

THE LATER PERIODS OF ENGLISH DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE

WITH A PLEA FOR PRACTICAL WORK IN THE RECORDING OF
SURREY EXAMPLES

BY

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With a note by Hilary Jenkinson, F.S.A.

IT is a common fallacy to suppose that the attention of antiquaries and archæologists should be confined within certain chronological limits and to refuse to admit that any of the works of the human intellect are worthy of their attention unless they are at least two centuries old. It seems to be vaguely accepted that they may, with propriety, concern themselves with things Elizabethan and things Jacobean, but there is too great an appearance of modernity about the life and thought of the Restoration Age, of the eighteenth century and of the Regency, to render them a fit and proper subject for their consideration. That this attitude is neither right nor reasonable must become apparent after even the most superficial survey of the subject ; the *terminus ad quem* of antiquity cannot for ever remain stationary and English county archæology itself is already nearly a century old. We must therefore move with the times and include within our studies a more extended and more recent purview. There is on the other hand, however, a definite limit beyond which study becomes more and more unprofitable and interest may perhaps be said to cease altogether. The Great Exhibition of 1851 was undoubtedly the greatest calamity that ever befell English art and craftsmanship, blotting out as it did all sound tradition and substituting in its place a deplorable cosmopolitanism which poisoned much of the taste of the rest of the

century and has only been replaced by the artificial and hot-house growths of recent years.

Down to the age of the Great Exhibition English architecture and craftsmanship was the genuine expression of its age and setting, amenable to the same laws and development as the Tudor, Elizabethan and Jacobean periods and equally with them worthy of study as the authentic products of our race.

The destruction, wanton or accidental, of a notable building of the earlier ages can always arouse the passing notice of the Press and the more eager and better-directed attention of the local antiquary, but the disappearance of an equally notable building of the later ages often enough passes without comment or protest from either the one or the other. Yet a perfect house of the age of Queen Anne, of William Kent or of the Brothers Adam is as well worthy of preservation as a Tudor mansion or a work of Inigo Jones.

It is but little realized, in this country, how great a heritage is our domestic architecture and how immeasurably superior that architecture is to the corresponding art of most continental countries. How continuously has our national genius preserved us from the extravagances of taste which deformed the architecture, at one time or another, of the rest of Europe. How seldom in a continental town does one encounter the wonderful variety of simple seventeenth- or eighteenth-century houses which can still be seen in almost any English town outside the industrial areas.

The course and development of this later English Renaissance is of at least as great interest as any of the preceding periods and touches us more nearly than they, in that it provides the immediate models on which nearly all the traditional elements of our present-day domestic architecture are based. They are essentially the homes of the middle classes and are as much the backbone of English Architecture as their inhabitants were of the nation itself.

With the Restoration of 1660 a new era may be said to have opened in the treatment of the English home, which at once removed it into the modern age. This was not only due to the general adoption of purely classical or Palladian forms for the architectural format of the building, but also

in the adoption of a number of minor features which hold their own to the present day. Thus the sash-window was introduced, to the eventual exclusion of the solid frame and casement, the Hall as a living-room is definitely abandoned and the staircase takes up its modern position in the house; even the old type of brickwork—the English Bond—is abandoned in favour of Flemish Bond. Externally the most striking feature is the introduction of the heavy eaves-cornice which gives so substantial and effective a finish to the house. The house-architecture of the age from Charles II to Anne is naturally associated with the name of Sir Christopher Wren, whose career coincided with it. He indeed may have set the fashion in building but he was followed by a host of nameless craftsmen all over the country whose works are normally of so excellent a character that they might be and often are taken as works of the master himself. Such are the Child House at Guildford, Friends' House at Croydon and Eagle House at Mitcham.

With the close of Queen Anne's reign a number of notable changes are observable in the appearance and fittings of houses. Some of these were directly due to Acts of Parliament controlling the building of London alone, but the capital set the fashion and it quickly spread throughout the country. To this cause is due the abolition of the eaves-cornice and the setting-back of the window-frames from the face of the wall. The eaves-cornice was replaced by the plain brick parapet which distinguishes the houses of the Georgian period; often older houses were brought up to date in this fashion so carefully that the former existence of the cornice is no longer apparent. The staircases also are altered in character; the heavy balusters, one to each stair, of the previous period, are replaced by a more slender structure, where at first two and then three balusters are set on each step. The ends of the stairs also are no longer closed in by a single moulded beam or string but the beam is notched to the steps and carved brackets set under the ends of each tread. Entrance doorways too are altered; the delightful shell-hood which is typical of the reign of Queen Anne disappears with the accession of George I and is replaced by more classical but hardly less pleasing designs. In external appearance the

ordinary house is severely plain and forms a good external expression of the solid comfort and unpretentiousness of the age of Walpole.

In Rudyard Kipling's "An Habitation Enforced" is perhaps the most sympathetic description of a Georgian house ever penned and it might have been written of half a hundred houses in any of the home counties. Such houses are fortunately exactly suited to our present needs; neither too large nor too small, they accommodate themselves as well to modern conditions as to those of the eighteenth century, and if they are so fortunate as to preserve their formal gardens and their wrought iron gates, they would seem to fulfil all we can reasonably desire.

The latter part of the eighteenth century is marked by a new taste in internal decoration. The discovery of the buried civilization of Pompeii was nowhere more immediately fruitful than in England. In the hands of the Brothers Adam and other contemporary artists the delicate plasterwork of the destroyed Italian city was reproduced in an even more delicate form and its festoons and vases set off the oval panels painted with nymphs and goddesses by Angelica Kauffman and her school. The marble fireplaces partake of the same delicate art with their coloured inlay of verd antique and miniature reliefs. Here we have none of the extravagances of Louis Quinze, all is formal and restrained and forms a fitting setting for the attractive propriety of Jane Austen's characters.

The age of the Empire and the Regency is perhaps too near to our own to concern us greatly. Our native art begins to be tintured by the new Greek and the new Gothic, a reflection of Byron on the one hand and Scott and the romantics on the other. Even in these later days, however, though there may not be much to admire there is yet something to interest and this something is not wholly lost until the middle of the nineteenth century.

In the foregoing paragraphs an attempt has been made to convey something of the value, both historical and artistic, of the later periods of English domestic architecture. Let us now, for a moment, consider what part we can take in preserving this inheritance for posterity. The best method, undoubtedly, is the retention, as much as possible unaltered,

of the buildings themselves. This in the end must necessarily be the result of enlightened public opinion, and public opinion has far to go before it interests itself in such matters. It remains therefore for the individual or the local society to take steps to arouse general interest in the preservation of these buildings. In the case of a country town the matter is, or should be easy, for in such a case the preservation of what may be called a 'period atmosphere' is economically profitable and a modernized town loses at once all its attraction to the visitor and consequently all the visitor's custom. That such things are profitable may be judged by one very painful example; it has led, in the city of Chester, to the erection at vast expense of innumerable sham Gothic or sham Jacobean house-fronts which may deceive the unwary American but can cause little but pain to the instructed Englishman. Such a danger however is not to be feared in the ordinary country-town, and now that the first tornado of street-widening is passed it should not be difficult to restrain the local authority from demolishing the whole of one side of the High Street in order that strangers may pass through at 30 or 40 miles an hour.

In cases where all efforts have failed to prevent the destruction of a 'period' house, and this must often be the case in the suburban districts of London, it should be the duty of the local society to see that, before such destruction, an adequate record in drawings and photographs is made of the building. Something of this sort is already being done by the London County Council and the London Survey Committee in London and its immediate vicinity and in a more general way by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments. In the latter case however the Commission is limited by its terms of reference to the periods before the death of Queen Anne.

All these, more or less elaborate, surveys, however, are too lengthy in their operation to be effective as an immediate deterrent in the destruction of an ancient building. In a county such as Surrey it seems therefore better to proceed by a less elaborate and more rapid method. The Society in 1913 published an illustrated inventory of the antiquities of the county which drew attention, *inter alia*, to the more pro-

minent examples of later domestic architecture. It would be extremely desirable if a survey on similar lines might be devoted entirely to this subject and, as a preliminary, that a list should be drawn up of the houses in each parish which are notable either for their architecture, structure or fittings. The very compilation of such a list and its subsequent publication should do much to bring home to the owners or occupiers the interest and value of the houses in their charge and act as a brake on a too hasty decision to alter or rebuild them.

The list once made might be subsequently classified so that all available pressure might be brought to bear in cases of the first importance. Such action however premises a further organization, for it is obviously necessary that early information of the proposed destruction of a scheduled house should come to hand before it is too late for effective action. It would thus be necessary to have a considerable number of local correspondents, preferably those who had compiled the original lists, who would give notice to the Society of the threatened destruction of any building.

It used to be one of the most cherished rights of an Englishman to do what he would with his own, and it must be our main endeavour in these matters to instruct him to desire only the desirable, rather than to give any colour of interference in his private affairs.

Let us above all not dissipate our energies in attempting the impossible or in trying to preserve the unimportant or the commonplace. The attempt to confine a department store or a garage within a mask of the sixteenth or seventeenth century is doomed to failure, nor can we reasonably expect the modern shopkeeper to rest content with the shop-front of his eighteenth-century predecessor. Such alterations are unfortunate but inevitable and may even be tolerated as the authentic impress of our own age. A continuous row of modern shop-fronts will not rob us of the infinite variety of gabled sky-line which is perhaps the greatest asset of a country town. Finally let us be sure before we take action that we have a good case; let us not cry fire! fire! when only the toolshed is threatened. By straining after gnats some camels are perforce swallowed, and if we do not at

the beginning carry public opinion with us, our cause is lost.

Note by Hilary Jenkinson, F.S.A.

ARCHITECTURE of this period was for a long time, archæologically speaking, nobody's child: not so many years ago it was found almost impossible to enlist the aid of any of the larger official organizations for the saving of certain fine specimens of early eighteenth-century architecture and decoration in one of the Surrey suburbs of London: they were "not archæological." The article which the Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries has contributed to the present volume of our *Collections* shows how completely and happily this point of view has changed: but even now, when the membership of Archæological Societies proclaims the increased amount of interest taken by the public at large in our heritage from the past, the quantity of such work which, without any public protest, is maimed or swept away every year to make room for modern improvements is still alarming.

Our County is extraordinarily rich in examples of Queen Anne and Georgian Domestic Architecture (not to mention fine specimens from the previous century); one well-known authority¹ who was asked to name places in Surrey which were worthy of the archæologists' attention in this connection gave a first list of no less than 55 places; and the Appendix of Illustrations which we are enabled to include here by the kindness of Mr. Harold Falkner, F.R.I.B.A., gives some idea

¹ Mr. P. M. Johnston, F.S.A.; his list included:
 Camberwell—Surrey Lodge, Denmark Hill (Adam style);
 Clapham—round Common and near St. Paul's Church;
 Clandon Park;
 Croydon—Inns and a fine Wrennian Brick House;
 Deptford and Rotherhithe—old Sea Captains' houses;
 W. Horsley Manor House, front;
 Peckham—Meetinghouse Lane;
 Richmond—Maids of Honour Row;
 Sanderstead Court and Rectory;
 Seale—Poyle Park;
 Thursley—Manor Farmhouse, near Church;
 Woking—Hoe Street, painted ceilings, etc.

of the contribution which our County has to make to the Nation's surviving possessions in this delightful and characteristic field.

The Council of the Society has long had before it the necessity of doing something to preserve for English posterity as much as possible of this typically English inheritance. Obviously the first thing is to take stock of our possessions, in other words to compile and publish an accurate and complete Hand-list of such survivals in Surrey: and the present time, when the Records and Ancient Monuments Committee of the Surrey County Council has invited the assistance of our Society in the task of preparing a list of Antiquities in the County with a view to helping in their preservation in the future,¹ seems to offer an excellent occasion for undertaking such a piece of research. Only one thing is necessary—a sufficiency of labour: and to be effective that labour must be well distributed over the County. The Council therefore appeals to the many Members who, it feels sure, are interested in this subject, to volunteer their assistance in the recording of *Notable Examples of Domestic Architecture in Surrey*: if such Members will write to the Honorary Secretary an attempt will be made to form a group of workers, draw up a scheme, and start operations. The work is very well worth doing, does not require (in its initial stages) much technical equipment, and will be easy to accomplish if enough Members will come forward to help; and once it is published and widely distributed it will no longer be possible, as it has been in the past, when interesting buildings have been destroyed, to plead that their historical value was not known. The list will be an invitation to all who are interested in these things to sound the alarm as soon as it is known that a building is threatened.

¹ See the Annual Report of the Council, recently published.

APPENDIX OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Reproduced from original sketches by Harold Falkner, F.R.I.B.A.

WILMER HOUSE, FARNHAM, 1715.

WILMER HOUSE, FARNHAM.

Detail of Front Door.

LONGBRIDGE HOUSE, FARNHAM, 1710.

LONGBRIDGE HOUSE, FARNHAM.

Detail of Front Door.

DOOR AND RAILING APPROACH, GUILDFORD.

Destroyed about 1905.

PAIR OF DOORS, RECENTLY IN GUILDFORD HIGH STREET.



WILMER HOUSE, FARNHAM, 1715



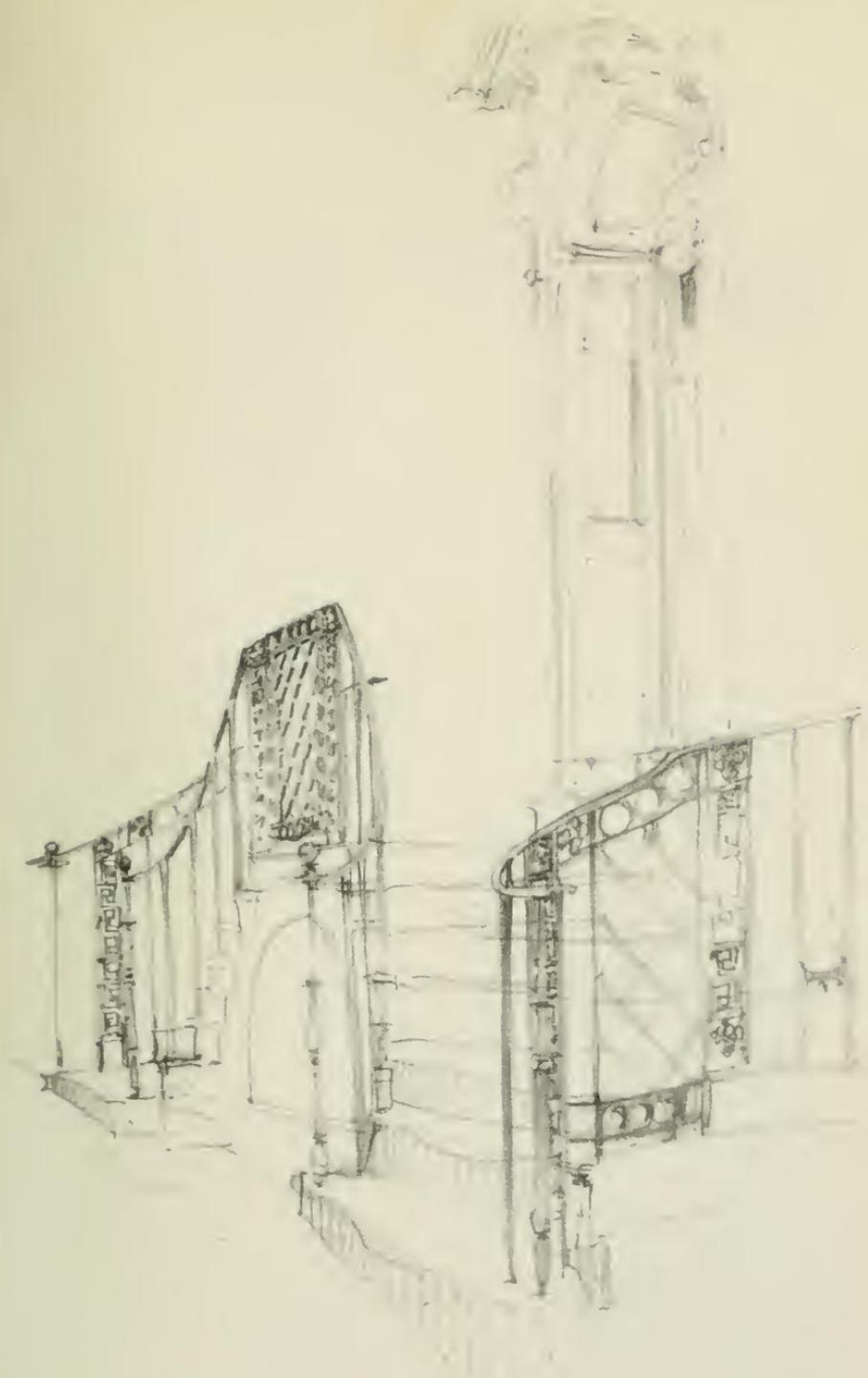
WILMER HOUSE, FARNHAM
Detail of Front Door



LONGBRIDGE HOUSE, FARNHAM, 1710



LONGBRIDGE HOUSE, FARNHAM
Detail of Front Door



DOOR AND RAILING APPROACH AT GUILDFORD
Destroyed about 1905



MODERN.
DOOR.
HAVING NO
RELATION.
TO ITS
COMPANION

PAIR OF DOORS, RECENTLY IN GUILDFORD HIGH STREET