

**HOUGHTON, RAYNHAM AND WOLTERTON HALLS
ON THOMAS RIPLEY'S MAJOR WORKS IN NORFOLK — ARCHITECTURAL
SUCCESS AMIDST POLITICAL TENSIONS**

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SUMMARY

The reputation of the architect Thomas Ripley (1682–1758) was not high amongst his contemporaries, and architectural history has neglected the work of this shadowy Neo-Palladian architect. A protégé of England's most powerful politician of the time, Sir Robert Walpole, Ripley's most important building activities were on the Walpoles' country seats in Norfolk at Houghton and Wolterton in the 1720s and 1730s. For Sir Robert's brother-in-law, Viscount Townshend of Raynham, Ripley directed major alterations to his stately home at Raynham Hall after 1725. To Ripley's disadvantage, the relationship between Townshend, Sir Robert and Horatio Walpole of Wolterton, was overshadowed by severe private and political tensions.

Ripley's work on country seats in Norfolk is still underestimated and deserves greater recognition. This article will focus on the complicated and challenging working relationships between Ripley and his clients and colleagues. It considers his artistic contribution to all three buildings as well as the political antipathies and tensions between the three owners, which sometimes caused an uneasy atmosphere even on the building sites themselves. Scrutiny of Ripley's work in Norfolk reveals a man whose greatest strength was his effective management of large projects, as at Houghton and Raynham. At Wolterton, however, he produced a building of controlled austerity which demonstrated how convenience and dignity could be achieved in a smaller house through astute planning — a scheme that anticipated the plans of famous architects as Isaac Ware, Roger Morris and William Chambers, men synonymous with the 'villa revival' of the 1750s.

Introduction

According to a Walpole family tradition, when Wolterton Hall was completed in 1741 Alexander Pope presented Horatio Walpole, the builder of the house, with his portrait and a complete edition of his published works. No doubt Walpole appreciated the irony of the gift for the volumes were scattered with Pope's stinging rhymes upon Thomas Ripley, the architect of his new country seat.

Heaven visits with a taste the wealthy fool,
And needs no rod but Ripley with a rule.
(*Epistle to the Earl of Burlington*, 17–18, 1731)

Who builds a bridge that never drove a pile?
(Should Ripley venture, all the world would smile).
(*Imitations of Horace*, Bk. II. Ep. 1, II. 185–6 (1737))¹

In the history of architecture Thomas Ripley (1682–1758) is an antihero. His name has been stigmatised and defamed and is hardly ever mentioned without reference to Pope's satirical verses. Although certainly not unrecognised in the field of English Neo-Palladian studies, his reputation has from the outset been reviled. Ripley has almost been treated as a *persona non*

grata. Apart from the scant references to his work for the Office of the King's Works² and his involvement in various building activities in connection with the Walpole family, only recently has a detailed architectural study of his work been written.³ But the disdain first found in the statements of the young Ripley's contemporaries has held a powerful influence to the present day. The political power play and relationships which dominated public discourse in the early 18th century have continued to be the stuff of today's architectural criticism. In a period when good and evil, and envy and resentment, were potent factors Thomas Ripley found himself slandered by the favourites of the bright star of society: Lord Burlington, 'the arbiter of taste' and the most important patron of the arts. Ripley had particularly annoyed the Burlington circle when in 1726, through the influence of Sir Robert Walpole, he succeeded Sir John Vanbrugh in the post of Comptroller of the King's Works. Also in 1726, poor William Kent, the famous protégé of Lord Burlington — who was still finding his feet as an architectural decorator and was not yet claiming to be an architect — was obliged to serve under Ripley in the less lucrative and influential post of Master Carpenter.

Ripley's rise through the protection and promotion of Sir Robert Walpole, 1st Earl of Orford (1676–1745), England's first Prime Minister, and his younger brother, Horatio Walpole, 1st Baron Walpole of Wolterton (1678–1757), was more than a thorn in their flesh. For Burlington and his circle, and particularly for Pope, Sir Robert was the epitome of addiction to power, splendour and affluence, and — worst of all — bad artistic taste. It was Walpole's political influence that helped Ripley climb the social ladder in London and to obtain important building contracts at both Houghton and Wolterton, and also at their brother-in-law's, the Viscount Townshend's Raynham Hall.

The Walpole family had owned land at Houghton, in west Norfolk, since at least the 13th century. Its members had long lived worthy but comparatively undistinguished lives, although they had always played their part in public life. However, it was not until the 18th century that they became a dominant force, not only in Norfolk affairs, but in the government of the British nation. Of similar political importance was Charles Townshend (1676–1738), the second Lord Townshend. Until the early 1720s the Townshends were a more influential family in Norfolk than the Walpoles. To Ripley's disadvantage, the relationship between him and the Walpoles was overshadowed by acute political and private tensions, since Townshend regarded Sir Robert as the too-successful 'boy next door'. Before the brothers-in-law fell out in the late 1720s, their relationship could be described as conciliatory as they were struggling for the same political aims. Furthermore Charles Townshend had married Dorothy Walpole in 1713. Both men held office under Queen Anne and had risen to power in the Whig reaction which followed Anne's death in 1714. Their political careers culminated in 1721, when the new Ministry included Walpole as First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer and Townshend as Secretary of State. For the next nine years they stood together at the centre of English government. Yet the resolution of the South Sea crisis in the summer of 1720 had been a first turning point in the partnership of the two leading Whigs, making it clear (if it had not been before) that Walpole was the dominant of the two. Walpole received much of the public credit for coping with the crisis and took the lead in the Commons to pass necessary legislation.

Thus their story of political harmony was not to last for long. Despite Walpole's rise to the Premiership, Townshend also became a charismatic political figure of widespread fame. The negotiations in connection with the formation of the Hanoverian Alliance of 1725 had been his work, but the unexpected death of Lady Townshend, Walpole's sister, in the following year had broken a bond between the three brothers-in-law. After this event, the story goes that Townshend's jealousy for Sir Robert was such that Townshend moved out of the neighbourhood

whenever Walpole was entertaining at Houghton.⁴ Furthermore their home and international policies began to differ, and in 1730 their differences had become so great that one of them had to resign. The King retained Walpole and Townshend retired to his Norfolk seat. There he spent his time improving the cultivation of turnips, prompting the contemporary nickname Turnip Townshend. Walpole had expressed the root of the whole matter in his commercial way: 'So long as the firm was Townshend and Walpole the utmost harmony prevailed; but it no sooner became Walpole and Townshend than things went wrong'.⁵

It was within this scenario of private and political vanity and suspense that Ripley had to position himself. This article will therefore focus on this complicated and challenging work-relationship, considering Ripley's artistic contributions to all three buildings as well as the antipathies and tensions between the three owners, which indeed sometimes caused an uneasy atmosphere on the building sites themselves. As Wolterton must be regarded as Ripley's masterpiece, an analysis of Ripley's idea of architecture is best centred on Horatio Walpole's Wolterton Hall. Focusing on Wolterton, I shall argue that Ripley's work on his country seats in Norfolk is still underestimated and deserves, as Wilson put it, 'more acknowledgement'⁶ than it has gained so far. There are still mysteries to solve, however, and a great deal of the actual proceedings and planning responsibilities at Houghton and Raynham remain puzzling. Other account books and plans may eventually be found and lead to further deductions. But a thorough analysis and classification of accounts, plans and designs has helped to illuminate the hitherto almost uncharted and often mysterious history of these magnificent houses.

Politicians, their country houses and the role of their architects

As the dominant rural architectural feature after the parish church, the country house stood as visible evidence of the power, wealth and physical evidence of the landed gentry's social eminence. It served as administrative centre for a landed estate as well as a place of hospitality and pleasure. Building and remodelling one's house was a predominant occupation for many landowners in early 18th-century England. Townshend and the Walpoles fit neatly into Summerson's sample of 71 per cent of landed gentry who were members of Parliament.⁷ These men were building houses with a view to success in public life. Summerson identified a vital connection between architectural enterprise and political activity. Moreover, not only was building a new country house significant but so was the choice of architect.

About the time when Sir Robert was only breaking ground at Houghton, Charles Townshend of Raynham began extensive renovations at his Norfolk home. Until the early 1720s the hall at Raynham, which dates back to as early as 1622, performed no major social functions. The Viscount was no great sportsman and had little interest in or success with grand entertainment, but he cared for his house as a symbol, as a sort of physical evidence of his social eminence. It can be claimed that Raynham's displacement by Sir Robert's Houghton as the county's leading house figured prominently in the political quarrel between the two owners. Lord Hervey in his 'Memoirs' observed that Townshend 'looked upon his own seat at Raynham as the metropolis of Norfolk, was proud of the superiority, and considered every stone that augmented the splendour of Houghton as a diminution of the grandeur of Raynham'.⁸

It is therefore fascinating to record that after 1725 Thomas Ripley — despite Townshend's resentment for Walpole's nearby Houghton — simultaneously served also as main contractor at Raynham and as architect at Wolterton. If Townshend's growing coolness towards his brother-in-law arose partly from envy of the splendid building going up at Houghton, the fact that work there diverted men from Raynham could only have irked the Viscount even more. Ripley's

difficult job was not to be envied. James Rosenheim, in his monograph on the Townshends and Raynham, supposed that Townshend would do anything to make his house a splendid symbol of his social eminence. 'Begged, bought, or stolen', Rosenheim wrote, 'Townshend obtained the best possible craftsmen for this work'.⁹ Leaving aside the questions of politics for a moment, a closer look at Ripley's earlier work may help elucidate some of the characteristics of this shadowy figure.

Thomas Ripley served in the position of 'Comptroller of the King's Works', the second highest post in the office, for 32 years until his death in 1758. He arose from humble origins in Yorkshire, became a trained carpenter and worked in various positions in the Royal Works after 1715. Allegedly an important coincidence determined the course of his career: Ripley might have made the acquaintance of Sir Robert Walpole through marrying a servant from Sir Robert's London household and thus becoming part of the successful Whig politician's society. Though Ripley had been admitted to the Freedom of the Carpenters Company following his examination for a master craftsman's diploma in 1705,¹⁰ he also made a living as a coffee-house proprietor in Woodstreet, Cheapside, until about 1715. Then Walpole made him the newly established 'Labourer in Trust' in the Savoy in the Strand.¹¹ To be more precise, his position was that of a major overseer mainly responsible for the condition of buildings of the royal estate in central London. Only one year later Ripley's area of responsibility expanded when he was appointed 'Clerk of the Works', in charge of maintaining the Royal Mews at Charing Cross. The tasks of his daily work were to become decisive for his professional career as they pre-supposed the ability to mediate between hierarchical levels with a concise knowledge of organisation in order to carry through varied restoration and maintenance to the buildings. Ripley was known and much esteemed by his work colleagues for his skill as a master craftsman and his practical knowledge.¹²

In 1721 Ripley was appointed 'Master Carpenter to the Crown' and thus became a member of the Board of Works Committee, where he gained knowledge of larger construction projects. When Walpole employed him as 'executant architect' at his seat in Houghton in 1721, Ripley had already conducted bigger projects by himself. His design for the new, recently burned-down Custom House in London in 1718 closely resembled the original edifice by Sir Christopher Wren. However, according to the 'Treasury's Minute Books', Ripley's Custom House was 'durable, convenient and suitable'.¹³ This is a perfect description of Ripley's architectural principles and of his other major works: the Custom House in Liverpool, begun in 1719 and his first solo-designed conducted country-seat, Blatherwycke Hall, Northamptonshire, which was begun in 1720 for Sir Henry O'Brien. Blatherwycke Hall was a rather plain but large stately home, which did not yet display typical Palladian three-part symmetry. The three-storey house with attics, colonnades and side wings was of nine bays to the north and south fronts and five on the sides. Unfortunately the house suffered the same fate as many other stately homes in the eastern counties of England: because of vandalism by Allied officers during World War 2, the mansion had to be taken down in 1948.¹⁴

The 1720s were to become the most important years in Ripley's career, and not only because of his work on the three country seats in Norfolk. His first engagements at Houghton date back to June 1721 and work at Raynham began in the spring of 1726, about the same time as foundations were laid at Wolterton. After Ripley had taken out a patent for 'a compound liquid metall, by which artificiall stone and marble is made by casting the same into moulds of any form, as statues, columns, capitalls etc.'¹⁵ in 1721, he obtained the commission for building Admiralty House, Whitehall, in 1723, which turned out to be a difficult task. It was probably due to both its unproportioned portico facing Whitehall — contemporaries associated it with

pipes of an organ as well as with candles¹⁶ — and the building's prominent location that Ripley never completely faded into oblivion. Admiralty House has lasted for centuries, like a rock breaking the waves of William Kent's surrounding Horse Guards, Royal Mews and Treasury. In 1726 Ripley was also occupied with major alterations on Horatio Walpole's London house at the Cockpit, which was situated near to the area nowadays occupied by Downing Street. In the same year, with Sir Robert's support, Ripley succeeded Sir John Vanbrugh as 'Comptroller of the King's Works' and remained in that position until he died in 1758. No-one ever held the position longer than he did.

Ripley's workload between 1726 and 1740 was enormous and only a few of his everyday activities can be mentioned here. He had to attend the Committee of the Board of Works at least twice a week, amounting to more than 1800 meetings in his career. His extensive occupation with the country seats forced him to commute between London and Norfolk regularly. Moreover, he submitted designs for a timber bridge over the River Thames from Fulham to Putney and for a bridge at Westminster in 1737. Like most 18th-century architects he was also heavily engaged in speculative building. He erected a couple of smaller Georgian houses in the better parts of Central London and directed the rebuilding of a church in Kingston-upon-Thames. In 1729 Sir Robert obtained him a further appointment as Surveyor of Greenwich Hospital. During the time of his surveyorship Queen Anne's Court was completed following his directions and, between 1735 and 1741, all the work on Queen Mary's Court was carried out to his designs. Together with William Kent he worked on new designs for the proposed Houses of Parliament in 1739. His career ended as one of the four members of the committee for rebuilding the Horse Guards at Whitehall, carried out mainly between 1750 and 1755. That Ripley was not only an invaluable committee member in the Office of Works, but also an indispensable surveyor and inventive planner of day-to-day work on the rising country seats for Charles Townshend and his two brothers-in-law, will be demonstrated in the following examination of his planning responsibilities in Norfolk.

Houghton Hall

Sir Robert Walpole knew what he was doing when he appointed Thomas Ripley as supervisor and executive architect of the forthcoming building works at Houghton in the summer of 1720. Since money was clearly no object, Sir Robert required a house of sufficient splendour to celebrate both a great country gentleman and a great statesman. It is unnecessary to point out that Houghton Hall's architectural importance and significance as one of Britain's most influential country-houses is well recorded.¹⁷ Houghton has been described as the model upon which the later development of 'country-house Palladianism' in England rested. Though its H-shaped plan was derived from 17th-century conceptions of the great house and was widespread in England, Houghton happened to be a prototype of what was to become the English Villa. The house anticipated what would be a standard architectural type of the 1740s and 50s.

While Houghton's outstanding architectural importance is recognised, some elements of the tantalising history of the building process — notably who contributed which architectural features — are not yet clear. It is most likely that an overlap of architects accomplished the final perfection. As we are used to the thought of one architect following another, it is difficult to imagine what the atmosphere on the site was like. In less than ten years five architects were (often simultaneously) competing on the spot: Colen Campbell, James Gibbs, William Kent, Isaac Ware and Thomas Ripley. Yet it is also possible that the architects themselves did not find these circumstances exceptional. Apart from James Gibbs, all the others worked for the Office of Works and were therefore familiar with constant debates about, for example, how to proceed

with a specific problem and whether or not a design should be altered in certain details. The various building commissions in the Office served as strongholds of applied 'teamwork', in which ties of deference, kinship and mutual self-interest guaranteed a fair standard of efficiency. On the other hand, Walpole can be imagined as an uncompromising, extremely unforgiving and demanding Maecenas, asking for perfection in both craftsmanship and design. However, the competition between all architects involved encouraged each of them to make Houghton an 'architectural experience that is unique in England'.¹⁸

Isaac Ware, Ripley's apprentice at Houghton from the time work began in 1722 and later his colleague in the Royal Works, did not seem to care about these matters. He left it to later academics' thorough research to discover Houghton's planning secrets. In his folio 'Plans, Elevations and sections; chimney pieces and ceilings of Houghton in Norfolk the seat of the Right Hon. Sir Robert Walpole', published in 1735, the year of the completion of the house, Ware attributes all the exteriors to Thomas Ripley. This is quite extraordinary, because Ware knew exactly what the situation must have been. Although it is certain that the original designs were not by Ripley, Ware was eager to honour his colleague's contribution by naming him sole architect. Apparently Ware's attribution was common knowledge at the time, as it corresponds with a letter a visitor to Houghton wrote in July 1735: '... From Rainham we went five miles to Houghton the seat of Sr Robt Walpole. This magnificent house is situated pretty high in a park yt is not unpleasant; it is all built of Portland stone. One Ripley was the architect ...'.¹⁹ On the contrary another traveller, Edward Harley, quite irreverently came to a different conclusion as he was positive that the house was built 'by Mr. Gibbs from the first design. The house as it is now is a composition of the greatest blockheads and most ignorant fellows in architecture that are. I think Gibbs was to blame not to alter any of their designs or mend their blunders'.²⁰ Since even contemporaries were puzzled by Houghton's planning history, it is not at all surprising that the search for truth still occupies today's scholars. Several examples of confusion may be cited.

That the original designs for Houghton Hall were first drawn by the Burlingtonian Colen Campbell, has recently been queried. Despite the fact that Campbell had published the 'New



Plate 1 Houghton Hall: the west front today

design of my invention' in *Vitruvius Britannicus* (*VB*) in 1717, a design for a large house dedicated to Sir Robert Walpole, John Harris believes that James Gibbs was the responsible architect between 1720 and 1723, though documentary evidence is still lacking.²¹ Houghton as illustrated in *VB* differs strongly from Houghton as built. The windows, for example, are much closer together, the sidelights of the Venetian windows are blind and there were never pedimented pavilion towers. Both the rustic and attic windows are three-quarter height, not half-height. Because of these 'stylistic flaws', Harris attributes the planning work of that early period to Gibbs.

There must have been differences of opinion between Walpole and Campbell at the same time, as Campbell was known to have been of selfish and resentful character. Campbell was dismissed from the works before the actual building process began in 1722 — the first stone was laid on 24 May 1722 — but was still present on the site in 1726.²² And — to introduce another protagonist — William Kent, Lord Burlington's favourite protégé, provided designs for the interiors in 1725 and was fully in charge of that field of responsibility in the following years. Referring to Kent's work, Ware in his folio was undoubtedly right in crediting him with all the internal designs.

Ripley's contribution to the alteration of Campbell's — or Gibbs's — plans is still underestimated and undervalued. There can be no doubt that from 1720, when Ripley obtained his post as supervisor at Houghton, he was occupied first with organising all the necessary building activities. Documentary evidence shows that in 1721 Ripley viewed timber for Houghton, and also investigated stone quarries in Yorkshire.²³ He not only bought the materials and co-ordinated the process of construction, but also paid all the craftsmen and bills. Yet it is also clear that, as a competent and experienced surveyor of day-to-day work and an architect of larger building projects, Ripley's work was not limited to the execution of others' orders. The detailed analysis of all available plans by Ingrid Sindermann-Mittmann proved — among other things — that Ripley was responsible for laying the pseudo-portico of Houghton's garden front against its outer wall.²⁴ While Gibbs's preliminary plan for Houghton from c. 1720 inscribed 'Sr Robt Walpole's at Houghton',²⁵ as well as all surviving Campbell plans in the R.I.B.A. collection, show the central portico projecting in the design, Ware's 'Plans, elevations and sections' demonstrate the executant architect's influence on the final design of Sir Robert's seat. Arguably Ripley, as executant architect, was Walpole's most important adviser and therefore powerful in major decisions. In all surviving plans the portico on Houghton's west side is located clearly away from the wall and not, as in Ware's folios from 1735 and 1760, carried out with columns against the wall with a three-quarter circle profile. Ripley would surely have been in favour of the latter solution since he had had his own experiences with another famous portico, and with its fatal consequences on both the building itself and the reputation of the architect — himself. The Admiralty's ill-proportioned portico facing Whitehall blocked out the light of the main block and disfigured the building's outer appearance.

At Houghton this decision was not made for practical purposes only but stands in a wider, rather aesthetic, planning conception. The arrangement of the West front with its two towers is not matched to the east. The two towers on Houghton's East front protrude by two-thirds of their depth, an arrangement of protrusive and recessive architectural structures forming the only ornamental feature on an otherwise plain facade. Such was the plainness of Houghton's entrance-front, that in 1731 Sir Thomas Robinson considered it 'being without either a portico, three-quarter columns and a pediment, or any other break [it] appears to me to be too naked and exposed, and rather as an end front to a very large palace, than the principal one of a modern house'.²⁶

Houghton's West front is arranged differently with a pseudo-portico of four Giant Ionic columns and above it a pediment with arms, crowned by three figures, being the most important

ornament (Plate 1). While it is an integral part of the facade, all other architectural elements are subordinated to it. The windows have plain surrounds with flat stones over. Only the central bay has a pediment, and that unbroken, while the sides of the two Venetian windows are blank. The towers protrude only slightly before the central facade. An 'ordinary' portico with its columns standing on the edge of the protruding landing would have been too importunate and restless, and would have been disadvantageous to the use of the rooms lying behind it. Ripley, as an architect well versed in all practical matters, was surely aiming to avoid this.

Apart from this prominent architectural feature and a couple of insignificant alterations to the service wings,²⁷ Ripley's most important contribution to Houghton's current appearance is the innovative positioning of the colonnades linking the service wings on either side of the central block. Campbell's drawings show the opening of the colonnades to the entrance-side (East), whereas Ripley simply turned them around, with the opening to the garden (West). There is no comparable example to this amongst Campbell's other works. The colonnades with added roofed passageways — a feature probably derived from the passage in Vanbrugh's Castle Howard, North Yorkshire where it was designed to keep the ways to the offices dry²⁸ — are in quarter-circle profile (colonnaded barchesse), quadrant-shaped to the west with ten Doric columns but 'L'-shaped to the east. To the East, Ripley structured the 'L'-shaped passageway with seven pairs of double Doric columns on the long (East) and five pairs of columns on the short (South) side. Thus he managed to 'open' the entrance front, which otherwise would have appeared even more severe. Apart from Ware's folio, none of the surviving plans show this solution. One must therefore conclude that Ripley as executant architect — after having discussed this matter with Walpole and probably his colleagues — was responsible for this decision both to embellish and round off Houghton's harmonious appearance.

While Houghton Hall was awaiting completion, and Thomas Ripley was busy surveying the rising edifice at nearby Wolterton, the new stables to the south-west of Sir Robert's house were begun in 1732. It has always been assumed that William Kent was solely responsible for their design.²⁹ While there are a number of surviving drawings at Houghton in Kent's, and probably also in Gibbs's, hand there is at least one that proves Ripley's involvement in the construction of the splendid stable block. It is this one drawing (Houghton Hall MSS. A/43), scattered with Ripley's unique scrawl and full of details characteristic of his personal drawing style, which suggests that the stable-block was erected with close collaboration by all the available architects. Since A/43 shows the façades as well as the measurements of the executed building, this drawing probably served as the 'manual': the instructions for the foremen while the executant architect was not on the site. Surviving accounts and payments to the craftsmen do not indicate who was responsible for the final designs, but one must assume again that exhaustive discussions took place.

Thomas Ripley had further obligations. Unfortunately documentary evidence for the rebuilding of the tower of nearby Houghton St. Martin church is particularly poor. A number of unidentified and undated drawings for the rebuilding of the tower have survived in the Houghton archives³⁰ but David Yaxley, the Hon. Archivist, complained that 'no documentary evidence has so far been found to supply a date for the building of the tower'.³¹ However, Yaxley dated the rebuilding of the tower as 'sometime subsequent to 1727'. Furthermore, while comparing an unexecuted elevation for a gothic church at Wolterton³² with the surviving drawings for the church-tower at Houghton, Yaxley concluded that there can be 'little doubt that the draughtsman, and almost certainly the architect, of the Houghton drawings was Thomas Ripley'.³³

Yaxley's assumption was correct. There is indeed an extraordinary similarity between some of the Houghton drawings (Houghton Hall MSS. B/1, B/3, B/6, B/7) and the unexecuted design for a church at Wolterton, the latter being attributed to Ripley by Horatio Walpole himself. As this attribution is certain one must conclude that the Houghton drawings are by the same hand, that of Thomas Ripley. Yet the tower of Houghton church was not built exactly as Ripley had designed it, but is almost identical with the Houghton drawings B/4, B/5, and B/10. These elevations, in a different hand and manner as well as on different paper, are mere variations of Ripley's drawings. The main differences between Ripley's (*eg.* B/6) and the latter (*eg.* B/5) designs are the second-stage window on the west front with a wide quatrefoil above. The third stage is much more elaborate than Ripley's, with a two-light ogee window with a quatrefoil in the fork, scrolls on the dripstone and mullions of short round pillars similar to the Tuscan order. Unfortunately, once again none of the drawings at Houghton is signed or dated. While comparison of the surviving plans at both Houghton and Wolterton makes a firm attribution to Ripley possible, the question of when the tower of St. Martin was built remains puzzling. The hall and the stable block were completed by 1735, and Ripley's presence in Norfolk decreased in the second half of that decade as Raynham's renovation had long been brought to an end and Wolterton Hall was slowly nearing completion. However, there is documentary evidence that larger building works in the church were carried out shortly after Sir Robert's death on March 23 1745.³⁴ Houghton's estate labourers worked overtime and in close collaboration 'with the masons', 'sawing stone and Rubing flag stones at the church', and continued their work there until mid July. It is likely that their hands were needed elsewhere, possibly for the harvest, as work on the church was not taken up again later that year.

Further efforts at the church were made in February 1747. In May, June and July the labourers were busy 'Removing of earth before the church & leaveling the ground', as they collaborated 'with the mason at the church'. It seems that, after another summer break, the greatest building activity took place in the following autumn and winter. Then, between August 1747 and February 1748, the estate's workmen were almost constantly 'with the masons & rubing and sawing flag stones'. Whether during this time the new tower, for which Thomas Ripley had produced the preparatory drawings, had been built, or whether Ripley even organised its construction, will remain an enigma until further documentary evidence comes to light.

Ripley's heavy influence at Houghton, not only on the outer appearance of Houghton Hall but also on the design of the nearby stables and church, must be regarded as only one of his major achievements in Norfolk. Yet it is no exaggeration to say that he also used his employment at Sir Robert's seat to gain important knowledge of how a country seat actually functioned. The designs for his 'masterpiece', Horatio Walpole's Wolterton Hall, were yet to be developed, and it was at almost the same time that Ripley first visited Wolterton and Raynham in late 1724. One must assume that it was due to Walpole's satisfaction with Ripley's work that the Prime Minister had recommended his architect to his brother-in-law. At that time, however, their relationship was still relatively stable. Two years later, in 1726, when the bulk of the renovations at Raynham and with it Ripley's responsibility there began, their family bonds were broken by the death of Dorothy Townshend, Walpole's sister. Changed circumstances asked for extraordinary competence. Ripley was definitely the man to go for.

Ripley's contribution to the renovation of Raynham Hall

James Rosenheim has shown that the necessary renovations carried out at Raynham in the first decade of the eighteenth century were not aimed at remaking the house 'the basis for



Plate 2 Raynham Hall, from the east.
From William Watts, *The Seats of the Nobility and Gentry*, Chelsea 1783

Townshend's exercise of authority, since he was already demonstrating that London would be the source of his local power and reputation'.³⁵ The Hall was to serve as the place from which to supervise his estate, not as a base of political power but as a rural retreat. Some fifteen years later, when the Viscount happened to be one of the most influential figures in British politics, he seriously turned his interest toward embellishing his house. While enviously following the rise of nearby Houghton Hall, his attitude towards his family home and grounds had undergone a dramatic change. He then not only decided to care for his house as a symbol of his social and political standing (Plate 2), but planned to invest in major alteration of the interiors. Despite his quarrels with Walpole, he employed Ripley in April 1724 as general contractor to survey and conduct day-to-day work. Ripley's London colleague William Kent, who designed the interiors at Houghton, was employed for the same job at Raynham.

Before the main building activity began, Ripley was responsible for the employment of craftsmen. Townshend needed the best workers available for his ambitious project and this request made Ripley's task difficult. Since it is obvious that all three building owners considered their house to be the most important to continue with, the organisation and scheduling of artisans was a challenging job in itself. At the same time, the executant architect could rely on his long-term colleagues from the Office of Works, who were also employed at both Houghton and Wolterton, though there is evidence that Ripley had to mediate on several occasions between the labourers — who were Norfolk locals — and the outside craftsmen. After successful arbitration at the beginning of the works, however, the renovation continued rapidly.

Ripley's detailed bill for work at Raynham between 1724 and 1732 shows that the renovations were substantial, but that the basic layout of rooms remained largely intact from an earlier date. The bill lists the names of all craftsmen and the total amount of money spent during the renovation, but it does not mention the executed work in any detail. Therefore it is almost

impossible to give a precise account of Ripley's interventions. It is hard to imagine that Townshend, an extremely orderly and careful character, destroyed documents as Sir Robert Walpole did to gloss over the total costs. More accounts may come to light in the future: a considerable number of trunks stored in the Raynham attics, filled with countless records, await closer examination. However, from the already examined craftsmen's accounts we may conclude that, apart from installation of a new water system, new floors were laid in many rooms, windows and stairs were renewed and gutters and drains replaced. Following Ripley's instructions, a few rather less prosaic structural alterations were also carried out, including the transformation of the former chapel into the grand saloon and the introduction of a miniature Arch of Severus — following Kent's design — in the ground-floor dining room. A fair amount of Townshend's money was consumed, partly by generous gilding and painting but primarily by the carving of several chimney-pieces from late 1728 onwards.³⁶ The Viscount spent more than £15,000 on his renovations, an average cost approaching £2000 a year.³⁷ Considering the £7500 cost of the building and completion of Ripley's first country seat at Blatherwycke, Northamptonshire, one gets an idea of the extent of the works carried out at Raynham.

In 1726, William Kent began his contribution to the house and helped to change Raynham's internal look. His elegantly-designed doorways and mouldings, the sky-lit staircase and his wonderfully painted mosaic in the 'Belisarius Room' made Raynham a stylish country seat, reflecting its owner's ambition to introduce the latest London fashion. Again, as at Houghton, Ripley and Kent worked in close collaboration. While Ripley was responsible for the planning and directing of all major architectural works, Kent embellished the house with his ornamental designs. Their different characters and fields of operation complemented one another in an ideal way. So perfect was the result that Townshend, in 1730 — forgetting all his quarrels with Walpole — wrote he found Raynham 'in the greatest beauty' and 'the utmost perfection'.³⁸ It was probably because Raynham lacked the outrageous splendours of nearby Houghton that the rather modest Viscount, after his dismissal in 1730, loved being at home. Townshend did not need an outrageous collection of pictures and portraits, nor did he favour ostentatious great entertainment as Sir Robert did. Enjoying his private life in the stylish surroundings of Raynham, Townshend — with the help of two competent architects — imported London standards into rural Norfolk. Horatio Walpole did the same at Wolterton, where Thomas Ripley found his vocation in the planning and executing of Walpole's new house.

Wolterton Hall

Introduction

When Wolterton Hall was completed in 1741, the initial reception of Ripley's only solely-executed house in Norfolk was promising. Horace Walpole — 'Strawberry Hill Horace', Sir Robert's son and nephew of Wolterton's founder Horatio — had very much complimented its architect: 'Lord Orford's at Houghton, of which Campbell gave the original designs, but which was much improved by Ripley, and Lord Walpole's at Wolterton, one of the best houses of the size in England, will, as long as they remain, acquit this artist of the charge of ignorance.'³⁹ Horace also remarked upon his unloved uncle's Wolterton in September 1742, though this time not without a side-swipe at his stingy relative: 'but I was really charmed with Wolterton; it is all wood and water!... Their house is more than a good one if he had not saved eighteenpence in every room it would have been a fine one.'⁴⁰ What had impressed the critical Horace on his visits at his uncle's seat so deeply that this dreaded cynical writer actually remarked on it positively? The following considerations may explain Horace's enthusiasm for Wolterton.

Wolterton Hall is situated 16 miles north-west of Norwich and about 3 miles from Aylsham. It is a country seat in the best meaning of the word and lies far from major roads. In summer mixed woodland, which was planted during the construction period, screens the house from the curious gaze of the few passers-by.

Horatio Walpole — ‘Old Horace’, to distinguish him from his popular nephew of Strawberry Hill — began his political career in 1702 as a Member of Parliament for the Castle Rising constituency. As a young man he was interested in foreign affairs. He went on to become a leading statesman and diplomat, especially during his brother’s administration, spending much of his time abroad on diplomatic missions at The Hague and as Britain’s ambassador in Paris. Although ‘Old Horace’ regularly received money from his elder brother it was probably the dowry of Mary Lombard, whom he had married in 1720, that enabled him to buy his country estate at Wolterton in 1722. With his great love for his native soil, Norfolk was a natural choice. The Estate consisted of the old mansion house, its adjacent buildings, gardens and orchards. Walpole bought the property from a widow, Penelope Gray, for the sum of £4300. Little is known of old Wolterton, which stood to the south-east of the present hall. It did receive extensive repairs, however, and Walpole embarked upon a renovation programme including both house and park. But in November 1724 a devastating fire destroyed the entire mansion, leaving only the outbuildings standing.

Within weeks Walpole had commissioned Ripley to visit the sad remains of his house. It seems reasonable to suspect that Horatio chose Ripley after seeing his convincing work at his brother’s seat at Houghton. Thus began a long acquaintance, if not a friendship. The oldest preserved letter, written only one month after the fire, portrays Ripley as an architect having a precise vision and the urge to see it realized in stone.



Plate 3 Wolterton Hall: the south front today

May it Please ye: Excellencess

London, Decm: 17th: 1724

I am very sorry for Your loss, but since this has happen'd, I think You should put an Entire Stop to all Your Works at Woolterton; Because I believe You will find a More Convenient Place to set Your House in then were it now is, and to answer Your present Gardens, and if so, any thing done to Your Cannale, and other out works; as also stables; will be lost, should a properer place be found for Your House; I am going to Houghton, and intend to go from thence to Woolterton, and shall make the best Observations in my Power, and at my Returne will let You know what I think is most proper for you to do in Generall. In the Mean Time it surely will be right, if You intend to make Woolterton your seat, to Order Earth to be thrown up for as many bricks, as possibly can be made next Season; and to buy any oak that is going down near You; that is fitt for Building; I believe it will be three weeks from this Time before I returne from Norfolk; that if You have any Com:ds. I Perhaps may receive them at Houghton; ... I am, Your: Hon.rs, most Obid.; Hum:le Serv:t, Tho. Ripley⁴¹

This was a pragmatist speaking. Although his client had not yet finally decided whether or not to have his house rebuilt, Ripley's mind was already planning to ensure that any decision to start construction in the following spring would not be hampered by lack of material. He was convinced that it would be more reasonable to build the house on a new site in order to give it greater prominence in the landscape. He envisioned the new house as an isolated block, at some distance to the service buildings and thus all the more embedded in the natural surroundings. As Ripley was involved in the work on a complete plan for Wolterton which included the park and gardens, he was aware of the importance of the best possible location for the house. Extensive work on the park had continued since the estate was purchased in 1722 and Ripley had organised and directed the bulk of these activities, which were mainly centred upon de-formalizing the old features around the west and south side of the hall.⁴² Altogether an enormous amount of work and money was spent on the alteration of the gardens, and in fact many of the proposals for work in the park, gardens and area surrounding the hall are directly accountable to Thomas Ripley. His orders for work to be carried out in the park and gardens at Wolterton also reflect his detailed knowledge of the latest fashion in gardening.⁴³

However detailed Ripley's first plans for Wolterton were, Walpole apparently also turned for architectural advice about his house to the 'amateur architect' John Erskine, 11th Earl of Mar⁴⁴ (1675–1732) in April 1725. Walpole's move must be considered as rather unconventional, if not thoughtless, since the two men's political allegiances were directly opposed. Lord Mar had held the leadership of the Jacobites in Scotland where, on September 6th 1715, he proclaimed James VIII King of Scotland, England, France and Ireland. A few weeks later 'Bobbing John', as Mar was called for his frequent tergiversations, was defeated at Sherriffmuir and the insurrection was practically at an end. Mar fled into exile; although wandering across Europe until his death in Aix-la-Chapelle in 1732, he constantly maintained contact with Britain, sometimes through his architectural teacher and favourite, James Gibbs.⁴⁵

It must have been in Paris that Walpole, then English Ambassador to France, met Lord Mar and asked him to prepare a design for his new house at Wolterton. It goes without saying that no written evidence of this meeting survived, but Lord Mar's designs for Wolterton are now in the Scottish Record office among the Mar and Kelly deposit.⁴⁶ Lord Mar's elevation proposal for Wolterton is fairly retarded in style for mid-1720s England: The short windowed mezzanine between the first and second storeys, the slightly projecting three-bay frontispiece entrance, crowned by a semicircular pediment and separated by broad quoining as well as the quoins on the sides, and the Belvedere enclosed by iron railings on top, are French in origin. According to the accompanying description, the ground plan is full of interesting features. The Hall and Saloon, in the centre of the ground floor, are separated by a 'balconie for music betwixt them over a corridore'. Bedchambers and closets are confined to the mezzanine whilst the third floor is for 'strangers'; this also containing bedrooms and a 'Gallary for a Library in the middle', lit

by a cupola which rises above a garret storey used 'for all kind of Lumber'. The service facilities, like the kitchen, laundry, dairy, brew-, bake-, and wash-houses, are in the two corridors and wings flanking the house, of which only the left-hand unit is shown in the drawing.

Even though Horatio Walpole had a great love for the Gallic world — his wife was French by birth — these designs were far too old-fashioned for his taste. Clearly not for political reasons alone did 'Old Horace' choose Ripley's designs, since he required clarity and simple glamour to place himself in the vanguard of architectural fashion.

Elevations and groundplans

It took 16 years for Wolterton Hall to be built, as the inscription above the door to the east hall states that the house was completed in 1741. Preparatory work for construction began in spring 1725. Ripley employed several London craftsmen he had known for a long time: the plumber George Devall, the painter John Jones and the joiner John Marsden. They all worked for the Office of Works and had also been employed by Ripley at Houghton and Raynham. The labourers were mainly Norfolk locals and there is evidence that Ripley had to mediate on several occasions between them and the outside craftsmen. For example, the carver Richard Fisher from Ripon in Yorkshire complained about rivalries among the workmen after being dismissed in 1739:

...not that I blame my Honour for my being discharged in Such a manor be cause you was not thear your Self; I know perfetly well it was ouing to some Envies persons that usd me with that manors from the very first of my coming to the last End, I am Shoure with out any just occasion; But it genrly hapens so that wheare some men uses all his Indavers to oblige & plese Some, he is the forder from it.⁴⁷

Fisher had mainly worked on the chimneypieces in the 'Piano nobile', but had evidently done some woodcarving for one of Walpole's neighbours when he ought to have been working at Wolterton. Yet, quarrels among the workmen aside, the building process continued rapidly. By 1728 Wolterton's basic three-storey structure was up and the execution of the internal and external features in progress. At this early stage the present-day house must have already been recognisable. In 1729 the Great Staircase and the backstairs were surmounted by skylights and



Plate 4 Wolterton Hall: the south front c. 1780 (artist unknown)

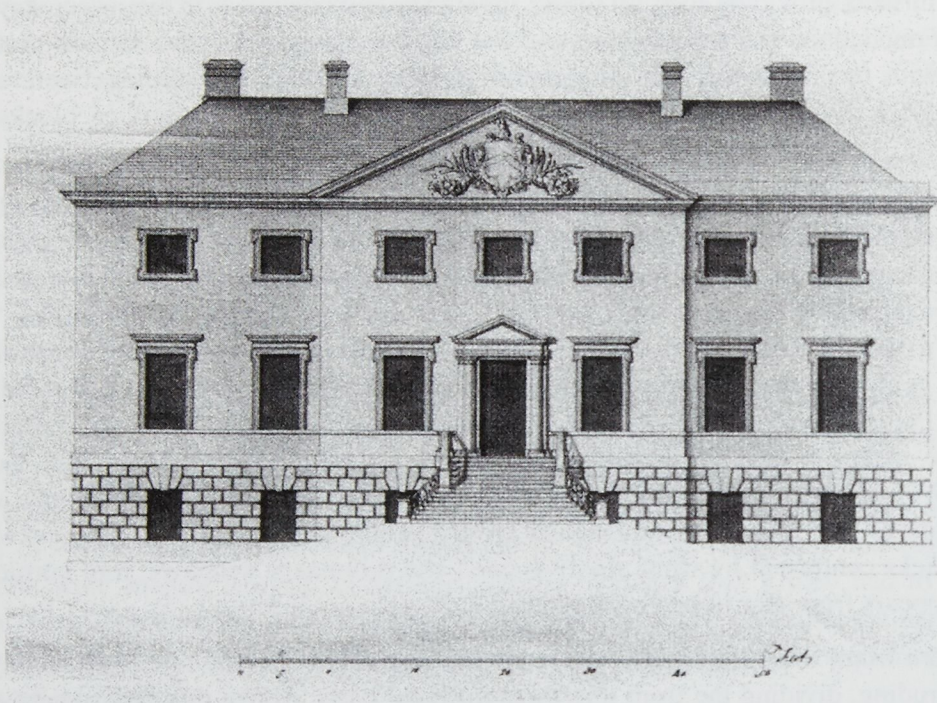
the garrets finished, providing lodging rooms for Ripley and others while they were staying in Wolterton. Foundations for new stables and the kitchen block were also laid in that year. Connected with the house by an underground passage, the service buildings were almost finished in 1731. Evidently the main block was completed before the service blocks were begun.⁴⁸

Ripley's Wolterton Hall is an excellent example of a compact medium-sized Georgian country house to accommodate both large-scale entertaining and family comfort (Plates 3 and 4). Its outward appearance embodies the purity of Palladian modesty with its clear, balanced and wide-spaced alternation between plain wall and openings, and the adaption of the Italian 'Piano nobile' with a rusticated base and a small attic storey. Wolterton is thus very plain, if not simple, so as not to contradict the greatest possible simplicity and programmatic grace. According to the spirit of Palladio each side has its own character and particularities. The detached position of the house makes it an independent cube because no service or administration block is attached.⁴⁹ Wing constructions would have detracted from the imposing appearance of the isolated building. The house has a rectangular ground plan. It consists of three storeys: with its warm red bricks contrasted by white thinly-framed and prominent windows, roof cornice and parapet, it appears from afar to be very balanced.

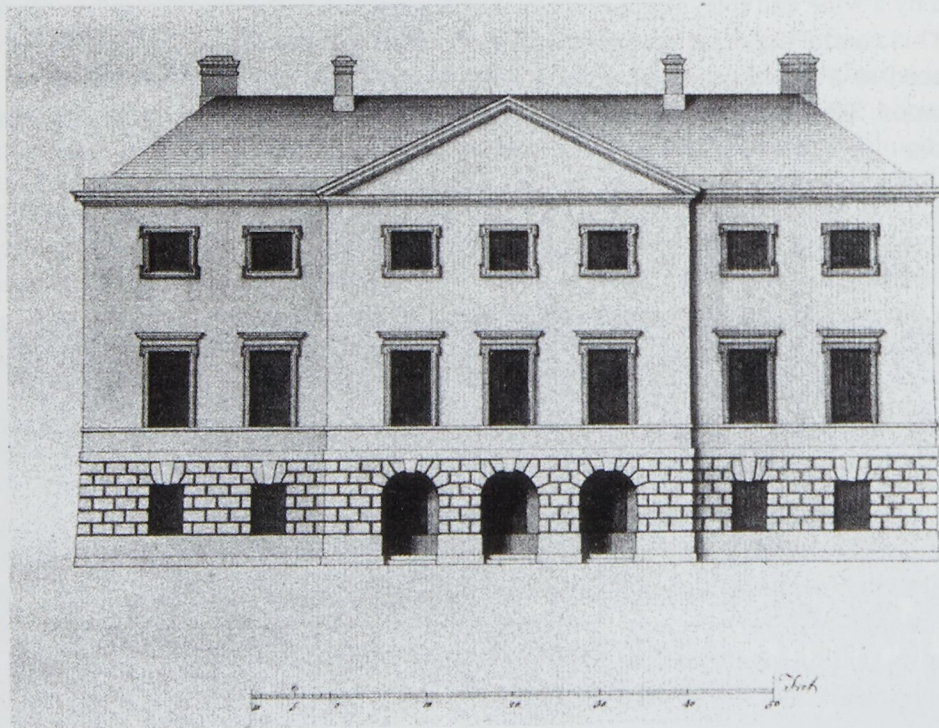
The northern front, of seven bays, is the reception side (Plate 5). The three central bays are slightly protruding, dividing the front into three different parts. Above this central area rests a profiled beam and a simple triangular pediment, where the coat of arms of the Walpole family is embedded. Originally the 'Great Marble Hall' in the centre of the north front on the first floor was reached by a wide and lofty flight of steps which admitted to the great portal on ceremonial occasions. This central staircase was removed in the 19th century due to dry rot. The entrance is now reduced to a modest door at ground level, framed and dignified by two Doric three-quarter columns. The rustic stonework is carried out in horizontal, blind ornament blocks of Portland Stone.

The arrangement of the south side facing the park and lake is similar (Plate 5). Here the rustic simplicity appropriately evokes the landscaped garden in that area of the park. Three axes form a central protruding bay which is also surmounted by a triangular pediment. But this façade bay differs from its opposite number because of the rustic design of the ground floor, which today is concealed by a later arcade. Semi-circular arches stretching over the three entrances lend this area its character. This feature interrupts the rustic nature and thus breaks up the regularity, or even sternness, of the façade. The arches above the doors also introduce irregularity and give the whole appearance of the façade a rather lively look.

It is not at all surprising that Ripley's plans for Wolterton renounce the use of a fashionable and bombastic pediment on either of the main fronts: in aesthetical terms this was a bold and most unusual move for the time. Such a display would have contradicted the architect's and his clients' intentions, however, because Wolterton's significance as a medium-sized, compact block lies in its unobtrusiveness. But the main reason for this decision is to be found in the interior. Wolterton's noble dining hall on the north-west side took on the function previously held by the saloon, with its central position indicated by the portico in other houses like Houghton. Although it did not fully overtake the saloon at that stage, the Wolterton dining room seems to have been a combination of the great parlour and the great dining room. This phenomenon is probably also connected with the increasing use of silver dinner services and the switch of emphasis from the sideboard for plate to plate on the tables with the epergne. Be that as it may, this detail indicates a step away from the traditional and formal use of the 'Piano



North Front



South Front

Plate 5 Wolterton Hall: Thomas Ripley's drawings of the north and south fronts, early 1725.
Published with kind permission of Lord and Lady Walpole.

nobile' and thus points at a contemporary understanding of 'party entertainment'. Ripley appreciated that a fundamental reason for the central position of a heavy portico with columns and entablature — to direct attention to the most important place of entertainment — had become superfluous.

Wolterton's west front is also plain yet it appears far more sophisticated, with its Venetian window and some of the more important state rooms behind. Of such charm is this front that during his visit in 1739, Lord Coleraine, collector of drawings and MP for Boston, where Roger and Robert Morris advised on a new town hall, was '...great in Love with ye Venetian window & sed it was ye Best that ever he saw done in England.'⁵⁰

Wolterton's plain east front houses the family entrance, leading into the small 'East Hall' to which some family rooms, as well as the smaller of the two skylit staircases, are connected. When Philip Yorke visited in 1750, he remarked there were '4 good plain rooms, the dining parlour, the drawingroom, the study (which has an arcade before it) and the breakfastroom. The rest are for servants'.⁵¹ Apart from the entrance hall, all the family-rooms face south or west. Since all the storeys are based on the same internal structure (Ripley employed the so-called 'Triple Pile Plan', where, on the principal floor, three by three rooms with structural walls between are grouped around two staircases: Plate 6) there is a well-thought-out system to connect the building vertically as well as horizontally. Thus Ripley divided the house into a family side on the east and a parade side in the centre and on the west. The small eastern staircase connects the family rooms on all three floors with the annexed subterranean kitchen

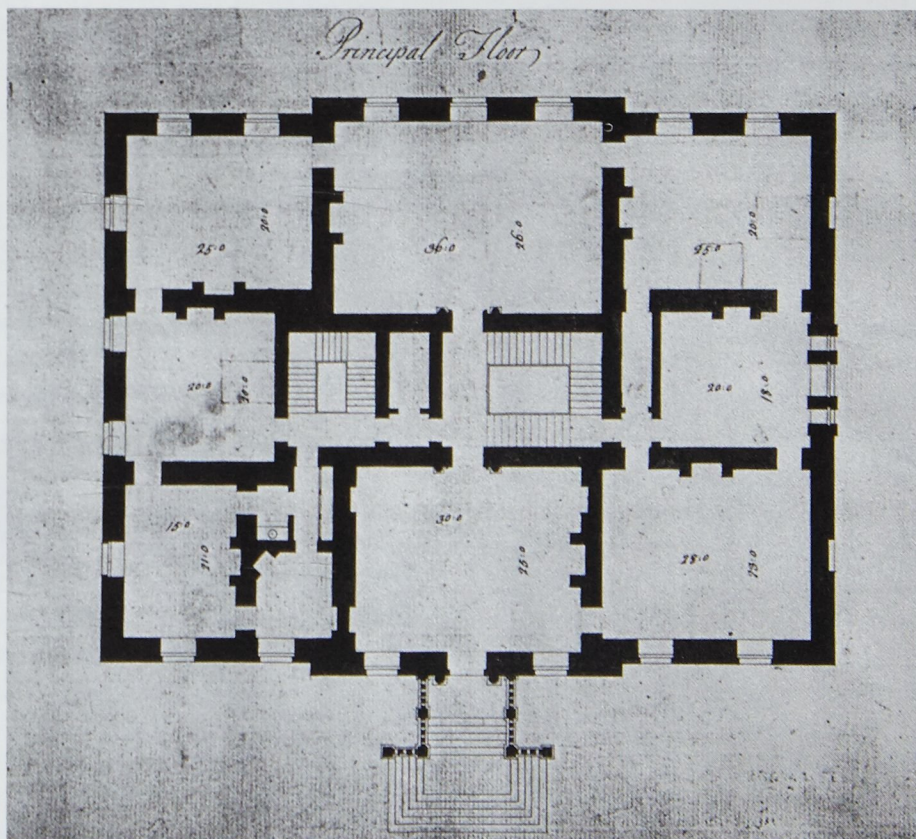


Plate 6 Wolterton Hall: Thomas Ripley's plan of the principal floor, early 1725. Published with kind permission of Lord and Lady Walpole.

block (now gone and replaced by the large 19th-century 'Repton wing'), while the official central staircase links the public rooms of the 'Piano nobile' with the other two floors. This was not in itself new, but Ripley was one of the first architects to continue this scheme through the full three storeys to a lantern in the top storey. As Girouard has pointed out, it was not until the 18th century that one discovered that the most attractive and convenient way to structure the new room arrangement 'was in a circle, around a top-lit central staircase ... but it was not until well into the eighteenth century that [its] convenience began to be appreciated'.⁵²

A short study of some aspects of the floor-plan will illustrate Ripley's idea of 'modest clarity', a principle that in this period imported a new element in the harmonizing blending of internal and external unity. While Sir Robert demanded splendour and affluence at Houghton, Ripley was determined to build the extreme opposite some twenty miles away for Walpole's younger brother. Since Wolterton had no pretensions to grandeur it was most famous for its size, functionality and convenience. These qualities can best be exemplified with a closer glance at the public 'Piano nobile' or 'principal floor'. The whole conception appears generous and clear, rather than over-scaled and pretentious, because of the moderately-sized rooms. The eight rooms are grouped around two staircases, with the open central stairs connecting the state rooms on the 'Piano nobile' as well as the other three floors. The Marble Hall on the north and the Saloon on the south occupy the centre of the house.

Unfortunately, as a result of the 19th-century sales, it is very hard to visualise how the main rooms looked, but they contained an unusual amount of tapestry and Ripley himself was concerned with the hanging of the pictures in 1739. Certainly the saloon would not have seemed the relatively poor relation to the dining room that it is now, and the French look of the rooms would have clearly impressed contemporaries. The Marble Hall however, though it has now lost its proper function as the reception room, is still the main link in the chain of lofty

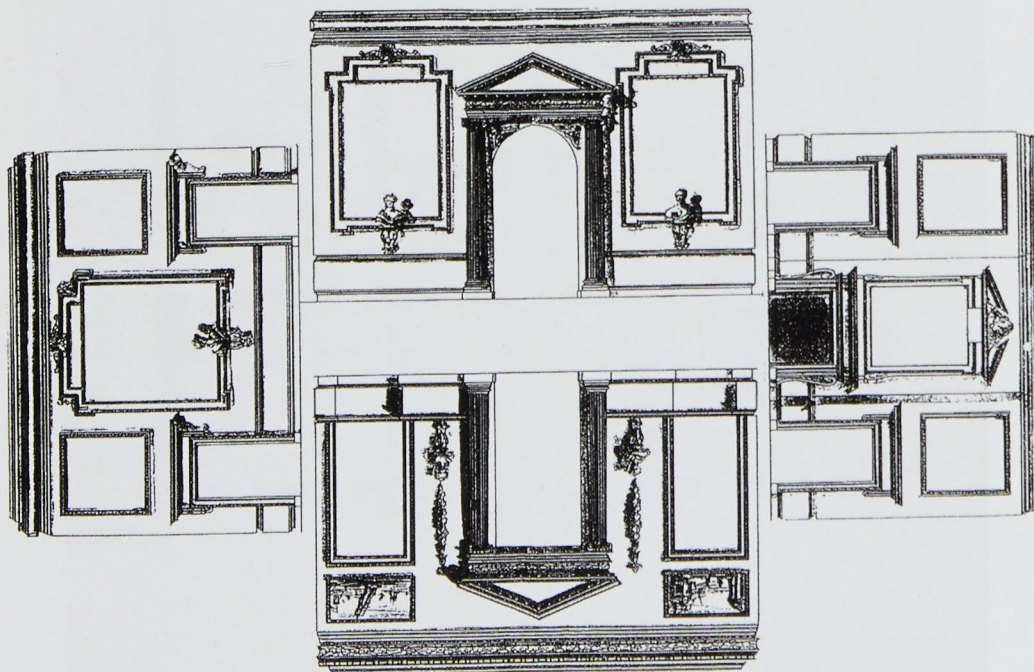


Plate 7 Wolterton Hall: Thomas Ripley's design for the Great Marble Hall, early 1725.
Published with kind permission of Lord and Lady Warpole.

intercommunicating state rooms (Plate 7). On its north side is a characteristic example of Ripley's interior decoration, containing almost all the elements of the Palladian vocabulary of ornamentation: dentil pattern and egg-and-dart are most prominent, followed by horizontal foliage with cords and ribbons, horizontal fillets and astragals, a modillion cornice, a ceiling divided into compartments by ribs with a guilloche pattern, moulded chair-rail, robust carving on the overdoors and on the highly enriched cornice with its modillions and pulvinated frieze. There is a well-planned scheme between the chimney surrounds and door frames, plaster-panels and ceiling. Although richly ornamented there are still large plain wall-surfaces for the exhibition of pictures and tapestries, which can be regarded as clear evidence of Horatio Walpole's own taste. These were also included for practical reasons, since Horatio could not afford the expensive London carvers and gilders Sir Robert had employed to embellish his great seat at Houghton. Ripley's decoration at Wolterton is robust but not overpowering and is dignified, although it is not as graceful as (for example) William Kent's interior designs for nearby Raynham Hall or some of the works of Henry Flitcroft. (Flitcroft was Ripley's colleague in the Office of Works and became a highly competent, if not very inspired, architectural decorator.) However, the combination is a complete and successful decorative unit that can also be found in all the other rooms of the 'Piano nobile', as well as on the top floor and in the central staircase.

To the west of the Marble Hall is the state dining room. This leads into the Venetian room facing west, so-called because of its large Venetian window marking the centre of the west-front. Adjacent is the 'Best Bedchamber' in the south-west corner of the house. As the saloon — a nobly conceived and proportioned room — occupies the centre of the south front, the circuit is completed by three more rooms: a drawing room and two bedrooms on the east front. The 'small' eastern staircase connects these two bedrooms in the 'Piano nobile' with the family rooms below, and thus serves as a perfect link between the floor-levels providing privacy for the family as well as easily-available service.

Bill Wilson hinted that Ripley's 'plan for Wolterton is an early example of Palladian standard, in that the basement storey holds only some of the everyday domestic rooms, leaving the principal official rooms ... radiating round the staircase at the first floor'.⁵³ Due to the simple arrangement of rooms this level served all of the demands for Wolterton's occasional entertainment and social (or musical) events. Compared with previous houses, which usually featured 'chains' of rooms, all the areas used would have been quickly and easily accessible.

There are more discoveries to make on Wolterton's second floor. Ripley designed the inner sides of the attic and top storey of the staircase as if it were attached to the outer wall, similar to the 'cortile' of an Italian villa. The walls of the staircase on these floors are interrupted by windows and doors which are framed by heavy stucco and pilasters, being exact copies of those of the outside walls. In other words, although Wolterton's top floor was intended to be private, we find both the same decoration as on the 'Piano nobile' and the same arrangement of eight large rooms. The mingling of the private sphere in the upper floor with the connecting 'public' staircase of the 'Piano nobile' must be regarded as one of Wolterton's qualities. Yet it is difficult to give the exact number of rooms of this floor because in most of them smaller areas are separated from a larger room without forming a truly independent area. This subdivision corresponds to their use as the children's, bed- and living-rooms. The unusual existence of children's rooms in the top storey is already documented as early as 1757, when Walpole's eldest son informed the steward Richard Ness that he had 'some thoughts of being at Woolterton

I must again repeat to you to take care to have the beds thoroughly aired in the Attick, East Front & likewise a Bed or two in the Nursery Apartment and Garrets'.⁵⁴

Ripley's pragmatic plan illustrates his intention not to hide the family rooms but to make them accessible from the ground storey *via* the staircases. The family's private area is therefore not treated as a necessary appendage but seen instead as an integral part of the whole scheme. Horatio Walpole demanded clarity and limited display, pleasant proportions and — especially — living space that was comfortable and easily usable, as Wolterton not only served as the centre of his estates but was also a retreat for this diplomat and politician when he was not living in Whitehall. He had no desire to imitate his brother's seat at Houghton. After Horatio's political decline in 1742 Wolterton became the chosen spot where he spent much of the evening of his life, while still coming to London for Parliamentary sessions. Such was 'Old Horace's satisfaction that Ripley was even mentioned in his will. The architect was given £100 'as a token of my Friendship and Acknowledgment for his kind Advice in finishing my Buildings at Woolterton'.⁵⁵

There can be no doubt that Walpole loved his house: 'My house of my own building, is not extremely large, nor little; is neither to be envied, nor despised. The disposition of the rooms is neither magnificent nor contemptible, but convenient. The situation is upon an eminence that commands a most agreeable prospect'.⁵⁶

Walpole knew that Wolterton's reputation among its contemporaries rested on its size. Otherwise there would hardly have been any discussion about the text for the plaque above the east door recording the completion of the hall. A friend of Walpole, the Reverend Mr. Addison, was consulted about the final version which runs HORATIUS WALPOLE HAS AEDES A.S. MDCCXXVII INCHOAVIT A.S. MDCCXLI PERFECIT. Addison wrote to Walpole that he thought it more appropriate to speak of 'Villa' rather than of 'Aedes'⁵⁷ in referring to a country seat. This document refers directly to the debate on architecture at a time when Ripley's innovative design was experiencing its first renaissance. His plans for Wolterton had already been used as a model for Copped Hall in Essex by the architect John Sanderson. At the same time Addison anticipates the distinction between 'greater house' and 'villa' made by John Summerson 200 years later. Summerson pointed out that the word 'villa' in the eighteenth century 'was never used with any architectural precision', but he insisted that 'it is Palladian or nothing' and gives this account of its essential features:

The English type is square or nearly square in plan, with a symmetrical arrangement of rooms on both axes. The front and back facades are divided into three, the central part having a portico (pilasterwise or in the round), the side parts one window each. The window-rhythm one-three-one is essential of the type. A house of this type has all the formality of a greater house but the window-rhythm renders it totally opposed to the idea of long ranges of intercommunicating rooms. Its accomodation is necessarily modest and its character therefore more in the nature of a retreat than an advertisement of its owner's standing or ability to entertain.⁵⁸

This is the concept that shaped the architecture of Wolterton Hall. It represents a movement away from the rich and ostentatious Palladianism of Houghton Hall and towards the mid 18th-century fashion for simplified exteriors which reflected an intimate and accessible interior. Behind the chaste façades of Wolterton Ripley's internal plans anticipate those of Isaac Ware and Sir Robert Taylor, of John Wood II, John Carr, Roger Morris and William Chambers, men whose names are synonymous with the 'villa revival' of the 1750s.⁵⁹ Ripley's designs for Wolterton can be regarded as a manifestation of trends in size, design and usage of country houses which had yet to develop. The bringing together of these elements of formal design is a result of Ripley not having been a specialist. He was no genius but was one of the new breed of highly professional, craft-trained architects. His models were not amateurs such as Burlington

but professional architects, such as Nicholas Hawksmoor, who were as comfortable with directions for making bricks, sawing floor timbers or slaking lime as they were with the massing of villa blocks. Ripley always retained a craftsman's concern for practicality and took account of utility in solving problems. Not only does this identify a basic feature of his artistic language, it also helps elucidation of the social significance of architecture in Georgian England.

However, it was left to Horatio Walpole's nephew Horace to classify Ripley's work at Wolterton: 'Yet Ripley, in the mechanic part, and in the disposition of apartments and conveniences, was unluckily superior to the earl himself'.⁶⁰ The Earl in question was Lord Burlington, and apparently Horace was not willing to forget that Ripley's condemnation was mainly the result of 'politics and partiality'. The present analysis of Ripley's work in Norfolk is a decisive plea against an art history of grand names and a rejection of handed-down prejudice. Ripley proved with his country seats in Norfolk that he was no longer the dull architect of his Admiralty House in London. His contributions to Houghton and Raynham Hall were decisive, for the harmonious outer appearance at Houghton and the everyday utility of Raynham. At Wolterton, Ripley's vision of a plain but convenient architecture was realised in stone. If Wolterton Hall were his only work, then surely his standing would be equal to those of his contemporaries Isaac Ware, Matthew Brettingham or John Sanderson.

Re-appraisal of Ripley's standing in the history of architecture is overdue. The manner in which Ripley was treated by the Burlington circle at the time, and in the 20th century by their admirers, should be at least reconsidered.

December 2000

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1. In 1743 Pope wrote:
'See under Ripley rise a new White-Hall,
While Jones' and Boyle's united labours fall', *Dunciad* Bk. III, II, 327-28.
2. Howard Colvin, *The History of the King's Works*, Volume V, 1660-1782, (1976).
3. This article results from the work on the writer's doctoral dissertation: A. Klausmeier, 'Thomas Ripley, Architekt. Fallstudie einer Karriere im Royal Office of the King's Works im Zeitalter des Neopalladianismus', Frankfurt/Main, Berlin, Bern, New York, Paris 2000. The study provides more detailed information about all of Ripley's major building involvements. Furthermore, there has been some reconsideration of his character in more recent research, such as Beverley Peters, *The Development of Wolterton Hall. A Country House and its Landscape, 1722-1858* (1991, unpublished), a study that analysed the regional and social changes that the erection of Wolterton Hall brought about on its immediate environment. Wolterton has twice been discussed in *Country Life*: on Oct 3 1908, 450 and in Gordon Nares, 'Wolterton Hall, Norfolk. The Home of Lord Walpole', July 18 and 25 1957, 116-119 and 108-111. See also John Harris, 'The Architecture of the House', in Andrew Moore, *Houghton Hall. The Prime Minister, The Empress and The Heritage* (1996); Nikolaus Pevsner and Bill Wilson, *The Buildings of England, Norfolk I. Norwich and North East* (1997) 730.
4. Marc Girouard, *Life in the English Country House* (1978), 4.
5. A. Johnson Evans, *The Intermediate Text-Book of English History, Volume IV. Being a longer History of England, 1714-1837* (1897), 81.
6. Pevsner and Wilson 1997, 73.
7. John Summerson, 'The Classical Country House in the 18th Century', in *Journal of the Society of Arts* (July 1959), 544-45.

8. *Lord Hervey's Memoirs*, ed. Romney Sedgwick (1952), 46-47.
9. James M. Rosenheim, *The Townshends of Raynham, Nobility in Transition in Restoration and Early Hanoverian England* (1989), 186.
10. Guildhall Library, London, MS 4335/2. Register of Freedom Admissions 1700-1714, 36.
11. Public Record Office, Kew, Work 4.1. Minutes and Proceedings May 1715-Nov. 1720. Vol. 1., July 12 1715.
12. Public Record Office, Kew, Work 4.1. July 12 1715.
13. Public Record Office, Kew, Treasury Papers, T.I. 219, 217.
14. Klausmeier 2000, 173-184.
15. The British Library, Additional Manuscripts, No. 11394.
16. John Hawkins, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1787), 375.
17. An extensive bibliography of the most important publications on the house is given in Moore, 1996. Unfortunately the most detailed analysis of all the plans has been neglected by English architectural historians. This is the German PhD. thesis by Ingrid Sindermann-Mittmann, *Studien zum Neopalladianismus am Beispiel eines englischen Landsitzes aus dem 18. Jahrhundert*, Freiburg im Breisgau, (1982).
18. John Cornforth, 'Houghton Hall, Norfolk, The Growth of an Idea', *Country Life*, May 14 1987. 168.
19. British Museum, Add. 15, 776, 'An account of the Journey yt Mr. Hardiess y I took in July 1735', in *Journal and Travels in different Parts of England and Wales*. See Sindermann-Mittmann 1982, 148.
20. Terry Friedman, *James Gibbs* (1984), 107.
21. John Harris, *The Architecture of the House* (1996), 22.
22. Sindermann-Mittmann 1982, 71.
23. Cambridge University Library, Cholm. MSS. 898, Letter from Rolfe to Walpole dated 19 June 1721.
24. Sindermann-Mittmann 1982, 76.
25. Published in Harris 1996, fig. 9, R.I.B.A., London.
26. Letter from Sir Thomas Robinson to Lord Carlisle, December 12, 1731, in Historical Manuscripts Commission, 15th. Rep., Part VI, *Manuscripts of the Earl of Carlisle*, (1897), 86.
27. Sindermann-Mittmann 1982, 73; Klausmeier 2000, 197.
28. Sindermann-Mittmann 1982, 94.
29. Most recently in Harris 1996, 22. The only exception is Sindermann-Mittmann 1982, 77, who attributes the responsibility for the building to Ripley. For building accounts of the stables see Cambridge University Library, C(H), Account book 23/2, 33, 42, 46, 47.
30. Houghton Hall MSS., Houghton Hall, Folder 'B'.
31. David Yaxley, 'The Tower of Houghton St Martin Church', *The Bulletin of the Norfolk Archaeological and Historical Research Group* No. 3 (1994), 47.
32. Wolterton Archives, Box 9LX, Doc. 10/99, 'Plan for a church at Wolterton by Ripley'.
33. Yaxley 1994, 47.
34. Cambridge University Library, C(H), Account book 50/4, between March 23 1745 and July 17 1745.
35. Rosenheim 1989, 176.
36. Raynham Hall Attic Archives, Christopher Cass's bill of December 28 1728.
37. Rosenheim 1989, 187.
38. Rosenheim 1989, 240.
39. Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England; With some Account of the Principal Artists; and Incidental Notes on other Arts. Also, A Catalogue of Engravers who Have been Born or Resided In England. Collected by the Late George Vertue; Digested and Published from his original Mss. by Horace Walpole* (with additions by the Rev. James Dallaway; a new edition, revised, with additional notes by Ralph N. Wornum), Volume III (1862), 769-70.
40. Horace Walpole, in a letter to Horace Mann. See Gordon Nares, 'Wolterton Hall, Norfolk', *Country Life*, July 18 1957.
41. Wolterton Archives Box 29L Doc. 8/21: Letter from Th. Ripley to Horatio Walpole dated December 17 1724.

42. Tom Williamson, *The Archaeology of the Landscape Park, Garden Design in Norfolk, England, c.1680-1840* (1998), 72-80 and 286-291.
43. Axel Klausmeier, "'Having a great Quantity of planting amongst it". Wolterton Hall von Thomas Ripley — Zu einem frühen Landschaftspark in Norfolk', *Die Gartenkunst. Heft 1/2000*, 131-152.
44. Mar was an extraordinarily ambitious man who once acknowledged he was 'infected with the disease of building and gardening'. See Terry Friedman, *James Gibbs*, New Haven and London 1984, 267.
45. Friedman 1984, 267. During the years following the Jacobite rising Gibbs had taken all of Mar's plans and designs into custody, while the Earl busied himself with architectural designing, sometimes probably with Gibbs's assistance. In the course of time he became thoroughly distrusted by the Jacobites. In 1721 he accepted a pension of £3500 p.a. from George I, and in 1724 he left the Pretender's service. His later years were spent in Paris and Aix-la-Chapelle, where he died in May 1732.
46. P.R.O. Edinburgh, Mar and Kellie deposit. RHP 13256-8.
47. Wolterton Archives Box 29L Doc. 8/21, Richard Fisher to H. Walpole, October 20 1738.
48. Wolterton Archives Box 18L Doc. 3/7/5. Bricklayer's Bill for Work done Wolterton by Thomas Hipsley, Oct. 1726-Jan. 1731.
49. Only Ripley's work is the focus of this study. Later changes and annexes like the 19th-century Repton Wing on Wolterton Hall's east front are not considered. Ripley's cubic block of moderate size measures 98 feet on the north and south and 74 feet on the east and west.
50. Wolterton Archives, Box 29L Doc. 8/21, Letter from J. Bradshaw to Walpole, September 8 1739.
51. Philip Yorke, 'The Travel Journal of Philip Yorke 1744-1763. An Account of a Journey through Norfolk 1750', *Publications of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society*, Volume XLVII (1965), 142.
52. Marc Girouard, *Life in the English Country House* (1978), 194.
53. Pevsner and Wilson 1997, 73.
54. Wolterton Archives Box 32L Doc. 8/63a. See also a letter from Horace Walpole's son Horatio to Richard Ness dated March 17 1757: 'The Garret Beds must be thoroughly aired, one of the Nursaries in the South front for my wife's servant'.
55. Wolterton Archives Doc. 15/13, Horatio Walpole's Will dated May 10 1748.
56. William Coxe, *Memoirs of Horatio, Lord Walpole. Selected From His Correspondence and Papers. And Connected With The History Of The Times* (1802), 287.
57. Wolterton Archives Box 3LX Doc. 8/12. 'Honour'd Sir, I have endeavoured, by a few slight alterations, to give your Inscription the form you first intended. Hanc Villam AD MDCCXXVII inchoatam MDCCXLI perfectum AE edificavit Nemoribus, Ambulacris, Euripo — *Et * Lacuvivo — Roberti illius, Orfordice Comititis, Frater Horatio Walpole *Ornavit*. I should choose *Villam* rather than *AEDES* for a Country seat. As for Euripo & Lacuvivo, the first you will recollect was a term in use for such pieces of water as were made to embellish gardens, as appears from Cic. de. Leg.L. 2.1. & from Pliny — the other is from Virgil's Speluncae, *viviq Lacus*, & frigida Tempe. Geo 2. where the epithet *vivus* seems to belong peculiarly to such Lakes as are supplied by springs of their own. I have nothing further but, whether your name alone without its addition, wou'd not be equally elegant, & at the same time highten the compliment design'd to Lord Orford? all this with due submission.' Walpole's preference for 'Aedes' indicates that he understood very well Wolterton's mediating function between the two concepts.
58. John Summerson, 'The Classical Country House', *Journal of the Society of Arts* (July 1959), 551-2.
59. Peters 1991, 86.
60. Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting. With some Account of the principal Artists; And additional notes on other arts. Collected by the late Mr. George Vertue; And now digested and published from his original MSS. by Mr. Horace Walpole. To which is added 'The History of the modern Taste in Gardening'* (1771), 769.