

## V.—THE WORK OF ROBERT ADAM IN NORTHUMBERLAND

BY W. RYLE ELLIOT.

At the present time there is much unnecessary talk of "Good Taste", "The Georgian Era" and of the perfection of the "Age of Adam". What "good taste" is, is a matter for conjecture. The social and political development of centuries sweeps away with it the culture and good taste of a previous age. Although it is difficult to determine just where one era ends and another begins, there is ever a constant transition, a casting off the old, and in time an adoption of the old to suit the new. At the commencement of the eighteenth century, life continued much as it had done during the past fifty years. There were innovations in all branches of art, music and architecture, but in general there was slowness to adopt the new forms. Money was certainly beginning to circulate more freely, and vast fortunes were yet to be made.

In Northumberland and the North, people were even more conservative, for them the period of turmoil and stress lay not so far behind, and there were still doubts and suspicions. Structural changes were slow; possibly because the great landowners in the north also possessed vast estates nearer the court, when they were already rebuilding their houses in the new mode, and their more northern territories were apt to be neglected.

The Scots, on the other hand, having been isolated for so long, had rushed southwards in force after the union of the crowns, returning full of enthusiasm, their wits sharpened, their manners vastly improved, to live a new life in the latest fashion. Their estates were modernized, and the old

houses pulled down and replaced by more elegant structures designed by the most fashionable architects.

It was not until the mid-eighteenth century that the English landed gentry began to trek northwards to re-model and rebuild their decaying and often derelict properties. At this period there was an awareness that the north was neither bleak nor grim, that the possibilities of developing and beautifying were great. Above all, there was a further opportunity of lavishing their ever increasing wealth, in the "good taste" already established in the south.

In Scotland things were progressing far in advance of northern England, the returning Scots were filled with the delights of the civilized south. William Adam was already a successful architect and builder in Edinburgh—an assistant to Sir William Bruce. Not only was he a successful architect but, more important, a successful and established business man. His sons, therefore, began life with every monetary and social advantage. Of his four sons Robert proved to be the most famous, and the best remembered. One must not forget, however, that his success was largely due to the perseverance and good sense of his three brothers; a fact which is not now fully appreciated.

Little is recorded of Robert Adam's early days. He was a school fellow at Kirkcaldy of Adam Smith, of subsequent *Wealth of Nations* fame. At an early age he showed his artistic prowess, and in the Soane Museum there is a sketch by him dated 1744, when he was sixteen years of age. It depicts a tower and bridge with a river, trees, and cattle in the foreground. Delightfully drawn, in it one can see traces of a certain type of work executed by him at a later date like the roof and crenellations at Fowberry Tower.

Like many wealthy young men of his time, he was sent abroad on the Grand Tour. This journey started early in 1754; whilst travelling through France he had the good fortune to meet, and to form a friendship with, Charles-Louis Clerisseau, an architect and engraver, the publisher of *Antiquities de France* and the more important work,

*Monuments de Nimes.* Clerisseau was some years older than Robert Adam, and it has been suggested by many people that he was Adam's tutor. This was not so, they were merely good friends, but Robert Adam was not insensible to the skill and draughtsmanship of his companion. On his return to England he was accompanied by Clerisseau, when the latter produced his famous *Ruins of Spalatro* drawings. Possibly this was the first classical influence on Robert Adam. Journeying slowly through Italy, he had the good fortune to meet Giambattista Piranesi, one of the best and most famous draughtsmen and engravers of architecture and ancient ruins of his time—referred to repeatedly as the “Rembrandt of Architecture”. Piranesi's most remembered, and possibly greatest, work is a two-volumed edition published in 1778. *Vasi, Candalebri, Cippi, Sarcofagi, Tripodi, Lucerne, ed Ornamenti Antichi.*

It is easily seen on studying the works of both Clerisseau and Piranesi the great influence that these two people had on Robert Adam. To them I think we owe entirely the style that was adopted by Adam. A young Scot, eager to learn, and receptive of new ideas, could scarcely help but be impressed by the ideas and works of these already well-known men. Ruins and Classicisms were the fashion, so ruins and classicism it should be. The *Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian* was not the cradle of the Adam theme, but rather the friendship and influence of Charles-Louis Clerisseau and Giambattista Piranesi.

The Grand Tour was gradually completed. In Edinburgh the work of the firm of William Adam and Sons was in full swing, and Robert returned to his family to begin work in earnest.

It is a lamentable fact that amongst all the notable achievements of this celebrated architect so little was built, and so little remains, in Northumberland. A few miles away on the other side of the Border, there is still much to be seen: Mellerstain, Paxton, the interior of Wedderburn Castle, and until recently Smeaton Heburn. These are

only a few, for dotted all over Scotland are fine examples of his buildings. Even more regrettable is the fact that what he did achieve in Northumberland was ruthlessly destroyed during the nineteenth century. Certainly there were never any houses to compare with the glories of Syon, of Osterley Park, or of Hume House in London, but what he did design was, in spite of general controversy, extremely beautiful and suitable to the natural surroundings of the northern countryside.

About 1760 there were designs for the interior of FORD CASTLE. Little is known of these save that they were in the revived Gothic style. Nothing remains of this interior work, it was destroyed when the castle was inherited and modernized by the Waterford family. What Louisa, Marchioness of Waterford, with all her artistic perception, could have been thinking about, one can only wonder.

The most important work of Robert Adam in Northumberland was, of course, ALNWICK CASTLE. This was commissioned by the first Duke of Northumberland about 1755. The date is a little uncertain, but he commenced to "re-organize his estates" in 1750. The castle was then more or less a ruin, and judging by Canaletto's painting of it in 1757 it was still in a deplorably ruinous condition.

When the work was commenced the towers facing the keep were rebuilt and united with one another by curtain walls and passages. The old banqueting hall remained the dining-room, and the ancient kitchens were turned into a state drawing-room. Private apartments for the Duke and Duchess were built at the southern side of the keep, whilst the western side was converted into state bedrooms.

The main entrance to the keep was on the north-western side of the inner ward, this led through a hall, to a fan-shaped staircase ascending to an upper hall and a suite of state reception rooms. The ground floor consisted mainly of servants' quarters, but an oval staircase at the south-west corner of the inner ward led to the private apartments of the Duke and Duchess.

The buildings within the inner and outer baileys were removed in 1755, and the ruinous curtain walls and towers were restored. A small building south of the barbican was rebuilt, and is now called the tower. The tower at the corner of the southern and western sides of the outer bailey was pulled down and replaced by the present clock tower.

The castle must have been completed round about 1764-1765. In a bottle found in the walls a note carries this wording, "The Castle was built by Mathew and Thomas Mills, Master Masons. In the year 1764."

These Mills brothers must have been diligent and successful builders at this period. They built many houses in Northumberland. Belford—the "James Paine town"—was built by the same firm.

Of the interior decoration of the castle much has been said and, in general, dismissed as sham, shoddy and trivial. It was certainly not in the familiar Adam tradition—but when one takes into account that the Duke was already involved in a "higher Classicism" at Syon, it is only natural that the decoration of Alnwick should be different. Executed in the then fashionable "High Gothic" manner, it must have been a thing of romantic beauty. Why people should condemn this Gothic style I do not know. It was a revival of a bygone age, and surely no more vulgar than the revival of the Classical manner; certainly no more vulgar than the faithful following of the "Georgian style" at the present day. The eighteenth-century Gothic revival had lightness, grace, colour, and though I hate to use such a word, "movement".

At Alnwick were all these things. From contemporary writers the fan-shaped staircase was one of the finest in England, the design being repeated across the ceiling and cornices. Sketches in the Soane Museum Collection show a great deal of lightness, and certainly no sense of the bizarre, although to our modern eye perhaps a trifle over ornamented. When one realizes, however, that it was delicate plaster work, and not heavy stone or woodwork, it is easy

to picture the great charm of the rooms. There is a drawing of the Grand Salon by Charlotte Florentia Duchess of Northumberland, which possibly portrays better than any diagrams just what it appeared after completion. The style of decoration is said to be the wish of the first Duchess and not of the Duke. She is reputed to have been a lady of flamboyant taste and manners, yet in *Diaries of a Duchess* there is little to bear this out. A bold and indefatigable traveller, full of resource and charm, she has so little to say of either Alnwick or Syon that the charge of ostentation can hardly be laid at her door.

In a "Design for a Gateway" (plate III, fig. 2) the general style and effect can be readily seen. There is nothing overdone and it is possibly one of the most charming of Robert Adam's Gothic designs.

The Lion Bridge still stands and can be seen by all. One is often asked "Where is the other lion?" There is only one Percy Lion—but had another been placed the effect from most angles would have been confusing and the purity of line would have been lost.

Inside the castle there are still to be found original chimney pieces. In the stewards' hall, now part of the ladies' college, is a beautifully executed piece carved in stone with restrained Gothic decoration. Smaller ones, also in stone, are to be found in some of the students' bedrooms. These are unique in their delicacy of design, the more so being carved in stone.

Perhaps the most notable is the chimney piece (plate III, fig. 1) removed from the drawing-room and now in the house-keeper's room. Of the many Adam chimney pieces I have seen throughout the country, this for delicacy and restraint in decoration is one of the loveliest. It is carried out in statuary marble, inlaid with yellow convent sienna marble.

There is still a great deal of the original furniture designed by Robert Adam, and executed by Chippendale, in the castle. The finest pieces are connected with the first Duke. Robert Adam speaks of "his extensive knowledge and correct taste in architecture", and who "brought classic

example and modern needs to a natural consistency, a constant encourager of literature, and the polite Arts". In a manuscript survey in 1785 there are described "Two elegant card tables, of inlaid woods lined with green cloth, the ornaments, of ormolu. Elegant Pembroke tables of inlaid wood with ormolu enrichments." Two of these tables still remain, one has a top veneered with satinwood and inlaid. The *guttae* beneath the frieze are of brass, another is similar, but has a folding top instead of Pembroke-end flaps.

In the red drawing-room is a magnificent suite of furniture, upholstered in crimson damask. This suite consists of a sofa, ten armchairs, and four stools. The tapered cylindrical legs are spirally fluted and the frames are richly carved with a foliate scroll and leaves. This suite of furniture compares favourably with a similar suite at Kedleston. It is more restrained in design, and less overpowering in size. Most of Chippendale's furniture was of mahogany enriched with gilding or ormolu, which showed to advantage the colour and beautiful figuring of the wood. Much, however, was completely painted or gilded, especially the frames of settees and chairs, torcheres and pedestals. The severeness of the lines of Robert Adam's designs called for the general enlivenment of gilt and painted decoration. The excellency of the construction of Chippendale's furniture is beyond doubt—to have had the experience of taking to pieces and reassembling a gilt chair designed by Robert Adam and made by Thomas Chippendale convinces one of the unseen craftsmanship, equally important as the carved and gilt exterior.

Possibly the most important pieces of Adam's design in the north are a pair of gilt pedestals (plate IV, fig. 2). The designs for these are in the Soane Museum, and are dated 1776. These in all probability stood on either side of the drawing-room chimney piece. They are triangular in form, faced on the upper angles by rams' heads. The lower angles are supported by *monopodia*, which rest on a platform supported by three sphynxes, which rest on a triangular plinth.

Two other pieces of great interest are the chair and reading desk (plate IV, figs. 1 and 3) designed for the chapel. These are in the Gothic style, or as Peter Waddels described it, as the "Antique Gothic form". They are painted white and have gold enrichments. There is also a writing table with baize-covered top, the frieze and tablet inlaid with the Vitruvian scroll, and with crossed palm branches. The legs are of rosewood, mounted with festoons of husks in gilt brass. Another mahogany table has a frieze inlaid with the Athenium, the squares above the legs and the upper portion of the legs mounted with a pattern of gilt brass and festoons of husks. This is dated 1775.

In Peter Waddels' description of Alnwick 1785 he notes that in the library "a small billiard table, for the entertainment of those who may wish to relax from the more serious studies to which it is peculiarly adapted". This table, though no longer in the library, is still within the castle.

We cannot but be grateful that these treasures still remain with us in Northumberland and, though few in number, compare favourably with anything elsewhere.

An enormous sum of money was spent on the rebuilding and embellishment of Alnwick Castle, a sum which amounted to between £70,000 and £80,000. Yet the greater portion of this work of art was to be destroyed in less than a hundred years when the Fourth Duke Algernon directed Signors Salvin and Canina to redecorate the interior in 1854. There are in existence many contemporary prints and engravings of the exterior of the castle, after the 1760 restoration. Most notable are:

" Alnwick Castle "	S. C. Godfrey	engraved	Blyth 1776
" "	William Hall	"	James Kerr
" "	Turner	"	Willmore
" "	Neale	"	Radcliffe
" "	"	"	Rode
" "	S. Hooper	dated	1776

and many others.

Before leaving Alnwick a word must be said of the tea house or gazebo on Ratcheugh Crags. This sham ruin is built from an Adam design, and save for the re-glazing of the windows and new window sashes is comparatively unspoilt. It is typical of its period, and still contains a rather beautiful cornice of fan tracing in plaster-work.

There are in Alnwick town itself several houses, built at the same time as the castle. Whilst we cannot say they are the work of Robert Adam, they are no doubt modifications of the "Adam plan". The builders of the eighteenth century were ever ready to copy and adapt from the plan of the architect engaged in building the "Great House".

#### SHAWDON HALL.

Perhaps the most typically "Adam" of all Northumbrian country houses, it was built in his later and grander style. The ceilings and chimney pieces are of great beauty. Except for additions, it has survived in a remarkable manner. Unfortunately, owing to the illness and death of Mr. Bevan, I have not been able to do much practical work at this house, but hope to make a complete survey of it at a later date.

#### FOWBERRY TOWER.

There is a great deal of controversy about this house. Its reconstruction during the second half of the eighteenth century has been ascribed to numerous architects. To Wyatt, Paine or Carr, and ludicrously enough said to have been a minor folly of Vanburgh himself, the latter is possibly a legend growing round the family connection between the Blakes and the Delavals. However, there are little visible signs of the work or designs of any of these men.

I myself consider it to be, save for the refacing of the south front and minor alterations, one of the most unspoilt smaller country houses in Northumberland. By careful comparison with the greater and lesser works of Robert Adam throughout England and Scotland, it would seem

that his hand had something to do with its construction. Possibly during the building of Alnwick and Shawdon Hall Robert Adam would certainly meet the Blakes, and no doubt occasionally passed through Chatton. It is more than likely that his advice would be asked and his designs and sketches used.

Internally it has many features, though naturally on a more modest scale, similar to Mellerstain in Berwickshire and to Culzean Castle in Ayrshire. The whole style of decoration, and plan, seems to be Adam.

Most of the interior is in a delightful Gothic style—the door frames and the doors themselves being particularly fine—these are similar to many at Culzean Castle. The entrance hall, library and boudoir are simple and restrained, with little or no decoration save for a Greek motif cornice, in the two last-mentioned rooms. Both these rooms are identical with the upper chambers in the houses on the north side of Charlotte Square, Edinburgh (1791).

There is a central corridor through the entire building which at one time terminated in side entrances, these having been re-modelled at a later date. Near the east end of the corridor in a recess is the main staircase, extremely unpretentious, but with a beautiful and elaborate plaster cornice and ceiling, the fan design as at Alnwick and shown in the Soane Museum Collection of sketches and diagrams. The upper corridor corresponds with that below, and the rooms on this floor have the same restraint and simplicity of style. In one of the bedrooms is a finely carved chimney piece in stone, contemporary in date and design to those mentioned in the bedrooms at Alnwick Castle.

On the north side of the lower corridor are the two principal rooms, a dining-room and a salon. The dining-room is in perfect proportion and has a fine chimney piece, simple in design and decoration, of red, and probably beneath its paintwork, white statuary marble. The cornice mouldings are delicate, Grecian in design, but contain the "bird" motif, from the crest of the Blake family. Unfor-

tunately the full beauty of the room is somewhat obscured by the dark paintwork of a later day. Over the pointed three-light window is a contemporary gilt pelmet of Gothic form. At the south end of the room are two pillars supporting the upper floor. Originally the corridor was here, but the wall was removed and replaced by pillars, thus enlarging the room and making it possible to have recesses for a side table and a service lift from the vaulted kitchen beneath.

The salon is, without doubt, the most elaborate room in the house; both it and the dining-room are extremely lofty and occupy the space of two floors. It is perfectly proportioned. The pointed, three-light window is recessed, and the massive pelmet in gilt is similar to that in the dining-room. On the opposite wall is a doubtless Robert Adam chimney piece worked in white statuary marble with sienna marble enrichments, the delicately carved entablature depicts the worshipping of the goddess Pomona. Possibly this is the work of Joseph Wilton. On either side are doors leading to the corridor, both are Gothic, and have architraves painted white and enriched with gilding, the design is taken from the famous doorway of the "House of Tristan L'Hermite" at Tours; no doubt visited by Robert Adam in his journey through France. The cornice is in a fairly bold style, as is the ceiling, and similiar to one at Mellerstain. The whole effect of the room is of great beauty, the proportions, the decorations and the immense amount of light, make it one of the most charming rooms in the north country.

The exterior of the building is extremely interesting, especially the north elevation. The south front has been re-faced. On the north there is much more of the Scottish feeling of Adam, and it has certain features adapted from his designs for "The Oakes" in Surrey. The masonry is slightly rusticated, and the lower portion has the same constructional theme as is seen at Edinburgh University, a fact which should not be overlooked. The pointed Gothic



FIG. 2. ARCHWAY DESIGNED FOR ALNWICK CASTLE BY ROBERT ADAM.



FIG. 1. FIREPLACE DESIGNED FOR ALNWICK CASTLE BY ROBERT ADAM.

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FIG. 1.

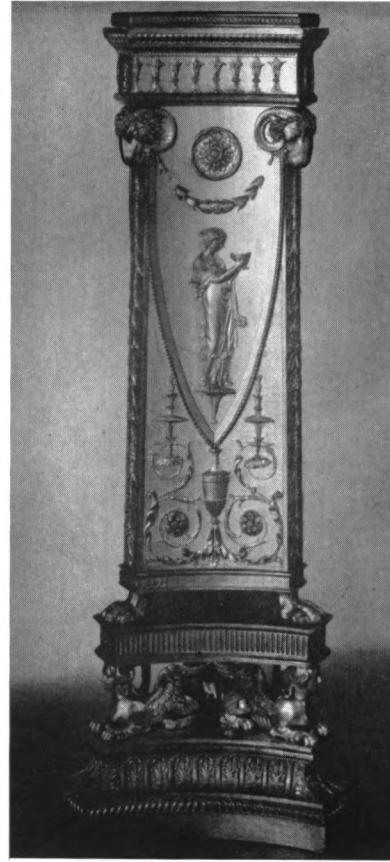


FIG. 2.

CHAIR, PEDESTAL AND READING DESK AT ALNWICK CASTLE DESIGNED BY ROBERT ADAM.

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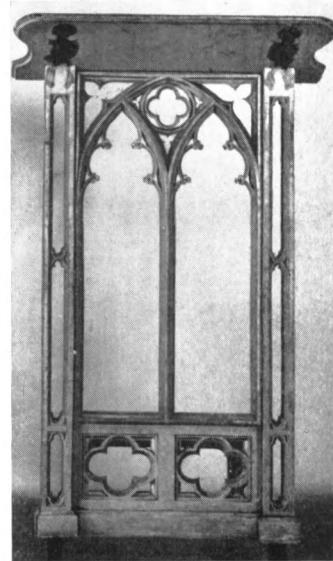


FIG. 3.





FOWBERRY TOWER—NORTH FRONT.

From photograph by W. F. T. Pinkney.



windows are unusual in their size, but form a perfectly symmetrical plan.

There is a decorated string course running along the upper portion of this north front, similar to that at Culzean Castle, and in the sketch for "The Oakes", as well as being almost identical with that shown in a sketch drawn by Robert Adam in 1744. The whole is surmounted with a battlemented parapet, corresponding with the parapets of Mellerstain and Culzean.

Because of the many similarities, one feels that here at Fowberry, Robert Adam at least had a hand in its design, and one can only hope that future generations will not attempt to destroy any feature of this unusually beautiful and decorative house.

I am greatly indebted to the Duke of Northumberland, the late Earl of Home, Mr. and Mrs. Milburn of Fowberry Tower and the late Mr. Bevan of Shawdon Hall. Also to the editor of *Country Life* for permission to reproduce the photographs of Adam treasures at Alnwick, and to Mr. W. F. T. Pinkney for photograph of Fowberry Tower.