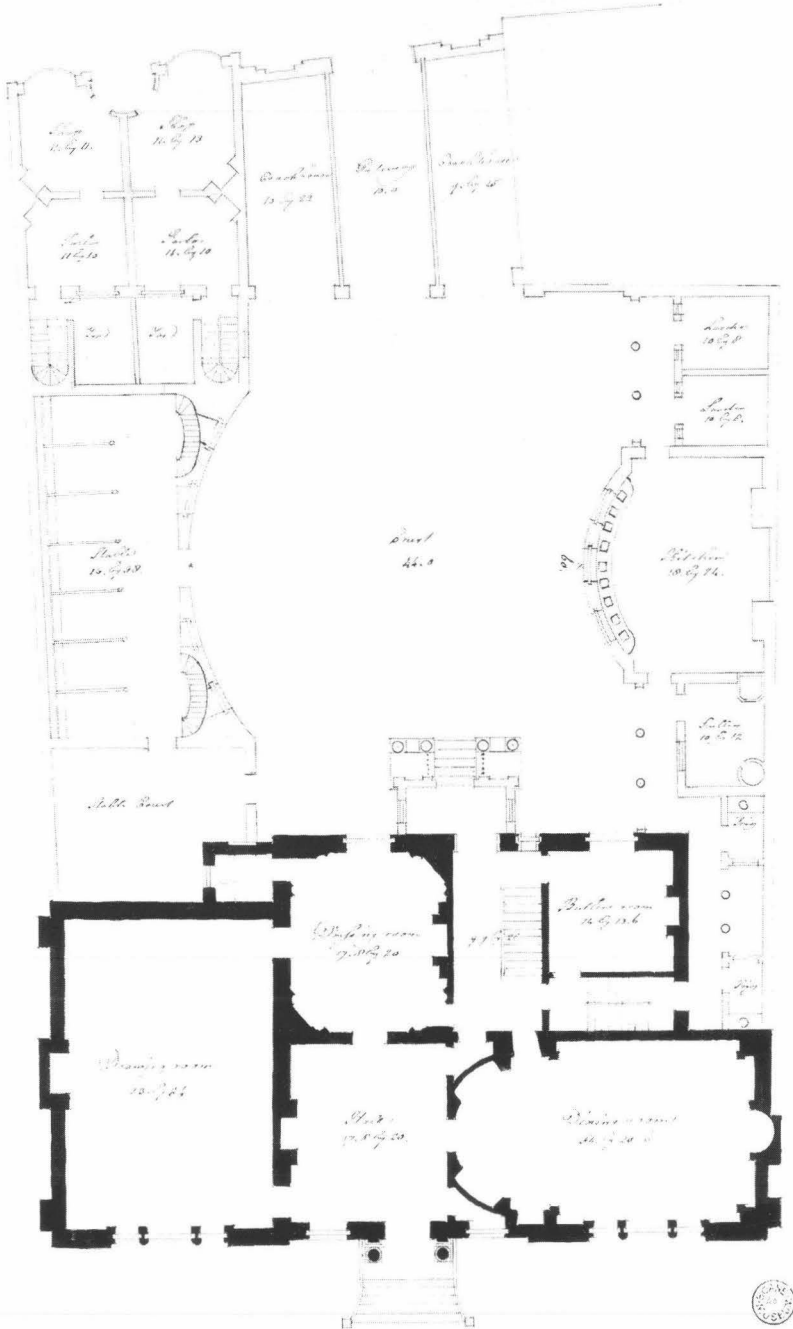


Plate 7. Robert Adam, ground plan of Marlborough House and proposals for the outbuildings and courtyard to the rear, or west, 1786, pen. (Source: Sir John Soane's Museum.)

Bed Room Story of a House for General Hamilton

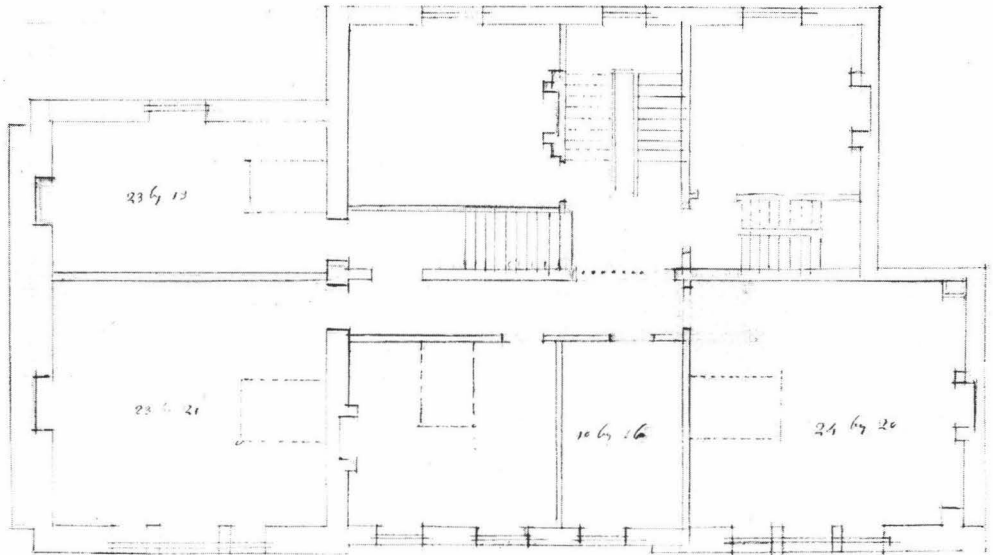


Plate 8. Robert Adam, first-floor plan of Marlborough House, 1786, pen. (Source: Sir John Soane's Museum. North is to the right.)

6) has never been worked out. Some sources describe the work as a re-fronting, others as a remodelling. Hamilton himself describes it as a rebuilding, but it was none of these. In effect Adam sliced off the eastern half of Shergold's double-pile house and at the same time took out the original main and servant stairs (Plates 7 & 8). The rear basement rooms of the earlier house were also retained.⁴⁷ The architect then fitted an L-plan suite consisting of dining room, hall, and drawing room around the core of the house and its south side, inserting a new stair into the old stair-bay and providing an enclosed serving stair beside the dining room, that is, perpendicular to the principal, open-well stair and running on a roughly north-south axis. He very likely added the closet-wing to the south of the rear entrance, and of course

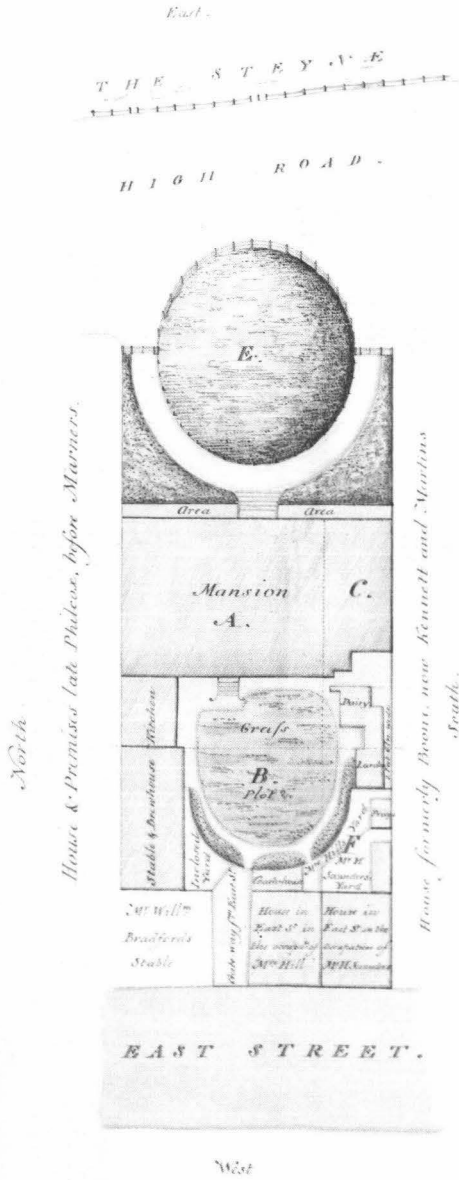
he gave the new structure an entirely new roof of Westmorland slate. His ground-floor rooms were much taller than the old ones, with a correspondingly taller suite of first-floor rooms. This explains the unusual level changes and complex hall and stair arrangement along the line of the join between the two builds (Plate 8).

Most of the rooms in the older portion were very likely used for the servants or as guest bed- or sitting rooms, but one of the first-phase rooms, the present study or, as Hamilton called it, the 'back parlour', was incorporated into Adam's scheme of decoration. The structure and overall dimensions date to the first phase of construction but the surface ornaments are all Adam. The design of the library ceiling (Plate 9) is unusual in his work since it features two pairs of broad, deep beams. The pair which runs east to



Colour plate 1. English School, *A View of Marlborough House on the Steine*, c. 1800, watercolour. (Source: Brighton & Hove Council, Brighton Art Gallery.)

GROUND PLAN of the **ESTATE** belonging to the late **LADY ANNE MURRAY**,
and now sold by the Devises, under her Will.
LADY E. M. FINCH HATTON, to **THO: HARRINGTON ESQ.**^R



Explanations.

The part marked **A** extending East to the Street and to the dotted line on the South & West comprises the mansion described in the Court Rolls as a piece of Land whereon a Barn formerly stood & whereon the capital Mansion is erected.

The part marked **C** comprises the small piece of ground, and on which the late Wth Marston Esq^r owned which forms now the south wing of the Mansion.

The part marked **B** comprises the site of the Butcher's Shop, Public Slaughter House & piece of ground last for Marston.

The site of ground described was proposed of 20 ft wide cannot be accurately traced to the precise extent, though part of it is marked in the Plan is still visible from the old walls.

All the above is in that part of the Manor belonging to C. A. Lockhart Esq^r.

The part marked **F** comprises the Tenement and Garden late Marston's & formerly Lewis and includes the whole of the House and Promiscuous Street in the occupation of Wth Hugh Linnard and part of the yard of the House in the occupation of Wth Tall and part of the back court of the Mansion, running in a straight line with the north wall of Wth Chambers's House & the whole of the Building called the Larder as shown by the dotted line is in that part of the Manor of Brighton belonging to J. R. King Esq^r.

The part marked **E** including the street is held of the underlord part of the Manor under the grant.

Colour plate 2. A detailed plan of the property, showing the layout of buildings and delineating teneurial divisions. (Source: Brighton & Hove Council, deed bundle 1094.)

west, from the rear to spine walls, are structural timbers from the c. 1765 house — they are repeated in all of the rooms which survive from this phase of construction. The other pair of beams are ornamental, included to create a symmetrical composition. The intimate scale of this room contrasts with the remaining rooms in the circuit, the hall, dining parlour and drawing room. This is not the only instance of Adam modernizing an earlier room (the room at Audley End painted by Biagio Rebecca and featuring a scaled-down suite of Adam furniture is of higher quality and earlier, 1763–5), and there are other examples of the architect reusing an older house as the servant's quarters for a new one.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, reconciling the two phases of construction tested Adam's skills as a practical planner, and is a significant aspect of Marlborough House's character and interest.

But why go to all this trouble? It may have been a case of Hamilton wanting to save time. Retaining half of the earlier house would have been quicker, in part because there would be no need to disturb the East Street side of the property, an area which, as we have seen, was heavily built-up and had a complicated pattern of land tenure. It would also have kept the cost down. This second hypothesis is reinforced, if not quite proved, by the drawings for the project which survive in the Soane Museum. Three show that the architect was asked to prepare cheaper alternatives. This is most striking in the design for the main elevation (Plate 6) which shows different levels of finish, from grandiloquent (and expensive) on the north projecting bay to the relatively plain finish on the south, which was the one eventually built. The drawing for the dining room ceiling offers exuberant and restrained alternatives by means of a flap. The design for the overmantel mirror in the study is carefully costed according to the number of gilded ornaments. Hamilton chose the least expensive.⁴⁹ Cost-consciousness is apparent in several parts of the fabric as well. None of the skirting boards or dado rails are carved, and the enrichment to the ground floor shutters is shallow. Another tell-tale sign is the use of wood where otherwise one might expect stone, most notably in the study fireplace, the entrance porch, and the balustrading to the ground-floor Venetian windows. The decision to use artificial stone was also in part motivated by economy, since there was no local building stone of high quality. Surface render (see below) was also easier to keep

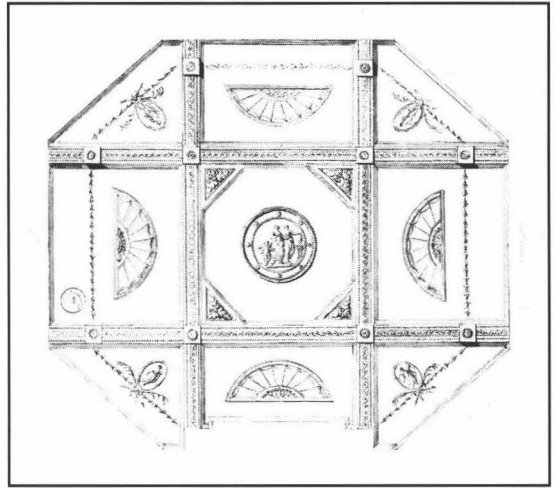


Plate 9. Robert Adam, design for the library ceiling, Marlborough House, 1786. (Source: Sir John Soane's Museum.)

looking smart.

Then there is the evidence of the 1787 letter from Hamilton to Adam. Although the client justified his suggestions on the grounds of 'convenience', the effect of his proposed changes would have been to cut the cost still further:

But if a Door or two could be dispens'd with in the [Entrance] Hall I own I should be pleas'd. I am sensible that no door can be taken away without some Inconvenience. But Warmth and Comfort are the principal Objects, and Elegance though a desirable, is only a secondary one. I sometimes think that the Door from the Hall to the Back Parlour might be parted with. At others that the Recess part of the Dining Parlour instead of being Circular might be made strait, and that in that Case the Door in the Centre of the Dining Parlour might be shut up, and the entrance in to it be made rather at the side, exactly opposite to the Door through which you go out of the Hall in to the Drawing Room. I own I am not pleased with my own thoughts, and therefore beg you would think for me . . .

Adam's plans did not stop at the house. He was asked to consider the entrance from East Street as well as the services and stables, and produced a clever design for the site Hamilton had amassed (Plate 7).⁵⁰ The challenge here was not so much the lack of space — Adam had more than a little experience of crowded West End gardens. No, the problem in

Brighton was that the old house did not sit in the middle of the enlarged site, but uncomfortably off to one side. The fact that the main carriageway from East Street was out of line with the centre of the rear elevation did not help much either. There was no question but that the kitchen and stabling had to be separated by a courtyard; the fit was going to be very tight indeed, and in the end the architect had to set the kitchen ranges hard up against the older house, thus spoiling its symmetry. Then there was the matter of the new monumental porch — a *sine qua non* for someone of Hamilton's pretence. Of course it had to stand in the middle of the new courtyard, but this meant putting it out of line with the carriageway and, even worse, spanning the second and third bays of the three-bay house, that is, hugely off-centre. One can imagine the architect returning time and again to the problem, making small adjustments here and there (introducing a covered walkway nearest the house on the north side, thus breaking up the bulk of the kitchen ranges at the crucial point where it hit the house), but then suddenly realizing that a big gesture was the only solution. Why try to hide from the fact, why not embrace irregularity? So, the kitchen wing to the north got a shallow curving wall, a long segmental bay, which had the advantage of maximizing square footage in the main preparation area, and the stables to the south got an answering concavity, shallow and broad. This treatment would have diverted the eye from the unbalanced rear elevation, establishing a north–south axis, and thus in effect cancelling that fraught line of sight across the narrow rear courtyard. What is more, these curves, so close to one another, would also have articulated the area as a volume, rendering the question of competing axes, of symmetry *versus* asymmetry, null and void. Something along these lines can be found in the architect's earlier plans for the services at Lansdowne House in Berkeley Square (built 1762–68), and it is interesting to see the architect returning them here, 20 years later.

The Marlborough House plan, then, is a far cry from the ideal symmetries and formal game-playing of Adam's late villa plans, and for this reason it has not attracted much comment. But surely this is the very reason why the plan deserves to be more widely known. It shows the architect taking difficult decisions, compromising, thinking, tinkering, reconciling rigorous, abstract notions of the villa. of how it appears in the mind's eye, with the

indisputable givens of the real world, of budgetary constraints and awkward sites, of a world where architecture is a luxury which can only just be afforded. Indeed, the different line weight and shading used to draw out the ancillary services indicate that the scheme was merely a suggestion. A plan accompanying the 1818 lease still in the possession of the local authority shows how it actually was then, and how it may have looked when Adam was called in; perhaps this ungainly assortment had even been there in the third Duke's day (Colour plate 2). The 1873 Ordnance Survey (Plate 15) shows this uneven collection of minor buildings and sheds with a few additions. The present balustrading to the forecourt was erected after this, probably in the 19th century; however, its present position is quite recent and was established as part of a traffic scheme.

Inside the house the quality of work is good and in places outstanding. This is particularly true of the plasterwork scheme for the hall and the dining parlour both of which can be attributed to the great master of the medium Joseph Rose, who by this point had left his native Sussex for London (his father had worked at Stanmer Park for the Pelhams). The triglyph and patera frieze adorning the Ionic entablature in the hall is to be found in Rose's 'Designs for Ornamental Friezes . . .', which is also at the Soane Museum, and so is the frieze to the Corinthian entablature in the dining room.⁵¹ The design of the plaster ornament is not what one normally associates with Adam. There is a leanness to it which is consistent with the need to economize that marks this commission overall, but this is not to say that Adam was simply implementing cuts without thinking. The interior has integrity and coherence. Here again is proof of the architect's consummate skill and artistry, a thorough-going approach which is consistent with his late design practice as this has been analyzed by Alastair Rowan.⁵² This is most apparent in the hall, where the positioning and scale of the openings and other features are perfectly adjusted to the amount of plain wall surface. The same judgment is manifest in the dining parlour and in the study, where, despite the small scale of the room and its low ceiling, the sensation is one of balance. The drawing room is almost bereft of relief ornament, and such as is there is rather unusual. The room cornice is of the Corinthian (or possibly Composite) order, which normally calls for a run of vegetation in the frieze

band, a palmyra motif perhaps or some acanthus scroll. But here Cupids astride dolphins alternate with a frozen fountain, each motif set clearly apart from the adjacent. This is the only specifically marine reference in the principal interiors. The richness in this room would have come from a splendid carpet of a verdigris hue, the drawing for which survives in the Soane Museum.⁵³ A 1788 description of the house (see below) confirms there was fine paper here not silk.

The Soane Museum also has the drawings for a dining room sideboard and wine cistern or cooler.⁵⁴ Adam's drawings for the pair of surviving, lozenge-shaped pier tables, which survive in the care of the local authority at the time of writing, have not yet been identified. Originally they were positioned opposite one another in the octagonal saloon, in the north-west and south-east corners, and are shown *in situ* in drawings published in 1931.⁵⁵

A description of the house published in 1788 provides the *terminus ante quem* for the principal interiors:

Upon the Steyne . . . is an elegant Mansion built upon the site of Marlboro' House by the Rt. Hon. W. G. Hamilton, Esq., M.P. This building consists of an elegant hall . . . 20 feet by 18. On the right side of the hall is a superb dining room, 34 feet by 20: on the left a handsome drawing room, 34 feet 6 inches, by 24 feet 6 inches. The hall and dining room are beautifully stuccoed, and painted. The drawing room is hung with an exceedingly elegant paper, and has a chimney piece on which is represented a Venus drawn by Cupids . . . The front is finished with Adam's artificial stone, and looks extremely handsome. The whole building is, indeed, justly admired for its elegance of architecture, as uniting simplicity with true grandeur.⁵⁶

In 1892 Bishop added that:

It was long after considered even 'in point of exterior beauty, the first house in Brighton'; the enclosed green plat and garden in front with trees at each side doubtless tending to add to its then elegant appearance.⁵⁷

This 'green plat and garden' to the east side of the house is shown clearly in the anonymous watercolour of c. 1800 (Colour plate 1). The arrangement of plants was carefully considered, as if a segment of Reptonian landscape garden had been lifted out of a larger park.

The reference in the 1788 description to 'Adam's artificial stone' is tantalizing, since it can only mean that the architect was using Liardet's patent stone, an oil and sand mastic which Adam first used on the south front of Kenwood House in 1767 and of which the brothers Adam were exclusive licensee. By 1785 the recipe was not much used because it had failed spectacularly on several occasions, though by the date of the Marlborough House commission the brothers were willing to extend their licence to other architects, for a fee of course. The fault with Liardet's was less the formula than the method of its application. If the sand used was not fully dry, or if there were too many hygroscopic salts in it, the preparation failed.⁵⁸ It is possible that the present facing material is in fact Liardet's cement. Were this proved by microscopic analysis, it would make it a rare survival worthy of careful conservation.⁵⁹

To contemporary observers Marlborough House stood out, its gleaming whiteness and carefully laid Westmorland slate roof setting it apart from a town where most buildings of any status were constructed of brick or flint, perhaps limewashed to reduce the textured appearance. And then there were the proportions of the east front. Since the 1750s land in Brighton was, it will be remembered, split into increasingly smaller lots, particularly in East Street. The houses tended to be high not broad, and the older streets had a pinched and mean quality. Hamilton's Marlborough House was by contrast a land-hungry design, conspicuously low slung, which made it even more distinctively different from the run of Brighton building. And it is this sense of foreignness which that anonymous watercolour in the Pavilion captures so beautifully (Colour plate 1). Once more Hamilton's letter of 16 January 1787 is revealing.

I can't forbear saying how exceedingly I am pleased with the additions of the Bread[th] at each extremity of the House; it gives a Character and an expression which the great length of the House much wanted, and which it has got very advantageously . . . Among the many obligations I have confer'd on Brighthelmstone . . . [it is] a principal one that I had brought one of the first Architects in the world to ornament their Fishing Town.⁶⁰

Marlborough House was a luxury item brought down specially from London, a city dandy intruding on rustic fête.⁶¹ Its aloofness was not unlike that of

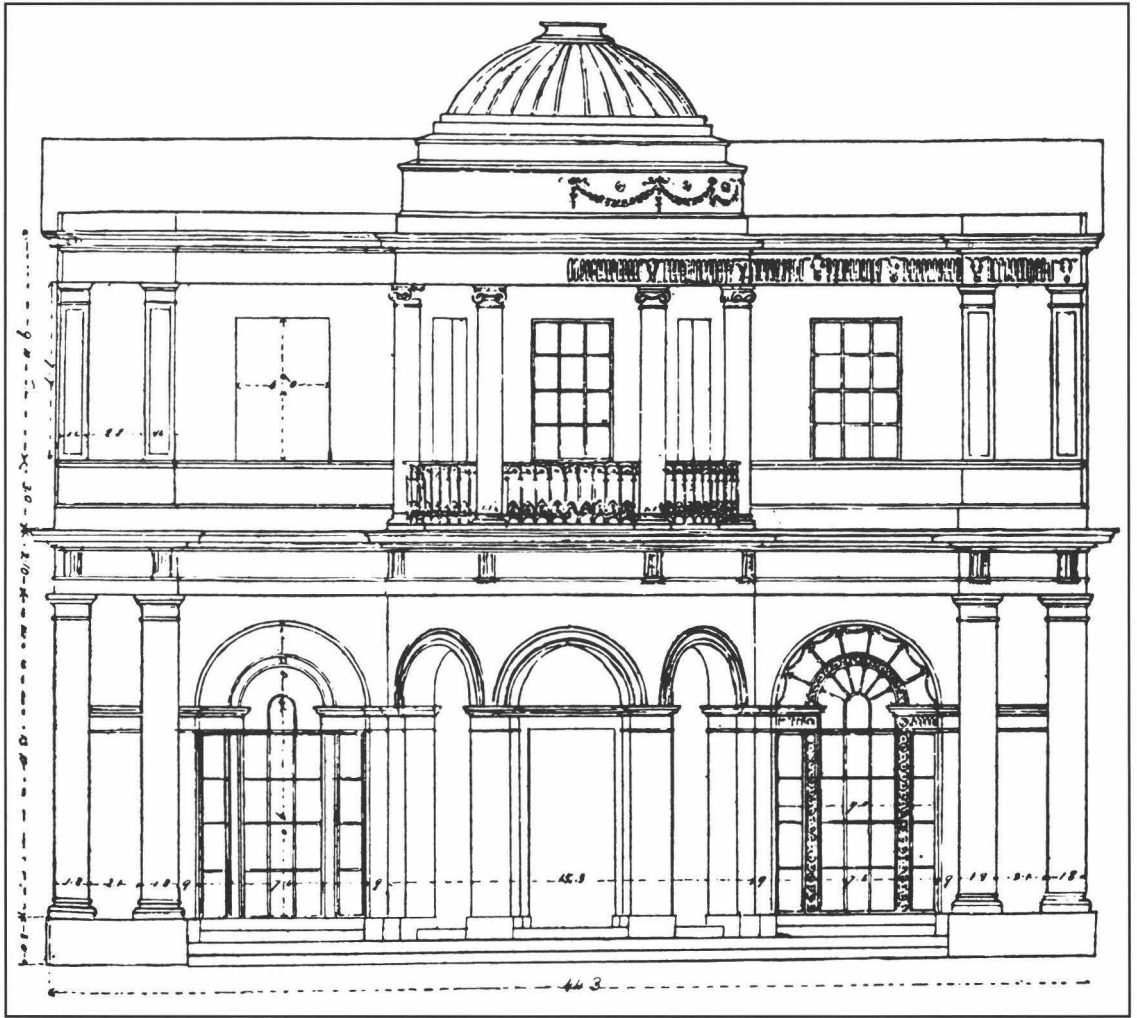


Plate 10. Robert Adam, design for the Steine elevation of a House for Mrs Fitzherbert, 1787, pen. (Source: Arthur Bolton, *The Architecture of Robert and James Adam* (1922).)

its owner. In 1788 Hamilton wrote:

I conceive that my manner of living here will suit you [Hely-Hutchinson] admirably; it is something between society and solitude. I see many people, and associate with few — you will find company enough to raise, and not overwhelm your spirits.⁶²

This image is reinforced by a letter written a few years earlier. 'My attachment to nobody', he wrote in 1781, 'lays me open to the society of everybody'. *The History of Parliament* observes, by way of conclusion, that 'Few men had such a wide social and political acquaintance and made so little of it'.⁶³

ADAM'S DESIGNS FOR MRS FITZHERBERT'S HOUSE, 1787

Had things gone just a little bit differently, Marlborough House would have had an Adam sibling nearby, a house intended for the Prince's own Mrs Fitzherbert (Plate 10). Few people who have written on Brighton or Adam have given this unrealized scheme much consideration. Only Arthur Bolton, writing more than 70 years ago, took the time to analyze this remarkable design, and it is easy to see why. There is no archival material relating to the Fitzherbert commission, and neither set of

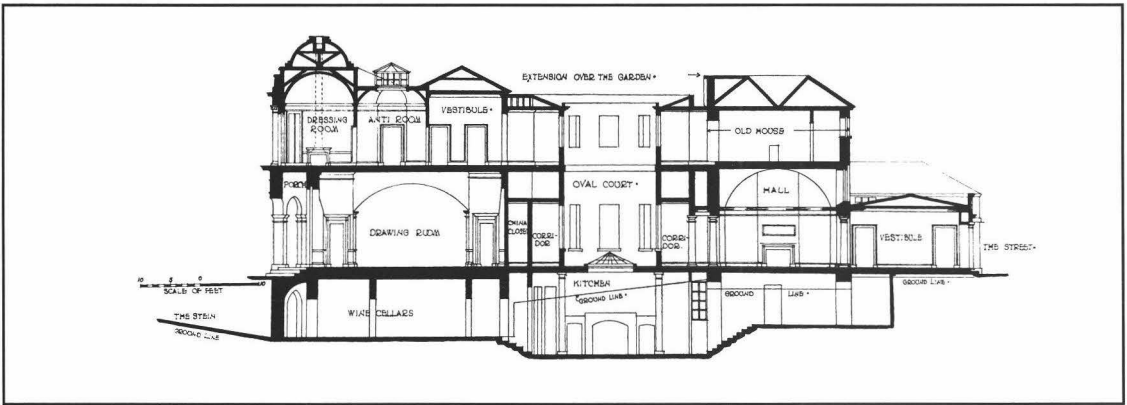


Plate 11. Robert Adam, cross-section for Mrs. Fitzherbert's House, 1787. (Source: Arthur Bolton, *The Architecture of Robert and James Adam* (1922).) The older house is to the right of the oval court.

drawings is dated. Not even the site has been identified. Perhaps the best place to start then is with Bolton's two-volume study of 1922, *The Architecture of Robert and James Adam (1758–1794)*.⁶⁴ Inscriptions identify two sets of drawings at the Soane Museum as belonging to the Fitzherbert commission.⁶⁵ What I take to be the first design Bolton interpreted as working drawings because of their style, level of finish and scale. This suite of six sheets consists of two elevations (one to the Steine and the other to East Street), three floor plans (basement, ground and first, Plates 12 & 13), and a marvellous longitudinal section made on the east–west axis (Plate 11). It is clear from these that Adam was once more adapting or adding to an earlier house which was itself a two-phase building, though it will be described in greater detail below. The second group of Fitzherbert drawings are executed in that dry and sober manner which Rowan believes was intended for a book of late house designs that the Adams never got around to publishing.⁶⁶ The ground- and first-floor plans of the second version are similar to those of the first, but the elevation has been radically revised.

The putative first design is remarkable by any standards, more adventurous in planning terms than Hamilton's house (Plate 6) and having a totally different stylistic character (Plate 10). Adam's additions to the Steine-side had two storeys and was divided into three roughly equal bays. The centre was treated as a projecting, semi-circular bay with a porch on the ground floor opening directly onto the Steine and providing access to the dining parlour on the south, or left, and the drawing room to the north. In order to bring light into the centre of the

building — the site was long (132 feet) — there was to be an elliptical light court open to the sky; a continuous gallery on each floor opened into this court. On the first floor the semi-circular porch contained a circular dressing room entered from a lozenge-shaped anteroom, which in turn was accessible from either of the principal bed chambers. This was an intimate, deeply romantic arrangement, all the more so for the panoramic views that the little circular dressing room would have offered. Bolton observed that the wall thicknesses and method of drawing suggested that the entirety of Adam's new structure, excluding of course the chimney breasts, was to have been made from wood and might perhaps even have been intended for a mathematical tile facing, making it quick and easy to build. Holland is known to have used this form of construction for the same reason in his first Marine Pavilion for the Prince.⁶⁷

The elevation is superb, light, open, graceful, elegant. The ground floor is treated as a continuous round-arched arcade with French windows opening almost level with the Steine. The springing course is continuous across the facade, running behind the doubled pilasters at the corners. This is a small touch, but it introduces a sense of depth and complexity. On the first floor the porch has an open ironwork balustrade and a sill band-cum-dado, as if an interior wall had been turned out. Here the order is reduced in scale and rests on the mock dado. The segmental bay is topped by a shallow, ribbed dome of modest size and strongly decorative in character. 'Confection' sums up this elevation best. The East Street, or rear, elevation by contrast is castle-like in

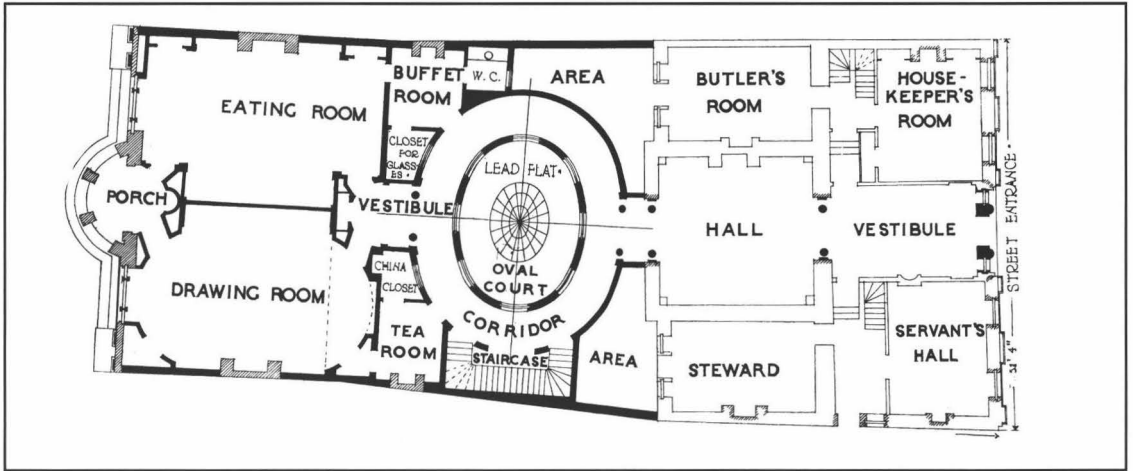


Plate 12. Robert Adam, ground-floor plan of Mrs Fitzherbert's house, 1787. (Source: Arthur Bolton, *The Architecture of Robert and James Adam* (1922).) The Adam addition is shown in dark outline.

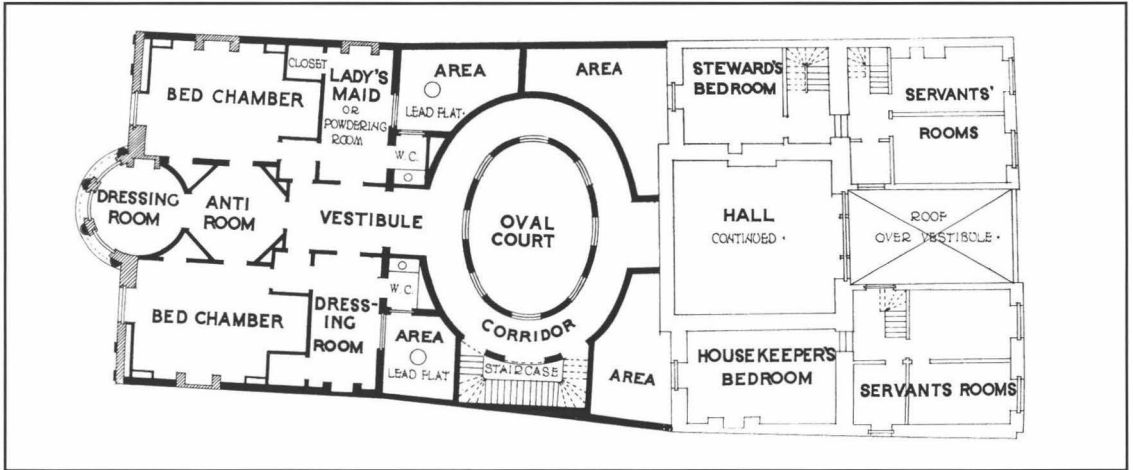


Plate 13. Robert Adam, first-floor plan of Mrs Fitzherbert's house, 1787. (Source: Arthur Bolton, *The Architecture of Robert and James Adam* (1922).)

its sternness. Perhaps this was all Adam could do here, since he had the unenviable job of trying to redesign the elevation of not one but two older and more modest buildings.

When could it have been done? Bolton surmised sometime in 1786, probably in the spring or summer, when the Prince of Wales and Mrs Fitzherbert came to Brighton.⁶⁸ This is unlikely because of the extraordinary events of that spring. The marriage took place on 15 December 1785 in Mrs Fitzherbert's Park Street drawing room, and though it was meant to remain secret the pair

appeared together at engagements and rumours quickly spread, so much so that the Duchess of Cumberland was uncomfortable on meeting her. In the first months of the new year, the scale of the prince's debt crisis was also becoming known, more than a quarter of a million pounds, no small proportion of it having come, it was said, from keeping his Roman Catholic wife in state. In March 1786 he wrote Prince William: 'My finances are as low as possible, so bad that the least sum [from you] will be of use'. The king would not settle until he had an assurance that there had been no marriage.

He also demanded a detailed account of how the debts had been incurred. The prince refused, and there followed, between April and August 1786, an embarrassing exchange of letters. By December the king stopped the prince's income entirely.⁶⁹ It is inconceivable that he would have seriously entertained the idea of building and kitting out any new house, much less one so conspicuous as Adam's for Mrs Fitzherbert would have been.

The result of the regal dispute is well known. The prince closed down Carlton House and sought refuge in Brighton. He left for the coast on 11 July 1786, and Mrs Fitzherbert followed from her house in St James, arriving in Brighton on the 24th. It took this long, nearly two weeks (according to Wilkins writing in 1905), to find a house for her, as she refused to live openly with the prince until her marriage was acknowledged. Therefore, 'a pretty modest villa was found for her close to the Pavilion'. It had green shutters and was separated from the Pavilion by a 'thin strip of garden'. Wilkins added, in a footnote, that this house was near to what is now the North Gate of the Pavilion, that is, not the site later occupied by Mrs Fitzherbert's house to the north of Marlborough House.⁷⁰

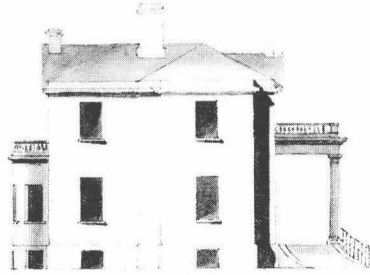
In May 1787 a deal was struck after the prince finally submitted satisfactory accounts, and although there was still the king's insistence that there would be no increase in the prince's allowance until he was married, the respite was enough to allow Holland to begin work in earnest on the Marine Pavilion.⁷¹ The Fitzherbert commission, I believe, dates to spring 1787, when the prince's finances looked set to recover. Why it was abandoned is not certain. What we do know is that at about this time a house in Pall Mall, no. 105, was being remodelled for Mrs Fitzherbert. It had been rebuilt by James Paine only a few years earlier, in 1779, when the exterior was given a coating of Liardet's cement ornamented by the brothers Adam. She lived there between 1789 and 1796, and the house was demolished in 1838.⁷² So, Mrs Fitzherbert did finally get to stay in a house touched by the Adam genius if not one actually built by him.

It is possible, however, to come to a firm view about the intended site by matching of the dimensions of the building — c. 134 feet by 42 feet at the widest point — with existing sites. The drawing for the rear elevation gives the location as 'East Street', which narrows the field considerably. There was in fact only one site that could have

accommodated this building's footprint, namely, the plot which runs from the east front of Porden's surviving Steine House back to the properties in East Street, that is, immediately north of Marlborough House. What makes the identification certain is the oblique 'kick' in the Adam plan which appears clearly in the property line between Marlborough House and Steine House as this is recorded in the Ordnance Survey sheet of nearly a century later (Plate 15). As for the site itself, adjacent Marlborough House, this was the property of Thomas Philcox, whose will was proved on 25 March 1786.⁷³ It lists several lodging houses, but the one which appears on Donowell's view must be that which is described as 'a messuage near the Steine, and joining the house and premises of the Duke of Marlborough'. This was left to his sister Elizabeth Stedman, a widow of Brighton, and she was admitted to the property on 31 May 1786. There is a fitting postscript to all this, for in 1802–3, when Mrs Fitzherbert was casting about for a site in Brighton on which to build, she went back to the Philcox site for which, I believe, Adam had worked up designs more than 15 years previously. Steine House, the work of William Porden, occupies that site still, albeit much transformed.

Adam's worked-up designs for the Fitzherbert commission are of interest to local historians, because they record how Brighton's humble vernacular housing was adapted to meet the requirements of holiday-makers. Adam was planning to build onto a house which was itself of two phases of construction, and his working drawings give some idea of this structure. The clearest picture of what it was like is conveyed by the cross-section and two plans (Plates 11–13).⁷⁴ The earlier, two-phase house was roughly square in outline. The west half which Adam treated as a vestibule framed by servants' quarters seems to have been a modest cottage, built without a basement and having one principal storey with chambers in the roof area. East of this — and so backing onto Philcox's house — was a taller, two-storey structure with a two-span roof. This was altogether grander than the phase-one building. Most of this status range was taken up by a commodious hall, nearly a cube room. There were modest bedrooms on the upper floor. Reinforcing a reading of this earlier structure (labelled 'old house' on Adam's plan) is an annotation on one plan relating to floor levels.⁷⁵ In order to make one continuous level across the ground floor, from East Street through the light court and finishing in the

View of the House



Design for the South front of Sunnyside, designed by Robert Adam

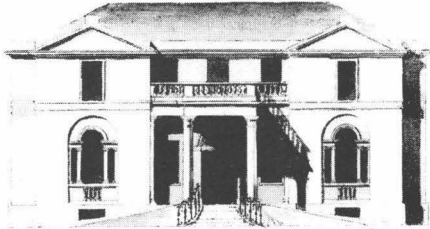


Plate 14

Plan of the Principal Story

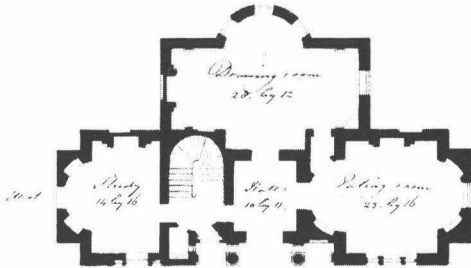


Plate 14. Robert Adam, elevation and ground-floor plan of Sunnyside for Sir Patrick Inglis, Edinburgh, 1790–91. (Source: Sir John Soane's Museum.)

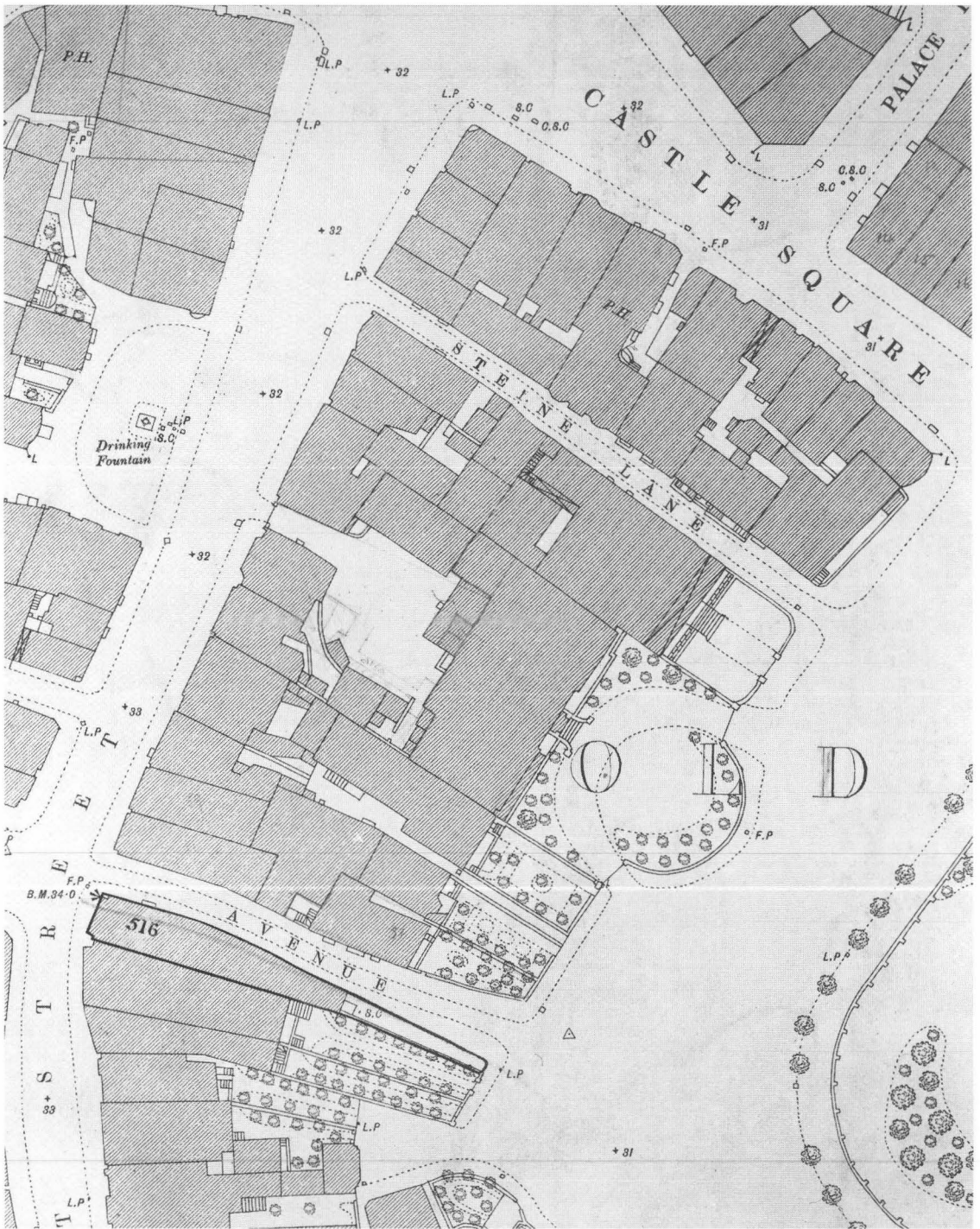


Plate 15. Ordnance Survey, 1873, 1:500 scale, showing Marlborough House — having a semicircular forecourt — with the site to the north, now occupied by Steine House, intended for Adam's Fitzherbert House.

Steine-side elevation, the 'cottage' range floor had to be raised one foot and the hall floor lowered three feet 10 inches.

But the really significant thing about Adam's Brighton episode is what it tells us about his work as a designer in this last phase of an illustrious career. For here he was designing a pair of villas on adjoining sites within months of each other, and giving each a completely different stylistic character (Plates 6 & 10). Hence his Brighton designs fit nicely with the case Dr Rowan has made out for seeing this period as one of intense creativity and experimentation.⁷⁶ Marlborough House is, however, perhaps more important than has previously been realized. There are strong points of comparison between the Steine-side elevation and Kirkdale House in Creetown (1787–8) for Samuel Hannay, Bt, which, like Marlborough House was conceived as a marine pavilion, in this case overlooking Wigtown Bay. But by far the nearest parallel is Adam's imaginative and justly celebrated design for Sunnyside, designed for Sir Patrick Inglis, Bt, on the outskirts of Edinburgh and dating to 1790–91 (Plate 14).⁷⁷ In the Hannay and Inglis plans one finds the standard circuit of four principal rooms, with dining parlour and drawing room flanking a roughly square entrance hall, behind which is a saloon of slightly more complex plan. The ground-floor plan of Marlborough House is an obvious variation on this type.

What has not previously attracted comment is the seminal position of the Steine elevation of Marlborough House (1786) in the genealogy of the final version of Sunnyside's principal front (1790–91).⁷⁸ Sunnyside went through endless revisions but in the end the architect, almost, one senses, in exasperation, broke with his earlier design paradigms and revisited the earlier elevation for Hamilton at Brighton. There are, of course, obvious differences. Marlborough House is longer and, furthermore, has a tripartite, flat-arched window above each of the Venetian windows on the ground floor. Another obvious difference is treatment of the entrance porches. At Sunnyside it is robust and bold; indeed the oversized proportions teeter on the brink of Mannerist distortion. But at the same time the sheer size of the porch reasserts the primacy of the centre and thus fixes the house in the Palladian tradition. In this sense the Marlborough House elevation is more radical, for by reducing the porch to a bare minimum Adam left a void where one might have expected a clear point of emphasis.⁷⁹ It may, once

again, have been a question of cost, but this does not change the fact that what Adam provided has a sureness about it, a rightness that betrays the hand of a talented designer. And Hamilton, from the little we know of him, seems to have been concerned with appearances. He took care to secure extra land as an encroachment on the Steine, rail it off, and then lay it out as a Reptonian landscape in miniature. There can be no doubt that Hamilton went to Adam to get something with style, something different from anything Brighton had so far seen. It should then come as no surprise that the Prince of Wales, that avatar of style, chose to stay at Marlborough House not once but twice, and on the second occasion for three weeks after his marriage to Caroline of Brunswick in 1795.⁸⁰

THE LATER HISTORY OF MARLBOROUGH HOUSE

Hamilton died in the following year, 1796, four years after his architect. The property was sold at auction on 10 September by Messrs Skinner and Dyke in three lots. The sale particulars mention stabling for six horses, suitable servants' chambers and numerous domestic offices. All the lots together fetched 4000 guineas but the name of the purchaser was not made public. It subsequently emerged that there was a mortgage of £7575 upon the house to David Pitcairn. That was settled by 1801, when Lady Anne Murray purchased the property. She was said to have run a popular and fashionable establishment in season. When she died in 1818, aged 90, the house passed to her niece, Lady Elizabeth Mary Finch Hatton, who sold it to Thomas Harrington, Esq., for £9500. The plan already referred to (Colour plate 2) was made at this time. Harrington lived in it, with occasional intervals, until his death in 1843, when his widow, Martha, purchased it (she did not inherit because of a trust arrangement) for £6900.

In 1849 she bequeathed it to her nephew, Charles George Taylor, a leading Sussex cricketer, who died suddenly in 1869. Taylor had let the property from 1850 to 1863 to one Captain Charles Thelluson, the grandson of Peter Thelluson, whose eccentric will has earned him a place in British legal history and resulted in the Thelluson Act. When the difficulties of the bequest (which gave Dickens the idea for *Bleak House*) were resolved, Charles commissioned Brodsworth Hall (completed in 1863) from an Italian architect. In January 1868 Mr Taylor

sold the Brighton property to Francis Henry Beidenbach, a perfumer in Bond Street, for £9500, and he and his family were the last private residents. In the second half of the 1870s the property was purchased by John Beal, a well-known stationer of East Street, who used the basement rooms for storage. Between 1876 and 1879 he entered into an agreement with the Brighton School Board, which let the ground and upper floors as offices. The School Board purchased the house outright on 29 September 1891 for £7000, which is how, ultimately, the property came into the ownership of the local authority.⁸¹ The education offices of the Borough were located here until 1974, when the county assumed control of this function. From then until the early 1990s Marlborough House was home to the Tourism and Resort Services Department of Brighton Borough Council, housing, for a time, the town's main tourist

information centre.⁸² The creation of the new Brighton & Hove Council made it redundant. At the time of writing (May 1998) it sits empty.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to several people for commenting on an early draft of this article and for helping with the research. Stephen Astley at the Soane Museum was generous as ever. I have also to thank Henry Smith, John Farrant, David Beevers, and Andrew Barlow, but I owe the largest debt to Christopher Whittick at the East Sussex Record Office for working through the Donoughmore Papers at Trinity College, Dublin, as well as various documents at the ESRO. Any errors in this article are, however, entirely my own. This research grew from a research project carried out under the auspices of English Heritage.

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APPENDIX:
TEXT OF LETTER FROM WILLIAM
HAMILTON TO ROBERT ADAM,
16 JANUARY 1787

Private Collection:

Jany. 16–87. Brighton

Dear Sir

I trouble you today with a very short Letter, because I hope we shall meet very soon and very often, and discuss various matters frequently over a good Soupe. I have given directions that your Plans should in ev'ry respect be followed minutely, and that there might be no delay whatsoever. But if a Door or two could be dispensed with in the Hall I own I should be pleas'd. I am sensible that no door can be taken away without some Inconvenience. But warmth and Comfort are the principal Objects, and Elegance tho' a desirable, is only a secondary one. I sometimes think that the Door from the Hall to the Back Parlour might be parted with. At others that the Recess part of the Dining Room instead of being Circular might be made strait, and that in that Case the Door in the Centre of the Dining Parlour might be shut up, and the entrance in to it be made rather at the side, exactly opposite to the Door through which you go out of the Hall in to the Dining Room. I own I am not pleased with my own thoughts, and

therefore I beg you would think for me. I can't forebear saying how exceedingly I am pleased with the additions of the Bread[th] at each extremity of the House; it gives a Character and an expression which the great length of the House much wanted, and which it has got very advantageously.

I have been detain'd here much longer than I intended by an opposition from some of the Inhabitants to my taking in more Ground towards the Steine, and on each side of my House. There was a very numerous meeting of them last Night. Two Questions were proposed, first, that my taking in 100 feet of Ground to which I had no Right, was an Encroachment. But this was determined in the Negative by a large Majority.

2^{ndly} that my blocking up the Coach way to Philcox's [to the north — the future site of Mrs. Fitzherbert's Steine House] was a Nuisance. But Philcox was the only person in the Room of that opinion. What would Mr. Pitt give for such a Parliament! To this Ld Mansfield would probably answer, nothing, for that he already had such a one. Stiles [?] I was told was exceedingly Eloquent. Amongst the many obligations I have confer'd on Brighthelmstone He considered it a principal one that I had brought one of the first Architects in the world to ornament their Fishing Town.

Yrs most Sincerely

WGH

NOTES

- ¹ D. Beevers, 'A rare watercolour by John Donowell at Preston Manor', *The Royal Pavilion Libraries and Museums Review*, April 1997, 6–7.
- ² No other rate-books from this period survive. Brighton Central Reference Library, SB.352.1. There is a rate-book covering the period 1744–61: East Sussex Record Office (hereafter ESRO), AMS 5889.
- ³ A transcription of this letter in a private collection is given in the Appendix to this article.
- ⁴ J. & S. Farrant, *Brighton before Dr Russell*, University of Sussex Centre for Continuing Education Occasional Papers **5** (1976), 2–3, 8 *et passim*. See also J. & S. Farrant (eds), *Aspects of Brighton, 1650–1800*. University of Sussex Centre for Continuing Education Occasional Papers **8** (1978), 3–6 and 'Brighton, 1580–1820: from Tudor town to Regency resort', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* **118** (1980), 331–50.
- ⁵ I. Nairn & N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Sussex* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 426.
- ⁶ *Brighton before Dr Russell*, 16–19, 21–2.
- ⁷ P. Dunvan, *Ancient and Modern: History of Lewes and Brighthelmstone* (Lewes: W. Lee, 1795), 526.
- ⁸ J. Bruce, *History of Brighton and Stranger's Guide* (Brighton: J. Bruce, 1827), 25.
- ⁹ T. Carder, *The Encyclopedia of Brighton* (Lewes: East Sussex County Libraries, 1990), no. 164.
- ¹⁰ A. Dale, *The History and Architecture of Brighton* (Brighton: Bredon and Heginbotham, 1950), 18–19.
- ¹¹ J. & S. Farrant, *Aspects*, 7, 47–8. See also S. Farrant, *Georgian Brighton, 1740–1820*. University of Sussex Centre for Continuing Education Occasional Papers **13** (1980).
- ¹² *Aspects*, 8–9, 32–3, 47–8.
- ¹³ *A Short History of Brighthelmstone . . .* (London: W. Johnston, 1761), 15.
- ¹⁴ The following is taken from *Aspects*, 45–55, except where otherwise indicated.
- ¹⁵ The only known building accounts for this period are for Dr Poole's House in East Street. ESRO, HOOK 23/1/13.
- ¹⁶ *Aspects*, 8–9, 35–6, 44–53.
- ¹⁷ Carder, no. 89.
- ¹⁸ They are listed grade II*. Carder, no. 113.
- ¹⁹ Born in Sussex, Cruden was by this date surveyor to the vestries of St Mary Paddington, St Pancras, and St Luke's Chelsea. For a description of the ballroom see J. A. Erredge, *History of Brighthelmstone . . .* (London: John Murray, 1862), 190. The Inn was demolished in 1823 and Cruden's rooms converted into a Royal Chapel. In 1850 it was moved to a new building in Montpelier Place. It survives as St Stephen's Chapel and is listed grade II*. Dunvan, 528, and Carder, no. 31.
- ²⁰ J. Farrant, 'Passenger travel between Sussex and France in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', *Sussex History* **1**(10) (1980), 8–13.
- ²¹ *Aspects*, 8, and S. Farrant, 'The development of coaching services from Brighton to London, c. 1750–1822', *Sussex Genealogist and Local Historian* **7** (1986), 85–92.
- ²² Dale, 34.
- ²³ J. & J. Ford, *Images of Brighton. Gallery of Prints* (Richmond-upon-Thames: St Helena Press, 1981), nos 336, 337.
- ²⁴ J. G. Bishop, 'A Peep into the Past': *Brighton in Olden Time* (Brighton: *The Brighton Herald*, 1892), 152–3.
- ²⁵ M. Hunter, 'The first seaside house?', *Georgian Group Journal* **8** (1998), 135–42.
- ²⁶ Carder, no. 183a.
- ²⁷ ESRO, SAS/BRI 58, p. 246. A notice in the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser and Lewes Journal* for 9 September 1771 mentions the house: 'We are well informed that his Grace the Duke of Marlborough has bought the large house at Brighthelmstone, built by Mr. Samuel Shergold about two years since'.
- ²⁸ Carder, no. 114k. On the scarcity of quality accommodation see ESRO, SAS/HA 310, 29 May 1763, 11 February, 9 April, and 23 July 1764.
- ²⁹ Manor of Brighton court-books: ESRO, SAS/BRI 52–60 (Sparrow moiety), ACC 4786 (Kemp moiety); the waste was held in common, and identical entries made in each set of books.
- ³⁰ ESRO, SAS/BRI 58, p. 170, 304–5 (site of mansion); ESRO SAS/BRI 58 pp. 349–50 (butcher's shop and slaughterhouse); ESRO, ACC 4786/4 pp. 111, 206–7, ACC 4786/5 p. 127 (cottage); for Shergold's activity in the land-market in the previous decade see *Aspects*, 35.
- ³¹ Bishop, 161.
- ³² *Lewes Journal* as quoted in D. Beevers, 'A brief history of Marlborough House', 1994.
- ³³ Beevers.
- ³⁴ Dunvan, 527, and Bruce, 25.
- ³⁵ Bruce, 14. Coal was still being sold on the Steine in the 1820s. R. Sicklemore, *History of Brighton and Its Environs* (Brighton, 5th ed., 1827), 32.
- ³⁶ J. Dinkel, *The Royal Pavilion at Brighton* (London: Philip Wilson, 1983), 19–23.
- ³⁷ For Hamilton see L. Namier & J. Brooke, *History of Parliament: the House of Commons, 1754–1790* (London: HMSO, 1964) **2**, 572–4, and the DNB. Boyle's *Court Guide* for 1792 and 1796 give 27 Upper Brook Street as his town address.
- ³⁸ In 1762 and 1763 he writes from the Privy Garden at Hampton Court, suggesting he had an apartment there, in September 1763 from an unspecified house in St James' Street, and in 1772 from another in Arlington Street. Trinity College, Dublin, Donoughmore Papers, C/17, C/112.
- ³⁹ Donoughmore Papers, C 1/7, 9 August 1762, and C 2/112, 5 August 1783.
- ⁴⁰ According to his obituary notice in *Gentleman's Magazine* **66** (1796) pt ii, 702–3: 'He was usually denominated Single-speech Hamilton; of which he was put in mind by Mr Bruce, when, on an insinuation of Mr Hamilton's, that it was highly improbable any man should make such fine drawings as Mr Bruce exhibited for his own, without ever having been known to excel in design, Mr Bruce said, "Pray, Sir, did you not once make a famous speech in the House of Commons?" "Yes, I did." "And pray, Sir, did you ever make another?" "No, I did not."'
- ⁴¹ R. G. Thorne, *History of Parliament: the House of Commons, 1790–1820* (London: HMSO, 1972) **4**, 138–9.
- ⁴² British Library, Add. MS. 33,100, f. 346.
- ⁴³ Donoughmore Papers, C2/112.
- ⁴⁴ Donoughmore Papers, C 2/170.
- ⁴⁵ Donoughmore Papers, C 2/172, 22 January 1787.
- ⁴⁶ ESRO, ACC 4786/5, pp. 134–5; SAS/BRI 59, pp. 238–41.

- ⁴⁷ This was determined by a thorough site inspection conducted by the author in 1997.
- ⁴⁸ A. Rowan, 'Sunnyside and Rosebank — suburban villas by the Adam Brothers', *AA Files* 4 (1983), 31–9, at 31.
- ⁴⁹ Library, Sir John Soane's Museum (hereafter Soane), Adam 42 (39), 14 (89), and 23 (173) respectively.
- ⁵⁰ Soane, Adam 42 (40).
- ⁵¹ Soane, Adam 53 (40, 41).
- ⁵² Rowan, 1983, 33–8.
- ⁵³ Soane, Adam 17 (211).
- ⁵⁴ Soane, Adam 14, 6 (116, 118) and 7 (225) respectively.
- ⁵⁵ Supplement to *The Architects' Journal*, 4 February 1931.
- ⁵⁶ As quoted in Beevers, 'A Brief History'.
- ⁵⁷ Bishop, 161–2.
- ⁵⁸ *Ex inf.* Peter Hood, August 1997. Mr Hood is currently preparing a study of stuccos in Brighton and Hove for the Council.
- ⁵⁹ F. Kelsall, 'Liardet versus Adam', *Architectural History* 27 (1984), 118–26. For the surviving cement-faced house in Conduit Street, Westminster (Higgins's patent cement, licensed to James Wyatt), see A. Saint, WM 822, Historical Analysis and Research Team, English Heritage, former London Region Historian's files of the Greater London Council.
- ⁶⁰ Soane, Marlborough House clippings file.
- ⁶¹ D. Stroud, *Henry Holland: His Life and Architecture* (London: Country Life, 1966), 87–9, and Dinkel, 19–23.
- ⁶² Donoughmore Papers, C 2/181, 20 August 1787.
- ⁶³ As quoted in Namier and Brooke 2, 574.
- ⁶⁴ First published by Country Life in London, it was reprinted in 1984.
- ⁶⁵ Soane, Adam 30/21–4, and 26–9; redrawn and republished by Bolton 2, 181–91.
- ⁶⁶ A. Rowan, *Designs for Castles and Country Villas by Robert and James Adam* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1985), introduction.
- ⁶⁷ Bolton 2, 181, 183–91.
- ⁶⁸ Bolton probably consulted W. H. Wilkins, *Mrs Fitzherbert and George IV*, 2 vols. (London & New York: Longmans, 1905), 1, 99, 161, 166–7, 169–74, 217, 229.
- ⁶⁹ A. Aspinall (ed.), *The Later Correspondence of George III*, 5 vols. (Cambridge: University Press, 1962) 1, nos 110, 113, 161, 181, 192, 289, 294, 300, 310, 340. See also A. Aspinall (ed.), *Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales, 1770–1812*, 5 vols. (London: John Murray, 1963) 1, nos 222, 225, 228, 231.
- ⁷⁰ Wilkins 1, 169. See also J. Richardson, *George IV: a Portrait* (London: Sedgwick & Jackson, 1966), 35–40, 47.
- ⁷¹ Stroud, 68–9.
- ⁷² According to Colvin this remodelling is mentioned in *The World* for 17 October and 30 November 1787. See H. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1600–1840*, 3rd ed. (London & New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 504. The house is described in *The Survey of London* 29, *The Parish of Saint James's Westminster* (London: London County Council and the Athlone Press, 1960), 349. The attribution of the exterior to the Adams comes from Paine's own *Plans, Elevations, and Sections of Noblemen and Gentlemen's Houses of 1783* 2, 28.
- ⁷³ ESRO, W/A 65.197, and dated 1 July 1783.
- ⁷⁴ Soane, Adam, 30 (23, 25, 26).
- ⁷⁵ Soane, Adam 30 (26).
- ⁷⁶ Rowan, 1985, 12–17.
- ⁷⁷ Rowan, 1983, 31–9, and D. King, *The Complete Works of Robert and James Adam* (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1991), 106, 135–7.
- ⁷⁸ Rowan, 1983, 37.
- ⁷⁹ Adam's Woolton Hall (1774–80), Liverpool, shows some similarities with the principal elevation of Marlborough House as well.
- ⁸⁰ Carder, no. 114j.
- ⁸¹ Bishop, 163–4.
- ⁸² Carder, no. 114k.