

**Vanbrugh, Blenheim Palace,  
and the Meanings of Baroque Architecture**

Two Volumes

**VOLUME ONE**

Text

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## ABSTRACT

Blenheim Palace, designed for the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Marlborough by Sir John Vanbrugh and Nicholas Hawksmoor, is not only an outstanding exemplar of English baroque architecture, and also one of the best documented; yet it has not been the subject of focussed monographic study since the 1950s. In this thesis I reconsider the design and construction of Blenheim between 1705 and 1712, in an attempt to shed light on its historical meanings that it was originally intended to embody. In my first chapter, I introduce Marlborough and Vanbrugh, arguing that both built careers by exploiting the implicit exchange between service and reward at the heart of early modern court life. In my second chapter, I explore how Vanbrugh, with Hawksmoor's increasingly important assistance, set about designing Marlborough a 'martial' and 'magnificent' residence suited to his roles as Queen Anne's leading courtier and most successful general. In my third chapter I argue that the standard accounts misrepresent the chronology of important aspects of Blenheim's design and construction, obscuring the existence of a highly cohesive phase of enlargement and aggrandisement in 1707. In my fourth chapter, I suggest that this transformation can be linked, circumstantially and chronologically, to the effects of Marlborough's military victories of 1706 and, especially, to his elevation to the rank of sovereign prince of the Holy Roman Empire. Offering an alternative to some recent iconographic approaches to the palace, I show how the palace's sculptural programme was designed to reflect and consolidate this exceptional status. Taken together, these findings significantly refine, and in some respects revise, our basic knowledge of the design and construction of Blenheim, and also reveal with new clarity the extent to which English 'baroque' architecture must be understood in the context of early modern English—indeed, European—court culture.

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## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the contents of this thesis are the result of my own independent and original work, and have not been submitted for a higher degree or certificate to any other University or Institution.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, any ideas, techniques, quotations, or any other materials from the work of other people included in my thesis, published or otherwise, are fully acknowledged in accordance with standard referencing practices.

This thesis includes material that has been submitted and accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, as follows:

A paper derived in part from findings presented in Chapters 1, 3, and the Epilogue and Conclusion will be published as 'Queen Anne, Court Culture and the Construction of Blenheim Palace', *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, vol. 37 no. 2 (June 2014), pp. 185-197.

### **Note on Dates**

All dates for events that took place in the British Isles are given according to the Julian calendar, which ran eleven days behind the modern Gregorian calendar in use on most of the Continent by the time Blenheim was being built. In the 'Old Style', the year date changed on 25 March; however, in accordance with modern practice or the 'New Style', years have been taken to begin on 1 January. For events that took place on the Continent or where there is the possibility of ambiguity, both dates are given, with the Old Style date preceding the New Style, e.g. 6/17 January 1705, 27 August/7 September 1707.

## INTRODUCTION

Blenheim Palace was one of the most costly and ambitious domestic building projects in Early Modern Europe. It is the outstanding achievement of one of the most elusive and fascinating architectural partnerships in English history, that of Sir John Vanbrugh and Nicholas Hawksmoor. It was built for a patron, John Churchill, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Marlborough, of conspicuous historical interest and influence in both the national and international arenas. It is also exceptionally well documented, with perhaps the most comprehensive series of contemporaneous sources for the design and construction process of any major English domestic building of its time.<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising, then, that Blenheim has attracted the attention of successive generations of scholars: Bonamy Dobrée, Geoffrey Webb, H. Avray Tipping and Christopher Hussey in the 1920s and 30s; Laurence Whistler and David Green in the years immediately after the Second World War; Kerry Downes from the 1950s onwards; and, in the last few years, Vaughan Hart. After so much labour by so many, and such eminent, architectural historians, it may seem unlikely that there could be much to add to our knowledge or understanding of this extraordinary building. This thesis is, nevertheless, motivated by the belief that there is indeed still much to say about Blenheim: firstly to clarify, amplify and where necessary revise the accepted factual framework; and secondly to explore in more depth aspects of Blenheim's history that have as yet to receive significant attention. These purposes will emerge more clearly when seen against the major contributions made by those who have studied Blenheim before me, and whose work has provided the indispensable foundation for my own research.

### **The Historiography of Blenheim Palace: The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Background**

In spite of its manifest architectural and historical importance, Blenheim Palace attracted remarkably little serious scholarly attention until well into the interwar

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<sup>1</sup> The documentation, now mostly preserved in the British Library, includes a full set of building accounts from 1705 until 1714 in the British Library; the correspondence of the Clerks of Works,

period. Until that time, even a persistent enquirer would have had difficulty ascertaining all but the most basic information about its design and construction. This was largely because until that period architectural history in England was largely written by and for practising architects working in an era of historical revivals.<sup>2</sup> Individual buildings were treated as self-contained architectural objects which could be arranged in a developmental or morphological sequence on the basis of approximate date, place of origin, and formal features, with major examples picked out for critical appraisal. Historical context was treated as strictly secondary to, and supportive of, these primarily stylistic concerns.<sup>3</sup> In this scholarly tradition, Blenheim was simply one more example, though a spectacular one, of the style broadly and imprecisely referred to as ‘English Renaissance’, or, with only marginally less imprecision, the ‘Queen Anne’ style.

Where more detailed information was available, it was likely to be found either in mainstream historical works, occasional essays by antiquarians and litterateurs, or works of reference. For Blenheim, these consisted primarily of incidental discussions in William Coxe’s magisterial biography of the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Marlborough, first published in 1818; Isaac D’Israeli’s brief and irresponsibly sensationalistic essay on ‘The Secret History of the Building of Blenheim’; and the relevant passages of a carefully documented but notably partial—in both senses of the word—joint biography of Marlborough and his duchess by the 8<sup>th</sup> duke’s occasional archivist and bookman, Stuart J. Reid.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For an accessible overview of the development of architectural history in Britain, see Bruce Allsopp, *The Study of Architectural History* (London, 1970), especially pp. 36-76; and for a more detailed study of the crucial phase when architectural history was professionalised in the wake of the influx of refugee German-speaking scholars in the 1930s, see David Watkin, *The Rise of Architectural History* (London, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> The classic example is Banister Fletcher and Sir Banister F. Fletcher, *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method for the Student, Craftsman and Amateur* (London, 1896, and numerous editions thereafter). Other notable examples of the genre include Joseph Gwilt’s *Encyclopaedia of Architecture, Historical, Theoretical and Practical* (particularly the revised edition by Wyatt Papworth, London, 1867); James Fergusson’s *A History of the Modern Styles of Architecture* (London, 1862); and Henry Heathcote Statham’s *A Short Critical History of Architecture* (London and New York, 1912, and numerous later editions).

<sup>4</sup> William Coxe, *Memoirs of John, Duke of Marlborough: With his Original Correspondence* (6 vols) (London, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1820), vol. 2, p. 74; vol. 5, pp. 347, 350; vol. 6, pp. 363-73, and *passim*; D’Israeli’s essay was published in the numerous editions of his *Curiosities of Literature* – see for example, Isaac D’Israeli, *Curiosities of Literature* (3 vols) (London, 1859), vol. 3, pp. 102-111; and Stuart J. Reid, *John and Sarah, Duke and Duchess of Marlborough 1660-1744* (1914; London, 1915), pp. 210-24 and *passim*.

In all these works, the primary focus was naturally not the building itself, but rather the circumstances of its commissioning, the personalities connected with it, and their relationship with each other. Much was made of the palace's origin as an expression of royal and national gratitude for the event after which it was named, Marlborough's decisive victory over the armies of Louis XIV at the Battle of Blenheim in August 1704. The other main areas of interest were the notoriously fraught relationship between Vanbrugh and the duchess of Marlborough; the vast amounts of public money consumed by the construction process until funding for the building was withdrawn following the Marlboroughs' fall from royal favour in 1711; and the disastrous conclusion of the whole process, in which the unpaid Blenheim contractors sued the Duke personally for the settlement of their accumulated debts. The only significant area of controversy was the where the greatest blame for the débâcle lay. For Coxe the duchess was the least sympathetic figure, although he conceded that she must have been sorely tried by Vanbrugh's irresponsibly extravagant management of the building process; for D'Israeli, it was Vanbrugh, whom he presents as a duplicitous and manipulative character who used his playwright's deceptive imagination to turn the vast debts he had incurred on behalf of the Crown onto the unwitting duke; for Reid, although consciously writing a 'vindication of John Duke and Sarah Duchess of Marlborough', the responsibility was more evenly distributed, with duke and architect, but most of all Queen Anne's withdrawal of royal favour, sharing their part.<sup>5</sup>

### **Vanbrugh, Hawksmoor and the Rise of Architectural History**

The first substantive signs of a recognisably modern approach to architectural history are to be found on in the 1920s. This was driven primarily by growing interest in the history of England's domestic buildings, especially those of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, and by the increasing stature of Sir Christopher Wren, who by the early twentieth century had come to be regarded as England's greatest architect.<sup>6</sup> These factors were clearly evident in the publication at this time of two multi-

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<sup>5</sup> Reid, *John and Sarah*, pp. vi, pp. 216-24.

<sup>6</sup> There was a mass of general works on English early modern English architecture published from the late nineteenth century onwards. Of these, Sir Reginald Blomfield, *A History of Renaissance Architecture in England 1500-1800* (2 vols) (London, 1897) is particularly notable. On English domestic architecture specifically, see, for example, J. Alfred Gotch, *The English Home from Charles I to George IV: Its Architecture, Decoration and Garden Design* (London, 1918).

volume works that would play a fundamental role in the development of English architectural history. The first was the series of lavishly illustrated folio volumes on *English Homes* (1921-36), written by H. Avray Tipping and Christopher Hussey.<sup>7</sup> Tipping and Hussey were on the architectural staff of *Country Life*, and the social as well as financial resources provided by their employer enabled them to write extended discussions, based on considerable original research, of most of England's finest country houses from the earliest times up to the end of the Georgian period. The second major publication was the twenty-year series of annual publications of the Wren Society, which had begun in 1924 under the editorship of the practising architect and architectural historian, A. T. Bolton, assisted by Duncan Hendry.<sup>8</sup> In due course these volumes would reproduce in whole or in part almost all of the major primary sources then known that related to Sir Christopher Wren and his circle.

It was in this context of growing interest in England's post-medieval architectural past that Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor began to emerge more fully as distinct architectural personalities. Two short illustrated monographs on Vanbrugh's and Hawksmoor's architecture, by Christian Barman and H. S. Goodhart-Rendel respectively, were published in 1924.<sup>9</sup> Although little more than picture books, they contained introductory essays in which outspoken cases were made for their subjects' architectural achievements. A year later, the literary historian Bonamy Dobrée published a lengthy essay on 'The Architect of Blenheim', notable as both the first sustained narrative of Vanbrugh's life and the first detailed account of his most important architectural commission.<sup>10</sup> Dobrée's essay makes striking use of lengthy extracts from a wide range of primary sources, some unpublished, including most notably Vanbrugh's correspondence with the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough. Dobrée subsequently edited Vanbrugh's plays for the four volume Nonesuch edition of the *Works of Sir John Vanbrugh*; and as part of the same edition, a young architectural historian, Geoffrey Webb, produced a collected edition

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<sup>7</sup> H. Avray Tipping with Christopher Hussey, *English Homes*, (9 vols) (London, 1921-36).

<sup>8</sup> Arthur T. Bolton and H. Duncan Hendry, *The Wren Society Volumes* (20 vols) (Oxford, 1924-43).

<sup>9</sup> Christian Augustus Barman, *Sir John Vanbrugh* (London, 1924); Harry Stuart Goodhart-Rendel, *Nicholas Hawksmoor* (London, 1924).

<sup>10</sup> Bonamy Dobrée, 'The Architect of Blenheim', in *idem*, *Essays in Biography, 1680-1726* (London, 1925), pp. 57-195.

of Vanbrugh's letters.<sup>11</sup> Webb's work for the first time made available in a single comprehensive volume these fundamental sources, of which the most important in the present context were numerous documents relating to the design and construction of Blenheim Palace. These comprised not only all the letters from Vanbrugh to the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough that were then available to Webb, but also the architect's letters to the Blenheim clerks of works, Henry Joynes and William Boulter, as well as various letters and statements assembled by Vanbrugh for the Blenheim trials. Finally, when Tipping and Hussey's *English Homes* volume on *Sir John Vanbrugh and His School* appeared in 1928, it included all the major country houses associated with Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor, as well as the most important examples by their less celebrated followers and contemporaries. Though restricted in scope and detail, and entirely lacking in scholarly apparatus, their account began to piece together the history of the most important individual country houses on the basis of original archival research and pioneering, if sometimes insufficiently discriminating, stylistic analysis. Blenheim was no exception, and Tipping and Hussey's careful and accurate use of Vanbrugh's correspondence placed historical understanding of the design and construction of the palace on an unprecedentedly secure footing.

The result of all this activity was that by the end of the 1920s, the amount of detailed information on Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor in general, and the design and construction of Blenheim in particular, had increased exponentially. However, these very advances threw into sharp relief a number of basic questions about authorship, attribution and architectural achievement that proved remarkably resistant to definitive resolution. The controversy over these questions had been launched by Goodhart-Rendel in the introductory essay of his book on Hawksmoor. He argued strongly that Hawksmoor should not simply be regarded, in the manner then customary, as first Wren's and then Vanbrugh's draughtsman-cum-technician. Instead, he was an architectural genius of the first order whose distinctive creative contribution had been obscured by the towering reputations of his more famous associates. Citing Vanbrugh's almost complete lack of architectural experience at the time of his early commissions, Castle Howard in particular, Goodhart-Rendel

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<sup>11</sup> Bonamy Dobrée and Geoffrey Webb (eds), *The Complete Works of Sir John Vanbrugh* (4 vols, London, 1927-28).

implied that he would have been utterly dependent on his better-trained and more experienced assistant.<sup>12</sup> It was therefore to Hawksmoor that much of the credit for Vanbrugh's architectural achievement was due.

Goodhart-Rendel's challenge was taken up on behalf of Vanbrugh by A. T. Bolton. Early on his research for the Wren Society, Bolton had discovered a series of dramatic and important drawings that he identified with one of the most important projects that Wren, Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh were all, at one point or another, involved in, the construction of Greenwich Hospital for Seamen. The drawings showed a project for a monumental chapel flanked by sweeping segmental colonnades. Struck by their boldness of conception and vigorous execution, Bolton concluded that they could not have been executed by a trained draughtsman of the Wren school like Hawksmoor, but must have come from straight from Vanbrugh's untutored hand. He immediately published them as Vanbrugh's, and developed and reiterated his views when he reproduced them in the Wren Society's sixth volume.<sup>13</sup>

Bolton's views were taken up even more emphatically by Tipping and Hussey, who explicitly stated that one of the principal objects of their volume was to show Vanbrugh's 'leadership of so important a contemporary as Hawksmoor, and of lesser professionals such as Etty and Wakefield.'<sup>14</sup> And this applied not only to architecture but to landscape design as well: William Kent himself could be seen 'as a continuator of Vanbrugh's manner in his designing of both buildings and gardens.'<sup>15</sup> Indeed, in their enthusiasm for Vanbrugh's achievement, they unhesitatingly attributed several lesser buildings to the architect on the basis of little more than broad stylistic resemblance. The most important examples were Gilling Castle and Duncombe Park, both of which were 'conclusively' given to Vanbrugh without the support of—indeed in opposition to—the fragmentary documentary and circumstantial evidence then available.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Goodhart-Rendel, *Hawksmoor*, esp. pp. 13-15, and *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> Bolton and Hendry, *Wren Society*, vol. 6 (1930), pp. 86-92, 99-100. Bolton had previously published the drawings and a reconstruction of the scheme in *The Builder* (1926).

<sup>14</sup> Henry Avray Tipping and Christopher Hussey, *English Homes, Pt 4 Vol 2: Sir John Vanbrugh and his School* (London, 1928), p. xi.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206. Both are now attributed to Vanbrugh's provincial contemporary, William Wakefield, although Duncombe displays very close stylistic parallels with some of Vanbrugh's work.

## The Revolution in Method

It was precisely this sort of ‘irresponsible attributionism’, as Howard Colvin would later call it, that helped precipitate a revolution in the temper of English architectural scholarship in the years leading up to and following the Second World War.<sup>17</sup> The pioneering figure in this revolution—at least in respect of the study of English Baroque architecture—seems to have been Geoffrey Webb. His edition of Vanbrugh’s correspondence was prefaced by an introductory essay which made an initial attempt to place Vanbrugh’s architecture in a broader art historical context, seeking to define his work as part of a distinctive ‘English Baroque’ style. In doing so, Webb called into question the claims of both sides in the Vanbrugh-Hawksmoor debate: against Goodhart-Rendel, he argued that Castle Howard showed an immaturity in the treatment of the whole and infelicity in the handling of detail that could not readily be attributed to a trained professional like Hawksmoor; against Bolton he cited the evidence of a drawing for one of the Greenwich schemes that bore on its reverse side a sketch for Castle Howard initialled ‘NH’.<sup>18</sup> Webb also added a third possibility, that of a ‘later Wren manner’ to which both Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh were indebted. But, he warned, ‘until a great deal more work has been done on the Greenwich Hospital building history all theories as the respective shares of Wren, Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh in these early works must be extremely tentative’.<sup>19</sup>

Webb had clearly realised that if such basic questions of authorship and attribution were to be resolved with any degree of certainty, it would be necessary to undertake research of a wholly different degree of depth and empirical rigour than that which had so far been accomplished. His view came to be shared by a whole generation of historians of early modern British art and architecture, some directly influenced by Webb through his position as a lecturer at the Courtauld institute, others arriving independently at similar convictions. Among their number were Webb’s pupil Margaret Whinney, who also became a lecturer at the Courtauld; Whinney’s friend, John Summerson, who succeeded Bolton as Curator of the Soane Museum in 1945;

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<sup>17</sup> Howard Colvin, ‘Writing a Biographical Dictionary of British Architects’, in *idem.*, *Essays in English Architectural History* (New Haven and London, 1999), p. 292.

<sup>18</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. xi.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

Summerson's assistant at the Soane, Dorothy Stroud, who became a pioneer historian of landscape design; Edward Croft-Murray, then Assistant Keeper of the British Museum Print Room and a historian of decorative painting; Rupert Gunnis, a wealthy amateur whose main interest was British sculpture; and, most influentially of all, Howard Colvin, a young history graduate who sought, with unprecedented scope and rigour, 'to apply to architecture the ordinary processes of historical scholarship'.<sup>20</sup>

Under their influence the study of the history of English art and architectural history turned decisively towards meticulous archival, documentary study. In specific relation to Vanbrugh, Hawksmoor and their work at Blenheim Palace, this transition was marked by the publication in the early 1950s of two seminal works: David Green's *Blenheim Palace*, and Lawrence Whistler's *The Imagination of Sir John Vanbrugh and His Fellow Artists*.<sup>21</sup> Green's was the first full-length monographic study of the palace and its park, and although it attempted to describe the entire history of the palace and park from Romano-British origins through to the twentieth century, the design and construction of the palace formed its primary focus. Green was essentially an amateur in architectural history—he was a journalist by profession and enthusiast for Blenheim and the Churchill family by inclination—but he approached his task with professional discipline.<sup>22</sup> With the advice and support of both Webb and Colvin, Green for the first time began to work through the full range of relevant source materials: not only those in the palace's immense archive, which was as yet only very imperfectly collated and catalogued, but also the many relevant documents preserved among the Joynes papers in the British Library, including the Blenheim building accounts and correspondence which had, astonishingly, been barely touched by previous writers.<sup>23</sup> He also unearthed a series of previously unpublished architectural, landscape and decorative drawings for the palace and its grounds in the Bodleian Library and elsewhere.

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<sup>20</sup> Colvin, 'Writing a Biographical Dictionary', p. 292.

<sup>21</sup> David Green, *Blenheim Palace* (London, 1951); Lawrence Whistler, *The Imagination of Vanbrugh and His Fellow Artists* (London, 1954).

<sup>22</sup> Author biography on the back dust jacket of David Green, *Grinling Gibbons: His Work as Carver and Statuary* (London, 1964).

<sup>23</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 11.

Drawing on this rich material, Green began the painstaking process of piecing together the detailed history of both the house and gardens. The result was an extremely rich picture of the circumstances of Blenheim's creation and its subsequent history, which he took all the way up to the ninth duke's restoration of the great parterre in the 1920s. Within this story, the most important strictly architectural finding related to the basic design history of the palace. Building on Webb's work, Green showed with unprecedented clarity that the palace's appearance underwent substantial modification in the course of construction. Green for directly documented the extent of the change by, for the first time, illustrating and discussing an early drawing for the south front of Blenheim (fig. 1).<sup>24</sup> This drawing forms a quite remarkable contrast with both the final design for Blenheim, familiar from its engraved representation in the pages of the first volume of *Vitruvius Britannicus* of 1715 (fig. 2), and the extant structure (figs. 3), which closely corresponds, with the exception of various sculptural details, to the 1715 engraving. The Blenheim that was built was therefore very different from the one originally planned in 1705, and it was this transformation that provided the primary explanation for the vast expenditures its construction entailed. Then, once royal favour, and with it royal funding, came to an end, the remaining history of the construction was essentially the duchess's attempt to bring this immense project to a state of completion that would do justice to the duke's achievements and, after his death, to his memory.

With Green's work knowledge of Blenheim entered a new era, and his book remains the standard basic reference on the subject. However, although he had for the first time established a well-founded basic chronology for the construction process, the more complex aesthetic, attributional and authorial issues that concerned Webb and Colvin were beyond Green's scope. Moreover, his treatment of the graphic evidence was summary and incomplete in relation to its importance for our understanding of both Blenheim specifically and Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor's work more generally. For a more considered view of the specifically architectural issues, we must turn to Whistler's nearly contemporary publication.

Whistler is perhaps best known as one of the twentieth century's most virtuosic glass engravers, but he was also a passionate Vanbrugh enthusiast, and in 1938 he had

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 48 & 75.

published the first full-length biography of the architect.<sup>25</sup> At that point, Whistler had barely been aware of the complexities of the architectural questions entailed by his subject, instead relying largely on Bolton, who acted as an informal advisor to the project, and Tipping and Hussey's work on the country houses.<sup>26</sup> His pattern of attributions follows their precedents almost exactly, and his chapters on Blenheim do little more than recapitulate the account in *Sir John Vanbrugh and His School*.<sup>27</sup> But Whistler subsequently became far more aware of the complexity of the attributional and stylistic issues, at least in part through acquaintance with Colvin.<sup>28</sup>

The result is that whereas Green's book was very much a history of Blenheim, Whistler's was far more strongly focused on the properly architectural aspects of his subject. Indeed, Whistler's *Imagination of Sir John Vanbrugh* reads like a systematic attempt to resolve Webb's statement of the Hawksmoor-Vanbrugh conundrum. Its avowed purpose was to 'distinguish between the imaginative contributions made by these two great artists to English architecture'; it attempts to fulfil this purpose by first considering 'A Question of Draughtsmanship', 'A Question of Authorship', and then 'The Problem of Greenwich', before moving on to a detailed discussion of Vanbrugh's major country houses.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the study, and doubtless influenced by Colvin's pursuit of historical rigour, Whistler attempted to address these questions on the basis of exacting analysis of a mass of written and graphic evidence, much of it previously unpublished. Whistler's account of Blenheim is consequently concerned not just with the process of construction, but also with the underlying dynamics of the design process, from which he sought to tease out Vanbrugh's and Hawksmoor's respective contributions.

Whistler's analysis of Blenheim begins with a fairly conventional statement of the palace's origin as a monumental expression of royal and national gratitude. But this is only a prelude to a meticulous discussion of the circumstances of Vanbrugh's appointment as architect and the building's subsequent design history, one that subtly enriches and modifies Green's account. Drawing on the comparative evidence

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<sup>25</sup> Laurence Whistler, *Vanbrugh: Architect and Dramatist* (London, 1938).

<sup>26</sup> For Bolton's role, see Whistler, *Vanbrugh*, p. vii.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, esp. pp. 54-55.

<sup>28</sup> See Whistler's acknowledgements, where Colvin receives the first, and most emphatic, expression of gratitude: *The Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. vii.

<sup>29</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, pp. 1, 2-16, and *passim*.

provided by Vanbrugh's and Hawksmoor's independent works, Whistler argued that the lanterns added to the design in the summer of 1707 exhibit 'a formal inventiveness not found in Vanbrugh's independent work, or his drawings'. This led him to conclude that they were essentially Hawksmoor's independent work.<sup>30</sup>

Whistler pursued this line of reasoning through the both the exterior and interior of the palace, as well as its wider setting. He made careful use of the building accounts to determine the dates when the main features were constructed, and attempted to infer the process through which they had been designed.

In doing so, he managed to further amplify the picture of enlargement and aggrandisement identified by Green. Citing early site plans showing the house in its parkland setting (fig. 4), Whistler noted a corresponding increase in its extent.

Whereas the early drawings show a house consisting of a main block to the south and two long narrow service wings extending on either side of the entrance forecourt to the north, in the executed structure an elaborate courtyard was added to the east (fig. 5) that would—had it not been for the Duchess's resistance—have been balanced by a similar group of structures to the west, as shown in the General Plan of Blenheim in *Vitruvius Britannicus* (fig. 6).<sup>31</sup>

Having clarified the changes in Blenheim's design, Whistler then sought to determine the responsibilities of, and the interactions between, the various collaborators involved—not only Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor, but also Henry Wise in the gardens, and James Thornhill and Grinling Gibbons in the interior schemes. The picture that emerged from Whistler's analysis was that Vanbrugh, in consultation with his patron, developed an overall vision for the commission; but it was his collaborators, and Hawksmoor first and foremost, who transformed this vision into reality. Hawksmoor alone had the requisite knowledge of both the practical and aesthetic aspects of architectural design to do so, and it is to him that we owe many of the most sophisticated features of Blenheim's design.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 98.

<sup>31</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 48, had already noted that 'Whether from the first Vanbrugh intended the wings to have quadrangular courts attached to them seems extremely doubtful', and cites Whistler as the source of his information; these ideas were not fully expounded, however, until Whistler published his *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>32</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 95.

In the time since Green and Whistler wrote, the application of a rigorous documentary approach to architectural history has continued to increase our fundamental knowledge of early modern British architecture. In the study of Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor specifically, the momentum generated by Green and Whistler has been sustained principally by Kerry Downes. Downes began researching Hawksmoor seriously when he was a student of Margaret Whinney at the Courtauld, and continued his studies with her as a postgraduate. His doctorate on the architect had already been accepted for publication and was in page proof at the time of its submission in 1959.<sup>33</sup> This, Downes's first book, was based on and in part published a vast mass of previously neglected or unknown primary documentation. With this foundation, he was able to provide the first authoritative and comprehensive account of the architect's life and career. In doing so, Downes revolutionised historical understanding of Hawksmoor and greatly enhanced his artistic reputation.

In spite of, and perhaps in part because of, the scope and scale of Downes's research, he did not propose significant changes to the relatively thoroughly researched issue of Vanbrugh's and Hawksmoor's collaborative works. 'The story of neither [Castle Howard nor Blenheim] needs telling here', he wrote, 'for both have been told recently and well by Mr Green and Mr Whistler...'.<sup>34</sup> He also broadly accepted Whistler's view of the wider attributional and authorial issues: if Castle Howard and Blenheim are, he wrote, "early Vanbrugh", they are surely also "Vanbrugh under the guidance of Hawksmoor".<sup>35</sup>

Downes therefore concentrated on refining and amplifying, rather than attempting to fundamentally rethink, the interpretation of his predecessors. He sought to define more closely the 'late Wren' manner originally hypothesised by Webb, and to distinguish the characteristics of the older master's more elegant approach from Hawksmoor's bolder conceptions. He also made more use than Whistler of Vanbrugh's fragmentary comments on architectural style, notably those related to the reconstruction of Kimbolton, to reinforce the idea that Vanbrugh was concerned with broad massing and general effects, but that only Hawksmoor was able to

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<sup>33</sup> Kerry Downes, *Hawksmoor* (1959, London, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1979), p. xv.

<sup>34</sup> Downes, *Hawksmoor*, p. 71.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

complement this with a thorough mastery of the detail of classical form and design.<sup>36</sup> On Blenheim specifically, Downes found little to dispute in Green's basic chronology and Whistler's more specifically architectural analysis, and focused instead on enriching their account in two areas. The first was the organisation and supervision of the works. Drawing on Hawksmoor's extensive correspondence with the clerks of works, Joynes and Boulter, Downes emphasised the extent to which Hawksmoor managed the fine detail of the design and construction process, in both aesthetic and practical terms, even while working within a general framework, especially with regard to planning, that was very much provided by Vanbrugh.<sup>37</sup> The second was in relation to drawings, where Downes's exhaustive research in libraries and archives added many new discoveries to the corpus, most notably a series of important early projects for the Great Hall of Blenheim, almost all in Hawksmoor's own hand.<sup>38</sup> These once again emphasised the fundamentally important role he had in transforming Vanbrugh's initial ideas into fully resolved designs.

Downes reconsidered Blenheim several times in his later works. He concisely restated his view of Hawksmoor's role in a second, shorter and more accessible, book on the architect published in 1969.<sup>39</sup> More significantly, the focus of his research subsequently expanded to include Vanbrugh, a development that bore fruit in another major monograph and then a magisterial biography.<sup>40</sup> The key reference for Blenheim is the monograph, as the biography's chapters on the palace build closely on its approach and conclusions.<sup>41</sup> Downes here provides a more sustained exposition of the palace's design and development than he had in his previous writings. He begins by briefly contextualising the building's origins and early history, emphasising the palace's changing purposes—originally a royal and national monument to Marlborough's victories, and then, following Marlborough's death, the duchess's memorial to her beloved husband. He also outlines the evolving political circumstances in which its construction took place, correlating the different phases of the building not only to Marlborough's rise and fall, but also to the political fortunes

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 78.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77 and figs 16a and b.

<sup>39</sup> Kerry Downes, *Hawksmoor* (London, 1969), esp. pp. 46-57,

<sup>40</sup> Downes, *Vanbrugh* (London, 1977) and *idem.*, *Sir John Vanbrugh: A Biography* (London, 1985).

<sup>41</sup> Downes, *Vanbrugh*, pp. 55-75. See also Downes, *Sir John Vanbrugh*, pp. 277-291, 295-315.

of the Whigs with whom the duke had become associated.<sup>42</sup> He then retells in more detail the design and building history he had first outlined in 1959, again basing his account largely on Green and Whistler, but supplementing them with his own reading of the primary sources. Finally he makes a cautious but illuminating attempt to understand the symbolic value of Blenheim's architecture, emphasising its castellar and historicising resonances. For example, he singles out features such as the circular basement windows, which he interpreted as symbolic evocations of military 'portholes', that is the gun-loops of a fortification; and he noted the resemblance of the Blenheim skyline to those of Elizabethan and Jacobean country houses, such as Wollaton Hall.<sup>43</sup>

As a result of Downes's deep and wide-ranging researches on Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor, we now have a far better founded understanding of both the essential facts and the broader significance of both architects' lives and works. Indeed, since his seminal works were completed remarkably little that is substantively new has been added to our basic knowledge of Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor's lives or their major works. For Blenheim, only one theme—the Great Bridge that dominates the palace's northern approach, for Downes 'the most mysterious and least understood' part of Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor's design—has been the subject of genuinely new, empirically-oriented research.<sup>44</sup>

This aspect of the palace was addressed systematically by the joint researches of Howard Colvin and Alistair Rowan, which were published in 1993.<sup>45</sup> A combination of close examination of the physical fabric and careful scrutiny of the primary sources in the British Library revealed that design of the bridge, like that of the house itself, underwent significant revision and enlargement in the course of its construction. The earliest of the bridge's three arches, that to the north, proved to be of different dimensions and materials from the rest of the extant structure. Colvin's and Rowan's reading of the accounts further demonstrated that the finalised design was only put into execution as late as 1708, some two years after the north arch had

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<sup>42</sup> Downes, *Vanbrugh*, pp. 57-60.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69. The Elizabethan parallels did not go unnoticed in Downes's 1959 book on Hawksmoor but in the earlier work there is little consideration of their historical or symbolic resonances.

<sup>44</sup> Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 72.

<sup>45</sup> Howard Colvin and Alistair Rowan, 'The Grand Bridge at Blenheim' (1993), reprinted in Howard Colvin, *Essays in English Architectural History* (New Haven and London, 1999), pp. 243-62.

first been begun.<sup>46</sup> They also argued that the large number of small rooms to be found within the bridge were not, as a sceptical Duchess of Marlborough had thought, simply an extravagance on Vanbrugh's part, but voids needed to lighten the structure for both economic and engineering purposes.

By the early 1990s, then, it could plausibly be argued that there was only limited residual potential for empirical research into the early history of Blenheim Palace to generate truly original discoveries. The initial researches of Green and Whistler had established the basic framework of fact and interpretation; the work of Downes had broadened, deepened, contextualised and in certain respects revised their findings; finally, Colvin and Rowan's study of the Grand Bridge filled the last major lacuna in our knowledge of the palace.

In this respect, Blenheim is arguably typical of early modern British architecture as a whole. The revolution in method and approach inspired by Webb and sustained most conspicuously by Colvin has transformed basic knowledge and understanding of the subject. Through their own efforts, and those of the generations of students they inspired, architectural history in Britain moved far beyond its earlier amateurism and imprecision. On the basis of close engagement with the archives, this new generation of scholars undertook the arduous task of compiling an extensive series of fundamental studies and monographs on the major architects, buildings, and building types of the early modern period. In the process, most of the basic questions of authorship, attribution, chronology, and immediate context that emerged so conspicuously in the inter-war period have been addressed and seemingly settled. The results of this steadily progressing pattern of research were then collated by Colvin and disseminated through the successive editions of his monumental biographical dictionary of early modern British architects.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Turn to Architectural 'Meaning'**

With this increasingly complete coverage of the field, however, a growing number of architectural historians have begun to argue that the 'Colvin revolution' has

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 249, 254.

<sup>47</sup> Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840* (New Haven and London, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 2008); the first edition was published in 1954.

accomplished its aim, and that it is now both necessary and desirable to address different and broader architectural historical questions. This conviction is most clearly perceptible in a steady turn away from narrowly historical researches towards broader questions of architectural meaning and significance. A clear and early intimation of this self-conscious change of direction can be seen in Charles Saumarez Smith's book on Castle Howard, published in 1990, but based on a doctoral thesis submitted in 1986. The author describes his study as 'an attempt to decipher the message, to examine the meaning of the building by an intensive examination of the original circumstances of production.'<sup>48</sup> Saumarez Smith observes that questions of purpose and meaning naturally arise in the process of looking at a building, but laments that,

In the conventional discourse of academic architectural history it is normal to ignore this extended meaning of a building and to concentrate on the immediate reading of its form and structure; but beyond the form and structure lies the concealed nature of the intention, which challenges explanation. Lurking behind the superabundance of architectural forms are critical questions: who built Castle Howard and for what?<sup>49</sup>

Even allowing for some overstatement—Downes in particular had by no means neglected such questions in his later work on Vanbrugh—these words are indicative of a change of orientation, and perhaps more importantly of mood, in architectural historical scholarship that has since become increasingly insistent. Saumarez Smith wanted to do more than simply ascertain the constructional and design of history of Castle Howard. Rather, he wanted to recapture its psychological significance and aesthetic impact in the context of its original creation, to see it as its contemporaries saw it.<sup>50</sup>

At around the same time, an American historian of early modern English literature, Frank McCormick, also attempted to develop a richer view of architectural meaning. In his study of *Sir John Vanbrugh: The Playwright as Architect*, McCormick sought to shed new light on Vanbrugh's architecture through a close examination of his

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<sup>48</sup> Charles Saumarez Smith, *The Building of Castle Howard* (London, 1990), p. xviii.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 193-94.

literary output, particularly emphasising the martial aspect of both.<sup>51</sup> Blenheim, he suggests, can be read as a kind of giant allusion to the battle of Blenheim after which it was named. Indeed, according to this interpretation, every aspect of the palace was intended to recall this great event to the minds of contemporary viewers: the massing of the building recreates the impression made on the French enemy by the similarly massed ranks of the allied armies; the bridge represents the Duke's crossing of the River Nebel before the battle; the fortified garden symbolically consolidates the gains that followed the victory.<sup>52</sup>

Similar concerns with elucidating architectural meaning are even more overtly evident in two recent books by Vaughan Hart.<sup>53</sup> Hart's books, the first considering Hawksmoor and the second Vanbrugh, seek to go beyond the existing scholarship by explicitly addressing questions of architectural meaning, primarily through analysing the iconography of the buildings they designed. Blenheim plays a critical role in Hart's interpretation. Using Vanbrugh's unsuccessful plea for the preservation of the ancient mediaeval manor of Woodstock as his principal source, Hart seizes upon a passage where the architect stated that later viewers of the palace would be encouraged to 'read the Duke of Marlborough in story.'<sup>54</sup> He reads this as unambiguous evidence that Vanbrugh's basic architectural priority was 'narrative, rather than aesthetic', and that both Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor employed a quasi-heraldic system of signs and symbols to 'tell the story' and convey circumstances of their buildings' inhabitants.<sup>55</sup> While Hart accepts that in the case of Blenheim this concern was to some degree subordinated to the building's ostensible purpose as a memorial to Marlborough's deeds and the Queen's glory, 'Vanbrugh also saw his role at Blenheim as helping to represent the Duke's legend in stone.'<sup>56</sup>

Hart proceeds to enumerate various symbolic elements of the building that he believes function in this way. These include the entrances into the kitchen court,

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<sup>51</sup> Frank McCormick, *Sir John Vanbrugh: The Playwright as Architect* (University Park PA, 1991).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>53</sup> Vaughan Hart, *Nicholas Hawksmoor: Rebuilding Ancient Wonders* (New Haven, 2002) and *idem*, *Sir John Vanbrugh: Storyteller in Stone* (New Haven and London, 2008).

<sup>54</sup> Hart, *Hawksmoor*, p. 105 and *idem*, *Vanbrugh*, pp. xiv, 129, 253.

<sup>55</sup> Hart, *Hawksmoor*, pp. 105-111, 116-118, and *Vanbrugh*, pp. 70-73, 129. For the basic idea of architecture as a form of heraldry, see also Vaughan Hart, "A peece rather of good Heraldry, rather than of Architecture": Heraldry and the Orders of Architecture as Joint Emblems of Chivalry', *Res*, vol. 23 (1993): 52-66.

<sup>56</sup> Hart, *Vanbrugh*, p. 137.

which he likens to Serlio's project for a fortified gate; the sculptures of lions mauling cockerels that surmount them, symbols of British victory over the French; Marlborough's armorial achievement in the tympanum of the pediment over the north portico; Pallas Athene 'in her warlike guise' standing on the acroterion of the same pediment; bound captives on the higher broken pediment behind her, signifying military victory; and the formal composition of the entrance court, which Hart sees as a conscious evocation of the Temple of Mars Ultor in Rome, again emphasising Marlborough's martial identity.<sup>57</sup> Finally, he broadens his terms of reference to explore literary parallels: the scale and grandeur of the building manifest 'Vanbrugh's need to form an architectonic equivalent to Dryden's revival of heroic verse', which can be seen a fitting literary equivalent to Marlborough's heroic achievements; while further insight into the landscape can be drawn from Addison's *Rosamond*, which was dedicated to the Duke of Marlborough, set in Woodstock, and written by a close associate of Vanbrugh.<sup>58</sup>

On the face of things, Hart's interpretation appears to represent the latest stage in a steady process of developing, deepening and broadening our understanding of early modern British architecture. From a situation in the period prior to the First World War, where knowledge was fragmentary at best, the growing interest in Britain's architectural past led in the 1920s to the collation and publication of the most important primary sources and to attempts at more sustained architectural historical analysis. This very process, however, revealed a lack of basic knowledge of chronological and attributional issues, provoking a turn towards the rigorous application of basic historical methods under the leadership of scholars such as Webb and Colvin. This bore fruit in a series of more specialised monographs, including those of Green on Blenheim and Whistler on the Vanbrugh-Hawksmoor partnership. These provided the foundation for a sustained period of fundamental research by scholars such as Downes, who have gradually filled the most prominent lacunae in our knowledge of architects, structures and styles, and deepened our grasp of the historical and aesthetic forces they embody. Finally, as both the corpus of published documents and the basic factual record have become more complete, architectural historians such as Hart have begun to move beyond the facts-and-

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138-42.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 144-45.

documents focus of earlier architectural historians to consider issues of meaning and significance. As William Whyte has recently written, ‘Then, the pressing need was for an accurate account of what was built. Now we’re increasingly interested in why it was built and what it was meant to mean’.<sup>59</sup>

That the reality is somewhat more complex than this is, however, attested by the mixed reception accorded to Hart’s work. It has been acclaimed by Elizabeth McKellar as ‘a fascinating and revelatory account’.<sup>60</sup> Anthony Geraghty, however, has disputed Hart’s foundational claim that Vanbrugh saw architecture as a fundamentally narrative rather than aesthetic medium, accusing him of unjustifiably transforming metaphorical parallels between architecture and literature, which are indeed to be found in early modern sources, into literal ones. In doing so, Geraghty contends, Hart consistently ‘reduces architecture to other things, denaturing it in the process’.<sup>61</sup> And Richard Hewlings has subjected Hart’s account to even more searching, indeed scathing, critique, convicting him numerous errors of fact and judgement, both in the specifics of his iconography and in more general contextual matters.<sup>62</sup> Leaving aside for one moment the justice or otherwise of these various assessments of Hart’s work, their contradictoriness must testify to the lack of shared standards by which work addressing such issues can be pursued and critically assessed.

### **Blenheim Palace and the Meanings of Baroque Architecture**

At this point, the rationale for my renewed attention to Blenheim should, I hope, begin to become more apparent. By undertaking a detailed ‘case study’ of a particular house, I hope to begin considering the relationship between architectural expression, social context and historical meaning in a way that is at once empirically well-founded but capable of yielding insights of broader art historical and historical relevance. In order to do this, I have chosen to focus my attention on the period

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<sup>59</sup> William Whyte, ‘Society News and Updates: Annual Symposium’, *Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain*, Newsletter 102 (Winter/Spring 2011): 19-20, p. 20.

<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth McKellar, Review: Vaughan Hart, *Sir John Vanbrugh: Storyteller in Stone* (2008), *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 49, no. 2 (April 2010): 431-32.

<sup>61</sup> Anthony Geraghty, Review: Vaughan Hart, *Sir John Vanbrugh: Storyteller in Stone* (2008), *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 69, no. 2 (June 2010): 276-77, esp. 277.

<sup>62</sup> Richard Hewlings, Review: Vaughan Hart, *Sir John Vanbrugh: Storyteller in Stone* (2008), *Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain Newsletter*, 102 (Winter/Spring 2011): 23-26.

between the beginning of Blenheim's construction in 1705 and the cessation of royal funding in 1712. This focus is in considerable part pragmatic: the period during which Queen Anne funded the project is extensively documented in a series of rich archival deposits, most of which are now held by the British Library. It was therefore feasible to obtain most of the relevant material as scans, enabling a depth of engagement with the design process and its contexts that would have been difficult to sustain for the later periods of the palace's construction.

There is also, however, a historiographical justification for this focus. To begin with, there is, somewhat paradoxically, a case to be made that the very richness of the surviving documentation from 1705-1712 has made it difficult to build a clear picture of Blenheim's development during this period. With such a quantity of sources to work with it becomes remarkably challenging to distinguish the critical transitions from the mass of more trivial incidents that crowd the pages of the building accounts and the immense correspondence between patrons, architects and those working on site. The later period, by contrast, presents a somewhat simpler picture, with a less complex and extensive documentary base. It has, moreover, benefited from the growing interest in female patronage. As a result, there is now a significant amount of recent literature focused on the years after Marlborough's disgrace, when the duchess took an ever more prominent, indeed dominant role, in decision-making. Judith Lewis has described the duchess's attitude to Blenheim in a recent article on aristocratic women's relationships with the buildings they inhabited; while Kathleen Szpila has written a doctoral dissertation on the duchess's building activities as well as a substantial article on her commissioning of the Marlborough memorials at Blenheim.<sup>63</sup> None of these works are without their flaws: readers should be mindful that Lewis's handling of sources in her account of the duchess is somewhat cavalier; and that Szpila's dissertation is vitiated by a number of errors of fact and interpretation.<sup>64</sup> Taken together, however, their work goes some

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<sup>63</sup> Judith S. Lewis, 'When as House is Not a Home: Elite English and the Eighteenth-Century Country House', *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 48 no. 2 (April 2009): 336-363; Kathleen Szpila, 'Sarah Jenyns Churchill at Blenheim Palace – Setting the Record Straight: A re-evaluation of the activity of the first duchess of Marlborough as patron of the arts', unpublished PhD thesis, Temple University, 1997; *idem*, 'An Eighteenth-Century Artemisia: Sarah Churchill and the Invention of the Blenheim Memorials', in Cynthia Lawrence (ed.), *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs*, University Park, Pennsylvania, 1997, pp. 189-206.

<sup>64</sup> There are, for example, errors in some of Lewis's transcriptions from BL Stowe MS 751, as in the quotation at fn. 37, p. 345, where 'adjusting' should read 'spoyling'; and occasions, as at footnote 32,

considerable way to enriching our picture of the intentions and circumstances that shaped the palace's completion. It is therefore for the earlier phase of construction that there remains the greatest need for further work.

Within this period, I seek to use the rich variety of extant sources to trace the connections between the evolution of the design of Blenheim with the changing status, purposes and priorities of both the architects and, especially, the patron. The primary manifestation of this concern is a strong focus on placing the design and construction of Blenheim within the context of Marlborough's values and ambitions. Marlborough was the epitome of the early modern courtier, and, as I hope to make clear, Blenheim constituted a central part of what we might call his 'representational strategy'. His career therefore forms the indispensable backdrop for any fully contextualised account of the palace's design and construction.

In my first chapter I accordingly consider various salient aspects of Marlborough's life both in England and abroad. I pay particular attention to his activities as a courtier and to the way he exploited the opportunities provided by the court to pursue his own and his family's interests. The duke's remarkable capacity for deception and manipulation emerges clearly from a close description of the means by which he accumulated titles and material benefits as the 'rewards' of his service. Building on this foundation, I go on to suggest that Queen Anne's grants of both the Woodstock estate upon which Blenheim was built and of Blenheim itself must also be understood in the context of Marlborough's relentless pursuit of material and social advancement. Instead of being the spontaneous gift of a grateful queen and nation that they are more usually understood to be, these lavish 'gifts' must be seen as the results of carefully coordinated strategy. Vanbrugh's career, too, I go on to argue, must should be understood in relation to the same courtly milieu; indeed, it may even have been his adroitness in negotiating its treacherous waters that attracted Marlborough's patronage.

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p. 344, when statements are supported by irrelevant or misleading citations from the same source. Szpila's difficulties mostly relate to the complex chronology of the duchess's involvement in the palace's construction, a problem exacerbated by the misdating of several important letters (e.g. on page 125, a letter of 1705 is placed in 1706; on page 137, an otherwise unrecorded visit to Blenheim by the duchess is inferred from another letter, similarly misdated by a year).

In my second chapter, I move on to consider the terms of Marlborough's commission to Vanbrugh, and try to understand how the architect began to translate his patron's desires into an architectural reality. I give close attention to two previously neglected early drawings for Blenheim and argue that they offer valuable insights into the previously unexplored early evolution of the palace's design. More specifically, I seek to show how they enable us to better understand how the palace's design evolved from that for Castle Howard, the model initially favoured by Marlborough. In doing so, I engage with debates about the purposes of Vanbrugh's evocation of the 'castle air' in his works; and further suggest that the desire to create an effect of 'magnificence', in the very specific sense that it was understood in the early eighteenth century, was at the heart of the architectural aesthetic Vanbrugh envisaged for Blenheim. Through this analysis I also seek, albeit tentatively, to contribute to longstanding debates about Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor's working relationship, providing new evidence for Downes's observation that Vanbrugh seems to have taken special responsibility for the ground plans of his houses, while Hawksmoor was responsible for transforming those initial plans into buildable structures.

In my third, and in some ways pivotal, chapter, I seek to revise the received chronology of, arguably, the single most important design change at Blenheim. This is the decision to increase the height of the house and change the major order from Doric to Corinthian, which, since the work of Green, has always been dated to the winter of 1706 to 1707. In the conventional chronology, this was then followed by a long drawn out series of essentially *ad hoc* changes that cumulatively resulted in Blenheim's transformation into a far more extensive and elaborate building than the one originally planned in 1705. Through close examination and coordination of the documentary and graphic evidence, I seek to show that it is, in fact more likely that not only the increase in the height of the house, but almost all the other significant changes to Blenheim's design, took place during the summer of 1707. This re-dating, transforming a fragmented series of changes into a single, highly cohesive phase of architectural reinvention, has considerable implications for our understanding of how and why the appearance of Blenheim was so comprehensively revised.

It is theme that I turn to in my fourth and final chapter, where I consider the reasons for Blenheim's architectural transformation in greater detail, showing how the expectation of increased funding in the wake of Marlborough's recent victories made it possible to reconceive its design. I then go on to show that, if a changed financial framework provided the means for Blenheim's transformation, its motivation should be closely related to the Duke of Marlborough's ever-growing military and political status. Tracing the consequences both of his victory at Ramillies in May 1706 and of his nearly contemporaneous acquisition, after much effort, of a territorial principality in the Holy Roman Empire, I suggest that Blenheim became a means of both displaying and consolidating Marlborough's unparalleled eminence. I then discuss Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor's decision to disseminate their fully resolved plans for Blenheim in the form of a book of 'official' folio engravings conspicuous—perhaps even unrivalled—for their size and quality. Drawing heavily on the evidence provided by these engravings, I move on to consider the iconographic programme intended for Blenheim but left largely unrealised in the wake of Marlborough's disgrace in 1711. After carefully assessing Hart's recent exposition of Vanbrugh's architectural intentions at Blenheim, I go on to offer an alternative interpretation of the iconography of the palace. In particular, I bring out the varied strands of imagery that can be traced in the sculptural adornments of Blenheim and relate them to their possible sources and probable intentional meaning. My conclusion is that the fully developed iconographic programme existed primarily to reflect, reinforce and legitimise Marlborough's claim to enjoy a unique dual status as both a loyal subject of Queen Anne and a sovereign prince in his own right. In this sense, Blenheim's iconography can be seen as the symbolic counterpart of the effect of 'magnificence' that Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor sought to evoke more directly through its formal language. When understood in this way, I hope, a far richer, more vivid, and ultimately more convincing account of Blenheim's historical meanings begins to emerge, an account that contributes not only to our understanding of the palace as an aesthetic entity, but to the place of 'baroque' architecture in early modern English society.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Reputation and Reward

*'History will be kind to me, for I intend to write it.'*

(Attributed to Winston Churchill)

#### Introduction

In the corridor behind the private apartments at Blenheim Palace there is a large oil sketch by Sir Godfrey Kneller depicting the palace's origins in allegorical form (fig. 7). We can interpret the complex iconography of this painting with unusual confidence because Kneller himself left a formal record of the circumstances of its commissioning and of the symbolism of its principal figures.<sup>65</sup> Kneller's account states that in 1708 Queen Anne sent orders through the Duke of Shrewsbury to paint 'a Large Picture Twelve foot high and Eight foot broad for the upper end of the Long Gallery at Blenheim'.<sup>66</sup> John Churchill, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Marlborough, for whom the palace was being built, himself set the terms of the commission, desiring 'that no person should be represented by the life except the Queen's Majesty But the whole Picture should be Allegoricall'.<sup>67</sup>

Formally, the main elements of the painting can be seen to form an inverted T, consisting of four units: a single figure stands in the lower centre, surrounded by figure groups, two on either side of her and one above her. At the centre stands the single portrait in the composition, that of Queen Anne as the personification of Generosity. Her monarchical status is emphasised by her rich golden dress and imperial purple velvet cloak, both edged with royal ermine, and by the lion beside her whose paw rests in its turn upon a globe, 'the Emblem of Power and Strength'; her wisdom and justice is shown by the sceptre she bears in her left hand, which terminates in the all-seeing 'Eye of Providence'. With her right hand she bestows an architectural drawing, 'a Model of Blenheim', upon the personification of 'Military

<sup>65</sup> British Library Add MS 61355, ff. 1-2; printed in full as Appendix IV in David Green, *Blenheim Palace* (London, 1951), p. 298.

<sup>66</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 298.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

Merit', a kneeling, armour-clad figure in an ermine lined robe, this time of red velvet.

Before Military Merit there lies a twisting cornucopia 'Shead by her Majesty's affections', disgorging its content of golden coins; and above him hovers an eagle, carrying a 'an Imperiall Lawrell Crown' in its beak, a crown which will shortly be placed on the head of Military Merit. Around him cluster a series of other figures. Furthest to the left of the picture space stands Victory with her palm branch; she is wingless to signify Steadiness and holds the Helmet of Mars and the Shield of Minerva as emblems of martial prowess. Next to her we find Hercules with his club and lion skin cloak, accompanied by a figure holding aloft a suit of armour and a series of military standards coloured white, red and blue, described by Kneller as the 'Trophys of conquered Countreyes'. In front of them stands the figure of Architecture, with a pair of dividers in her hand, who we must assume was the author of the design that the queen is presenting to Military Merit. Finally, a small boy can be seen almost lost in the crowd of figures; his youth symbolises Posterity, who we can presume must represent the descendants of the Duke of Marlborough, to whom his great house will descend along with his titles of nobility.

On the other side of the queen, to the right of the picture space, a young, golden-haired woman holds a sheaf of grain in one hand and a rudder in the other, accompanied by three other female figures, one more prominent than the others and crowned with a garland of vegetation. They symbolise 'Plenty both by Sea and Land with other Nymphs of Rivers', and we can infer that they represent the abundant natural wealth of the Queen's kingdom, the source of her bounty. Before them sits a figure writing upon a scroll which rests on winged hourglass, the 'Allegorical figure history ... Signifying perpetuall Record'. Finally, in the sky above the Queen, stands the figure of Apollo, who illuminates the scene with his torch and commands trumpeting Fame 'to proclaim and the Signifie the Same to the whole Universe'; under him three *putti* hold a golden serpent biting its tail, the traditional symbol of eternity, here standing for Apollo's love of truth, and by implication, the truth of Kneller's representation.

With the component figures identified in this way, and some knowledge of contemporary events, the intended meaning of the image is not difficult to decode.

At the time the painting was executed, England was deeply involved in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), which had erupted following the death without direct heir of the last Spanish Habsburg monarch, Carlos II. Shortly before he died, Carlos had made a will by which he left his kingdoms to Philippe de Bourbon, duc d'Anjou, a grandson of Louis XIV of France; but the surviving Austrian branch of the Habsburg dynasty also had a strong hereditary claim to the throne that they were unwilling to give up without a fight. The English, fearful of the political and economic consequences of French hegemony over the Spanish Empire, had subsequently entered the war as part of a 'Grand Alliance' with the Dutch and the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I, in an attempt to secure the succession of the main Habsburg claimant to the throne, Leopold's grandson, Karl.

The Duke of Marlborough, the intended recipient of the full-scale version Kneller's painting, was Captain General of the English army, and supreme commander of the English and Dutch forces on the Continent. In this capacity he won a series of major victories against the armies of the Bourbons and their allies, of which the first and arguably the most dramatic was the Battle of Blenheim (Hochstadt), where Marlborough, fighting alongside the chief of the Imperial forces, Prince Eugene of Savoy, engaged the joint armies of France and her most important ally Bavaria on 2/13 August 1704. By the end of the battle some thirty thousand French and Bavarian troops had been killed or taken prisoner; the French commander, Marshall Tallard, had been captured along with the standards and colours of 238 French cavalry and infantry companies, a severe blow to French pride and prestige; and the Bavarian elector was forced to flee his domains and take refuge in the Spanish Netherlands. When Marlborough finally found time to scribble a note to his wife Sarah, he can surely be forgiven for 'being soe vain as to tell my dearest soull that within the memory of man there has been noe Victory soe great as this'.<sup>68</sup>

The news of Marlborough's great victory was received in England with astonishment and rejoicing: 'every bumper was crowned with the Queen's or the Duke of Marlborough's health and the loyal citizens emptied the cellars so fast I think two-thirds were foxed next morning. Never were such illuminations, ringing of bells,

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<sup>68</sup> Henry L. Snyder (ed.), *The Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence* (3 vols) (Oxford, 1975), vol. 1, p. 351: Marlborough to the duchess, 3/14 August 1704.

such demonstrations of joy since the laying of London stone'.<sup>69</sup> On 7 September 1704 Queen Anne and the Duchess of Marlborough attended a great *Te Deum* at Westminster Abbey to offer thanks to God for so signal a victory. God was not the only one to be thanked: minds turned to the great commander, and it soon became clear that for Marlborough the fruits of victory were to be more than martial. On 17 January, the Queen informed the House of Commons that she had considered the 'proper means for perpetuating the memory of the great services performed by the Duke of Marlborough', and had decided to bestow upon him a royal estate, the manor and honour of Woodstock, with the Hundred of Wootton.<sup>70</sup> She then requested that Parliament grant funds to buy out the current tenants of the estate. By the end of the following August, John Vanbrugh and Nicholas Hawksmoor had designed the house that was to be known as Blenheim Palace for the site, the foundations were already being laid, and funds issued from the royal purse to help defray the costs of its construction, funds which were to be regularly added to over the next six years.

Kneller's painting, then, is a carefully constructed portrayal of Queen Anne's bestowal of these rewards on Marlborough. Military Merit is the personification of Marlborough's services, the fruits of which are symbolised by the figures of Victory and Hercules. The enemy standards behind identify the vanquished enemy: the white semy of golden fleurs-de-lis on a white background is the symbol of France, while the motto *nec pluribus impar* and the head of Phoebus-Apollo on the blue standard are the personal devices of the French king, Louis XIV. The queen then becomes the medium through which the plenty of her realms is generously bestowed on Marlborough as the just reward for his victories over Louis' armies. The reward takes the form of funds for the construction of Marlborough's great house, which will truthfully preserve the memory of his great military services for as long as its stones stand.

This narrative of the origins of Blenheim as a fitting reward for, and memorial of, a great victory corresponds closely to the account given by historians of the palace.

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<sup>69</sup> G. M. Trevelyan, *England under Queen Anne* (3 vols) (1930-32; London, 1946).

<sup>70</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 38; Frances Harris, 'Parliament and Blenheim Palace', *Parliamentary History*, vol. 8, no. 1 (May 1989): 43-62; esp. 43-44.

According to David Green, for example, Queen Anne attended the victory *Te Deum* and then,

having with a full heart rendered thanks to the Lord of Hosts, turned to the delightful task of deliberating with the Duchess how His chosen instrument could be thanked and honoured. ... Marlborough was already a duke. Anne had seen to that two years before ... Now was her opportunity to support the dukedom with an estate.<sup>71</sup>

The Queen chose the Woodstock estate; the duchess took up the suggestion with alacrity; the duke concurred; and somehow or other the gift of the house followed. The duke then received this gift in a remarkably disinterested way. Indeed, according to this interpretation, the duke's quite literally self-effacing reluctance to see himself portrayed as the recipient of Queen Anne's generosity directly reflected an unusual ability to distinguish his own person from his talents and successes:

We see then that Military Merit is not simply a representative of the Duke nor, as an unknown warrior, of the allied arms (though Marlborough was never slow to acknowledge what he owed to his comrades-in-arms). He is, rather, what the late Duke perceived to be Marlborough's impersonal desire for fame. Only a man of Marlborough's calibre could have made and maintained so solemn and yet so subtle a distinction between himself and his deeds. He never explained, and so few understood him that even his 'dearest soul' the Duchess, when it came to finishing Blenheim, to an appreciable extent misinterpreted his will.<sup>72</sup>

In a similar vein, Kerry Downes has also accepted the relatively straightforward explanation that Blenheim was a reward for the victory at Blenheim, writing that

the mood of Queen, Parliament and (for what they were worth) people was that too great a reward for the victor would be difficult to imagine ... There

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<sup>71</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 38; see also Charles, 9<sup>th</sup> Duke of Marlborough's introduction to Reid, *John and Sarah*, pp. xxvi-xxvii.

<sup>72</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 46.

was general agreement that the nation's thank-offering extended to an appropriation from the Civil List to pay for Marlborough's house....<sup>73</sup>

And Downes, too, has accepted on the basis of Kneller's painting that Marlborough 'accepted the glory as his due, though in a curiously impersonal way, for the deed and not the doer'.<sup>74</sup>

In this view, then, Blenheim Palace was first and foremost a reward granted by the Queen, Parliament, and in some sense the nation, to memorialise Marlborough's great deeds, with the man himself remaining a basically passive recipient of this great bounty. On the surface of things, moreover, this would not seem to be an unreasonable explanation. Given the magnitude of Marlborough's victory at Blenheim, the bestowal of an estate and a suitable house might seem a proportionate reward, especially in a pre-modern society such as Augustan England, where the sovereign was expected to be the 'fount of honours' from which gifts, pensions, and favours would liberally flow.<sup>75</sup> However, it is my claim here that when we turn to examine the circumstances within which Blenheim Palace was conceived and the personalities of the major players, this conventional explanation comes to seem less than probable. Instead, a quite different story emerges that must, inevitably, begin with the man whose achievements were to be memorialised in Blenheim's forms: John Churchill, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Marlborough.

### **Marlborough at Court: Power, Patronage and Ambition**

Marlborough has a complex and contradictory historical reputation. Portrayed by some—Macaulay in particular—as a treacherous and unscrupulous climber, and by others—such as his descendant and (still) most recent major biographer, Winston Churchill—as a political visionary whose grasp of military and political strategy saved Europe from French domination, he has generated continuous controversy

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<sup>73</sup> Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 55.

<sup>74</sup> Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 58.

<sup>75</sup> The study of gift exchange in traditional societies is now a well-established strand in the social sciences, largely because of the influence of Marcel Mauss's, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London, 1966); more recently, historians have begun to explore these concepts in relation to early modern European societies: see Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Oxford and New York, 2000).

since his meteoric rise to power and influence more than three hundred years ago.<sup>76</sup> In recent years, however, there has come to be more appreciation of Marlborough as figure who can only be genuinely understood in the context in which he lived and forged his career: the courts of early modern Europe. As Maurice Ashley noted as long ago as 1939, and as J. P. Jones has recently emphasised, Marlborough was first and foremost a product of the court. By skilfully and sometimes ruthlessly exploiting every opportunity for social advancement and material acquisition open to a young and ambitious courtier, John Churchill—as he was before he gained his succession of ever more eminent noble titles—was to attain a vertiginous rise from modest origins to wealth, power, and status.<sup>77</sup> As his contemporary, Gilbert Burnet put it,

He knew the arts of living in a Court beyond any man in it. He caressed all people with a soft and obliging deportment, and was always ready to do good offices. He had not fortune to set up on: this put him on all the methods of acquiring one. And that went so far into him, that he did not shake it off when he was in a much higher elevation: nor was his expense suited enough to his posts...<sup>78</sup>

These comments, though cynical, seem to be amply justified by the facts of Marlborough's career. The foundation of his fortune was his father's post in the royal household of Junior Clerk Comptroller to the Green Cloth.<sup>79</sup> This position was only modestly remunerated, and in itself did little to remedy the fortunes of his family, minor Dorset gentry that had been virtually ruined for their royalism during the Civil War. However, thanks to their father's office, the Churchill siblings occupied a place at the heart of the English court that was the foundation of John Churchill's later eminence. The critical moment was Arabella Churchill's

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<sup>76</sup> Winston Churchill, *Marlborough, His Life and Times* (4 vols) (London, 1933-38).

<sup>77</sup> Maurice Ashley, *Marlborough* (London, 1941), pp. 85-87 and *passim*; J. R. Jones, *Marlborough* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 10-11; although Jones's short biography has been welcomed as an innovative contribution to Marlborough scholarship (see e.g. reviews by W. A. Speck, *English Historical Review*, 111:40 (1996): 96-97, and Kurt Kluxen, *Historische Zeitschrift*, 259:2 (1994): 514-15), it may be noted that Ashley not only foreshadowed this view in his—unjustly neglected—biographical essay, but presented it with more conviction and clarity. My own account is strongly indebted to Ashley's presentation of the future Duke of Marlborough's early career, which accords closely with my own interpretation of the duke's later years presented below.

<sup>78</sup> Ashley, *Marlborough*, p. 89.

<sup>79</sup> Alfred Lesley Rowse, *The Early Churchills* (London, 1956), pp. 58-59.

appointment as a maid-of-honour to the Duchess of York, the wife of James, Duke of York, younger brother of the king and his heir apparent. Arabella soon attracted the attentions of the duke himself, becoming his mistress and eventually bearing him four illegitimate children.<sup>80</sup>

No doubt through Arabella's influence, John Churchill became one of the duke's pages at the age of only sixteen, and then began, like so many young men of gentle but impoverished birth, a military career. After serving briefly as an ensign in the Mediterranean, Churchill fought in the Franco-Dutch war of 1672-79, when the English were allied with the French against the Dutch. He first followed his royal patron into the naval battle of Sole Bay, being rewarded with the rank of Captain. He then fought as a volunteer under the Duke of Monmouth in the siege of Maastricht, where he attracted the attention of the great French general Turenne, who no doubt helped secure his subsequent appointment as Colonel of one of the English regiments in French pay.<sup>81</sup>

Churchill's advancement in French service was compromised by rumours of dishonourable sexual behaviour. He had earlier become one of the lovers of Charles II's sexually voracious mistress, Barbara Castlemaine, Duchess of Cleveland, and, like several others, he seems to have benefited financially from the relationship: in 1674 he received from her a gift of £4500, which he used to buy a £500 annuity, the foundation of his later fortune.<sup>82</sup> His profitable liaison did not, however, lose him favour with the Duke of York; Churchill became a Gentleman of the Bedchamber and then Master of the Wardrobe, household posts that brought close personal contact with his patron and modest but much-needed salaries; and his military position was secured in February 1678 when he was allowed to purchase a commission as Colonel of Foot, a post that brought with it further privileges and perquisites.

In 1678, however, Churchill's powerful patron began to experience serious political difficulties. James's unyielding attachment to Catholicism, to which he had been secretly converted in 1668 or 1669, led to attempts to exclude him from the

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<sup>80</sup> Ashley, *Marlborough*, p. 89.

<sup>81</sup> Ashley, *Marlborough*, p. 87.

<sup>82</sup> Ashley, *Marlborough*, p. 87; Rowse, *The Early Churchills*, p. 143.

succession. Charles II stubbornly protected his brother's rights, but decided it would be politic to keep him away from the court until the matter was resolved. James was in exile for three years, first in Brussels and then in Edinburgh, returning only in 1682 following the defeat of the exclusionists. Churchill followed his master, and although he allowed his discontent at James's religion and personal conduct to become known in court circles, 'by tact or dissimulation, he retained the duke's confidence ... [and, when James returned to London,] he could claim his rewards, a barony in the peerage of Scotland and the combined emoluments of two regiments'.<sup>83</sup> Further honours followed in 1683, when his wife, Sarah, became one of the Ladies of the Bedchamber of Princess Anne, James's younger daughter, a post which led to both Lord and Lady Churchill becoming Anne's most favoured courtiers. Finally, following James's ascent to the throne as James II in 1685, Churchill was raised to an English barony and given the highly profitable position of Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>84</sup>

However, Churchill's loyalty was tested by what he perceived to be James's failure to reward him appropriately for playing the crucial role in defeating the Duke of Monmouth's rebellion of 1685. This disappointment was compounded by growing unease at James's authoritarian tendencies and increasingly overt support of Catholicism, which led to the progressive marginalisation of those formerly favoured courtiers, Churchill among them, who refused to abandon their adherence to Anglicanism. Seeing his power and influence waning, and no doubt genuinely concerned for the future of the Protestant faith in a country ruled by a Catholic King, he began to forge discreet links with the increasingly coherent and well-organised underground opposition that was developing at the court.

Although Churchill initially confined himself to a peripheral role in their plotting, the birth of a son and heir to James and his Queen opened up the prospect of a Catholic succession and demanded a more decisive commitment. At this point he became more deeply involved with the opposition: he and his wife used their growing influence over Princess Anne to induce her to join them; and he then allowed himself to be drawn into their project of inviting James's Protestant son-in-law, William of Orange, to invade the country and 'restore' what they considered to

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<sup>83</sup> Ashley, *Marlborough*, p. 89.

<sup>84</sup> Rowse, *The Early Churchills*, p. 205.

be the traditional English constitution. With characteristic caution Marlborough did not sign the original letter of invitation from the ‘Immortal Seven’, but when it was clear that the invasion would indeed go ahead he wrote separately to William on 4 August 1688 to promise him that he would ‘pay an entire obedience’ to his commands.<sup>85</sup> After William arrived, Churchill continued to hedge his bets: he sent his wife and Princess Anne to the rebel camp, but stayed with James until the last possible moment.<sup>86</sup> But desert he finally did, and when he went he took most of the army with him. Deprived of military support, James fled to France before open conflict could break out, thus ensuring that the ‘Glorious Revolution’ was also very nearly a bloodless one. In his absence, William’s Stuart wife was recognised as Queen Mary II, and William himself as King William III.

The success of the revolutionary party brought Churchill further material and honorific rewards: advancement through the ranks of the peerage; a place on the Privy Council; and nomination as one of the nine Lords Justices who were to help Mary rule whilst her husband was absent abroad.<sup>87</sup> But these benefits were insufficient to satisfy the new Earl of Marlborough, who sought but was denied supreme command of the army and the office of Master-General of the Ordnance. His chagrin barely concealed, ‘Overpowering and unscrupulous ambition henceforward guided his conduct’.<sup>88</sup> He became the focus for parliamentary opposition to William’s government, reopened communications with James II, now in exile at Saint-Germain-en-Laye near Paris, and induced Princess Anne to take an increasingly hostile attitude towards the new monarchs. His conduct at first earned him dismissal from his offices and a spell in the Tower; but compromise soon became necessary. Mary had died childless in 1694, making Anne the most immediate Protestant heiress to the throne. The Marlboroughs, as her most intimate companions and trusted advisors, were now both more dangerous potential enemies and more valuable potential allies for William and Mary. Both sides therefore made tentative advances: Marlborough was made governor to Anne’s son, the Duke of Gloucester, and in return moderated, though did not abandon, his opposition activities.

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<sup>85</sup> Coxe, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, p. 37.

<sup>86</sup> Again, this interpretation draws heavily on Maurice Ashley. See his *Marlborough*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>88</sup> Ashley, *Marlborough*, p. 94.

However, it was the outbreak of war with France in 1701 that finally restored Marlborough to a central position in government and the armed forces. William's life's work had been the containment of French power and aggression—indeed it was only England's value as an ally in this struggle that had induced him to invade in 1688—and he recognised that Marlborough alone exercised sufficient influence over Anne to ensure that his great project continued into the next reign. He therefore made Marlborough the commander-in-chief of the English forces and his diplomatic representative in the negotiations that led to the Grand Alliance.

No sooner had the articles of the alliance been signed than William was thrown from his horse and died. Queen Anne's ascent to the throne now cemented Marlborough's hold over the highest offices of state. In 1702, the queen rewarded her longstanding favourite and counsellor with the Order of the Garter, the long-coveted office of Master-General of the Ordnance, the rank of Captain General of the army, and a dukedom. So rapid was his ascent that even Marlborough's own wife was uneasy, particularly at the prospect of his being raised to the most exalted rank of the peerage. She evidently feared that they would lack the means needed to maintain the style of life expected of a duke, and perhaps also feared the jealousy and resentment such overt marks of favour might bring. She therefore opposed his elevation to ducal rank, to the point where their mutual friend Lord Godolphin intervened on her behalf in an attempt to dissuade the queen from following through with it.<sup>89</sup>

Marlborough's reaction to his wife's resistance is highly revealing both of the extent of his ambition and the means by which he sought to satisfy it. At first he temporised, conceding that 'wee ought not to wish for a greater title till wee have a better estate', and acknowledging that so generous a grant might expose the Queen to solicitations from others; but he then blithely informed her that 'The Queen's goodness in being desirous to establish my family answers the first, since that may be done this winter'.<sup>90</sup> In the face of Sarah's continued resistance, he found new grounds for acceptance. This time he claimed to have sought the advice of the Dutch State Pensionary, Anthonie Heinsius, who is reported to have counselled Marlborough to accept on various solid grounds of both honour and *Realpolitik*: 'I insisted very much,' Marlborough claimed improbably, 'that [accepting the

<sup>89</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 138 and fn. 2.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 142: Marlborough to the duchess, 4/15 November 1702.

Dukedom] would be of greater advantage to my family at the end of the war than now'. According to Marlborough's account, Heinsius then argued, contrary to all obvious logic, that if he accepted his elevation now it would be attributed to his great services, but if he waited until the conclusion of the conflict it would be seen as a mere 'effect of favour'; for this reason it would preclude rather than encourage the solicitations of other families.<sup>91</sup> In addition, the new title would place Marlborough on a more equal footing with the other leading generals in the conflict; and as for Marlborough's lack of an estate suitable to such a dignity, 'He said the Queen's kindness was such that I need not doubt a fortune...'.<sup>92</sup> Marlborough subsequently accepted the title regardless of his wife's objections, and, in due course, Anne did indeed grant him a pension on the Post Office of £5000 per annum to support his new dignity.

### **Marlborough and the Pursuit of Princely Status**

Marlborough's involvement in the War of the Spanish Succession provided him with many more opportunities for advancement and acquisition, and he pursued them firmly and consistently. The acquisition of the status of prince of the Holy Roman Empire provides perhaps the clearest instance of this. This is an episode that has been recounted several times before—by Klopp, Coxe, Churchill, and most recently and comprehensively Peter Barber—but it is worth retelling once more in order to gain a clear sense of Marlborough's purposes and the means by which he sought to realise them.<sup>93</sup>

The idea that Marlborough should be raised to a principality appears to have originated in 1704, shortly before the full-scale campaign in Germany began. On 30 May/10 June of that year, Marlborough had met Prince Eugene of Savoy, President of the Imperial War Cabinet and supreme commander of the Emperor's forces, who was accompanied by Count Wratislaw, the Emperor's principal diplomatic agent. Shortly afterwards, on 4/15 June Marlborough wrote letters to his wife, Sarah, and his closest ally in the English government, Lord Treasurer Sidney Godolphin,

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 143-44: Marlborough to the duchess, 6/17 November 1702.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>93</sup> Onno Klopp, *Der Fall des Hauses Stuart* (14 vols) (Vienna, 1875-88), vol. 11, pp. 188-89; Churchill, *Marlborough*, vol. 2, pp. 485-89; Peter Barber, 'Marlborough as Imperial Prince, 1704-1717', *British Library Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 46-79.

reporting that Wratilaw had unexpectedly conveyed to him an offer from the Emperor to raise him to the title of Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, and to grant him a sovereign territory so that he could become a member of the Imperial diet.

To the duchess he wrote that Wratilaw had interrupted him at the very moment he was writing, and it is worth quoting his words at length:

When I had write thus far, count Wratilaw came to me, having just received an express from his master. After very great expressions, it ended in saying that his master was desirous that he might have leave to write to 1 [the Queen], to have their consent to make 86 [Marlborough] a prince of the empire, which he would do by creating some land he has in the empire into a principality, which would give 86 [Marlborough] the privilidge of being in the colidges or diets with the soverain Princes of the Empire. You know I am not good at compliments; however, I did assure him that I was very sensible of the honour his master intended me, but in my opinion nothing of this ought to be thought on till we saw what would be the fate of 159 [the Elector of Bavaria]. He replied, that what already had been done, had laid obligations on his master above what he could express, and that if 1 [the Queen] would not allowe him to doe this, he must appear ungratefull to the world, for he had nothing else in his power worth giving, or 86 [Marlborough's] worth taking. What is offered will in historie for ever remaine an honour to 86 [Marlborough's] familly, but I wish him soe well, that I hope he will never want the income of the land, which noe doubt will be but little, nor enjoye the privilidge of Germain assemblies. However, this is the utmost expression that thay can make, and therefore aught to be taken as it is meant. I know you wish 1 [the Queen] and 86 [Marlborough] soe well, that you would be glad that nothing should be done that might doe either of them hurt. Therefore my opinion of this matter is, that there can be noe inconveniency in allowing 34 [Wratilaw's] master to write to 1 [the Queen] to aske their consent for the doing this, and then to bring the letter to the Cabinet Councell. In the meantime I shall take care with 34 [Wratilaw] that noe further step be made till I know 1 [the Queen's] pleasure, and the opinion of 16 [Godolphin]. I am very clear in my own opinion that if anything of this is to be done, it will

have a much better grace for 86 [Marlborough] when the business of 159 [the Elector of Bavaria] is over. But I beg to assure 1 [the Queen], that 86 [Marlborough] will with great pleasure obey in this matter, as well as in everything else, what is most agreeable to them.<sup>94</sup>

No soon had Marlborough finished writing to the duchess than he wrote to Godolphin. He again broached the subject as if he was seeking advice on how to respond to the offer, stating that,

I have write to Lady Marlborough of a thing that 34 [Wratislaw] has by order spoke of to me. You will be pleased to lett nobody know of itt but 1 [the queen] and 2 [the prince of Denmark], and that you will be soe kind as to lett mee be derected how I am to behave myself in this matter. You will see by my letter to 87 [Lady Marlborough] that I have gained time enough for the having your advice, for I would have nothing done in this but what you think may be for the interest of 1 [the Queen] as well as for the honour of 86 [Marlborough].<sup>95</sup>

In these two letters, then, Marlborough very clearly presents himself as the reluctant recipient of an unsolicited reward. Unwilling to accept the princely title for himself, he defers the matter for as long as possible in order to seek guidance from his wife, his friends in Government, and most importantly of all, the queen, on the appropriate course of action.

However, neither Klopp nor Barber, working on the materials in the Viennese archives, have found evidence of any such reluctance to accept the title on Marlborough's part. Instead, as Barber has written,

After learning of the Emperor's intention, Marlborough exerted continuous pressure for title and lands on Wratislaw whose letters to Leopold emphasized that the Duke's 'vornehmstes Verlangen' [foremost wish] was a seat and vote in the Imperial diet 'sammt dem Titel Durchlaucht' [with the

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 319-20.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 318.

title Serene Highness], and that it was essential (‘unumgänglich’) to satisfy him in the Emperor’s own interests.<sup>96</sup>

In fact it is only on 9/20 June that we find any clear evidence that the Emperor was willing to accede to these demands, when in an Imperial rescript he consented in principle and asked whether a suitable territory could be found. This was, of course, some time after Marlborough had presented the offer as certain to the duchess and Godolphin.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, instead of the Emperor requesting that Queen Anne should be consulted, as Marlborough had implied, it was Marlborough himself who demanded that the Emperor should write to the queen outlining the offer of a principality and requesting her consent to the honour.<sup>98</sup>

Even then, it was not until Marlborough’s seizure of the Bavarian fortifications at Schellenberg near Donauwörth that the Emperor gave any direct hint to Marlborough that he might be willing to follow through with the suggestion. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of that month he wrote the captain general a flattering letter in Latin that generously acknowledged the greatness his services, but still fell short of making a commitment to any specific reward. Instead it stated only that the Emperor would ‘lose no opportunity to shew you by effects how grateful and well I am enclined towards you’.<sup>99</sup> The Imperial envoy in London, Hoffmann, was then instructed to request a personal meeting with the queen to discuss the matter. Hoffmann contacted Harley, who took him to see the queen at Windsor on which took place on 23 July/3 August 1704. At the interview, Hoffman stated that Marlborough had told Wratislaw that ‘his ambition was limited to the Queen’s favours’, and, perhaps reassured by this show of modesty, the queen gave her consent to Marlborough’s elevation, though the duchess, Godolphin and Harley remained cautious.<sup>100</sup>

In the meantime, and even though he had not as yet received the queen’s reply, the great victory at Blenheim encouraged Marlborough to press his case to the Emperor with renewed vigour. On 10/21 August, he approached Wratislaw to suggest that if

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<sup>96</sup> Peter Barber, ‘Marlborough as Imperial Prince’, p. 47.

<sup>97</sup> Onno Klopp, *Der Fall*, vol. 11, p. 188.

<sup>98</sup> Klopp, *Der Fall*, vol. 11, p. 189; Barber, ‘Marlborough as Imperial Prince’, p. 47.

<sup>99</sup> English translation given in I.S. [James Smallwood], *England’s Triumph; or the Glorious Campaign in the Year 1704...* (London, 1704), p. 40.

<sup>100</sup> Klopp, *Der Fall*, vol. 11, p. 188; Churchill, *Marlborough*, vol. 2, p. 486; Barber, ‘Marlborough as Imperial Prince’, p. 47.

the Emperor was ‘still most graciously inclined to raise him to the rank of Prince of the Empire, he considers that after his victory would be the right time’; indeed, ‘after such an event, [the Emperor] should not consider himself obliged to wait for the Queen’s consent’.<sup>101</sup> Marlborough therefore suggested that the Emperor confirm the decision by writing him a letter addressing him by his new title.<sup>102</sup>

The Emperor’s letter was written on 17/28 August, and indeed addressed Marlborough as a prince. However, when it arrived in mid-September, Marlborough was distressed to find that it contained no mention of the territories that Marlborough wanted to accompany the princely title; it suggested only that the Emperor ‘would use his endeavours to procure Your Dilection a place and vote in the Diet, among the princes of the Empire’; and it was moreover carelessly signed by the Emperor in the wrong place.<sup>103</sup> Marlborough therefore demanded a new version that included the necessary details and was signed in the correct form; and when this failed to arrive sufficiently quickly he complained loudly that the embarrassing delay was rendering him a ‘wunderliche Figur in der Welt’.<sup>104</sup> In the face of the Emperor’s evident reluctance, the British envoy-extraordinary at Vienna, George Stepney, warned the duke that it would be better ‘to let the thing dropp, than to pursue the Error to farr’—but to no discernible effect.<sup>105</sup>

While this was all going on, Marlborough continued to play a double game. A few days after requesting Wratislaw to press his case, the news arrived that the queen had given Marlborough her permission to accept the title. At this point Marlborough disingenuously told Godolphin that he had requested ‘that a delay might be putt to the Emperor’s intensions concerning mee’, but that Wratislaw had replied that ‘it was nether in his nor my power to doe itt, showing me what Haufeman [Hoffman] had write to the Emperor, as her Majesty’s answer’.<sup>106</sup> And when the Emperor’s first, imperfect letter arrived, he again concealed his role in soliciting it: ‘I was very much

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<sup>101</sup> Churchill, *Marlborough*, vol. 2, p. 487; Klopp, *Der Fall*, vol. 11, p. 189.

<sup>102</sup> Klopp, *Der Fall*, vol. 11, p. 189; Barber, ‘Marlborough as Imperial Prince’, p. 48.

<sup>103</sup> Barber, ‘Marlborough as Imperial Prince’, p. 48.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>106</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 356.

surprised' he reported to Godolphin, 'and so I told Comte Wratislaw, that such a step should be made before I had the least notice'.<sup>107</sup>

Marlborough did at least provide Godolphin with a copy of the letter and inform him that he had requested a new version. But to his other political allies he simply remained silent until the revised letter arrived and he was able to present his elevation to princely rank as a *fait accompli*. Thus he wrote to Robert Harley on 2/13 November claiming that:

Count Wratislaw, being sensible how little I was inclined to accept the dignity intended me by the court at Vienna, deferred giving me the Emperor's letter till two days since, when he told me that his Imperial Majesty had been informed by M. Hoffman that her Majesty had declared her royal pleasure, and would lay her injunctions on me to accept it. Enclosed you will receive the original letter to be laid before her Majesty. You will see it bears date ever since the 28<sup>th</sup> of August. The Count tells me that the Emperor has given orders for erecting some lands into a principality in my favour: when that is done, the usual signification will be sent to the Diet of the Empire in order to my having session and vote in the College of Princes.<sup>108</sup>

And on the same day he wrote in similar terms to his most influential correspondent in the Netherlands, Anthonie van Heinsius:

You will see by the date of the inclosed letter, which I received from Count Wratislough that I have deffered the taking that honour as long as I could til he shewed me a letter from their Minester in England, that the Queen had bid him assure the Emperor, that I should accept it; I send the original letter to Her Maty by this post, and I rely on your ffriendship to acquaint the States with itt, in the maner you think most proper, for I would not write to them of itt, unless you should think it necessary.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 371.

<sup>108</sup> Sir George Murray (ed.), *The Letters and Dispatches of John Churchill, First Duke of Marlborough, from 1702 to 1712* (5 vols) (London, 1845), vol. 1, p. 538.

<sup>109</sup> W. Bliss, 'The Duke of Marlborough's Letters at the Hague', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 11 no. 41 (Jan., 1896): 117-120; this quotation on p. 119.

It was not only his political associates that Marlborough sought to deceive. It appears that he also sought to project a similar image of reluctant acceptance of worldly honours to a wider public. On 29 November, James Smallwood, Chaplain of Marlborough's regiment, published a eulogistic account of the German campaign entitled *England's Triumph*.<sup>110</sup> This account blatantly misrepresents the acquisition of the Principality, with Smallwood recounting events in close conformity to the account given by Marlborough in his correspondence with the duchess, Godolphin and Harley.

According to Smallwood, the Emperor's gratitude for Marlborough's military services made him resolve 'to confer upon him the Title and Dignity of a Prince of the Empire'. Having instructed Wratishlaw to ascertain Marlborough's views on the matter, he received from Marlborough the following 'generous Answer, worthy of a true *English Hero*, and of being recorded to all Posterity...'

That he was much obliged to the Emperor, but that the Queen his Mistress had given him so many marks of her favour, that there was no Titles of Honour could please him so well, as those Her Majesty had conferred upon him; and so desired he might be excused from accepting any other.<sup>111</sup>

The Emperor, Smallwood continued, was dissatisfied with this modest response, and ordered his minister in London to request the Queen 'to lay her commands on him in order that he should accept the Title designed for him', but without even then inducing Marlborough to accept.<sup>112</sup> Finally, though, 'Caesar would not be denied, but writ him again in Latin, in which Letter he gives him the Title of Prince...'<sup>113</sup>

Given Smallwood's close connections to Marlborough, and the suspiciously convenient timing of his publication only a few weeks the receipt of the Emperor's revised letter, it would seem likely that his writings were undertaken at least with the duke's approbation and most probably at his explicit direction.<sup>114</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>110</sup> Smallwood, *England's Triumph*. On the dating and authorship of this work see Robert D. Horn, 'The Authorship of the First Blenheim Panegyric', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, vol. 24 no. 4 (Aug., 1961): 297-310, especially pp. 300-301.

<sup>111</sup> Smallwood, *England's Triumph*, p. 38.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>114</sup> For Smallwood's close relationship with Marlborough, see Horn, 'Authorship', pp. 306-309.

Marlborough was well aware of the value of disseminating ‘authorised versions’ of important events: he instructed his personal chaplain Francis Hare to compile an official journal of the German campaign, and checked it himself before sending it to England for publication.<sup>115</sup> In this context, Smallwood’s account should probably be seen as deliberate propaganda designed to minimise public criticism of Marlborough for accepting so unusually eminent a foreign title.

Marlborough, then, can very clearly be seen to have skilfully and unscrupulously concealed his dogged pursuit of princely status from his allies and countrymen, not hesitating to tell barefaced lies even to his own wife and his closest associate in the process. Coolly calculating the best way of securing the honour he so clearly coveted, he meticulously exploited his contacts in both Vienna and London to manoeuvre himself into a position where he could accept the title while appearing to have done his best to refuse it. In London, he portrayed the grant as the will of the Emperor, implying that refusal would risk causing offence in Vienna; having thus obtained the Queen’s consent to his elevation, he was then able to present his acceptance of the title as the result of reluctant submission to royal commands that could scarcely be refused. He then engineered or at least approved the publication of a work designed to disseminate this fictitious narrative more widely. These tactics proved highly effective, and by the end of November 1705 Marlborough had succeeded in obtaining the unprecedented dignity of a foreign principality with barely any complaint or resistance from politicians or the wider public; and it was with this success fresh in his mind that he returned to England only a few weeks later.

### **The Woodstock Grant**

On 3/14 December, Marlborough arrived in England to a hero’s welcome, and would have found a number of projects for memorialising the battle circulating in court and government circles. One was for the erection of a town house for Marlborough as the centrepiece of a square of houses on the site of the royal mews at Charing Cross, to be called Blenheim, or Marlborough, Square; another was for the erection of a commemorative pillar or statue within the proposed square; and there also appear to

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<sup>115</sup> National Archive, State Papers 87/2 f. 156: Cardonell to Harley, 25 September 1705.

have been other, more short-lived, proposals.<sup>116</sup> The question of a monument was soon being discussed in correspondence between the duke's closest political associate and also most intimate friend, the Lord Treasurer, Sidney Godolphin, and the Speaker of the House of Commons and Secretary of State for the Northern Department, Robert Harley, who was then acting in close concert with Marlborough and Godolphin.<sup>117</sup>

The relevant letter is fragmentary and undated, but suggests that at some point between early September and early January 1704 Harley had advanced a proposal for erecting two statues in London, one of the duke and the other of the queen.<sup>118</sup>

Claudine van Hensbergen has shown that it was most probably at around this time that the poet Matthew Prior composed an inscription for, 'a Fountain, on which is Queen Anne on a triumphal Arch, the Duke of Marlborough on Horseback under the Arch, and all the Rivers of the World round about the whole Work'.<sup>119</sup> A model for the fountain was made by Claude David and its appearance disseminated more widely in the form of an engraving. Given the thematic similarity of David's project to that advanced by Harley, and Prior's known association with the statesman, it seems likely that David/Prior proposal corresponds to the project Harley had advanced to Godolphin.

Godolphin, however, seems to have initially preferred a less ostentatious form of remembrance, suggesting that an 'anniversary thanksgiving by Act of Parliament for so entire a victory, as the most public, the most decent, and the most permanent record of it to posterity'.<sup>120</sup> It nevertheless seems that these objections did not entirely put to an end proposals for a monument. Instead, with due note taken of the danger of placing the queen and Marlborough on 'too near an equality', the idea of

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<sup>116</sup> Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Calendar of Manuscripts of the Marquis of Bath, Preserved at Longleat*, (5 vols) (London, 1904-80), vol. 1, pp. 63-64; Harris, 'Parliament and Blenheim Palace', p. 43.

<sup>117</sup> On Harley's close relationship with Marlborough and Godolphin at this time, see Henry L. Snyder 'Godolphin and Harley: A Study of their Partnership in Politics', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1967): 241-271; and Angus McInnes, 'The Appointment of Harley in 1704', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 11 no. 2 (1968): 255-271.

<sup>118</sup> The relevant passages are published in HMC, *Bath*, vol. 1, pp. 63-64.

<sup>119</sup> Claudine van Hensbergen, 'Carving a Legacy: Queen Anne and the Politics of Public Sculpture', paper given at a seminar of the Centre for Eighteenth Century Studies, University of York, 29<sup>th</sup> May 2012. Her discussion is forthcoming as an article in the *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, vol. 37 no. 2 (2014). Prior, it should be noted, was to be Harley's main diplomatic agent during the secret negotiations with France that preceded the Treaty of Utrecht.

<sup>120</sup> HMC, *Bath*, vol. 1, pp. 63-64.

some kind of pillar or column gradually gained the upper hand. A drawing by Nicholas Hawksmoor dated October 1704, now in the possession of the Soane Museum, shows a design for a monumental clock in the form of an obelisk adorned with sculptural medallions, large-scale figures, and Latin inscriptions (fig. 8). The inscriptions have been interpreted in Gordon Higgott's catalogue of the Soane Museum's Baroque drawings as extolling Marlborough's prowess; but they are more likely to be aimed at Anne. The first, *vicem gerit illa tonantur* – 'she acts the part of the thundering deity' – is taken from the queen's official coronation medal, where she is represented in the guise of Pallas Athena hurling thunderbolts at a two-headed monster, and thus showing herself to be the true female equivalent of Jove (fig. 9).<sup>121</sup> The second, *Hispanum trepidare facit, pallescere Gallum*, '[s]he made the Spanish tremble and the French pale', also appears to be more appropriate to the queen who presided over the whole course of the war than to Marlborough, who at Blenheim had made the French and the Bavarians—rather than the Spanish—lose their colour. The reception of Hawksmoor's specific scheme is unrecorded, but as late as 7 February 1705, the British representative in Berlin, Lord Raby, was writing to George Stepney, his equivalent in Vienna, as if a related project for a column or pillar was still being actively pursued at the highest level. Stepney had evidently been commissioned to produce a Latin inscription for the monument, as Raby thanked him for sending a second draft and expressed his hope that it would appear on 'the pillar or statue which is to be set up in Marlborough Square, that posterity may see that we had not only as great heroes as the Romans but as good writers'.<sup>122</sup>

By this time, however, the project for a monument had been quietly abandoned in favour of granting Marlborough an estate from the royal domain.<sup>123</sup> This decision had clearly been made before Christmas 1704, when Marlborough approached the playwright and architect John Vanbrugh while attending the Drury Lane Theatre. According to Vanbrugh's later testimony, Marlborough informed him that Queen Anne, having given him 'the Mannor and parke of Woodstock, He ... had thoughts of

<sup>121</sup> Gordon Higgott, 'Online Catalogue of Baroque Drawings in the Soane Museum' entry for SM 109/74, [http://www.jeromeonline.co.uk/drawings/index.cfm?display\\_scheme=141](http://www.jeromeonline.co.uk/drawings/index.cfm?display_scheme=141). For the medal and the translation, see 'The History of the Medals of Queen Anne and George I', separately paginated appendix to Nicholas Tindal, *The History of England by M. Rapin de Thoyras, Continued from the Revolution to the Accession of George II*, 4 vols (vol. 4 in two parts) (London, 1744-1747), vol. 4, part 2, p. 1.

<sup>122</sup> James J. Cartwright (ed.), *The Wentworth Papers 1705-1739* (London, 1883), p. 14.

<sup>123</sup> Harris, 'Parliament and Blenheim Palace', pp. 43-44.

Building an House there'. Marlborough outlined his proposed budget—a maximum of £40,000—and announced his intention to consult Vanbrugh on how to proceed.<sup>124</sup> This, it should be noted, happened some time before there was any public acknowledgement that Marlborough was to receive the Woodstock estate. Indeed, it took a further three weeks for the gift to be publically acknowledged by the Queen, and even then only after a complex series of exchanges with the House of Commons.

The exchanges began on 8 January 1705, when the House of Commons resolved unanimously 'That a day be appointed for taking into Consideration, the Great Services that have been performed by his Grace the Duke of *Marlborough* the last Summer, and to consider some means to perpetuate the Memory of them'.<sup>125</sup> They met again on 11 January, and this time decided to ask the Queen to decide what the 'means' should be. Godolphin kept himself fully abreast of developments, and at the very moment that the proposal to ask the queen's advice was being debated in the Commons he was already drafting her formal reply. The queen, he suggested, should say that she had decided to 'grant some house and lands belonging to the Crown, as a proper mark of distinction to remain in his family for perpetuating the memory of his eminent services', but that she would need the assistance of the House to deal with the 'very remote terms' granted to royal tenants.<sup>126</sup>

The House did in fact present their resolution to the queen on 12 January, initially receiving from her only and a short and formulaic reply that simply expressed her pleasure at the House's address. On 17 January, however, she sent a second letter that clearly relates to Godolphin's draft, specifically stating that Marlborough would receive the Woodstock estate, and requesting that the House should grant funds to 'clear incumbrances' (that is to say, buy out the rights and tenancies) that were held on the estate.<sup>127</sup> The House replied positively on the same day, and further requested that, pending the passing of the Act, the Queen should advance the necessary funds 'in order to the present settlement thereof to the Duke of Marlborough and his heirs'.<sup>128</sup> In the event, the act was passed rapidly, receiving the assent of the

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<sup>124</sup> Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 254.

<sup>125</sup> Anon., *The Sense of the Nation, Concerning the Duke of Marlborough...* (London, [1712]), p. 7.

<sup>126</sup> HMC, *Bath*, vol. 1, p. 65: Lord Godolphin to Robert Harley, 11 January 1704-1705.

<sup>127</sup> Anon., *Sense of the Nation*, p. 8.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Commons on 3 February and that of the Lords on 7 February. A few days later Lord Treasurer Godolphin obtained a Royal Sign Manual for £12,000 to be

paid over and applied for buying in the Offices of the Lieu.<sup>†</sup> Ranger Comptoll.<sup>†</sup> Surveyor Keepers and other Offices within the Honour Mannor and Park of Woodstock in the County of Oxon with the Inheritance of the Tythes of the said Park & other Incumbrances upon the Honour Mannor and Park of Woodstock or upon any the Members thereof or upon the Hundred of Wootton'.<sup>129</sup>

Negotiations with the existing tenants were completed, and after the payment of a further £1,000 to secure their agreement, the estate was finally cleared and formally transferred to Marlborough's possession on 16 March 1705, when the Act of Parliament received Royal assent.<sup>130</sup>

Although this complex process has attracted little attention from historians, it exhibits a number of striking features. Raby's letter to Stepney is of particular interest. Raby was a diplomat in British service and therefore in a good position to access reliable information. Even allowing for the remoteness of his Berlin posting, the fact that the news of the abandonment of the monument had still not reached him in early February 1705 suggests that this had only recently happened. The clear implication is that it was only *after* Marlborough's arrival in London in mid-December that the decision to grant him an estate was made. Moreover, it should be noted that the early correspondence between Harley and Godolphin is concerned primarily to memorialise Marlborough's victory. Clearly, this function was to a considerable degree lost when the reward was transformed from the erection of public monument to the bestowal of a private estate, suggesting that although the rhetoric of the gift continued to stress its commemorative function, its underlying purpose had also changed after Marlborough's return. Finally, Vanbrugh's testimony about his first meeting with Marlborough suggests that—as with the grant of the status of Imperial prince—the duke seemed to know the details of his impending reward some time before anyone else did. Taken together, these points would seem

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<sup>129</sup> Soane Museum SM 166 f. 3r.

<sup>130</sup> *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the reign of Anne preserved in the Public Record Office*, (4 vols to date) (London, 1916-2006), vol. 3, p. 258.

to suggest that Marlborough is likely to have actively pursued rather than the passively received the Woodstock estate.

The same sense of active management is implicit in the smooth unfolding of the exchanges between the Queen and the House of Commons. This is especially noteworthy given that Marlborough had already had his fingers burned by an earlier attempt to secure a material reward in exchange for his services. This had taken place in 1702, when the Queen had requested that Parliament render perpetual the £5,000 a year pension that she had granted him to enable him to support his dukedom. Parliament generously acknowledged his great services, but politely rebuffed the request, choosing ‘humbly to lay before Her Majesty the great trouble they have, that they cannot comply with Her Majesty to make a Precedent, by alienating the Revenue of the Crown’.<sup>131</sup>

Judging by a later letter written by the duchess, it appears that Marlborough sought to preclude any comparable debacle in connection with the Woodstock grant by making use of the good offices of the influential Parliamentarian Simon Harcourt (later 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Harcourt) to ‘manage’ the House:

Your Lordship will remember (I am sure I can never forget) the part you took in obtaining the Grant of Woodstock for the Duke of Marlborough and as that was chiefly owing to Your good management and interest...<sup>132</sup>

Harcourt’s involvement on behalf of Marlborough at this period is highly plausible. He was a leading member of the Oxfordshire gentry, and his own estate of Stanton Harcourt was a dependency of the Manor of Woodstock. He was also a prominent Tory, the party with which Marlborough was most closely associated in this period. He represented Abingdon in the House of Commons from 1690 until 1705, and was also a close ally of Harley, with whom he had been at school at Mr. Birch’s Academy in Shilton, Oxfordshire, along with twelve other future MPs and Thomas Trevor, a future Lord Justice.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Anon., *Sense of the Nation*, p. 4.

<sup>132</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 233: the Duchess of Marlborough to Harcourt, 18 January 1724.

<sup>133</sup> Elizabeth Hamilton, *The Backstairs Dragon: A Life of Robert Harley Earl of Oxford* (London, 1969), p. 4.

A further indication of close links between Marlborough and Harcourt is that in early 1705 Marlborough made over the control of the manorial courts at Woodstock to him ‘if he dose not think it to[o] much trouble.’<sup>134</sup> Equally suggestive is Harcourt’s election to the Cornish rotten borough of Bossiney in 1705, a seat which appears to have been obtained through the interest of the court. He retained the seat until 1708, immediately following the Marlborough-Godolphin interest’s definitive split with the Tories, the subsequent fall of Harley, and their alliance with the resurgent Whigs. At this point, Harcourt resigned his recently acquired office of Attorney General, and was replaced as MP for Bossiney by Marlborough’s protégé Samuel Travers, who was both Surveyor General of the Land and Revenues of the Crown and the duke’s representative at Woodstock. The implication would seem to be that alliance with the Marlborough-Godolphin interest had gained, and then lost, Harcourt his seat.

Thus there is good evidence that the Woodstock grant was likely to have been actively pursued by and on behalf of Marlborough; and this naturally raises the question of the reason why he might have chosen it as his reward. The first point to make clear—given various inflated statements of the vastness of the estate in Churchill’s biography of Marlborough and in the recent *History of Parliament*—is that the primary motive is unlikely to have been financial gain.<sup>135</sup> A survey commissioned shortly after Marlborough acquired the estate shows that it consisted of only 2,330 acres, of which 1,793 acres consisted of deer park. The total income from rents, sale of deer from the park, and various manorial rights was just over £836, along with some corn and chickens—a gentlemanly, but hardly ducal, portion.<sup>136</sup> So if mercenary concerns were not uppermost in the minds of Marlborough and his circle, what were the critical determinants of their choice?

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<sup>134</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 470: Marlborough to the duchess, 30 July/10 August 1705; and fn. 9.

<sup>135</sup> Churchill, *Marlborough*, vol. 2, p. 519, giving a figure of 15,000 acres; David Hayton, Eveline Cruickshanks and Stuart Handley (eds), *The House of Commons, 1690-1715* (5 vols) (Cambridge, 2002), vol. 2, p. 479, stating ‘a demesne of 22,000 acres’. The latter figure bears a suspicious similarity to the 21,944 acres attributed by Bateman to the Duke of Marlborough’s Oxfordshire estates when they were at their greatest extent in the late nineteenth century; see John Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland...* (4<sup>th</sup> edn., London, 1883), p. 300.

<sup>136</sup> Edward Marshall, *The Early History of Woodstock Manor and its Environs in Bladon, Hensington, New Woodstock Blenheim* (Oxford and London, 1873), p. 259.

Given the ruthlessly political ambience in which Marlborough functioned, one likely motivation was the estate's proximity to the electoral borough of Woodstock. Possession of Woodstock Park could potentially translate into a decisive control over the borough elections, and with that came enhanced representation for the Marlborough interest in the House of Commons. There is indeed clear evidence that, following Marlborough's acquisition of the estate, he moved rapidly to cement his influence over the town's political life. After initially agreeing to share control with the incumbent patron, Lord Abingdon, the Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, Marlborough soon decided to field candidates for both the borough seats, choosing his neighbour and ally, Sir Thomas Wheate, and his aide-de-camp Brigadier Cadogan.<sup>137</sup> Abingdon was then removed from the Lord Lieutenancy of Oxfordshire, only to be replaced by Marlborough himself. Thereafter, the critical importance of the Woodstock constituency to the Marlborough interest is amply confirmed by the correspondence concerning the town emanating from Marlborough's circle, especially in election years.<sup>138</sup>

Another possible motivation for choosing Woodstock was the particular prestige in early modern England of emparked property. Emparkment was always the result of a royal grant, and the control of deer that accompanied it consequently had considerable social cachet. Deer hunting was still regarded as an elite activity, and the ability to present venison to friends and associates was a highly prized privilege. Moreover, Woodstock's cachet can only have been reinforced by its royal history, which was particularly associated with Henry II and his legendary mistress, 'Fair Rosamond', and with Chaucer, then conventionally regarded as the greatest of all English poets.

Marlborough's initial encounter with Vanbrugh, however, suggests that from the very beginning the prospect of constructing a great country house was a centrally important reason for obtaining an estate instead of some other reward. It is therefore to the question of how he pursued this goal that we now turn.

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<sup>137</sup> Hayton, Cruickshanks and Handley, *The House of Commons, 1690-1715*, vol. 2, pp. 479-80.

<sup>138</sup> See, for example, Churchill, *Marlborough*, vol. 4, p. 328 fn. 1; British Library Add MS 61353 ff. 36r, 117-18.

## The Blenheim Grant

Whereas the grant of the Woodstock estate was undertaken in the most formal and public manner possible, the construction of Marlborough's house on the estate was initially regarded as private matter. As we have seen, Marlborough initially told Vanbrugh that he would be paying for the house himself, a claim that he repeated when he first visited the site in February 1705.<sup>139</sup>

However, in letter from the duke to the duchess of 13/24 April, it is made absolutely clear that it was already understood that the house would be paid for with royal funds, to be derived from the sale of timber from the Crown estate.<sup>140</sup> Marlborough was evidently concerned at possible delays in receiving the proceeds, and on 27 April/8 May Godolphin assured him that he would do his best to provide the necessary sums. Finally, on Monday, 21 May Godolphin called a young draughtsman and clerk, Henry Joynes, for an interview at the Treasury the following Wednesday, at which he appointed him Comptroller and Clerk of Works at Woodstock.<sup>141</sup> Godolphin subsequently installed two Treasury officials, Samuel Travers, the Queen's Surveyor of Woods and Waters, and his deputy, John Tailer, to supervise the management of the finances.<sup>142</sup>

In response, Marlborough thanked Godolphin for his efforts, adding that he was 'very much sett upon the ending my days quietly in that place'.<sup>143</sup> And in subsequent letters to the duchess and Godolphin, Marlborough plaintively repeated his desire for a quiet retirement at Blenheim, claiming that his advancing years led him to fear that he would have little time in which to enjoy it. The implication was clear: that they should do everything possible to 'forward the work' at Woodstock on the Duke's behalf. In practice, that meant making it a priority to find the vast amounts of money needed to finance its construction.

This was especially the case given that Marlborough clearly had in mind a house far grander and more costly than was necessary even for a suitably ducal retirement. As early as 1705, the duchess was voicing concerns to Godolphin at the way the project

<sup>139</sup> Harris, 'Parliament and Blenheim Palace', p. 44.

<sup>140</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 419.

<sup>141</sup> British Library Add MS 19606 f. 1r: William Lowdnes to Henry Joynes, 21 May 1705.

<sup>142</sup> Soane Museum SM 166 f. 7r.

<sup>143</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 429.

was developing. Godolphin sympathised but explained that there was little he could do in the face of the Duke's wishes:

'Tis needless (I beleive) for mee to tell you I agree entirely in your notions both as to the expence and the unwieldyness of Woodstock, and have sayd so much as was fitt for mee, but I can't struggle very long in anything of that kind, and you have seen by all Lord Marlborough's letters upon that subject, he thought it was not only proper, but necessary. Now if one looks upon this house only as a memorial, sett up for the publick upon so remarkable an occasion, hee is certainly in the right. But with a view of enjoying it himself, I am apt to think your notion would have been righter.<sup>144</sup>

If we combine this evidence with the conclusions drawn above about Marlborough's likely role in securing the Woodstock estate, we can piece together the following account of the Blenheim grant. Marlborough, after first engineering the virtual abandonment of the idea of a public memorial in favour of the gift of a private estate, then resurrected it in order to induce the Queen and Godolphin to disburse far greater funds on the project than they might otherwise have thought necessary. Indeed, given Marlborough's capacity for manipulation, we might reasonably suspect that his intention all along was to secure an estate precisely so that he could use its memorial function to solicit royal finance to construct a great house.

Whether or not we accept this more extreme interpretation, however, it is clear that Marlborough was indeed able to extract vast sums from the Treasury. On 21 July, Godolphin obtained a Sign Manual from the Queen for £20,000, for the sole purpose of 'defraying the Care & Expence of Building or making the Fabrick or Mansion House & Gardens lately begun by the Direction of ye said Duke of Marlborough within the Park of Woodstock'.<sup>145</sup> A second Sign Manual followed in December, and further issues were made at regular intervals right up to the time of Marlborough's fall from favour in 1711.

In spite of the vast sums of public money involved, however, the works at Woodstock were never technically treated as a public building project. Instead, the

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<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 495.

<sup>145</sup> Soane Museum SM 166, f. 7r.

Treasury Warrants stated that the grants were made directly to the Duke and his agents, without the need for any ‘acc<sup>t</sup>, Imprest or other Charge to be rendred to or for Us, Our Heirs & Sucessors or to or for any other Person or Persons whatsoever’.<sup>146</sup> Thus the Duke himself remained the nominal patron of the project throughout, and this represents another aspect of the building process that demands explanation.

Frances Harris has plausibly suggested that the reason for this ‘deliberate informality, not to say secretiveness’ was to conceal the royal source of the money for the building works. Marlborough and his circle were well aware of concerns on all sides of the political spectrum about his apparent monopoly on royal favour, and of the potential accusations this could provoke of self-aggrandisement at public expense.<sup>147</sup> There were therefore good reasons to avoid acknowledging the nature of the project until a more opportune moment. This moment eventually came in the winter of 1706-1707, in the wake of the brilliantly successful campaign in Flanders that began with Ramillies.

At this point, Marlborough’s prestige was such that he knew few favours could be refused him, and he successfully renewed his attempt to secure his pension of £5,000 a year to his heirs in perpetuity; and at the same time he obtained Parliamentary recognition of the Blenheim gift in the Commons Address and Preamble related to that Act. For the first time there was now formal, public acknowledgement that ‘Your Majesty is at your Expençe graciously pleased to erect the House of Blenheim, as a Monument of his glorious actions...’<sup>148</sup>

There is some evidence that this belated public avowal of ‘the House of Blenheim’ as part of Marlborough’s reward also resulted in an expectation among those involved in the project that funding, which was now falling seriously behind expenditures, would be substantially increased. Nicholas Hawksmoor, deputy to Marlborough’s architect Vanbrugh, wrote to Joynes on 15 March 1707 that ‘The main matter is mony relating to Woodstock and I hope we shall shortly have good Tydeings about it’.<sup>149</sup> But it was, in fact, only following Marlborough’s third great

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<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 7r. and *passim*.

<sup>147</sup> Harris, ‘Parliament and Blenheim Palace’, pp. 43-44.

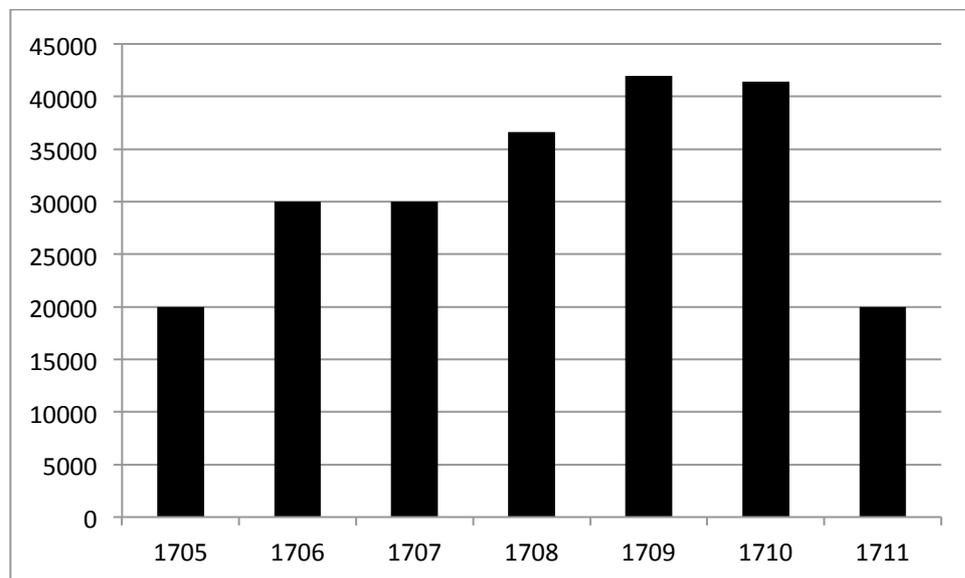
<sup>148</sup> Anon., *Sense of the Nation*, p. 17; *House of Commons Journal*, vol. 15, pp. 221, 230.

<sup>149</sup> British Library Add MS 19607, f. 43r. See chapter four below for a more detailed discussion of the changed financial expectations that followed the victory at Ramillies.

victory at Oudenarde on 30 June/11 July 1708 that we find a clearly discernible slackening of financial control. Up to this date, Godolphin had always taken care to ensure that the several issues of funds that followed each of the Queen's Sign Manuals for £20,000 together equalled the total sum authorised. This practice ceased on 12/23 July 1708, with the disbursement of funds falling into a new pattern of regular issues of £6000, which periodically ran slightly ahead of the Sign Manuals that in principle authorised them.<sup>150</sup>

From this point on, expenditures on Blenheim increased to record levels, rising from £30,000 per annum in 1706 and 1707 to £36,600 in 1708 and an astonishing £42,000 in 1709. This pattern persisted until Godolphin's departure from the Treasury in 1710, when expenditure briefly returned to more normal levels in the period before Marlborough's own disgrace in 1711. By this time the staggering sum of £220,000 had been issued for the works at Woodstock, and in addition a debt of nearly £45,000 had been accumulated with the leading workmen and artisans.<sup>151</sup>

**Table 1: Funds issued by the Treasury for Blenheim Palace by year, 1705-1711**



<sup>150</sup> The complete series of grants for the works has been reconstructed for this research on the basis of Bodleian Library MS Top. Oxon. c 265 ff. 89-90: 'Money Issued for Blenheim House'; Soane Museum SM 166, *passim*; and the *Calendar of Treasury Books*, vols 22-25, *passim*. See Appendix 1 for a more detailed breakdown of the figures.

<sup>151</sup> Bodleian Library MS Top. Oxon. c 265 ff. 89-90: 'Money Issued for Blenheim House'; Soane Museum SM 166 f. 4r and *passim*.

Thus in its basic outline the Blenheim Grant seems to have followed a clear pattern, in which Marlborough used his military successes to exploit the reciprocal relationship between service and reward characteristic of early modern societies. With each great victory, Marlborough appears to have carefully managed the conventional expectation that he should be rewarded in order to extract the maximum benefits possible. Following the Battle of Blenheim, it seems that he adroitly diverted attention away from the idea of a public monument in order to secure the publicly acknowledged grant of the Woodstock estate and the private promise of funds to support the construction of his house (quite possibly his intention all along). Following Ramillies, he secured Parliamentary recognition of the Queen's responsibility for the construction of 'the House of Blenheim'; and following Oudenarde he seems to have been able to secure still greater infusions of public money to support the construction of his great house.

Far from being a reward bestowed upon a passive recipient, then, Marlborough's move to secure royal funding for his House of Blenheim was the result of a carefully managed strategy. Relying where possible on intermediaries to solicit the queen on his behalf, he avoided compromising himself through excessive importunity. Making generous use of the arts of deception and manipulation, he exploited every opportunity to secure material advantage, while taking pains to avoid perceptions of greed or self-interest by framing the benefits he received as having been imposed upon him from above or legitimated by some higher purpose. His great house, then—no less than his elevation to Ducal rank, his metamorphosis into a Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, and his acquisition of the Woodstock estate—reflected a long-term goal pursued patiently and persistently. And this naturally begs the question of why, throughout this process, the construction of a great house was so important to Marlborough?

### **The Purposes of Display: Marlborough and 'Representational Culture'**

To begin to understand the fundamental purposes that Marlborough had in mind for Blenheim, it is first necessary to consider it in relation to what we might usefully label his wider 'representational strategy'. Marlborough's career was characterised by an impressive involvement in the richest and most luxurious forms of

consumption that early modern Europe could furnish. The clearest examples of this are his acquisitions of spectacular gold and silver, rich tapestries and magnificent works of art, most of them acquired specifically to adorn Blenheim. Detailed analysis of these aspects of Marlborough's patronage is beyond the scope of this study, but a few examples will serve to give some sense of the scale and ambition of his cultural pursuits.

In the realm of plate, the most spectacular examples are probably the two solid gold Marlborough ice-pails today preserved in the British Museum, each of which weighs an astonishing 5.5 kg (fig. 10).<sup>152</sup> A more palpable display of movable wealth is difficult to imagine; but this is only the most remarkable of numerous examples of superb silverware from Marlborough's collection. These include the massive pair of Pilgrim Flasks that today adorn the Saloon, or the many fine examples of English and Continental silver in, or disposed from, the collection of Marlborough's descendants, the Earls Spencer, at Althorp.<sup>153</sup>

Marlborough's purchase of tapestry forms another strand of the same representational strategy. Almost from the moment he secured the Woodstock estate, he began commissioning major suites of tapestries to adorn both the state rooms and the private apartments.<sup>154</sup> The first was the *Art of War* series, commissioned through the Antwerp tapestry dealer Nicholaas Naulaerts.<sup>155</sup> These tapestries are ostentatiously rich even by the standards of their time: as the original account puts it they are a 'very richly worked with gold and silver'.<sup>156</sup> Marlborough sought to pre-empt the duchess's criticism of such ostentation by implying that it was unintentional: 'The hangings I had made att Bruxelles are finished, and the greatest fault I find with them is their having to[o] much silver and gold in them'. Although so costly an adornment can hardly have been accidental, Marlborough did promise that the next tapestries he commissioned would be plainer, and it is true that the later tapestries were distinguished more by quality of design and finesse of

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<sup>152</sup> Arthur Grimwade, 'Silver at Althorp', *Connoisseur*, 151 (October 1962): 81–7.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> On Marlborough's tapestry commissions, see Alan J. B. Wace, *The Marlborough Tapestries at Blenheim Palace and Their Relation to Other Military Tapestries of the War of the Spanish Succession* (London and New York, 1968) and Jeri Bapasola, *Threads of History: The Tapestries at Blenheim Palace* (Lydney, 2005).

<sup>155</sup> Bapasola, *Threads of History*, p. 33.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

execution than a wealth of precious metal.<sup>157</sup> The next tapestries were ordered in 1707, one suite for his own apartment, recounting the *History of Alexander the Great*, and another for the duchess's apartment, showing a series of peasant scenes after Teniers.<sup>158</sup> Marlborough then concluded his tapestry purchases with three further sets, both for Blenheim and the duchess's London residence, Marlborough House. These were apparently commissioned in the winter of 1708-1709, although additions were made subsequently. These included the *Pleasures of the Gods*, the *Virtues*, and last, but certainly not least, the *Victories* set, which portrayed Marlborough's own greatest military triumphs with the most remarkable verisimilitude and were destined to hang in Blenheim's state rooms.<sup>159</sup>

Tapestries were, however, only one element of the magnificent decorative display that Marlborough sought to realise on the walls of Blenheim. As time went on, pictures became an ever more important focus for Marlborough's acquisitive eye. He soon accumulated a spectacular collection of paintings, with the largest major works destined for the Long Gallery at Blenheim and the finest small paintings for the Grand Cabinet.<sup>160</sup> These appear for the most part to have been spoils of war: the most spectacular were acquired after the Ramillies campaign from the collections of the defeated Elector of Bavaria and from the palace of the Governors of the Spanish Netherlands. In Marlborough's characteristic fashion they were 'an example of the most well-bred way of acquiring works of art as booty, the way of firmly asking for them as a present'.<sup>161</sup> Marlborough could not conceal his excitement at these acquisitions: 'it is certain that there are not in England so fine pictures as some of these,' he wrote to the duchess, citing in particular Van Dyck's equestrian portrait of Charles I (now in the National Gallery) (fig. 11).<sup>162</sup> Shortly afterwards, a shipment of approximately nineteen cases of works of art arrived in London, although it appears

<sup>157</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 720.

<sup>158</sup> Bapasola, *Threads of History*, p. 40.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 57, 71.

<sup>160</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 2, pp. 724, 973.

<sup>161</sup> Charles Avery, 'The Duke of Marlborough as a Collector and Patron of Sculpture', in Edward Chaney (ed.), *The Evolution of English Collecting: The Reception of Italian Art in the Tudor and Stuart Periods*, Studies in British Art 12 (New Haven and London, 2004), pp. 427-465, esp. p. 428. See also Lionel H. Cust, 'Notes on Pictures in the Royal Collections—XX. The Equestrian Portraits of Charles I by Van Dyck—II', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 18, no. 94 (January 1911): 202-209, esp. pp. 207-208.

<sup>162</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 724.

that the Van Dyck was not at this point among them.<sup>163</sup> To these were added in 1708 a further five paintings by Van Dyck and Rubens taken from Tervueren, the residence of the Governors of the Spanish Netherlands.<sup>164</sup> At around the same time Marlborough also acquired a series of nine paintings of the *Loves of the Gods*, then believed to be by Titian.<sup>165</sup>

It will be clear even from this truncated discussion that Marlborough's pursuit of a great house was part of a pattern of acquisition characteristic of the uppermost reaches of the early modern European social and political elites. There can be little doubt that in Marlborough's case this was a natural result of his long career as a courtier, combined with his experiences of serving in the War of the Spanish Succession. These had exposed him to patterns of material display that he sought to emulate in the construction and furnishing of his spectacular new house.

Marlborough was no doubt keenly aware of the extraordinary wealth and privilege being conferred on his fellow commander, Prince Eugene of Savoy. Eugene was then in the midst of constructing a magnificent residence in Vienna, the *Stadtpalais*, and was already developing plans to build an equally grandiose suburban retreat, the Belvedere, with its neighbouring *Lustschloss* (now known as the Lower Belvedere). While fighting or engaging in diplomatic activities in Germany and Flanders, Marlborough would also have encountered the displays of the great Continental princely and aristocratic families. He had visited Berlin in late 1704, immediately after the victory at Blenheim, when he could only have been deeply impressed by the efforts of Frederick I of Brandenburg-Prussia to provide material substance to his recently acquired royal status.<sup>166</sup> These included the recently completed high Baroque *Rittersaal* of the Berlin Stadtschloss, with its spectacular display of silver plate on the buffet towering up almost as far as the coving of the ceiling.<sup>167</sup> Such ostentation can only have encouraged Marlborough's own taste for magnificence. Indeed, for someone so deeply immersed in such a milieu the construction of a spectacular palace must have seemed an entirely natural ambition, an appropriate and

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 725, fn. 1; Cust, 'Notes on Pictures', p. 208.

<sup>164</sup> Cust, 'Notes on Pictures', p. 208.

<sup>165</sup> British Library Add MS 61355 f. 3.

<sup>166</sup> Churchill, *Marlborough*, vol. 2, pp. 506-509.

<sup>167</sup> See Lorenz Seelig, *Silver and Gold: Courtly Splendor from Augsburg*, Munich and New York, 1995, pp. 31-33; and Alfred Hagemann and Matthew Winterbottom, 'New Discoveries Concerning the Berlin Silver Buffet', *Silver Studies*, no. 22 (2007): 117-122.

even necessary assertion of status. The only question that remained must have been who could be entrusted with the design such a building. It is to this question that we know turn.

### **The Choice of an Architect**

Like Marlborough's career, Vanbrugh's appointment as Surveyor of Blenheim cannot properly be understood apart from the pursuit of place and favour at the English court. Although Vanbrugh came from a less distinguished—though also less penurious—background than Marlborough, and his ambitions were correspondingly more modest, the means by which he hoped to realise them were cut from much the same cloth. He showed a similarly remarkable capacity for calculated risk-taking, and whilst he did not have the good fortune to find a royal patron, Vanbrugh did have aristocratic kinsmen. It was to them that he turned after failing to find success or satisfaction as quickly as he wished either in the wine trade and or as an agent of the East India Company at their factory in Surat. As the head of the Surat factory, John Child, reported on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1685:

Mr John Vanbrugh and Mr Robert Graham take their passage for England on this ship, being quite weary of these parts and in big expectation of much sooner raising their fortunes in England, depending on their good friends to put them into places of great profit, credit and ease. They are a couple of young men, very fit for business, and a few years more of being over their heads may do them a great deal of good. We heartily wish them both well, for their worthy relations' sakes, and have argued with them all we could, to persuade them to continue, but all to no purpose.<sup>168</sup>

Judging by a letter written on 28 December 1685, shortly after his return to England, it seems that Vanbrugh's hopes for these 'places of profit, credit and ease' were pinned on his distant kinsman, Theophilus Hastings, seventh Earl of Huntingdon. Vanbrugh's letter refers to favour already shown him and goes on to request Huntingdon's further aid in obtaining some 'station as may be at present creditable' either under the new Lord Lieutenant of Ireland or under Huntingdon himself

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<sup>168</sup> Robert Williams, 'A Factor in his Success. The Missing Years: Did Vanbrugh Learn from Mughal Mausolea?', *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 5031 (3 September 1999): 13-14.

following his appointment as Warden and Chief Justice in Eyre of Royal Forests south of the Trent.<sup>169</sup> Vanbrugh's solicitations did not gain him the office he wanted, but he did briefly take a commission in Huntingdon's regiment before attaching himself to another aristocratic kinsman, James Bertie, 1<sup>st</sup> earl of Abingdon.<sup>170</sup>

Vanbrugh then went to France where, after some indiscreet comments, he was imprisoned as spy for more than four years. During this time he was a prisoner at Vincennes and the Bastille, and he spent several weeks in Paris after his eventual release. Thus he had some opportunity to experience what was widely recognised as the most sophisticated cultural and artistic milieu in Europe. In the meantime, another Bertie kinsman, Lord Willoughby had obtained for him a sinecure in the duchy of Lancaster, and after his return he also rejoined the Marines, seeing service at Camaret Bay.<sup>171</sup>

Soon afterwards, Vanbrugh made yet another dramatic change of direction. He now turned playwright, writing a series of successful comedies that clearly brought him a measure of financial benefit. No less importantly for his future career, however, they also seem to have brought considerable social success in the form of familiarity with the elite patrons who attended his performances. His newfound literary credentials enabled him to join the Kit-Kat Club, bringing him into contact with a wide and influential circle of Whig literary and political figures. This must have been the point at which Vanbrugh began to develop what the Duchess of Marlborough later described as 'a large acquaintance with the Nobility', and it was these social contacts that were to prove crucial to his subsequent architectural success.<sup>172</sup>

At some point in late 1698, one of these Whig aristocratic acquaintances, Charles Howard, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Carlisle, conceived plans to rebuild his family house at Henderskelfe in Yorkshire. Although the commission had initially been offered to William Talman, the Comptroller of the King's Works, within months Vanbrugh had taken over the job in spite of his total lack of architectural experience. This turn to architecture 'without thought or lecture' is notoriously poorly documented and has

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<sup>169</sup> Albert Rosenberg, 'New Light on Vanbrugh', *Philological Quarterly*, vol. 45 (1966): 603-613, esp. 603.

<sup>170</sup> Downes, *Sir John Vanbrugh*, p. 59.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>172</sup> British Library, Add MS 61464 f. 95r.

provoked a combination of puzzlement and astonishment from historians.

Although it is unlikely that a definitive explanation will ever be found, viewing the limited evidence in its social context does suggest how Vanbrugh might have felt himself capable of taking on the project that would eventually give rise to the grandiose forms of Castle Howard.

It is well-known that Vanbrugh subsequently came to be closely associated with Nicholas Hawksmoor, clerk to the Surveyor of the King's Works, Sir Christopher Wren. It has generally been assumed that Hawksmoor was brought in to provide the technical assistance that Vanbrugh needed in response to the demands of Carlisle's project. Saumarez Smith, for example, has pointed out that the first reference to Hawksmoor in the surviving correspondence appears to date from no earlier than late 1700, and possibly early 1701, 'at least a year after Vanbrugh had first been consulted about the plans for Castle Howard and several months after the model had been sent to Hampton Court for inspection'.<sup>173</sup>

Even for a man of Vanbrugh's entrepreneurial disposition, however, this would seem foolishly bold. Vanbrugh's own drawings remained crude throughout his career, and his earliest attempts at draughtsmanship appear execrable.<sup>174</sup> It is surely more plausible to suggest that it was an encounter with Hawksmoor that suggested to Vanbrugh the possibility of an architectural career. As Downes has pointed out, the most obvious source of contact between the two was Vanbrugh's cousin, William Vanbrugh, who was clerk to the commissioners for the Royal Naval Hospital in Greenwich from 1698.<sup>175</sup> At precisely this time Hawksmoor was undertaking a very large amount of work, in a startlingly impressive new style, on the new hospital for which Sir Christopher Wren was receiving the public credit.

It is not difficult to imagine Vanbrugh—ambitious, audacious and always with an eye on the main chance—thinking that there was an opportunity here to act as the middleman between Wren's talented but socially inferior clerk, and the wealthy aristocrats with whom he had developed such extensive contacts. And it is no more difficult to imagine the kind of working relationship this would involve. Vanbrugh

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<sup>173</sup> Saumarez Smith, *Building of Castle Howard*, p. 49.

<sup>174</sup> Downes, *Hawksmoor*, p. 70.

<sup>175</sup> Kerry Downes, *Sir John Vanbrugh*, p. 290.

would procure commissions, discuss requirements and outline basic forms, while Hawksmoor would provide the necessary technical advice and produce the drawings. In this connection it should be emphasised that in the letter cited by Saumarez-Smith, Vanbrugh states that

I spoak to Mr Hawksmoor about his perticular concern and found him as he us'd to be. so he intended to ask yr Ldship fourty pound a year Sallary & fifty each journey wch mounts to £100 clear. I hope he'll deserve it, and that all will go to yr Ldships satisfaction.<sup>176</sup>

The key phrase is 'as he us'd to be': both Hawksmoor and his employment terms were therefore familiar to both Vanbrugh and Carlisle, suggesting that this was not the first time that they had encountered each other. In addition, it is evident that many of even the very earliest drawings for Castle Howard are in Hawksmoor's, rather than Vanbrugh's, hand. There is, in other words, no need to assume that Vanbrugh 'turned to architecture' and then went in search of an assistant; it is surely more plausible to assume that Vanbrugh found the assistant, and then went in search of the architecture.

Further evidence that Vanbrugh tacitly conceived himself as an intermediary between Hawksmoor and potential clients can be found in the correspondence about a potential commission to remodel Welbeck Abbey for the Duke of Newcastle. This includes Vanbrugh's famous relation of the evidence he gave at a trial occasioned by an attempt by his main competitor, William Talman, to extract payment for his sketch drawings for Castle Howard. Vanbrugh suggested that Talman should not receive payment on the grounds that for 'Designs drawn imperfectly, by way of proposition for a house, nothing ought to be reckon'd, any more than if a Shopkeeper shew'd you his goods'.<sup>177</sup> It was only the detailed drawings that should be paid for, as they 'took up a vast deal of pains and time'.<sup>178</sup>

It is worth considering the implications of this, for it suggests that in Vanbrugh's view the basic task of architectural design—the development of an overall form for the building—was nothing more than a mere preliminary to the more substantive

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<sup>176</sup> Saumarez Smith, *Building of Castle Howard*, p. 49.

<sup>177</sup> Whistler, *The Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 36.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

work involved in transforming those propositions into reality with the help of working drawings. Thus it was Hawksmoor's specialist function as a professional draftsman that demanded payment, not the initial conceptualisation of the building. Given Vanbrugh's inexperience as a draughtsman, he is in effect writing himself out of the design process, or at least out of its remuneration.

In this connection, it is worth noting that there is no evidence Vanbrugh ever received any payment for designing Castle Howard. It would instead seem that Vanbrugh was working for free on the implicit understanding that he would be rewarded in other ways for his services. It is therefore of interest that he received the position of Comptroller of the Works in 1702, presumably through the good offices of Carlisle. In other words, there are circumstantial grounds for thinking that Vanbrugh's architectural advice to Carlisle was repaid by advancement to court office, and that it was by this means that Vanbrugh at last secured the position of 'profit, credit and ease' that had induced him to abandon his East India career nearly twenty years earlier.<sup>179</sup>

It is at this point that we can begin to see why Vanbrugh is likely to have been regarded as a suitable candidate to manage Marlborough's great building project. Vanbrugh had clearly established himself as generally knowledgeable about architectural matters, and in addition provided access to the bold and dramatic architectural style that Hawksmoor had pioneered at Greenwich (as will be discussed in more detail in the next two chapters). Together Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor had applied this style to aristocratic domestic architecture at Castle Howard, providing an obvious, and perhaps only, English model for a house capable of holding its own against the spectacular residences of Marlborough's Continental European contemporaries. No less importantly, however, Vanbrugh had clearly established himself as a skilled 'player' in the game of court life, as someone who understood the risky but potentially rewarding principle of reciprocity that underpinned social and material advancement in that complex and treacherous world.

Indeed, this principle was perceptibly at work in his relationship with his new patron: as with his work for Lord Carlisle, there is no evidence that Vanbrugh was given a salary when he was appointed architect of Blenheim. On the other hand,

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<sup>179</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. xi.

however, there is clear evidence of an implicit *quid pro quo*. In exchange for receiving Vanbrugh's full cooperation in executing the building Marlborough wanted and for doing so without charge, Marlborough would support his advancement at court. According to the later testimony of the duchess, this took the form of 'the promise of giving him Sr. Christopher Wren's employment when he should happen to dye.'<sup>180</sup> Subsequent developments appear to confirm that it was indeed the case that such a deal was made.

The previously tacit agreement first came into the open when Vanbrugh's financial position began to deteriorate as a result of his decision to build the Haymarket Opera house. He evidently approached the duchess in the hope of receiving some kind of recompense for his services, but appears to have been refused. Vanbrugh then seems to have approached her fixer and go-between, Arthur Maynwaring, in the hope that Maynwaring would use influence with the duchess to advance his cause. Maynwaring responded to Vanbrugh's plight with a characteristic mixture of sycophancy and indifference, telling the duchess:

I have read Mr. Van's letter, and can only say I am sorry for him, because I believe he is unhappy through his own folly, and I can see no reasonable way to help him. What I mean by his folly, is his building the play-house, which certainly cost him a great deal more than was subscribed; and his troubles arise from the workmen that built it, and the tradesmen that furnished the cloaths, &c., for the actors. But I am now in your Grace's service (in which I will die). I cannot advise you to do anything for him out of your own estate, from which I may hope for a subsistence myself after I am grown old and good for nothing, though for the last reason I am afraid I might pretend to it already.<sup>181</sup>

The duchess was clearly ready to take Maynwaring's advice and again responded in the negative; and the duke wrote to her on June 20 approving her decision:

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<sup>180</sup> Howard Colvin (ed.), *The History of the King's Works* (6 vols) (London, 1963-1982), vol. 6 (1976), p. 36, quoting from Chatsworth Archives, Letter 122.3: Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough to the Duke of Devonshire, 6 May 1721.

<sup>181</sup> Arthur Maynwaring to the duchess, in Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough, *Private Correspondence of Sarah Duchess of Marlborough, Illustrative of the Times of Queen Anne...* (2 vols) (London, 1838), vol. 1, p. 140, undated in this source, but written on 15 June 1708 (see Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 1016 fn. 3).

In my opinion what you write of Vanbrugh is very right, and I should think that any reasonable man would be satisfied, if you could find the proper opportunity of letting him know them; for besides the reasons you give against a pension, it is more for his interest to have patience till something happens which may be lasting.<sup>182</sup>

On 8 July Vanbrugh still obviously entertained hopes of gaining some kind of benefit, writing another letter pleading his case and suggesting that he should receive the salary formerly paid to William Boulter, who had died in May leaving one of the comptroller's posts vacant.<sup>183</sup> Again, Vanbrugh's pleas fell on deaf ears: in September, a warrant was issued by Godolphin appointing Tilleman Bobart, another protégé of the duchess.<sup>184</sup> At this point, Vanbrugh seems to have let the matter rest, no doubt consoling himself with the thought of the 'something more lasting' he had been promised three years before.

That this was still the surveyorship is made clear after financial necessity led him to renew his importunate demands in 1710. Vanbrugh again approached the duchess in the hope that she would support his request to receive more substantial payments for his services than he had so far received. The duchess again refused, but this time Vanbrugh reacted with ill-disguised fury. He approached Maynwaring, complaining with particular bitterness about the duchess' decision, the previous year, to appoint Sir Christopher Wren and his son Christopher as architects of her new London residence, Marlborough House:

...great stress he laid upon the employing of Sir Christopher Wren to build the house here, which had been the only encouragement to him, to think of resigning to his son, by which he [Vanbrugh] should now lose that office.<sup>185</sup>

At this point Vanbrugh began to lose faith in the ability or willingness of the duchess and Godolphin to secure the surveyorship for him, prompting him to start cultivating the new Lord Chamberlain, the Duke of Shrewsbury: 'Tis only', wrote Godolphin

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<sup>182</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 1016.

<sup>183</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 92.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92, 245.

<sup>185</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 3, p. 1630, fn. 3.

to the duchess, ‘by 28 [Shrewsbury] that he can hope to gett the better of the little old man and his sonn’.<sup>186</sup>

Vanbrugh’s ambitions were not limited to his own career. In addition to pursuing Wren’s position of ‘profit, credit and ease’ at the head of the Queen’s Office of Works, he was also, it would seem, a broker of patronage as well. Several letters in his published correspondence clearly deal with the advancement of his friends and protégés to court and government office. Perhaps the most remarkable is a letter in which he roundly scolds the Duke of Newcastle for daring to dispose of a post in the King’s Music another petitioner, even though it had already been promised to one of Vanbrugh’s servants, to. ‘I never was more Supris’d’, Vanbrugh boldly told Newcastle, ‘at any disagreeable thing, has happen’d to me in my Life; than to find (a day or two ago) your Grace had thrown aside a Small Domestick, of mine, to make way for an other’.<sup>187</sup> Vanbrugh thus emerges as yet another courtier who was, like Marlborough, engaged in building a patronage network in which present services were repaid with future advancement, in part looking up to those who could protect him, and in part looking down to those who could serve him. Marlborough and Vanbrugh then, for all their disparity in rank, reputation, and fortune, were habitués of the same social world, cherishing the same ambitions for social advancement and economic advantage that were the courtier’s defining characteristics.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen how both Marlborough and his architect belonged to the same, highly distinctive, courtly milieu. Both knew that their advancement depended on the provision of services to a powerful patron in exchange for the implicit or explicit promise of substantial rewards. The broking of position; the establishment of networks of clients and ‘friends’; the skilled deployment of dissimulation and psychological manipulation; these were the ordinary currency of court life and the normal environment in which both Marlborough and ‘Honest Van’ lived and worked. Against this background, we must regard with a degree of scepticism the evidence of Marlborough’s attitudes and motivations presented in Kneller’s *Queen*

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<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 1631.

<sup>187</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 140; see also p. 121 for his solicitations on behalf of others.

*Anne Presenting the Model of Blenheim to Military Merit.* Marlborough was a skilled propagandist who was well aware of the feelings of envy and resentment that could result from the material benefits he derived from his military achievements and his favour with the Queen. Kneller's idealised portrayal of the duke's receiving the rewards of service as his abstract and depersonalised due rather than as his personal desire was clearly intended to counter potential criticism from his contemporaries. More specifically, it served to disguise Marlborough's likely role in soliciting the rewards he received, not only in the form of the Woodstock estate but also in the form of the Queen's decision to fund the construction of his house. The painting's iconographical programme, then, can be seen as a pictorial equivalent to James Smallwood's deceptive account of Marlborough's elevation to his German principality. No less importantly, Marlborough's related concern to secure an architect fully conversant with the material and psychological realities of court life implies that the design and construction of Blenheim must be firmly situated in the same milieu. In doing so, we are forced to consider whether Marlborough himself may have had a more direct influence over his house and his architects than has been hitherto acknowledged—not always, perhaps, by direct prescription, but by creating a framework of expectations that left his architects in no doubt of the nature of his architectural ambitions. It is with this possibility in mind that I will now go on to consider the development of the earliest known plans for Blenheim, tracing how Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor set about creating a fitting house for Queen Anne's most favoured courtier and brilliant general.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Captain General's Castle

#### Introduction

In the months and years that followed Marlborough's initial approach to Vanbrugh at Christmas 1704 the captain general's great house had to be transformed from a vague conception into a physical reality. Since the earliest days of serious scholarship on Blenheim it has been known that this process was remarkably long-drawn-out and complex. As we have already seen, when first Green and Whistler, and then Downes began to uncover previously neglected graphic and documentary sources, it became apparent that the house upon which construction began in 1705 was very different from the one that was actually built. Elucidating how, when, and why Blenheim underwent such a remarkable metamorphosis in the course of its construction has been one of the central concerns of architectural historians working on early eighteenth century British architecture, and it will also be one of the dominant themes in this thesis. But in this chapter I wish to take the story back further in order to consider the development not of the final design but of its simpler predecessor (fig. 1). This is a subject that has received relatively little attention in the scholarly literature, largely, no doubt, because of the paucity of surviving evidence. It seems that it is only with the early drawings for the south front of the palace that there are any significant graphic sources to draw upon, and even these are a fraction of what must originally have been produced.

In recent years, however, the importance of two previously neglected early drawings for Blenheim has begun to be recognised. Historians of the Blenheim landscape have directed attention to an extremely early site plan that has been left almost unexamined by architectural historians; while an otherwise unrecognised floor plan of very early date has recently been identified by Gordon Higgott in the course of cataloguing the Soane Museum's baroque architectural drawings.<sup>188</sup> Given the fragmentary state of the graphic evidence, these two documents have the potential to

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<sup>188</sup> The relevant drawings are respectively: Bodleian Library MS Top. Oxon. 37\* f. 1, which is identified below as being the earliest surviving drawing for Blenheim; and Soane Museum SM 166 f. 6.

enrich and even revise our understanding of the early evolution of Blenheim. It is my purpose here to begin this process by undertaking a close analysis of these drawings, in order to illuminate the origins of the design process that culminated in the early elevations for the south front. I will take as my starting point Vanbrugh's accounts of Marlborough's commission to build Blenheim before looking in more detail at the relationship between Blenheim and Castle Howard, the model chosen by Marlborough as the basis for the design of his own house. By undertaking a close analysis of the early graphic evidence for both projects, I will attempt to piece together how the model provided by Castle Howard was reworked and rethought to meet the Duke's requirements. To do this, I will consider first how the general layout of the site may have been derived; then analyse the evolution of the ground plan; and, finally, look at the treatment of the house's façades. I will also attempt to consider the motivations for the various changes that were made in terms of both the architectural effects that were intended and the wider cultural values to which they related.

### **The Commission**

The most important evidence for the very earliest stages of Blenheim's development consists of three accounts of the commissioning of the design, all given by Vanbrugh as depositions in the various lawsuits over the settlement of the Blenheim debts initiated by the main contractors, the Stronges.<sup>189</sup> Although written some years after the event, Vanbrugh's three statements provide the only coherent narrative accounts of the critically important decisions that provided the initial framework for the project. While they differ in their level of detail, they contain few contradictions and can also be shown to be accurate where independent evidence can be adduced to test them. They can thus, without inconsistency, be combined to produce a single narrative which we can take to represent Vanbrugh's own recollection of the earliest stages of the design process; and this narrative can probably also be taken as a reasonably faithful record of what actually happened.

According to Vanbrugh, shortly after their meeting at Drury Lane Marlborough despatched his agents to view the Woodstock estate and survey the areas of the park

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<sup>189</sup> Downes, *Vanbrugh*, Appendix D, pp. 254-55.

most suitable for the construction of a new house. As soon as they had arrived back in London, Marlborough sent one of them to Vanbrugh's house in Whitehall to announce that the duke would visit him there that morning.<sup>190</sup> The date of the duke's visit is not recorded, but it is perhaps significant that in later years both Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor would retrospectively claim arrears of salary as if they had been formally engaged on the project from 1 February 1705.<sup>191</sup> This date also fits neatly in the known chronology: it allows some time for the survey work to be done at Woodstock after Marlborough's initial approach to Vanbrugh 'about Xmas' but precedes by some weeks the first recorded visit by the duke and his architects to Woodstock park, which took place in late February, as discussed below.

Although the date must remain conjectural, something is known of what transpired during the visit. Marlborough arrived with his friend and political ally, Sidney, Lord Godolphin, and together they viewed a model of Castle Howard, the new house that Vanbrugh had designed, with Hawksmoor's assistance, for Charles, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Carlisle. Marlborough was clearly impressed by the model, for he decided that his own house should conform to its general outlines, though 'with some alteracōns and addicōns'.<sup>192</sup> The most notable of these additions—the only one which Vanbrugh specifically recalled—was a gallery. Marlborough and Godolphin then instructed Vanbrugh to prepare a design accordingly, which he soon afterwards delivered to them at the Duchess of Marlborough's lodgings in St. James's Palace. After looking over it several times 'both before and after dinner', Marlborough and Godolphin 'at last came to a Resolution to look no farther but fixt on yt design'.<sup>193</sup> Over the coming weeks, the design was drawn out in more detail and revised in accordance with the wishes of the duke, the duchess and Godolphin. The duke then ordered Vanbrugh to meet him at Woodstock to 'fix upon the Situacōn' of his new house.<sup>194</sup> There is independent evidence in the London newspapers of the duke's departure for Woodstock on Monday, 26 February, and his expected return the following Friday,

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<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix D, p. 254.

<sup>191</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 92 and fn. 1, quoting from British Library Add MS 19603 f. 116.

<sup>192</sup> Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 254.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

and it seems reasonable to infer that this was the time he and Vanbrugh saw the proposed building site for the first time.<sup>195</sup>

On their arrival the patron and his architect would have found themselves confronted by the large, irregular area of Woodstock Park. It was very roughly the shape of a long rectangle, with its longer axis running from the southeast to the northwest. Through the park ran the valley of the Glyme, more rivulet than river, its banks bordered by marshes and water meadows. The valley divided the park into a larger section on the north, and a smaller section towards the south (fig. 12). The section to the north sloped upwards all the way to the northern boundary of the estate towards Ditchley; the section to the south ascended briefly but sharply from the valley before levelling out and then falling gently towards Bladon in the south. It was on the north side of the Glyme valley that the ancient royal manor house of Woodstock stood. Although famed for its associations with Henry II and his legendary mistress, Rosamond Clifford, its state was ruinous and incomplete, though still impressive. Farther away to the west, at the top of the hill overlooking the whole park, stood another smaller but still substantial house, High Lodge, which was to serve as the duke and duchess's residence until their new house was completed. Then, towards the east, was the town and borough of Woodstock, where the principal entrance to the estate was located, connected by ancient causeways to the manor house.

According to Vanbrugh's account, his initial suggestion for the location of the house was immediately accepted by the Duke.<sup>196</sup> The site chosen was the brow of the hill that defined the southern side of the Glyme valley, just opposite the old manor house. From this point there were prospects to the north and west across the river and the park; southwards towards Bladon; and eastwards towards Woodstock. With the site decided upon, Marlborough immediately gave orders for construction to begin, and a team of workmen in the employ of the royal gardener, Henry Wise, was called in to begin clearing and levelling the site in preparation for the digging of the foundations. By 16 April 1705, they were already on site and at work.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> *Daily Courant*, no. 895 (27 February 1705).

<sup>196</sup> Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 254.

<sup>197</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 95; British Library Add MS 19592, f. 12 r.

In the meantime, Vanbrugh recalled, the design continued to be perfected and finalised:

After his Graces return to London there were many more draughts made in order the carrying on the work, and constantly shown to the Duke, who sometimes approved and sometimes disapproved of the same, tho he consulted his Duchess, Lord Treasurer Godolphin, the Dukes of Shrewsbury and Montague and others in most of 'em.<sup>198</sup>

It thus appears that within two months of Marlborough's first approach to Vanbrugh the basic constraints for the design had been established: the site was to be in the south of Woodstock park, overlooking the Glyme; and the general disposition was to be based on the model of Castle Howard seen by Marlborough at Vanbrugh's house. It also seems that the design was developed in close collaboration with the duke, who was 'constantly shown' the evolving design. In order to begin tracing how Marlborough's wishes were transformed into the design upon which work actually began in June 1705, we must now turn to consider the extant graphic evidence for Blenheim's early design: a general site survey preserved in the Bodleian Library as MS Top. Oxon. 37\*, folio 1; and a slightly later, but still very early, floor plan that has recently been discovered in the Soane Museum.

### **Bodleian MS Top. Oxon 37\* f. 1 and Soane Museum 166 f. 6.**

MS Top. Oxon 37\* f. 1 (fig. 13) consists of a survey map of Woodstock Park superimposed with broadly sketched designs for Blenheim and the surrounding landscape. The drawing was first published by David Green in his study of Henry Wise, the gardener contracted to undertake most of the landscaping and gardening work at Blenheim.<sup>199</sup> Since then it has been republished in two recent landscape histories, Jeri Bapasola's study of Blenheim's landscape setting and Caroline Dalton's monograph on Vanbrugh as a garden designer.<sup>200</sup>

<sup>198</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, Appendix XII, p. 315.

<sup>199</sup> David Green, *Gardener to Queen Anne: Henry Wise (1653-1738) and the Formal Garden* (London, 1956), p. 98; I am indebted to Kerry Downes for bringing my attention to this reference.

<sup>200</sup> Caroline Dalton, *Sir John Vanbrugh and the Vitruvian Landscape* (London and New York, 2012), pp. 105-107; Jeri Bapasola, *The Finest View in England: The Landscape and Gardens at Blenheim Palace* (Woodstock, 2009), p. 20.

All these authors have recognised that the drawing shows the landscape scheme at a very early stage of development, as it exhibits numerous differences from the design that was actually put into execution in the summer of 1705.<sup>201</sup> Thus, although the house is shown in approximately its final location, there is no route to the house across the Glyme Valley where the Grand Bridge now stands; the avenue that leads up to the house from the north is of an entirely different form to that actually planted; and the entire formal garden to the south of the house, including the parterre, appears to be contained in giant hexagon immediately adjacent to the south front of the house, whilst in the final scheme the parterre occupies a square to the south of the house with a hexagonal ‘woodwork’ beyond it, forming two distinct but contiguous units. The drawing must therefore substantially predate the beginning of construction work on the gardens, and Dalton has concluded that it can only date to ‘early 1705’.<sup>202</sup>

The second very early drawing, Soane Museum 166 f. 6, is a plan of Blenheim’s main floor (fig. 14). The plan is bound in with a set of summary building accounts and has only recently been identified by Gordon Higgott in the course of cataloguing the baroque drawings in the Soane Museum’s library. The plan very clearly foreshadows the extant structure, but diverges from it far more radically than other surviving drawings of the principal floor, leading Higgott to argue that it must predate ‘any other known’. Indeed, he claims not only that it must precede the beginning of work on the foundations on the house on 18 June 1705, but that it most probably dates ‘to the early months of 1705’, immediately after Marlborough’s first consultation with Vanbrugh in late 1704.<sup>203</sup>

The early dates given to the two drawings can be confirmed and refined by correlating the designs they show with documentary evidence. The critical source is in both cases the same: a letter from Vanbrugh to Marlborough of 22 June 1705. This letter reports that a number of improvements had been made to the design, of which the most important was the decision to reconfigure the entrance hall so that it broke forwards into the forecourt on the north side of the building:

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<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> Dalton, *Vanbrugh and the Vitruvian Landscape*, p. 106.

<sup>203</sup> Higgott, *Baroque Drawings*, entry for SM 166/6.

The drawings I sent your Grace were not (nor cou'd not [*sic*] be) perfect in little perticulars, wch at leasure have since been more thoroughly considered. The only alteration worth mentioning to your Grace however is in the first entrance of the House, where by bringing the break forwarder, the Hall is enlarg'd, and from a round, is brought to an Ovall, figure, a Portico added and yet the Room much better lighted than before. And the top of it rises above the rest of the building regularly in the Middle of the four great Pavillions.<sup>204</sup>

The implication of Vanbrugh's description is that, in the original design, the façade of the central part of the north (entrance) front was relatively flat, but that the redesign of the hall had created a projection there that was further extended by the new portico.

The two drawings fall on either side of this divide. The general site plan still shows the centre of the façade between the two quadrangular stretches of wall without the break or the portico. Thus it can be no later than mid-June 1705. However, its date can probably be pushed back somewhat further, since it also shows the corners sections of the main block of the house as being flush with the greater part of the neighbouring façades. It therefore appears that the four 'great pavilions' that were to become one of the most characteristic features of Blenheim's design had not as yet been thought of. It seems clear that these pavilions had been incorporated into the plan some time before Vanbrugh wrote his letter. Indeed, Vanbrugh's manner of writing suggests that he took it for granted that Marlborough would immediately recognise them as a significant feature of the design. The last time Vanbrugh had been in communication with the duke, and therefore the latest date on which he could have notified him of the addition of the pavilions, was when he sent the set of drawings ('The drawings I sent your Grace') referred to in his letter. These had not arrived on the Continent by 10/21 April 1705, when Marlborough wrote impatiently to the duchess asking her to 'take the first oportunity of sending me the draught Vanbrook promised me' and which he presumably received not long after then.<sup>205</sup> It is therefore possible that Vanbrugh first broached the subject of the pavilions in correspondence accompanying the drawings at some point in April; but the

<sup>204</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 230.

<sup>205</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, p. 417.

expectation of familiarity makes it rather more likely that they already were in place when they had last discussed the project in person. This would have been before Marlborough left London for the Continent on 26 March 1705, taking us back to the very beginning of Blenheim's design.<sup>206</sup> The Bodleian survey plan must therefore be regarded as the earliest surviving graphic document not only of the design of Blenheim's landscape setting but also of the building's architectural development.

In the floor plan, by contrast, both the pavilions and the modified north front with its break and portico are clearly visible. Since the decision to revise the design of the hall was clearly made after Vanbrugh's drawings were sent to the duke at some point after early April 1705, the plan is unlikely to be quite as early as Higgott's suggestion of the first months of 1705. It must nevertheless substantially predate the beginning of construction, as it exhibits numerous substantive differences of proportion, layout and detail from the design put into execution in June 1705. To take only one example, the breadth of the hall and saloon is much narrower than in the plan as put into execution—approximately 36 feet rather than 44 feet. Since the laying of the foundations of the main house was already underway in June 1705, and as there is no subsequent evidence in the building accounts of the substantial rebuilding and consequent additional expense that would have been entailed by such a major adjustment to the house's dimensions, we can presume that this drawing had already been superseded before significant construction was undertaken. The plan must therefore have been executed at some point between the despatch of drawings to Marlborough—the first weeks of April at the earliest—and Vanbrugh's letter to Marlborough—in late June—with the earlier part of this range considerably more likely than the later. This drawing, too, must therefore be recognised as amongst the earliest surviving pieces of visual evidence for Blenheim's architectural development, again dating from the first critical months when initial ideas were being translated into a buildable design.

Given their exceptional interest as the only direct documents of Blenheim's early development, these two drawings deserve sustained analysis. This must begin with the most basic question, that of authorship. In the case of the survey plan this is a

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<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 413.

somewhat complex issue. Even in the small literature that references it, it has generated a series of conflicting attributions. It has customarily been grouped with another, similarly freely executed but later site plan, Bodleian Top. Oxon. 37\* f. 2 (fig. 4). Whistler, although he explicitly discussed only the latter plan and not the drawing under consideration here, clearly assumed that, as landscape designs, both must have been ‘made by the garden designer, Henry Wise’.<sup>207</sup> Green later made the somewhat non-committal suggestion that they were ‘perhaps by Wise, perhaps by Vanbrugh’.<sup>208</sup> Dalton does not explicitly discuss the drawings’ authorship, but is clear that they represent Vanbrugh’s intentions.<sup>209</sup> According to Bapasola, they ‘may have been drawn by Vanbrugh or his assistant at Blenheim, Nicholas Hawksmoor’; yet neither drawing is to be found in the exhaustive catalogue of Hawksmoor’s drawings appended to Kerry Downes’s authoritative 1959 monograph on the architect.<sup>210</sup>

The first point to make before attempting to resolve this question is that there appear to be indications that at least two hands worked on the plan.<sup>211</sup> One set of lines is tightly drawn with a very fine point in dark, almost black ink; these trace the outlines and basic geography of the park. On top of these, the design of the house and gardens have been sketched in with a broader, freer hand using a quill with brown ink. We can therefore see a distinctive process at work: a general survey of the existing site has been used as a base, upon which the designer has superimposed a rough layout for the new building and its landscape. The broader outlines can, as Bapasola suspected, be confidently attributed to Nicholas Hawksmoor. The draughtsmanship is typical of his firm and fluent style, and Downes has since confirmed the attribution.<sup>212</sup> The authorship of the underlying survey plan is somewhat more challenging to identify. However, the slightly scratchy, almost needle-like line is remarkably similar to that of the Soane floor plan, suggesting they may have come from the same hand. Higgott has noted this plan’s highly distinctive

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<sup>207</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 90. See also his caption to fig. 35 showing the second drawing, which he describes as an ‘abandoned design evidently by Wise’.

<sup>208</sup> Green, *Gardener to Queen Anne*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>209</sup> Dalton, *Vanbrugh and the Vitruvian Landscape*, pp. 106-109.

<sup>210</sup> Bapasola, *Finest View*, p. 20; Hawksmoor’s Blenheim drawings are listed in Downes, *Hawksmoor*, p. 282.

<sup>211</sup> I am grateful to Professor Kerry Downes for drawing my attention to the plan’s dual authorship.

<sup>212</sup> Personal communication to the author, 3 March 2012.

draughtsmanship, characterised by the use of very fine diagonal hatching to shade in the walls, and attributed it to Henry Joynes.<sup>213</sup>

The attribution of the Soane plan to Joynes seems to be plausible on both circumstantial and stylistic grounds. Joynes is known to have been one of the main draughtsmen at Blenheim. According to Tilleman Bobart, comptroller and clerk-of-works after the death of Boulter, he was ‘an ingenious person and skilled in drawing Draughts of buildings’, and he is known to have produced drawings for Vanbrugh, the Marlborough, and Samuel Travers.<sup>214</sup> Moreover, it is notable that several drawings from Hawksmoor’s office for Oxford buildings appear to be in the same, distinctive style. A particularly notable example is a plan for the fellows’ building at All Souls College, Oxford, preserved amongst the Clarke papers at Worcester College, Oxford (fig. 15).<sup>215</sup> This drawing has been dated to around 1708-1709 and, although not previously assigned to a particular draughtsman, it not only exhibits the same fine, rather nervous line and dense cross-hatching, but also has dimensions in a hand that closely resembles Joynes’s.<sup>216</sup> Joynes is, moreover, known to have aided Hawksmoor in his Oxford projects, especially during the construction of the Clarendon Press building.<sup>217</sup> It is also surely of some significance that one of the general plans of the college and university buildings that can be connected with Hawksmoor’s projects for recasting the centre of Oxford is boldly inscribed ‘Harry Joynes’ (fig. 16).<sup>218</sup> Similarly striking is the resemblance of all these drawings to a survey drawing of Castle Howard and its landscape setting (fig. 17). Although in this case the handwriting of the label under the scale bar and the appended ‘explanation’ does not seem to be Joynes’s, it again exhibits the same fine, freehand cross-hatching

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<sup>213</sup> British Library Add MS 19606 f. 1: William Lowndes to Henry Joynes, 21 May 1705.

<sup>214</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 247.

<sup>215</sup> Cat. no. 26 in Howard Colvin, *A Catalogue of Architectural Drawings of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries in the Library of Worcester College, Oxford* (Oxford, 1964), p. 5 and pl. 64.

<sup>216</sup> For the dating of this drawing, see Downes, *Hawksmoor*, p. 135, and Howard Colvin, *Unbuilt Oxford* (New Haven and London, 1983), pp. 37-40. It may be noted that a plan showing the ground floor of the whole college that incorporates an identical north block is initialed NH and dated 1714, although this inscription is usually regarded as later than the drawing.

<sup>217</sup> For Joynes’s role in Hawksmoor’s Oxford projects, see British Library Add MS 19607 ff. 90, 91, 97, 100, which principally concern the Clarendon Press building but also refer to other lesser commissions.

<sup>218</sup> Bodleian MS Top. Oxon. a 24 f. 46. I am very grateful to Kerry Downes for sharing photostats of the group of Oxford survey drawings to which this belongs.

of the main blocks and tightly controlled lines for the underlying survey.<sup>219</sup> The similarities to the other drawings are emphasised by the recurrence of the same distinctive trefoil motif on the scale bars of the All Souls drawing and the Castle Howard plan; similar trefoils also appear to be faintly visible on a pencil scale bar just visible beneath one of the two ink scale bars on the Blenheim plan. Moreover, the Castle Howard plan is dateable to c. 1706 by the state of development of building work at Ray Wood, and Joynes is known, from the Blenheim correspondence, to have been working on Castle Howard drawings at precisely this time.<sup>220</sup> It does therefore seem that the evidence, though fragmentary and circumstantial, converges on Joynes, as it is difficult to think of a more plausible common denominator between the early Blenheim drawings, the Castle Howard plan, and Hawksmoor's later Oxford projects.

The main impediment to giving the survey drawing as well as the floor plan to Joynes is its exceptionally early date, which certainly predates his appointment as one of the Blenheim comptrollers in late May 1705. There are, however, reasons for thinking that Joynes could have been involved even at this early stage. It should be remembered that according to Vanbrugh's account the initial surveys of Woodstock Park were undertaken at Marlborough's behest before his first formal visit to his architect in early February. It is reasonable to assume that the survey was deputed to Marlborough's landscape gardener, Henry Wise, for whom the duke evidently had high esteem.<sup>221</sup> This would certainly parallel the Earl of Carlisle's course of action at Castle Howard, where Wise's partner George London was brought in when rebuilding was first contemplated. In any case, other evidence suggests that Wise was involved at Blenheim at an early stage, as he apparently received instructions to start clearing the site immediately after the late February visit to Woodstock, and the building accounts show that his teams of labourers were ready to begin work on 16 April.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> It should be noted that the handwriting on the Castle Howard survey is the same as that on Vanbrugh's 'first proposal' plan for the same building, discussed below, but is certainly not Vanbrugh's.

<sup>220</sup> Dalton, *Vanbrugh and the Vitruvian Landscape*, p. 90; Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 209; Vanbrugh to Joynes, 6 March 1707.

<sup>221</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 62.

<sup>222</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 96 and fn. 3, quoting from British Library Add MS 19592 f. 12.

If Wise was involved at Blenheim at such an early date, then it is certainly possible that Joynes was. The early sources make it clear that Joynes was an employee of Wise: the duchess later recalled him as a ‘sort of a Foot-man to him’.<sup>223</sup> It therefore seems probable that Marlborough had very early recruited Vanbrugh as his architect and Wise as his garden designer; that Wise had despatched his employees to Woodstock to survey the park, with the resulting drawings from his office being at least partially executed by Joynes and then passed on to Vanbrugh in advance of Marlborough’s first visit. The drawings were then given to Hawksmoor, whom Vanbrugh must already have engaged to work with him, and it was Hawksmoor who made the earliest surviving attempt to define the place of the house in its landscape setting. As the project developed, however, Joynes started working on drawings for the house itself, starting with the floor plan in the Soane Museum (which, in view of its probable authorship, I will henceforward refer to as the ‘Joynes plan’).

### **The Early Design of Blenheim: The Problem of the Castle Howard Model**

Even with the inclusion of these two early drawings, the direct documentary evidence for the early stages of Blenheim’s design remains skeletal. However, by combining a close analysis of the graphic evidence with all the available written sources, it is possible to build on the existing historiography to considerably amplify our understanding of Marlborough, Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor’s initial plans for the house. To begin this process, we must return to the initial commission set out by Marlborough: to build a house like Castle Howard but ‘with some alteracōns and addicōns’.

There have been some remarkably differing views of the extent to which Marlborough’s instruction was realised at Blenheim. Almost all writers agree about the close parallels in the ground plans of the final designs (in neither case fully implemented) for both buildings as they are documented in the plates of *Vitruvius Britannicus* (fig. 18). Tipping and Hussey, for example, wrote about the

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<sup>223</sup> Green, *Gardener to Queen Anne*, p. 97. I am indebted to Kerry Downes for this reference. See also Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 96 fn. 2, quoting sources that document Wise’s recommendation of Joynes.

quite singular likeness not only in the planning of both accommodation and layout, but also in the grouping of the architectural masses. What divergences there are arose partly from the different size and aim, and partly, no doubt, from a maturing sense of right and telling disposition. ... But the accommodation within it is identical.<sup>224</sup>

Similarly, Green pointed out that both buildings share ‘a lofty hall leading to a saloon, which is the central apartment of the range of state rooms running the length of the south front’; the hall is flanked by, and opens into, staircases on either side, while ‘vaulted corridors, north and south of the hall, connect it with the private wing on the east’ as well as, in spite of its somewhat different placement in the two buildings, the chapel on the west.

In spite of all these parallels, however, attention has also been drawn to the many differences between Castle Howard and Blenheim. Green, for all his sense of the essentially similar planning of the two buildings, remained very conscious of the very different moods of the two buildings, commenting that Blenheim’s external treatment ‘showed no immediately recognisable kinship with its gracious predecessor and prototype’.<sup>225</sup> Geoffrey Webb also emphasised the differences between them, claiming that ‘Stress has been laid hitherto on the essential resemblances between the Castle Howard and Blenheim Plans, as this is not apparent at first sight; but the importance of the modifications in the plan as used at Blenheim can hardly be exaggerated’.<sup>226</sup> He noted the way that at Blenheim the ‘relatively diffuse Castle Howard arrangement of central nucleus and spreading wings’ had been pulled into a far more cohesive grouping framed by the four massive pavilions at the corners of the main house. These changes, in Webb’s view, reflected the progressive maturation of Vanbrugh’s capabilities as a designer, characterised by ‘the enlargement of the unit of design’. Webb’s phrase was intended to refer to Vanbrugh’s increasing ability to design the building as an integrated whole.<sup>227</sup> It was precisely this trajectory towards increasingly large compositional units that for Webb

<sup>224</sup> Tipping and Hussey, *Sir John Vanbrugh and His School*, p. 68.

<sup>225</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>226</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. xviii.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. xix.

signalled the advent of a genuinely baroque style in English architecture, making Blenheim a truly seminal building.

In the next part of my discussion, I will attempt to deepen our understanding of the early evolution of Blenheim's design both in its own right and, especially, in relation to the design of Castle Howard. I will seek, in particular, to move beyond comparison of the Vitruvius Britannicus engravings of the two buildings, which provided the basis for the accounts of Tipping, Webb, and Green. The need for this reflects a simple point: while the example of Castle Howard was clearly at the front of Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor's minds from the very beginning, it was, as we have seen, the model for that building, and not the building itself, which Marlborough saw and approved. Because of this, it is problematic to compare relatively late engravings when attempting to understand the relationship between the two houses. Instead, we must systematically prefer the use of early sources for both.

This immediately entails certain challenges, as we lack a detailed study of Castle Howard's design and construction. Even Saumarez-Smith's monograph on *The Building of Castle Howard* pays relatively little attention to the fine detail of the architectural design process in order to prioritise broader issues of social meaning.<sup>228</sup> We therefore remain reliant on the illuminating but relatively concise discussions provided by Whistler and Downes in the course of their more general accounts of Vanbrugh's and Hawksmoor's architectural careers. Their work, with some suggested refinements, consequently provides the main foundation for the following discussion.<sup>229</sup>

The first question is to try to ascertain the state of Castle Howard's design at the time the model was built. The relevant time period is late 1699, as it was in a letter to the Earl of Manchester written on Christmas day of that year that Vanbrugh reported the start of the model's construction.<sup>230</sup> Vanbrugh's letter also contains the most important firmly dateable references we have to help us decode the nature of the design at that stage. Vanbrugh makes it clear that by time of his visit to Duke of

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<sup>228</sup> Saumarez Smith, *Building of Castle Howard*.

<sup>229</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, pp. 35-62; Downes, *Hawksmoor*; Kerry Downes, 'Vanbrugh over Fifty Years', in Christopher Ridgway and Robert Williams (eds), *Sir John Vanbrugh and Landscape Architecture in Baroque England, 1690-1730* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 1-11.

<sup>230</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, pp. 3-4.

Devonshire at Chatsworth that summer, his plans for Castle Howard already included what were to be among the building's most characteristic features, the 'low Wings' adorned with 'those Ornaments of Pillasters and Urns' that extended on each side of the south front.<sup>231</sup> The evidence of Vanbrugh's letter can be combined with a memorandum written for the Earl of Carlisle by a Yorkshire neighbour, Thomas Worsley of Hovingham, dated 26 June. Worsley specifies that the body on the house was to be 106 feet long by seventy-five feet wide, and the two wings were to be seventy-two feet long and just over thirty-five wide.<sup>232</sup> This appears to confirm that the essential form of the house had already been resolved by this stage, but does not allow us to conclude much more about the design's precise degree of development.

We must therefore turn to analysis of the graphic evidence in an attempt to gain a more detailed understanding of Castle Howard's design history. Whistler identified two distinct phases in the development of the plans for Castle Howard.<sup>233</sup> A 'first proposal' could be associated with a group of three drawings: a ground plan that is apparently by Vanbrugh himself, and two superbly drafted elevations of the north (entrance) and south (garden) fronts by Hawksmoor (figs 19, 20 & 21). This scheme bears a close and obvious relationship to Castle Howard as executed, most notably in the combination of a high central block with low flanking wings on the south front and a further pair of wings, oriented perpendicularly to the main block, which advanced northwards on either side of the forecourt. There are, however, numerous differences of disposition, proportion and detail from the executed design. The most conspicuous is the attachment of the northern wings to the extremes of the southern wings, creating a broad, shallow forecourt in front of the main house in place of the narrower, deeper space that was in due course to be executed (cf. figs 18 & 19). The house in the plan is also considerably smaller than the executed structure: the main block is seven, rather than nine, bays wide and measures approximately eighty-three feet long and seventy-five feet deep; the flanking wings on the south front were each

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<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>232</sup> Downes, 'Vanbrugh over Fifty Years', p. 5.

<sup>233</sup> Downes has suggested that a 'preliminary' scheme, represented by 'Mr. Vanbrook's draft of a great house' preceded the 'first proposal', and that this design conforms to Worsley's dimensions: see his *Vanbrugh*, pp. 29-30; and, for illustrations of the relevant drawing, see *ibid.*, fig. 18 and Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, fig. 1. However, in his more recent discussion of Vanbrugh's early Castle Howard, 'Vanbrugh over Fifty Years', Downes has revised his position to argue that Worsley's measurements described the design after its development through both the first and second proposals. Given the uncertainty about the status of this plan, I have omitted it from the present discussion.

six, instead of nine, bays long and four deep, corresponding to a length of approximately seventy-four feet and a depth of around thirty-seven feet; and the projecting wings to the north, on either side of the forecourt, were to measure approximately one-hundred by forty-five feet.<sup>234</sup> With the exception of the forecourt wings, every part of the building grew larger as the plan developed. This pattern of growth is already evident in the earliest drawings from the group collectively referred to be Whistler as the ‘second proposal’ (figs 22-25). In a ground plan for this modified scheme, again apparently in Vanbrugh’s own hand, the northern wings are shifted forwards and inwards, with quadrants linking them to the central block of the main house in much the same basic disposition as built (fig. 22). In addition, both the main block and the southern flanking wings are considerably larger, bringing their dimensions into closer accord with the extant structure. The main block is exactly one hundred feet long, approximately its final length, and the flanking wings are now seventy-seven feet long. As the design developed further, the central block and forecourt wings retained approximately the same dimensions, but the flanking wings on the south front grew considerably in extent, acquiring additional bays and a terminating pavilion with a small dome (figs 23 & 24). At some point in this process, we also find the entrance hall being reconfigured by the insertion of clusters of columns and pilasters into the corners of what had been a rectangular space open at each end to the house’s two transverse corridors. The early stages of this development are evident in the second proposal floor plan (fig. 22). The clusters of pilasters have clearly been added after the plan was initially drawn, with the result that the two windows on either side of the entrance door have had to be blocked off and replaced by external niches.<sup>235</sup> As Whistler noted, however, the pilasters are at this stage still fairly small.<sup>236</sup> This implies that the initial conception was probably for a single-storey hall. There is, however, a closely related half-plan of the first storey of the central block of the house that must somewhat postdate the full ground plan (fig. 25). Vanbrugh’s decision to resolve the layout and dimensions of the upper level of the house at this stage presumably reflects the decision to open up the hall to the full height of the house and to add the massive cupola that crowns and lights it. The maturation of his conception of the house is further documented in this drawing

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<sup>234</sup> All dimensions are taken by measurement from the plan, as the inscribed measures are inconsistent.

<sup>235</sup> Downes, *Hawksmoor*, p. 75.

<sup>236</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 45.

by the increasingly resolved articulation of the north front, which has been elaborated by the addition of paired pilasters separated by niches at either side of the central frontispiece and at the ends of the façade. This was to provide the basis for the north front as executed, which Hawksmoor worked out in detail in a magnificent pair of elevation drawings now in the Victoria and Albert Museum (figs 26 & 27).<sup>237</sup>

The advent of the cupola at the time Vanbrugh was drafting his half-plan appears to be confirmed by another drawing on the reverse side of the same sheet of paper, which for the first time shows the south elevation with the cupola towering above it (fig. 24). The underlying organisation of the proposed front is remarkably close to Hawksmoor's working drawing for the south front, now preserved in the Minet Library (fig. 28). Apart from their general resemblance, we find, for example, that in both cases the springing of the first floor window arches aligns with the astragal between the pilaster shafts and the capitals, whereas in Vanbrugh's other, apparently earlier, half elevation (fig. 23) they do not. Another striking anticipation of the final design, unfortunately not visible in Hawksmoor's drawing but very evident in Vanbrugh's second design for the south front (fig. 24), as well as in the *Vitruvius Britannicus* engravings and the extant fabric, can be found in the careful alignment of the sills of the first floor windows with the corona of the entablature on the wings. There is thus a remarkably smooth trajectory between the first and second proposals, with Vanbrugh apparently carrying out much of the basic design work himself through his small-scale, somewhat crude, plans and elevations, which he must then have handed over to Hawksmoor to work up into finished drawings and, in the process, to resolve the fine detail of dimensions and ornament.

The key question—and one that is very difficult to resolve even tentatively—is exactly where the model seen by the Duke of Marlborough fitted on this trajectory. The early Castle Howard drawings are all undated and none of the dimensions of the plans, whether taken by measurement or calculated by summation of the annotated figures, correspond with any real degree of consistency to those quoted in Worsley's letter. However, by bringing to bear the evidence of the early Blenheim plan we can develop a picture which coheres reasonably well with the available evidence and sheds some light on the evolution of the plans for both buildings. The first point to

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<sup>237</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, E.424-1951, illustrated in Geoffrey Beard, *The Work of John Vanbrugh* (London, 1986), p. 90, fig. 16.

make is that quadrants are a prominent feature of the entrance front of the earliest Blenheim site plan (fig. 29), making it very likely that the general disposition of the Castle Howard model was broadly like that documented in the second proposal. It should also be noted that the ends of the south façade in the Blenheim plan lack terminating features of any kind, and still less the massive corner pavilions that are so characteristic a feature of the design put into execution. This suggests that the Castle Howard model upon which Blenheim was based also lacked the pavilion terminations to the south front it would soon after acquire. It therefore again seems that the model that formed the principal source for Blenheim corresponded more closely to the early second proposal plan than the design as it subsequently developed through first Vanbrugh's and then Hawksmoor's processes of revision. The plausibility of this hypothesis is indirectly documented by the block plan at the centre of second general site plan for Castle Howard usually attributed to George London (but with passages that seem more characteristic of Hawksmoor), which also shows a building with quadrants but without terminating pavilions on the south front (fig. 30).

Further evidence in favour of this interpretation can be found if we hypothesise that the model represented a building in which the centre block had reached approximately its final dimensions but the flanking wings on the south side of the house retained the more diminutive dimensions of the first proposal. This provides us with measurements of one hundred by seventy-five feet for the main block and seventy-two by thirty-seven feet for the wings. This is reassuringly close, if not quite identical, to the dimensions quoted in Worsley's letter of June 1699. That such an intermediary stage of development probably took place is further supported by consideration of the likely coevolution of the larger centre block and the reconfigured disposition of the forecourt and northern wings. The quadrants were clearly added to the plan for functional as well as aesthetic reasons, as they serve to connect the main house to the office wings. The addition of the quadrants would have required in turn the addition of a corridor immediately behind the north façade, so that the central pile of the main house could be entered from the wings without passing through the rooms on either side of the hall. However, the only way of adding this corridor without rendering the rooms behind it uselessly small was to enlarge the central block of the house in at least one dimension. The brilliantly

elegant solution chosen was to add an extra bay at each end of the principal façades and to replace the conventional square stairwell in the first proposal with a pair of relatively narrow but very long staircases—reminiscent of the state staircase at Easton Neston—on each side of the hall. This arrangement left enough space for reasonably sized rooms on each side of the central pile of the main house.

If this was indeed how the plan developed from the first proposal—and the internal logic seems compelling—then it is unsurprising that the southern wings received attention only after the layout of the northern wings and main block were resolved. There is, moreover, evidence that this was in fact the case. In Vanbrugh's initial plan for the second proposal, the southern wings appear to be on separate pieces of paper that have been pasted into place. The obvious explanation for this is that it was done to cover over an earlier design for the wings that was, presumably, closer to that shown in the plan of the first proposal.

The evidence, though fragmentary, therefore appears to converge on a series of basic conclusions. Firstly, it seems that Vanbrugh himself worked up the 'first proposal' for Castle Howard at least as a floor plan, before handing it over to Hawksmoor, who developed a set of highly finished elevation drawings. Working more hypothetically we can further infer that the Castle Howard 'first proposal' was revised in preparation for the construction of the model, and it was at this point that the disposition of the northern wings was changed and the main block of the house enlarged to take account of the need for additional internal passageways. It then seems that Vanbrugh later heavily reworked the model design before the construction of the house finally began in 1700 to 1701, refining and lengthening the southern wings by first adding an extra bay and then terminal pavilions; turning the entrance hall into a centralised space that rose through the full height of the house; and then adding the massive cupola to light it. While doing so, Vanbrugh also worked up basic designs for the south front of the house and established, in plan form at least, the basic articulation of the north front. The reconfigured design was then again handed over to Hawksmoor, who produced a series of highly worked elevations and plans to resolve the finer points of ornament, detail and dimensions. The design of Blenheim therefore seems to have taken as its starting point not the finished design for Castle Howard but an intermediary stage of the house's

development. At this stage, when the model was made, the design seems to have lacked a number of features of the executed structure that were consequently also omitted in the early designs for Blenheim, most notably the central cupola and the terminating pavilions on the south front.

### **From the Castle Howard Model to the Beginnings of Blenheim**

We are now in a position where we can make, if not certain, then at least reasonably well-founded inferences about the early evolution of the design for Blenheim. If we return again to the block outline in the Bodleian site plan and the more detailed evidence of the Soane floor plan, we can begin to build a picture of how Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor took the precedent offered by the Castle Howard model and reworked it to conform to the rather different requirements of the Duke of Marlborough. The first point that can be made very clearly is that even in the very hastily drawn block plan we can see that the two buildings have many features in common. The location is itself significant: in spite of the very different landscapes at Woodstock and Henderskelfe, Blenheim as nearly as possible replicates the situation of its predecessor. Both are situated on the brow of a hill and oriented around a roughly north-south axis. At both Castle Howard and Blenheim, the entrance front faces northwards across ground that first falls fairly steeply into a valley and then rises moderately but continuously for a considerable distance. Similarly, the main state rooms along the garden front face southwards over even, gently declining ground perfectly suited to the laying out of a *parterre*. The only significant difference, as Hussey and Tipping noted in 1928, is that Blenheim appears to sit on a somewhat broader plateau than Castle Howard, enabling the building to be far deeper than its predecessor.<sup>238</sup>

The similarity of the Blenheim block plan to the probable appearance of the Castle Howard model is especially evident on the south front towards garden, which is divided in exactly the same way into a central unit with a frontispiece flanked by slightly recessed ranges. Thus we can be reasonably certain of the intention to replicate at Blenheim the combination of a high central block and lower wings that, as we have seen, was a central component of the design of Castle Howard from at

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<sup>238</sup> Tipping and Hussey, *Sir John Vanbrugh and His School*, p. 69.

least the summer of 1699. The resemblance is strengthened if we allow the evidence of the Joynes plan for Blenheim and the early second proposal plan for Castle Howard to help us infer the fenestration of the two fronts (cf. figs 14 & 22-24). In both cases, we find a tall, nine bay main block cast into three approximately equal sections, which is then flanked by long wings. The Joynes plan also confirms that the almost identical arrangement of the principal apartments was indeed evident—as one would expect—from early in the design process. The similarities would, if anything, be even clearer if we had a Blenheim floor plan that predated the recasting of the hall: we can readily imagine that, until the decision to enlarge it, the two corridors that run across the plan of Blenheim would have opened into the hall and defined approximately square space between them, just as they do in the Castle Howard plan.

It also seems obvious that the basic arrangement of the central part of the north front was intended from the outset to be very similar to the arrangement at Castle Howard, with a tall central block flanked by quadrants. If we place the Joynes plan for Blenheim, as the earliest detailed evidence of the palace's layout, alongside Vanbrugh's second proposal plan for Castle Howard, as the best available evidence for the form of the model, the parallels accumulate. Again, we have in both cases a nine-bay main block divided into three units of three. We even find that the Blenheim quadrants project one bay into the courtyard, exactly as they do at Castle Howard. The quadrants appear somewhat larger than those at Castle Howard, and are four rather than three bays long; but even this difference may not have been present at the very earliest stage of the design. If we look at the earliest Blenheim site plan carefully, we can see that there are additional small blocks embedded between the north ends of the quadrants and the northern façades of the north east and north west pavilions of the main house (fig. 29). These blocks are probably best accounted for as the ends of the corridors that run along a north-south axis immediately behind the east and west ranges of the house. If these were present, they would have confined the quadrants to a smaller area than that shown on the Joynes plan. We can therefore make a hypothetical reconstruction of the initial plan in which smaller quadrangles abut the corridors, giving them proportions very close to their predecessors at Castle Howard.

For all the self-evident importance of Castle Howard as an aesthetic precedent, however, Webb was surely right to stress the importance of the differences between the two buildings. The most obvious is the infilling of the space between the quadrants and the southern wings to provide additional ranges to the east and west, thus transforming the irregular open areas between the north and south wings at Castle Howard into internal courtyards. As Webb implies, we can associate this change with Marlborough's desire for a gallery, which, in every known ground plan for Blenheim, as well as in the extant structure, occupies the entire west side of the main house. The corresponding space on the east was filled with a series of rooms that were to be the private apartments of the duke and duchess. The effect of these additions was to fundamentally transform the Castle Howard model by adding another two principal fronts to the earlier building. Their aesthetic importance is reflected in the inclusion of a highly innovative feature at their centre, a bow window. Downes has now demonstrated—in the face of some poorly founded claims to the contrary—that the bow window was introduced first to Blenheim before a variant was introduced to the centre of the lateral (west-facing) front of the terminal pavilion of the south western wing at Castle Howard.<sup>239</sup> The specific choice of the bow form appears to have been motivated by a desire to please the duchess: Vanbrugh referred to the one on the east side of the house as 'My Lady Duchesses Favourite Bow Window', and she is known to have loved light rooms and open views.<sup>240</sup> But irrespective of the duchess's preferences, some such motif would have been necessary to provide the kind of strong central accent needed to ensure that the new fronts would be effective independent compositions. This was especially so because the early site plan shows that Hawksmoor already envisaged the centre of the east front as the culminating point of an avenue linking the house to a new entrance gate in Woodstock.

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<sup>239</sup> Downes has provided an exhaustive discussion of the dating of the bow windows at Castle Howard and Blenheim in Appendix E of his *Sir John Vanbrugh*, pp. 530-33, in which he bears out Whistler's claim that Blenheim's bow window came first against the alternative point of view first presented by Susan Lang in 1950 and reiterated in her review of Downes's *Vanbrugh* monograph in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 38, no. 2 (1979): 208-210.

<sup>240</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 229: Vanbrugh to Marlborough, 22 June 1705. For the duchess's love of light, see her letter to her daughter, Diana, quoted in Scott Thomson, *Letters to a Grandmother*, p. 54; and for her love of views, see Joynes's letter to the duchess of 2 July 1709, British Library Add MS 19606 f. 20; and Vanbrugh to Lord Royalton, 18 July 1709, Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 35. When read in conjunction, these sources make it clear that the duchess's concern to preserve views was one of main reasons for forbidding the construction of a second greenhouse to the west of the house.

The process of inserting the gallery and private apartments in the interstices between the southern and northern wings of the house did not simply result in the addition of new façades; its impact on other parts of the building was no less important. The most significant was the change it required to the placement of the office and stable wings. As Webb observed, these had to be brought forward to the north to clear the prospects of the new east and west fronts.<sup>241</sup> In the process, the quadrants were rendered functionally ineffective as means of accessing the service wings from the main house, as the pavilions at the south ends of the new east and west ranges were interposed between them. The redundant space within the quadrants was subdivided into a sequences of small and irregularly shaped closets, and an alternative means of communication to the service wings was added to the plan in the form of colonnades that extended northwards towards them from the pavilions. The colonnades were first explicitly referred to in a letter from Hawksmoor to Joynes dated 28 July 1705, but it is likely that they were resolved upon early in the design process.<sup>242</sup> It appears likely from the later correspondence between Vanbrugh and Marlborough that the colonnades were also intended to link the house to the kitchen and chapel, even though these last were at this point apparently intended to be free-standing buildings located in the areas immediately adjacent to the north east and north west corners respectively of the main house.<sup>243</sup> This appears to be the arrangement proposed in the earliest site plan, where substantial blocks can be seen in these locations. Unfortunately, the plan gives no real hint of the proposed location of the colonnades, but even with this element of uncertainty the basic disposition of the buildings around the forecourt at Blenheim represents a striking development from the much simpler composition at Castle Howard.

By developing in this way, the early design of Blenheim came to exhibit, to a degree that seems never to have been explicitly noted, considerable similarities to proposals for the north front of Hampton Court Palace shown in two early, unrealised schemes for almost entirely rebuilding the ancient Tudor buildings. These ‘Grand’ projects date from 1689, when William and Mary, shortly after their installation as joint

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<sup>241</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. xviii.

<sup>242</sup> Cited by Green in his *Blenheim Palace*, pp. 60, 242; and fully transcribed in Downes, *Hawksmoor*, p. 236.

<sup>243</sup> Whistler, *The Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 231.

sovereigns, decided that Hampton Court should become their main residence. The general site plan of the first Grand Project makes use of a similar set of basic components for its north court (on the bottom of the page in the drawing) as Blenheim: quadrants, detached blocks, and passageways or colonnades (fig. 31). The dominant form, that of Henry VIII's retained Great Hall, is placed at the centre of the composition between two shallower linking units. These connect it to the terminating corner pavilions of the flanking privy apartments to the east, and to the northern side of the western entrance court. From them spring quadrangles that are in their turn connected to long, thin corridors or colonnades that push forwards and turn outwards to lead into service courts to the north east and north west.

The resemblance is in important respects even greater when we turn to the block plan for the second Grand Project, which followed soon after the first (fig. 32). The arrangement of its north front (on the left hand side of the page) appears to be a derivative of Palladio's unbuilt but highly influential Villa Trissino at Meledo (fig. 33), and exhibits a schematic arrangement that is very close to the Blenheim forecourt.<sup>244</sup> Indeed, close observation of the drawing shows that Hawksmoor has carefully graded the lengths of the shadows cast by the blocks to indicate their relative height. This means the arrangement of units around the north court can be summarised as: (a) a high central block; (b) a pair of low quadrants springing from that block; (c) detached blocks or pavilions; (d) a long, straight colonnade or passageway on each side of the forecourt; and (e) long, narrow, low service blocks attached to the colonnades on either side of the forecourt. If we conceptualise the early Blenheim drawings in the same way, we find exactly the same sequence of forms, very different though their likely aesthetic effect may well have been. Indeed, it may be noted that at Hampton Court straight passageways were intended to run across the space between the main block and the end of the quadrant, just as they do at Blenheim.

Such similar compositional approaches in the Grand Projects for Hampton Court and the earliest designs for Blenheim betray the same underlying aesthetic predilections, and the common denominator can only be Hawksmoor. The architect, as Wren's assistant, appears to have played an important role in the development of the early

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<sup>244</sup> For the importance of the Villa Meledo, see James S. Ackerman, *Palladio* (London, 1966), p. 73.

Hampton Court projects: building on a suggestion initially made by Eduard Sekler, Gordon Higgott has attributed almost all the working drawings to Hawksmoor rather than to Wren himself; and Simon Thurley has even conjectured that the Grand Projects' highly inventive and adventurous forms mark the emergence of Hawksmoor's distinctive architectural personality.<sup>245</sup> So long as we acknowledge that Wren continued to exercise controlling authority over the total process of design, Thurley's suggestion that Hawksmoor was increasingly permitted to exercise a degree of creative autonomy is by no means implausible. The subsequent recurrence of the same sequence of forms at Blenheim suggests that Hawksmoor took a formative role in the design process there from its very inception. Indeed, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that he saw there the opportunity to realise something of the compositional drama of the long since abandoned early projects for rebuilding Hampton Court. As we shall see, however, there are good reasons to think that, at least in the early months of the project, the basis for Vanbrugh's collaboration with Hawksmoor remained much the same as it had been at Castle Howard, with Vanbrugh labouring to work out the layout of the floor plans and establish the basic composition of the façades before Hawksmoor transformed them into fully resolved, accurately dimensioned and appropriately detailed drawings. In order for this to become apparent, however, we must move beyond the very earliest stages of the design to consider how the initial ideas set out in Hawksmoor's site plan evolved into the building upon which work actually began in June 1705.

### **Vanbrugh and the Design of the Main House**

The design shown in the early block plan recognisably established the basic components of Blenheim's layout; but it was to be little more than a starting point for a series of developments and elaborations that took the design ever further from its initial form. As we saw during the discussion of the date of the Bodleian site plan and the Joynes plan, the first major modification appears to have been the addition of pavilions at the four corners of the main block of the house. Neither the date nor the origins of this design change are directly documented, but what evidence does exist points towards Vanbrugh as its progenitor.

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<sup>245</sup> Simon Thurley, *Hampton Court: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven and London, 2003), p. 163.

Vanbrugh's role in the change is suggested by the curiously paradoxical character of the early Joynes plan of Blenheim's principal floor (fig. 14). On the one hand, it shows the design in a fairly advanced state of development, with the modifications to the hall already present. On the other hand, it is architectonically crude to a quite remarkable degree. To cite only a few examples: the fenestration of the five bay stretches of the south front between the central pile and the terminal pavilions is almost bizarrely irregular; the walls that form the sides of the nine-bay central pile of the house break outwards where they intersect the southern corridor, a conceptually inelegant feature that has the effect of making the central pile slightly wider to the north than to the south; the northernmost of the two east-west corridors fails to align with the central axis of the west and east fronts, creating an awkward junction with the bow-window room on the east and the central part of the gallery on the west; the design of the quadrants is, to say the least eccentric, with columns that appear to belong to the major order in a part of the building that could only have been too low for it; and the portico projects so far into the forecourt that it is difficult to imagine that it could be aesthetically satisfactory or even practically buildable.

Such infelicities make it tempting to dismiss the drawing as a crude and inaccurate copy of a lost early drawing; but closer examination shows that the layout is too systematic and carefully defined for such a simple explanation for its eccentricities to be plausible. For example, the internal dimensions of the terminal pavilions are twenty-eight feet square, exactly the dimensions they were to have in the executed design.<sup>246</sup> The saloon at the centre of the south front at first sight appears too small to form the centre point of such a long façade, while breaking unusually far forward into the garden to the south. Its proportions may nevertheless have a simple explanation. The room measures exactly thirty-six feet square. This is the same depth as the saloon in the executed structure although much narrower; and these dimensions gain additional significance when we consider that the initial intention was to articulate the exterior of the house's central pile with a thirty-four foot Doric order. Thirty-four feet is close enough to the length of the room's sides to suggest that the initial intention was to create a double-height cube room, providing a potential rationale for this at first sight oddly proportioned room. Moreover, the very

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<sup>246</sup> For confirmation of this, see Hawksmoor's dimensioned drawing for the south end of the gallery, Bodleian Top. Oxon. 37\* f. 19.

considerable projection of the saloon suggests that the insertion of this kind of unusually tall room, of the kind that was actually to be realised in the extant structure, may have been another early revision to the design.

Even more compellingly, some of the more peculiar features of the plan can be accounted for on the hypothesis that they are somewhat clumsy attempts to implement the major changes that we know took place during the initial design phase. More specifically, the failure of the centres of the east and west ranges to align with the north corridor can be explained as the result of the addition of the corner pavilions. If we draw a centreline along the central east-west corridor, it will be found to lie exactly half way between the north façade of the northern pavilion and the line of the south front between the centre block and the pavilions. This suggests that the projection of the pavilions in front of the rest of the south front was simply added on to the existing plan without the addition of corresponding projections to the north front. The resulting extension to the southern end of the east and west fronts would then have required the bow windows to be shifted southwards to maintain their central position, with the result that they were brought out of alignment with the axis of the corridor (fig. 34, white overlaid lines).

The tell-tale signs of exactly the same pattern of inexpert modification of the initial layout can be also seen in the way that the Joynes plan incorporates the next major alteration, the transformation of the hall described in Vanbrugh's letter to Marlborough of 22 June 1705. In this instance the principal result is the mammoth projection of the portico. It will be recalled that, according to Vanbrugh, the upper part of the hall, after being carried outwards and upwards, would rise 'above the rest of the building regularly in the Middle of the four great Pavillions'.<sup>247</sup> If taken at face value, his claim is puzzling: the hall is manifestly asymmetric about the central axis of the two lateral façades. However, if we imagine adding above it an attic storey that extends continuously from the innermost wall of the hall to the front of the portico as they are defined in this drawing, we find that it would indeed be perfectly centred between the pavilions (fig. 34, black overlaid lines). The depth of the portico, then, has been defined by simply placing its columns at the same distance from the transverse (east-west) central axial line as the back wall of the hall.

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<sup>247</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 230.

It was this relatively simple manner of proceeding that led directly to the extraordinary projection of the portico, which would have required massive lintels of some twelve feet or more in length.

The structural and aesthetic naïveté with which these major changes appear to have been incorporated make it difficult to believe that an architect of Hawksmoor's skill and experience was significantly involved in them, even if he may have had some role in suggesting them. By a process of elimination, then, we must surely see the addition of the pavilions primarily as the work of Vanbrugh. It was he, we can assume, who must have taken the lead on defining the ground plan throughout the early months of the project, in this case apparently working with Joynes as his amanuensis or copyist. This would parallel the more completely documented design process at Castle Howard, where, as we have seen, we can actually trace the emergence of key ideas for the building in a series of drawings almost certainly from Vanbrugh's own hand. Indeed, the comparable development of terminal pavilions in both buildings some time after their initial design seems to betray a similar underlying approach to architectural design, and this pattern of interdependency appears to be further confirmed by the function of the rooms contained in the pavilions. The corresponding pavilion at Castle Howard was to contain a 'Grand Cabinet' for Lord Carlisle, and this is exactly the designation that was given to the room at the east end of Blenheim's south front.<sup>248</sup> But the new pavilions at Blenheim cannot simply have been motivated by planning considerations, as there is no reason to think that they added significantly to the internal size or layout of the house. What then, drove Vanbrugh's to add these new components to the initial plan?

### **Blenheim, the 'Castle Air', and the Pursuit of Magnificence**

If, as I have suggested, the main impact of the earliest changes made to the Blenheim was not primarily on the internal layout, then the primary motivation for their introduction must have been their external effect. In this respect the pavilions mark an important stage of Blenheim's increasing departure from the precedent offered by Castle Howard. The two relatively modest pavilions of Carlisle's house are here

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<sup>248</sup> For the Castle Howard 'grand cabinet', see Downes, *Sir John Vanbrugh*, Appendix E, pp. 530-33; for evidence of the inclusion of an equivalent at Blenheim, see Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 973: Marlborough to the duchess of Marlborough, 3/14 May 1708.

replaced by four massive blocks, and it seems from Vanbrugh's letter of 22 June that these pavilions were intended from the beginning to tower above the neighbouring lengths of frontage.<sup>249</sup> As Geoffrey Webb noted, the resulting strong definition of the outside boundaries of the building makes for an unmistakable contrast with the relatively diffuse spatial composition of Castle Howard.<sup>250</sup> Apart from their impact on the overall composition of Blenheim, however, the addition of the pavilions to the corners of the building also served to endow it with undeniable affinities with the architecture of castles and fortifications. More specifically, the four corner towers of the main block of the house bring to mind the great Norman square keeps, such as the White Tower in London or Rochester Castle.

There are some *prima facie* grounds for thinking that the castle-like qualities of Blenheim were intentional. Hawksmoor addressed letters to 'Blenheim Castle' from at least as early as June 1706, and if the clean copies of the accounts are to be trusted the term was used from the beginning of the works.<sup>251</sup> The use of the term must admittedly be treated with some caution. Downes has rightly pointed out that it should probably be seen as the English equivalent of the French word *château*, which he equates with the seventeenth-century English phrase 'great house'; and there is even pleasing evidence to this effect in a single letter from Joynes that is actually addressed from 'Blenheim Chateau'.<sup>252</sup> The aesthetic effects of the four pavilions nevertheless remains suggestive, especially given Vanbrugh's well-known predilection for 'Something of the Castle Air', as he termed it in his oft-cited letter to the Earl of Manchester about the rebuilding of Kimbolton Castle.<sup>253</sup> Of more direct relevance in the present context, however, is the frequency with which Vanbrugh repeated the use of such corner pavilions in other great houses that he was associated with. Downes has rightly direct attention to the unrealised designs undertaken by Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor—again in competition with Talman—for Welbeck Abbey (fig. 35).<sup>254</sup> Here we see four great pavilion towers of a kind that strikingly

<sup>249</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 230.

<sup>250</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. xviii.

<sup>251</sup> British Library Add MS 19607 f. 15v: Hawksmoor to Joynes, 12 June 1706; it should be noted, though, that the fair copies of the accounts preserved in the British Library postdate the originals by an indeterminate period. Examples of apparently original accounts for October to December 1708 are preserved in Bodleian Library MS Top. Oxon. c 230, ff. 1-45v.

<sup>252</sup> British Library Add MS 19609 f. 12: Joynes to Samuel Travers, 14 May 1709.

<sup>253</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, pp. 13-14.

<sup>254</sup> Downes, *Sir John Vanbrugh*, p. 285.

anticipate the solution that was in due course to be adopted at Blenheim, as well as the channelled rustication that is such a prominent feature of the north front at Castle Howard as well as the initial scheme for Blenheim's south front.

Grimesthorpe Castle is similarly defined by four great towers, and related motifs can also be found at Eastbury and, in miniature, the Claremont belvedere. There has, however, been remarkably little substantive discussion of Blenheim itself as an early example of this strand of Vanbrugh's practice, even though the castle-like qualities of the building are often implicitly or explicitly acknowledged.<sup>255</sup> This is a significant omission, especially given the design of Blenheim's garden walls, where great bastions were placed at each corner of the parterre and wooded pleasure ground beyond. These bastions have increasingly been recognised as quite self-conscious evocations of fortified structures. Robert Williams has called attention to Stephen Switzer's later claim that it was with Blenheim's garden walls that the art of 'reducing Fortification into Gardening' was introduced to England.<sup>256</sup>

The bastions, like the pavilions, do not figure on Hawksmoor's initial site plan for the house and landscape. A second slightly later plan nevertheless shows that they were an early addition. Like its predecessor (figs. 14, 29), this second plan (fig. 4) combines a finely drawn survey plan of Woodstock Park with a boldly but fluently drawn out scheme for the house and gardens, again seemingly from Hawksmoor's skilled hand. In this case, the plan shows a layout far closer to the scheme actually executed. The north front of the house breaks forward into the forecourt, showing that the hall has now attained its revised form; and it also seems that the colonnade and outbuildings have been given their definitive outlines, placing the drawing no earlier than late July or early August 1705 (fig. 36).<sup>257</sup> It cannot, however, have been produced very long after then: Whistler noted that the 'absence of office courts' behind the stable and kitchen blocks, which were added much later in the design

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<sup>255</sup> For example in Timothy Mowl, 'Antiquaries, Theatres and Early Medievalism', in Christopher Ridgway and Robert Williams (eds), *Sir John Vanbrugh and Landscape Architecture in Baroque England, 1690-1730* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 71-92, esp. p. 86; Giles Worsley, 'Sir John Vanbrugh and the Search for a National Style', in M. Hall (ed.), *Gothic Architecture and its Meanings, 1550-1830* (Reading, 2002), pp. 97-132; Hart, *Storyteller in Stone*, p. 74.

<sup>256</sup> Quoted in Robert Williams, 'Fortified Gardens', in Christopher Ridgway and Robert Williams (eds), *Sir John Vanbrugh and Landscape Architecture in Baroque England, 1690-1730* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 49-70, esp. p. 51.

<sup>257</sup> Significant changes to the placement of the chapel, kitchen and colonnades were reported by Hawksmoor in a letter of Joynes of 28 July, cited in Green, *Blenheim Palace*, pp. 60, 242; and first transcribed in full in Downes, *Hawksmoor*, p. 236.

process, and therefore suggested a date ‘before 1707’; while Dalton states that the second drawing ‘must be a little later in 1705’ than the first plan.<sup>258</sup>

These dates can be refined further. Not only is the kitchen garden entirely absent from the plan, but there is also an avenue and *rond-point* lightly sketched in over its future location. The drawing must therefore predate, presumably by some margin, the decision to locate the kitchen garden to the south east of the parterre and woodwork. An initial decision on the location of the kitchen garden appears to have been taken as early as June 1705, although the final decision may not have been made until some time later, and it is not until October that we find any reference to actual construction work, in the form of the construction of temporary dry stone walling.<sup>259</sup> Thus October 1705 provides a reasonably certain *terminus ante* for the plan. This in its turn suggests that the massive circular bastions at each angle were added no later than that time. The relationship of these forms to fortifications is, moreover, confirmed by the early Blenheim account books, where in addition to explicit use of the word ‘bastion’, the ditch around the garden is described as the ‘graff’—a technical term for a dry moat or trench.<sup>260</sup> The nearly contemporaneous introduction of the fortified bastions and graff to the garden and the great pavilions to the house strongly suggest that they belong to the same programme of symbolic fortification.

But what, exactly, were these fortifications symbolic of? Much has been made in recent years of Vanbrugh’s ‘medievalism’, which is increasingly seen as the source of the remarkable, proto-Romantic castellated forms of his own residence in Greenwich, appropriately known as ‘Vanbrugh Castle’ (fig. 37).<sup>261</sup> Vanbrugh’s fondness for the medieval is usually demonstrated by his famous defence of the manor of Woodstock for its historical associations with the love affair between Henry II and Rosamond Clifford; or by reference to Vanbrugh’s activities as a herald

<sup>258</sup> Dalton, *Vanbrugh and the Vitruvian Landscape*, pp. 107, 109.

<sup>259</sup> According to the building accounts for June 1705, Wise’s workmen had dug out ‘2719 solid yards of Earth’ which was ‘layd in great Heaps near the Designed Kitchin Garden’: see British Library Add MS 15592 f. 12 r. By October 1705 Richard Payne had submitted a bill for £40 1s 6d for dry-walling around the kitchen garden: see British Library Add MS 19592 f. 75. It may be noted, however, that it was not until 31 May 1705 that Joynes first reported work on the solid wall in ‘A Progress of the Worke of Blenheim Castle and Offices adjoining &c.’, British Library Add MS 19608 f. 37.

<sup>260</sup> See, for example, Blenheim accounts for October 1705: British Library Add MS 19592 f. 80v and 15593 f. 45v.

<sup>261</sup> McCormick, *Playwright as Architect*, pp. 121-26.

and an occasional purchaser of books on medieval subjects.<sup>262</sup> This alleged fascination with medieval culture has even been associated with a search for a ‘national style’, a point of view that was especially associated with the late Giles Worsley and that has now been adopted by Vaughan Hart in his recent work on the architect.<sup>263</sup>

Notwithstanding the attractiveness of this kind of interpretation, we should bear in mind that the central reason for Vanbrugh’s decision to metaphorically fortify Blenheim was probably the most straightforward one: to flatter the Duke of Marlborough by evoking his military accomplishments. This, at least, was what Switzer implicitly assumed when he wrote that such gardens ‘will, I believe, be very pleasing to all the martial Genius’s of our Country’.<sup>264</sup> If Blenheim’s ‘fortification’ was indeed principally a matter of creating an appropriately martial residence for the Queen’s Captain General, then there need not have been anything self-consciously mediaeval about Vanbrugh’s use of castellar elements. Switzer was, after all, very clear that the bastioned garden was ‘after the ancient *Roman* manner’; and he was in a position to know what he was talking about, as he was employed at Blenheim for more than four years.<sup>265</sup>

Such testimony must severely qualify any uncomplicated assumption that fortified features can directly be equated with early Gothic revivalism.<sup>266</sup> This was especially the case given the undeveloped state of knowledge about the chronology of England’s ancient fortifications at the time Blenheim was being built. Although

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<sup>262</sup> Hart, *Storyteller in Stone*, pp. 46-47, 53-57.

<sup>263</sup> See esp. Worsley, ‘Sir John Vanbrugh and the Search for a National Style’ and *idem*, ‘Blenheim: Architecture of Albion’, *Country Life*, 197 (October 9, 2003): 90-94. For Vaughan Hart’s development of this interpretation, see Chapter 2, ‘The Historicall Argument: The Order of the Garter and Vanbrugh’s ‘Castle Air’’ of his *Storyteller in Stone*, pp. 45-81.

<sup>264</sup> Partially quoted in Williams, ‘Fortified Gardens’, p. 51, from Stephen Switzer, *Ichnographia Rustica, or the Nobleman, Gentleman and Gardener’s Recreation*, 3 vols (London, 1718), vol. 2, p. 174.

<sup>265</sup> He was employed to pay labourers working on the bridge at the request of Samuel Travers: see British Library Add MS 19608 f. 79: Travers to William Boulter, 11 March 1708; and British Library Add MS 19608 f. 75: Boulter’s undated, affirmative reply. A letter from Joynes to Travers dated 31 August 1712 shows that Switzer was still at Blenheim nearly five years later: see British Library Add MS 19609 f. 126.

<sup>266</sup> Williams, ‘Fortified Gardens’, p. 51. He had also been at work intermittently on works at Blenheim since the opening of the park quarries in 1705, and had vainly hoped to succeed to Boulter’s position after the death of the latter in May 1708; see William Alvis Brogden, ‘Stephen Switzer and Garden Design in Britain in the Early Eighteenth Century’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1973, pp. 152-60.

Wren and Hawksmoor, like the antiquarian Aubrey, had some conception of the periodisation of medieval architecture, this was both skeletal and exceptional.<sup>267</sup> So pervasive was the ignorance of the real age of early medieval round-arched structures that a critic as knowledgeable as Lord Burlington appears to have been quite convinced that Micklegate Bar in York, a late Norman structure, was ancient Roman in origin.<sup>268</sup> Wren was admittedly more alive to the existence of an ‘ancient Saxon manner, which was with Peers or round Pillars, much stronger than the Tuscan, round headed Arches, and Windows’; but even he claimed that this style of ‘Saxon’ building was ‘not much altered from the *Roman*’.<sup>269</sup> Vanbrugh himself very rarely, if ever, employed forms with unmistakably medieval associations, such as pointed arches and traceries, preferring instead the round arches that both Wren and Burlington so readily classed as Classical in origin.<sup>270</sup> Vanbrugh’s ‘medieval’ fortifications, then, are probably more intended to evoke the *Commentaries* of Julius Caesar or the histories of Tacitus than a medieval *chanson de geste*.

The evocation of fortifications should, moreover, be seen in a broader early modern European context in which the idealisation of warfare remained commonplace. This was the age in which Louis XIV, though a genuinely devout Catholic, could unashamedly extoll the waging of a war as the most delightful occupation for a monarch, the source of the ‘gloire’ that was a great ruler’s highest purpose.<sup>271</sup> Such attitudes can be understood as an inheritance from medieval chivalry.<sup>272</sup> It is telling,

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<sup>267</sup> For Wren’s understanding of the stylistic evolution of English medieval architecture, see his memorandum for the Bishop of Rochester in Stephen Wren (ed.), *Parentalia* (London, 1750), pp. 296-98. For a recent discussion of Aubrey’s pioneering analysis of Gothic style, see Howard Colvin, ‘Aubrey’s *Chronologia Architectonica*’, in his *Essays in English Architectural History*, pp. 206-16; and Olivia Horsfall Turner, ‘“The Windows of this Church are of Several Fashions”: Architectural Form and Historical Method in John Aubrey’s *Chronologia Architectonica*’, *Architectural History*, vol. 54 (2011): 171-93.

<sup>268</sup> Philip J. Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 111.

<sup>269</sup> Wren, *Parentalia*, p. 296.

<sup>270</sup> Downes reproduces an autograph drawing by Vanbrugh for a garden building on the reverse of a letter from Christopher Wren Jr. dated 1712, in his *Vanbrugh*, p. 259; to the best of my knowledge, this is the exception that—in the strictest sense—proves the rule. For here we see not only pointed arches and tracery, but stepped buttresses and gothic pinnacles, showing that Vanbrugh was well able to summon up the signifiers of medieval construction when he wished to. It would therefore seem that he intentionally chose not to in the vast majority of his executed structures.

<sup>271</sup> This attitude is a pervasive feature of Louis XIV’s memoirs: see Paul Sonnino (trans. & ed.), *Memoirs for the Instruction of the Dauphin* (New York, 1970).

<sup>272</sup> For a persuasive statement of the case against the traditional view that the chivalric mentality was functionally extinct by the sixteenth century, see Ryan Anders Pederson, ‘Noble Violence and the Survival of Chivalry in France 1560-1660’, unpublished PhD thesis, State University of New York, 2007.

for example, that in much of Continental Europe the tourney continued to eke out its life well into Vanbrugh's lifetime in the ritualised form of the carrousel, which combined elaborate displays of horsemanship, mock battles, and tiltyard games such as the *course de bagues* or ring-tilt. Perhaps the most famous example was the great carrousel held by Louis XIV in 1662 to celebrate the recent birth of the dauphin, an event memorialised in a lavish volume published by the Imprimerie Royale in 1667. With its eulogistic text by Charles Perrault and superb engravings by Israël Sylvestre, this extraordinary work clearly reflects the prestige that Louis and his ministers expected to accrue to them through such magnificent martial festivities.<sup>273</sup> As examples such as Sylvestre's representation of the king (fig. 38) and the remarkably preserved carrousel armour of Charles XI of Sweden show (fig. 39), the costumes worn on these occasions typically and self-consciously evoked Roman precedents; and the influence of this kind of imagery, even if it may have come at second or third hand, is shown by the occurrence of a heavily stylised version of a carrousel shield (not, as Vaughan Hart claims, an 'admiral's hat') in the frieze of Seaton Delaval (figs 40 & 41).<sup>274</sup> It would seem to follow that the use of symbolic fortification, so often interpreted as medieval 'revival', might therefore be better seen as cultural 'survival', testimony to the continuing attraction of the feudal-aristocratic warrior ideal in eighteenth-century Western European society.<sup>275</sup>

Early modern militarism also carried very distinctive social connotations, as Louis XIV's sumptuous carrousel implies. The pursuit of glory in armed combat remained deeply intertwined with the aristocratic ideal. Historians of medieval architecture are increasingly conscious of the potency of fortification as a signifier of lordship in pre-modern England. They have argued that the persistence of forms such as battlements, towers and moats in medieval and early modern castles and country houses was

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<sup>273</sup> Charles Perrault, *Courses de testes et de bague faites par le roy et par les princes et seigneurs de sa cour en l'année 1662* (Paris, 1670).

<sup>274</sup> For examples of carrousel armour and a cursory account of other some important examples of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century carrousels, see Michael Snodin and Nigel Llewellyn (eds), *Baroque: Style in the Age of Magnificence*, exh. cat. (London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2009), pp. 182-84. For Vaughan Hart's interpretation of the Seaton Delaval frieze, see his *Storyteller in Stone*, p. 161, caption to figs 233 a and b. Richard Hewlings, in his review of Hart's book, points out that naval uniforms were not introduced until 1748 and that the 'fore-and-aft' bicorne hat of the type Hart is clearly thinking of was not worn until the French Revolutionary Wars.

<sup>275</sup> Frank McCormick gives a sensitive account of Vanbrugh's fascination with 'martial fantasy' in his *Playwright as Architect*, pp. 113-21.

symbolic, rather than practical, in intent.<sup>276</sup> The enduring power of such symbolism even in the eighteenth century is vividly embodied in another striking, and absolutely explicit, example of symbolic fortification. Duncombe Park in Yorkshire (fig. 42) is usually attributed to the gentleman amateur, William Wakefield (1672-1730), as he is the named architect on the plates of the house in the third volume of *Vitruvius Britannicus*; but the Vanbrughian aesthetic at work there is manifest. As Colvin has observed, ‘The massing of Duncombe, and above all, the external expression of its twin staircase towers, shows that he was strongly influenced by Vanbrugh’.<sup>277</sup>

The most salient feature in the present context is precisely the staircase towers of which Colvin took particular notice. These are now lost as a result of the late Victorian rebuilding of the house following a devastating fire in 1879, but they are clearly visible in early photographs (figs 43 & 44). These remarkable structures directly evoke the forms of the Norman keep of the house’s predecessor Helmsley Castle (fig. 45), and are as clear-cut an example of the reproduction of medieval fortifications as one could wish for. I would, however, suggest that antiquarian revivalism was an unlikely priority for either patron or architect. The miniature replicas of the ancient castle can only be present on this otherwise full-bloodedly classical structure to proclaim the Duncombes—a family that made its fortune in the less than glorious world of high finance—as the legitimate successors of the great feudal lords whose domain the estate had once been. Militarism, aristocratic magnificence, legitimate lordship—these are as likely to represent the qualities that Vanbrugh sought to evoke by means of his idiosyncratic emulation of fortified structures as the proto-Romantic revival of medieval history.

The vocabulary of fortification was, of course, by no means the only way of representing lordly power and status in stone. Indeed, it should be seen as one of several interrelated means of creating an effect of ‘magnificence’. Vanbrugh wove endless variations on the Vitruvian triad of ‘beauty, firmness and delight’, and usually remembered to include beauty; but among the words it was combined with,

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<sup>276</sup> A valuable general synthesis on the subject that draws on the recent specialist literature is John Goodall, *The English Castle* (New Haven and London, 2011); for fortification as a marker of lordship, see esp. the examples discussed on pp. 1-4.

<sup>277</sup> Colvin, *Dictionary*, p. 1081.

‘magnificence’ and its near synonym ‘state’, occur remarkably often. The early modern meaning of the concept and its conscious pursuit as a cultural aim have received relatively little attention from scholars of eighteenth-century British architecture.<sup>278</sup> Some insight into its meaning can be gained from one of the earliest English dictionaries, Philips’s *New World of Words*, which states that a magnificent person ‘lives in Great State’, and that a magnificent thing is ‘stately, noble, great, fine, costly, lofty’.<sup>279</sup> There can be little doubt that magnificence in this sense remained a real and vivid cultural ideal for Vanbrugh. In a letter to the Duke of Newcastle describing a visit to the Duke of Chandos, Vanbrugh described his lavish style of life as his ‘Magnificence’, which had ‘Nothing at all in it Ridiculous or Foppish as many people have Represented’.<sup>280</sup> The unmistakable implication is that true magnificence is opulent but not effete, splendid but without being carried to the point of self-indulgence or absurdity.

For Vanbrugh, the pursuit of architectural magnificence seems to have been a matter of creating buildings that would astonish and awe their beholders. In the same letter in which Vanbrugh praises Chandos’s building and gardening, he promises to keep that same great man out of the new room he was building Newcastle’s villa, Claremont, ‘till ’tis quite done; that it may Stair in his face, And knock him downe at Once’.<sup>281</sup> It was no doubt a similar concern to astound the visitor that made vertiginously tall spaces such an important element in Vanbrugh’s architectural armoury. The obsession with height is already evident at Castle Howard in the vertical growth of the hall, but at Blenheim it is even more apparent. As we have seen, it is likely that the incorporation of a double-height saloon at the centre of the state apartments facing towards the garden was another of the changes made to the house during the very earliest stages of the design.<sup>282</sup> In Vanbrugh’s opinion, only a double-height room could be considered a true saloon, as he made clear when

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<sup>278</sup> It has received far more attention from historians of Renaissance architecture, who have located the term in the humanist discourse of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century Italy and its concern to distinguish lavish expenditures that in some sense benefited the whole community from those which could rightly be condemned as mere ‘luxury’; see e.g. John Onians, *Bearers of Meaning: The Classical Orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance* (Princeton, 1988), esp. pp. 123–26.

<sup>279</sup> Edward Philips (and ‘J. K.’), *The New World of Words; or Universal English Dictionary* (London, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., 1720), s.v. ‘magnificent’.

<sup>280</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 126.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>282</sup> Castle Howard had instead two single-storey saloons, one over the other, an unusual configuration – see Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 45.

writing to the Earl of Manchester about proposals for a ‘large Noble Room of parade’ proposed for the state apartment:

I wish it cou’d have been made a reall Salon, by carrying it up into the Next Story, but that wou’d have destroyed one of the three Bedchambers Above, which my Lady thinks cannot be Spar’d. ’Twill however be eighteen foot high, which is no contemptible thing, tho’ not what in Strictness One wou’d wish.<sup>283</sup>

This concern with height was no doubt also part of the reason for the modifications to the hall at Blenheim, of which a crucial component was the raising of its ceiling above the roofline to form a clerestory. In this case, however, there was probably a more complex set of motivations at work, as what slender evidence there is implies that the basic idea that is more likely to have come from Hawksmoor than Vanbrugh’s own fertile imagination. It will be recalled that the primary external effect of the modifications to the hall was to increase both its height and its central projection. It will also be recalled that this change was subsequent to the addition of the pavilions. Read against this background, the following sentences from Wren’s first tract on architecture gain peculiar resonance:

Fronts ought to be elevated in the Middle, not the Corners; because the Middle is the Place of greatest Dignity, and first arrests the Eye; and rather projecting forward in the Middle, than hollow. For these Reasons, Pavilions at the Corners are naught; because they make both Faults, a hollow and depressed front ... The Ancients elevated the Middle with a Tympan, a Statue, or a Dome.<sup>284</sup>

Wren’s tracts are of uncertain date and may not reflect his most developed ideas. Pavilions, certainly, are not consistently avoided in the designs produced during his Surveyorship. Nevertheless, it is true that almost all his and Hawksmoor’s architectural productions conform to the principle that the main façades of a building should have a strongly articulated central accent that in most cases advances both forwards and upwards. This is not, however, always the case with Vanbrugh’s

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<sup>283</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 13. See also Vanbrugh’s defence of the room’s height in a letter to Lord Royalton of 18 July, 1709, *ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>284</sup> Wren, *Parentalia*, p. 352.

independent works, where corner pavilions or towers do on several occasions rise above the centre, as in the entrance front at Grimsthorpe (fig. 46) or Vanbrugh House in Greenwich (fig. 47), providing a framing device reminiscent of the effect Blenheim would have made without the modifications to the hall. The form of the Blenheim portico, with its unusual use of coupled columns at the corners, one square and the other round, is also suggestive. A close parallel is to be found in the early Wren-Hawksmoor scheme for Greenwich Hospital, where a giant portico of this kind is placed before a tall, domed central hall (fig. 48). On the balance of probabilities, then, the basic idea for endowing the building with a stronger central emphasis seems more likely to have been prompted by Hawksmoor's grasp of Wren's aesthetic doctrines than to have come from Vanbrugh's unaided architectural imagination.

Nevertheless, we have already seen that the detailed layout of the early Joynes plan for Blenheim and the more complete evidence available for Castle Howard both suggest that Vanbrugh would have wished to retain control over the implementation of any such changes. The use of the freestanding portico is an especially striking development, as they were still exceedingly rare in English domestic architecture and most unusual even in public buildings.<sup>285</sup> Vanbrugh's use of the portico is therefore in need of explanation, especially as he would soon become perhaps their most prolific early enthusiast: Blenheim's portico was followed by others at Stowe, Eastbury and Seaton Delaval, and one occurs again in the unexecuted designs for the south front of Grimsthorpe.

A possible stimulus for their use was the one conventional architectural treatise that we know for certain Vanbrugh owned: the 'French book of Palladio' he had asked the publisher Jacob Tonson to procure for him in Amsterdam in 1703 and which he later accidentally left behind at Blenheim after one of his visits.<sup>286</sup> Freestanding porticos are a leitmotif of Palladio's villa architecture, and their ubiquity in the *Quattro Libri*

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<sup>285</sup> With the exception of the perennially quoted example of the portico at The Vyne and a modest example at Amesbury, both the work of John Webb, it is difficult to think of any plausible domestic precedents for the Blenheim portico. Wren had, however, used a freestanding Doric portico at Chelsea and there seem to have been plans for an even grander hexastyle Composite portico at Winchester. See John Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530-1830* (1953; Harmondsworth, 1970) pp. 146, 239-42.

<sup>286</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, pp. 9, 236: Vanbrugh to Tonson, 13 July 1703 and Vanbrugh to Joynes, 17 February 1711.

no doubt helped legitimise the idea of a grand entrance portico for Blenheim (fig. 49). Nevertheless, Vanbrugh was not simply reproducing a precedent from Greenwich or parroting Palladian motifs; he was using a device that he believed had a distinctive and potent aesthetic effect upon the viewer. Indeed, he later wrote that there is ‘no production in Architecture so solemnly Magnificent’ as the portico, and for that same reason advocated that they adorn all the Fifty New Churches that Queen Anne’s government proposed to build in the later years of her reign.<sup>287</sup> Such qualities were clearly a major concern in the changes to the Blenheim hall and portico as well, since they would, he told Marlborough, add ‘wonderfully (I think) to the beauty, regularity, and magnificence of the building’.<sup>288</sup> Thus, magnificence again emerges as a fundamentally important component of Vanbrugh’s conceptual apparatus, and it was arguably to remain central to the way the architect thought of Blenheim. Six years later, when the duke was rapidly losing favour and continued royal support for the house’s construction was seriously in question, Vanbrugh stressed that not only had the queen viewed the original model for the house, but that ‘far from making any exceptions [she] entirely approved of it and was particularly pleased with the magnificent part’.<sup>289</sup>

The progressive development of the ‘magnificent part’ of Blenheim, then, was already well in train by April 1705 at the latest. In only a few months, Vanbrugh had taken the Castle Howard model and substantially rethought it to make it more suitable in scale and style to his new patron. This was reinforced by the evocation of fortification in the towering forms of the corner pavilions, which were paralleled by the addition of bastions and graffs to the garden walls. The result was a coherent idea of the impression Marlborough’s new ‘castle’ should make and of the basic arrangement of spaces within it. The magnificence intrinsic to such a grandiose structure was then further reinforced by the addition of double height spaces to the interior and massive porticos to the exterior. As the beginning of building operations approached, then, Blenheim had already acquired a distinct architectural personality quite different from the original model provided by Castle Howard.

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<sup>287</sup> ‘Mr Van-Brugg’s Proposals about Building ye New Churches’ in Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 257.

<sup>288</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 230.

<sup>289</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Letters*, p. 44.

### **From Conception to Construction: Hawksmoor's Resolution of the Plans**

For all the progress that had been made in defining and developing Blenheim's layout in the months following Marlborough's initial commission, the Joynes plan records a scheme that is so crude in conception as to be virtually unbuildable. For all their daring, the clumsy addition of the pavilions and the inept reworking of the hall show that there was still much to do if the initial conception was to be transformed into useable architectural drawings. This is likely to reflect Vanbrugh's continuing lack of experience in the practicalities of architectural design. Such inexperience would have been tested to the extremes by the enormous intellectual demands posed by designing a building of Blenheim's vast scale and increasing aesthetic complexity. The central challenge presented by Blenheim lay precisely in the way that the addition of the gallery and private apartments had created a fully-three dimensional aesthetic entity. At Castle Howard, the two pairs of wings are disconnected from each other, both physically and aesthetically, meaning that Vanbrugh was essentially able to develop the north and south fronts of the building in relative isolation from each other. At Blenheim, however, every component of the building had to be combined into a tightly-integrated three-dimensional whole, and this requirement is likely to have rendered Hawksmoor's services even more than usually indispensable.

The clearest evidence for this is to be found in the conspicuous contrast between the Joynes plan and another pair of early plans that have, like the other early Blenheim drawings, received little consideration in the scholarly literature. One was reproduced by Green in 1951 as 'Vanbrugh's plan of the principal floor' (fig. 50), but was not otherwise discussed, either in his own study or in any succeeding scholarly work on Blenheim. Downes did however include this drawing, along with the corresponding basement plan (fig. 51), in his catalogue of Hawksmoor's drawings, and dated both to 1706-1707. Gordon Higgott has since re-examined them for his catalogue of the baroque architectural drawings in the Soane Museum, where the plans are now preserved. Higgott accords with Downes's attribution to Hawksmoor, but he assigns them a much earlier date, of around April to June 1705. Because of the re-dating, Higgott concludes that the plans are evidence of the very earliest stages of Blenheim's development and therefore deserve 'very detailed

scrutiny, alongside the evidence of the accounts and Hawksmoor's correspondence'.<sup>290</sup> Before going on to subject their architectural content to the kind of detailed scrutiny that Higgott calls for, however, we must once again briefly review the questions of dating and authorship upon which their claims to significance rest.

Higgott's primary reason for giving these drawings an early date is the numerous differences in detail they exhibit when compared with the final design as documented in *Vitruvius Britannicus* (figs 52 & 53). In the basement, for example, the space under the gallery is handled entirely differently, while on the principal floor the hall is shown with detached columns lining its walls, quite different from the largely astylar treatment eventually adopted. In addition, there is a series of more specific differences in the layout of the apartments on the east side of the house. The critical evidence cited by Higgott for his dating is, however, the absence of any sign of conjunction between the house's northern pavilions and the colonnades. He places the decision to add the colonnades 'well before' 28 July 1705, when Hawksmoor wrote to Joynes to tell him that their disposition had changed, and goes on to suggest that their absence from the plans suggests they must have been drawn 'perhaps as early as April that year', a date he associates with the construction of a wooden model of the house.

In this instance, Higgott's arguments appear to be open to question. To begin with, it was not until considerably later than April 1705 that a model of Blenheim was constructed.<sup>291</sup> Moreover, there are good reasons to think that the absence of terminal points for the colonnades reflects lazy draughtsmanship rather than a very early date. The corresponding basement plan, which is identical in scale and technique and on similar paper, shows doorways in the northern walls of the pavilions at precisely the right point to permit entry into the colonnades. It is therefore difficult to account for the presence of these doorways except on the assumption that this aspect of the design had already, at least in general terms, been resolved.

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<sup>290</sup> Higgott, *Baroque Drawings*, entry for SM 109/59.

<sup>291</sup> This is presumably based on Higgott's reading of Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 60, where it is erroneously stated that the Blenheim model was built in April 1705; Downes corrected the error in his *Sir John Vanbrugh*, pp. 298-99.

Additional evidence of the plan's relatively late date can be found in its inscription. This gives a key to various lettered rooms on the plan, and finishes with a statement—evidently a postscript as the writing is not quite continuous with the rest of the inscription—that there was to be ‘no entresole’ over a series of rooms on the east side of the house that were to form the Duke of Marlborough's private apartment (labelled E, D, F, H and L on the plan). Well into the summer of 1706, the intention was that both the duke and duchess's apartments would be given mezzanine floors, meaning that their bedrooms and dressing rooms would have lower ceilings than the other rooms on the ground floor.<sup>292</sup> However, it seems that the duke decided his apartment ceiling should be raised during one of his site visits in the winter of 1706 to 1707. The evidence for this can be found in a letter written by Vanbrugh to Marlborough on 15 June 1707, when he reported that the duchess had been persuaded to raise the ceiling of her bedchamber, presumably to match.<sup>293</sup> The duchess herself later recalled how Marlborough had, much to her chagrin, decided to raise his apartment ceiling and how she eventually persuaded him that both apartments should be returned to their original height.<sup>294</sup> This makes it highly probable that the inscription dates from some point between the duke's visit to the building site in December 1706 and Vanbrugh's letter of June 1707. It therefore seems that the drawing too should be assigned, in line with Downes's view, to late 1706 or early 1707 rather than to the first half of 1705.

The drawings' authorship is also difficult to determine with certainty. As we have seen, Downes and Higgott agree that they should be given to Hawksmoor, and it must be conceded that the inscriptions, modifications to the placing of fireplace and flues, and the scale bar are all in Hawksmoor's distinctive hand. Nevertheless, such finished small-scale floor plans would more usually have been delegated to a more junior draughtsman. Indeed, the survival in the Marlborough papers of similar but later plans in a variety of hands would seem to suggest that drawings of this kind were produced in the site drawing office as a matter of routine.<sup>295</sup> Moreover, the

<sup>292</sup> British Library Add MS 19607 f. 18: Hawksmoor to Joynes, 22 June 1706.

<sup>293</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 232.

<sup>294</sup> On the reversion to the original plan, see the duchess's annotations to ‘Mr Vanbrugh's Book of the Directions for Blenheim’ [1709]: British Library Add MS 61354 f. 19r.

<sup>295</sup> For example, there are two typologically comparable drawings in British Library Add MS 61355, ff. 5-7 which were used to record the progress of the works when construction was stopped by the duchess in October 1710. According to the duchess's inscription, the first is ‘of Mr. Bobart's

frequent lapses in precision in this particular plan, such as the irregular sizes of the columns flanking the arcaded walls of the entrance hall, seem to stem from uncertainty about the architectural intentions they are supposed to represent, and are untypical of Hawksmoor's carefully modulated drafting style.

If the drawing is not in fact by Hawksmoor, Joynes would seem to be the obvious candidate; but the brown ink and slightly slapdash approach do not seem to have much affinity for the very fine line and preference for black ink evident in other drawings attributable to him. The Blenheim accounts may provide some grounds for identifying alternative candidates in the contracting masons. When the drafting room at the worksite was set up, we find that three people were given drafting equipment: in addition to Joynes and the landscape contractor and gardener, Henry Wise, one of the major masonry contractors, Edward Strong, was given two drawing boards and probably also a ruler.<sup>296</sup> While it might be assumed that he would have needed such equipment primarily for drawing out full-scale profiles of mouldings for his masons' use, the provision of such equipment 'on expenses' is nevertheless suggestive that he, or one of his employees, was part of the drafting team.

Because of their relatively late probable date and questionable authorship, these drawings cannot be taken without qualification to represent the design as it was put into execution in mid-1705. They nevertheless possess unique value as the earliest surviving fully resolved ground plans for Blenheim, and, if used with appropriate caution, can be used as an indicator of the way that the Joynes plan was developed in preparation for the beginning of construction work. The first, and most obvious, point to make is that the layout of the house has been carefully reconfigured to deal with the most conspicuous problems presented by their predecessor. The inadequate breadth of the central unit of the main pile has been remedied by enlarging the width of the hall and saloon from thirty-six to forty-four feet. The clumsy discontinuity in the lateral walls of the main pile has been eliminated. The misalignment of the corridor with the bow windows on the east and west façades has also been resolved by extending the east and west ranges to the north, allowing the centres of the façades to be pulled in the same direction in order to create a single east-west axis

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drawing' and dates from 1710; the second is an anonymous copy. Tilleman Bobart was the successor to William Boulter as joint comptroller of the works, following the latter's death in May 1708.

<sup>296</sup> British Library Add MS 19592 f. 7.

through the centre of the whole building. But perhaps the most ingenious piece of architectural problem-solving is evident in the handling of the hall and portico.

Vanbrugh, as we have seen, told the duke that the hall, by means of enlarging it forwards and upwards while adding a portico, would rise ‘regularly in the Middle of the four great Pavillions’.<sup>297</sup> We have seen in the Joynes plan how he must have attempted to accomplish this by proposing that an attic should extend over the whole area of the hall and a massively projecting portico; but we have also seen the aesthetic and structural deficiencies that would have resulted from this proposal. The treatment of the hall in the later plan shows in germinal form a brilliantly economical and ingenious alternative approach. The short re-entrant walls in the hall next to the southernmost of the two-east west corridors suggest that an arch was to be inserted just before the innermost bay of the hall, and we can presume that this was intended to bear the southern wall of the hall clerestory. The lateral clerestory walls would then be extended—as Vanbrugh seems to have originally intended—to the front of the portico, which is exactly the same distance from the central east-west axis as the southern clerestory wall. By this means the new design fulfilled the fundamental aim of providing a dominant central compositional unit above the roofline that would be symmetrical about both major axes of the house, but without the serious problems engendered by its original implementation (fig. 54). The projection of the portico was still to be considerable, but to a much lesser degree than in Vanbrugh’s proposal, and the very long central mass that would have been apparent from the sides of the building had the original plan been implemented was reduced to more manageable proportions.

The considerable revisions undergone by the floor plan of the main house in the period immediately before construction began must have been accompanied by similarly extensive changes to the design of the elevations, if indeed these had already been brought to any degree of definition. Unfortunately, no elevation drawings from the very earliest design phases survive to confirm this. We can, however, trace the development of the façades in the period immediately after the resolution of the floor plan through a series of four drawings now preserved in the Bodleian Library (figs 1, 55-57).

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<sup>297</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 230.

The drawings show two variant views of the south front, and single elevations of the east front of the main house and the west front of the stable block. Their scale divides them into two distinct groups. Two drawings, showing the south and east fronts (figs 1 & 55), are drawn at scale of around ten feet to the inch. The remaining drawings (figs 56 & 57) were executed with a very fine ruling pen at a scale of twenty feet to the inch. All four drawings have been published and discussed repeatedly in the standard literature, but there remain certain difficulties with their attribution and dating that must be addressed before they can be considered in relation to Blenheim's evolving design.<sup>298</sup> Green published the larger-scale drawing for the south front as 'Vanbrugh's first elevation' for the façade.<sup>299</sup> Whistler, however, noted that Hawksmoor's handwriting can be seen on this and another of the drawings, and also claimed that his 'hand may also be detected in the ornaments' of the façades.<sup>300</sup> Downes went further, observing that 'none of the surviving Blenheim drawings is Vanbrugh's', before going on to claim that 'Hawksmoor's hand can be seen ... in the first known elevations for Blenheim', all of which he included in his catalogue of Hawksmoor's drawings.<sup>301</sup> Whistler, however, had also noted that one of the two drawings for the south front appears to have been a reduced copy that incorporated a number of modifications that are lightly pencilled in on the first drawing. Indeed, he pointed out that the comment in Hawksmoor's handwriting was a direction to a draughtsman that the drawing should be copied at a scale of twenty feet to the inch. Since this was the scale of the other drawing of the south front, Whistler concluded that it was the copy that Hawksmoor had requested.<sup>302</sup> This reasoning, if sound, suggests that an office hand is a more plausible candidate for its authorship than Hawksmoor.

Close scrutiny bears out Whistler's hypothesis. The two large-scale drawings of south and east fronts are both confidently drawn in pen and dark brown ink over grey wash. These do indeed appear to be in Hawksmoor's hand, with the highly calligraphic rendering of the sculpture and ornament being completely characteristic

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<sup>298</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 75, pl. 29 and p. 84; Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, pp. 92-93 and pls. 27-30; Downes, *Hawksmoor*, pp. 76-77, 282; *idem*, *Vanbrugh*, pp. 60-61; *idem*, *Sir John Vanbrugh*, p. 286.

<sup>299</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 84.

<sup>300</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 92.

<sup>301</sup> Downes, *Hawksmoor*, pp. 76, 77.

<sup>302</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 92.

of his independently attested work. The other drawing of the south front and the elevation of the stable block are, by contrast, of quite different character. The medium is black, rather than dark brown, ink; the line is almost neurotically precise but nevertheless not always quite accurate. The sculpture and ornaments—particularly of the statues placed on the five bay stretches of wall between the pavilions and the main block—appear coarse and tentative by comparison with the more fluent draughtsmanship of the other two drawings. All these characteristics suggest that the second pair of drawings is indeed the work of an office draughtsman rather than of Hawksmoor himself. Once again, Henry Joynes is circumstantially the most plausible candidate, and the fine line, black ink and somewhat fussy handling are all to be found in the other Blenheim and Oxford drawings apparently from his hand.

Implicit in Whistler's claim that the smaller drawing of the south front is a reduced copy of the larger is, of course, its relatively later date. In support of this, he further observed that it is in certain respects more highly resolved than the other, and in ways that bring into closer accord with the building as executed. The key evidence is in the form of the basement, which in the two large-scale drawings remains unresolved (figs 1 & 55) but in the small-scale drawing has been fully rendered (fig. 56).<sup>303</sup> We can build on these differences to considerably refine the dating of the large scale drawings, which must predate the beginning of construction of the basement walls in August 1705. They are also likely to predate the cutting and laying of the foundations, since a small but significant adjustment was subsequently made to the treatment of the external angles of the taller central section of the south façade. In the large-scale drawing the corner is formed by the meeting of two pilasters distinctly separated by a re-entrant angle between them. By contrast, in both the later small-scale drawing of the south front and in the extant fabric the corner pilasters meet as if they were two faces of a single square column. In order to make this adjustment possible, the planned thickness of the lateral walls of the main pile was reduced from five feet to four. Such a change, since it probably required a slight adjustment to the disposition of the entire south front, is more likely to have been contemplated while the project remained on the drawing board than while it was in execution. The date of the large-scale drawing of the south front can therefore be

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<sup>303</sup> British Library Add MS 19608 f. 15: Joynes to Tailor, 28 August 1705.

pushed back to June 1705 or before. Given the nearly identical draughtsmanship and design of the drawing of the east front, we can presume that this drawing, too, can be placed at this point.

The two large-scale drawings give a clear idea of what Hawksmoor envisaged as he began to translate Vanbrugh's initial ideas and the revised plan into carefully delineated, buildable elevations. The most conspicuous feature is the building's grandiose but sober, even austere, appearance. The south front is articulated by thirty-four foot high giant columns of a particularly plain form of Doric, its massive shafts unrelieved by fluting and its frieze without the usual ornaments of metopes and triglyphs. The resulting impression of strength and severity is further reinforced by the channelled rustication that spreads across most of the building.

The treatment of the façade takes Blenheim even further from the studied elegance of Castle Howard's garden front, with its long run of refined Corinthian pilasters. The squatter proportions of the Doric order in the design for Blenheim entail further differences between the two buildings as they leave room only for square headed windows at first floor level, in place of the uniform use of arched window openings at Castle Howard. The overall effect owes more to Castle Howard's north front as finally executed after further modification by Hawksmoor (fig. 58). We find there the same combination of French-style channelled masonry and Doric columns, as well as the use of paired columns or pilasters to define the central part of the building. Hawksmoor's design for Blenheim, however, is even more plain and unadorned. The resulting impression of austerity is only partly relieved by the ornaments that stand across the top of the elevation: a balustrade, urns, trophies composed of armour, flags and weapons, the Duke's armorial achievement over the attic storey of the frontispiece, and, atop the paired columns that define the central three bays, statues of Fame and History. The resulting composition is simultaneously less ornamented than Castle Howard but palpably grander. Indeed, Downes has noted that Blenheim's southern and northern façades have more columns and pilasters than Castle Howard. He has plausibly attributed this to its patron's social competitiveness: 'It would not even be ridiculous to imagine that Marlborough wanted more giant pilasters on the front and back of his house than Carlisle had—

twelve towards the garden instead of ten, and ten or twelve towards the court instead eight...<sup>304</sup>

The east elevation continues the basic themes of its neighbour, as indeed it had to, given that the two could be viewed together. However, there are a number of features unique to this façade that deserve particular notice. One is the partial omission of the channelled rustication that runs continuously across the whole of the corresponding south elevation except the central bay and the attic of the stretches between the central pile. Here, it appears only on the pavilions, considerably moderating the mood of severity. The more domestic aspect of the east front is further reinforced by the occurrence of mezzanine windows between the principal floor and the attic, recalling the similar treatment of the lateral fronts of Easton Neston. The windows were clearly intended to light ample small-scale private accommodation for the duke and duchess, whose apartments were situated in this part of the building. The space taken up by the inclusion of these windows has required the use of square headed windows for the principal storey, and, apparently for the sake of consistency, this treatment was continued in the corresponding stretches of wall between the pavilions and central pile on the south front.

These two ambitious drawings, impressive though they are, were not the final state of development of the early Blenheim plans. Almost as soon as they were completed it seems that they were being rethought. The elevations are scattered with modifications lightly drawn in pencil; these include crosses over the mezzanine windows of the east front to indicate their removal; the insertion of arched heads over the windows of the principal floor beneath them; the instruction to add a fascia just below the existing string course on the same façade; and, on the south front, to give the square-headed windows arched openings and, above them, to insert aprons under the attic windows to match those of the first floor windows in the pavilions.

As Whistler noted, these last modifications, as well as some others, have actually been incorporated into the second, smaller-scale elevation of the south front.<sup>305</sup> The most obvious further change in this later drawing is that the basement has now been defined in far more detail; it has attained the height it was to have in the executed

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<sup>304</sup> Downes, *Sir John Vanbrugh*, p. 286.

<sup>305</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 92.

structure, and distinctive round windows, redolent of gun ports, have been inserted in place of the tentatively sketched rectangular openings. These were also put into execution and are still visible across in the south front, although those in the stretches between the pavilions and the central pile were replaced with windows of quite different design later in the construction process. In addition to the reworking of the basement, however, there is also a series of additional, more subtle developments. The channelled rustication has been removed from the entire front except for the pavilions, where it has been extended across the corner pilasters; and across the whole front the first floor windows have been deepened, presumably reflecting a change on the east front intended to take advantage of the space liberated by the elimination of the mezzanine windows. On the central pile, the coupled columns that previously framed the frontispiece have been absorbed into a portico of engaged columns, while the attic above has been narrowed and has lost the statues that previously sat on top of the coupled columns. In the three-bay sections of wall neighbouring the portico there have been related changes, with the square half-columns at the corners of the main pile being replaced by shallow pilasters. The result is that the two engaged columns in the centres of each section are thrust into sharp relief, and the plasticity of the façade correspondingly increased. Finally, there have been a series of minor changes above the cornice line: the balustrade has disappeared from the central pile and been replaced by a shallow parapet; the parapet that stands over the intermediate stretches of wall has been narrowed and surmounted with statues; and the end pavilions have lost the mansard caps that were tentatively sketched onto the earlier elevations but gained a deep balustrade of French-inspired design. These have the collective effect of slightly lowering every element above the cornice-line, presumably to increase the visibility of the centrally placed attic storey over the hall.

With the exception of the addition of the aprons to the attic windows and the associated omission of the string course from the intermediate sections of the front, these changes brought the design of the façade a great deal closer to what we know or can infer was put into execution in the second half of 1705. Only two further significant changes to the design of the south front probably occurred before construction actually began: firstly, the elimination of the corner pilasters on the pavilions, as they are absent in the extant structure and we have no record of

alterations to this part of the façade in the accounts; and, secondly, the reinstatement of the fasciae under the attic windows in the sections between the pavilions and the central pile that were visible in the large-scale drawing of the south front. The close resemblance between the later drawing for the south front and the executed design enables us to narrow its likely date to somewhere between late May 1705, the latest likely date for the Joynes plan, and early August 1706, when work on the basement walls actually began.<sup>306</sup>

The development of the design for the north front cannot be followed in any detail for the simple reason that there is not a single extant elevation drawing for this part of the building. At best, we can make inferences about its likely development on the basis of the second Soane plan, which, as we have seen, is unlikely to date from much before late 1706 and may well be a little later. For reasons discussed in detail in the next chapter, however, it seems likely that the plan does accord reasonably well the earliest fully resolved intentions for this part of the building.<sup>307</sup> The critical priority, at this early stage, was to resolve the details of the quadrants that frame the central pile of the main house, as the east quadrant was one of the first parts of the façade to be built. These were given the form of colonnades of plain, two-and-a-half foot wide Doric columns of identical proportions to those that were to frame the bow windows on the east and west fronts, introducing an additional element of continuity between the northern and the lateral facades. The rows of columns in the quadrants mark yet another major departure from Castle Howard, where the corresponding parts of the façade consisted of plain rusticated arches. An essentially Francophile aesthetic is thus transformed into something more redolent of Italian baroque models, most obviously Bernini's colonnade for the Piazza San Pietro in Rome (fig. 59). The Bernini colonnade would have been familiar to Hawksmoor from Domenico Fontana's *Il Tempio Vaticano* of 1694, of which copies were to be found

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<sup>306</sup> The beginning of work on the basement walls is not directly documented, but on 14 August Joynes wrote separately to Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor informing them that the foundations of the main house had just been completed: see British Library Add MS 19605 f. 2 and British Library Add MS 19607 f. 8 respectively for the relevant letters. By 28 August he was able to report that the cellar walls 'are going up with all speed and some of y<sup>m</sup>: are 5<sup>f</sup>. high': see British Library Add MS 19608 f. 15.

<sup>307</sup> The foundation for this claim is the evidence presented in that chapter that the progressive modification of the Blenheim plan, hitherto regarded as a diffuse process, was in fact a relatively concentrated process that took place in the period between May and December 1707.

in both Wren's library and his own, and its influence is obvious here.<sup>308</sup> The use of coupled columns to frame the end bays of the Blenheim quadrants further emphasises the relationship, as the central bays of each arm of columns are emphasised in exactly the same way in their Roman baroque predecessor.

The same Doric order must have also been intended from very early in the construction process to define the proportions of the colonnades that lead from the northern pavilions of the main house to the chapel and kitchen. As we have previously seen, however, this particular part of the design was changed within weeks of construction beginning. The decision had taken place by 28 July at the latest, and probably shortly before then, as on that date Hawksmoor wrote hurriedly to Joynes, asking him to

tell Harry Bankes I give my service to him, and also tell him that the disposition of ye chapel kitchin and colonnade is by my Ld Treasurer's appointmt quite alter'd from ye designs he has Soe thus befor he proceeds he must hav a new Draught.<sup>309</sup>

As we have already seen, it appears from both the very earliest Blenheim site plan and from Vanbrugh's later letter describing the change that the kitchen and the chapel were originally conceived of as freestanding structures placed behind the colonnades between, respectively, the north east pavilion and the domestic offices and the north west pavilion and the stables. The position of the colonnade appears to have changed only slightly, however, so we can assume the overall effect would have been similar.<sup>310</sup>

The remaining parts of the building that needed to be addressed before construction began were the service wings: the domestic offices to the east of the forecourt and

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<sup>308</sup> See Wren's and Hawksmoor's sale catalogues, printed in David Watkin (ed.), *Sale Catalogues of Eminent Persons. Volume 4 – Architects* (London, 1972), pp. 3-43, 79-105 respectively; Wren's copy appears as lot 552, p. 36, and Hawksmoor's as lot 118, p.104.

<sup>309</sup> British Library Add MS 19607 f. 4: Hawksmoor to Joynes, 28 July 1705

<sup>310</sup> When Hawksmoor sent the revised plans to Joynes two weeks later he stated only that 'there is some small alteration in placing the colonnade to y<sup>e</sup> pavilions', suggesting that the major change referred to in his earlier letter concerned the position of the kitchen and chapel, a conjecture that fits Vanbrugh's account of the revision in his letter to Marlborough of 24 August: see British Library Add MS 19607 ff. 4, 7: Hawksmoor to Joynes, 28 July 1705 and 14 August 1705; Green, *Blenheim Palace*, pp. 301-302 and Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, pp. 230-31: Vanbrugh to Marlborough, 24 August 1705.

the stables in the corresponding position on the west. The final surviving early elevation drawing is for this part of the house and gives some intimation of Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor's intentions at the earliest stages of the construction process. The drawing in question is identical in style and scale to the more developed elevation of the south front, so we can presume that this is another office copy by Henry Joynes. It is also probably of similar date, that is to say from some point between May and, in this case, late July, when the design of the service wings was changed as result of the alterations to the disposition of the chapel, kitchen and colonnades reported by Hawksmoor at that time.

The elevation alone is enough to suggest that the floor plan of the service wings had attained its basic form by then: as in the extent structures, there is a long central stretch of façade disposed about a rusticated entrance arch and set between two deeply projecting end pavilions, altogether measuring just in excess of two hundred feet. The treatment of the elevation at this early stage shows a low front with a crowning cornice that would have matched the height of the springing of the arched window heads of the main floor of the house in order to maintain visual continuity across the whole building. On each pavilion stands an elaborately shaped mansard roof, and over the entrance arch a clock-tower rises in an elaborate succession of stages, starting with shallow attic with segmental pediment, into which is embedded a base with chamfered corners, which in its turn supports a small pavilion with an arched opening with square buttresses that support urns, before the whole ensemble finishes with a square clock case, serpentine cap, and weather-vane finial. This rich variety of forms gives a somewhat chaotic impression in the tiny drawing, an impression hardly mitigated by clumsy drafting; but this impression conceals the careful alignment of the stages with major horizontal lines in the corresponding design for the façade of the main house: the top of the bevelled base unit appears to be intended to align with the sills of the first floor windows, for example. The service wings, then, had also clearly been brought to a fairly high level of development by the time this drawing was executed.

Thus we can see that in the few months—or more probably weeks—that separated the drafting of the Joynes plan, probably in late April or early May, and the beginning of construction, an initial set of bold but ill-defined ideas for a

magnificent castle for the queen's captain general had rapidly been transformed into a buildable design. This process involved completely reworking the Joynes plan to address its structural and aesthetic inadequacies. While the basic conception was carefully retained, and many of the actual dimensions were translated unchanged into the executed plan, the internal relations of the varied forms and spaces were carefully regularised and developed into a coherent, systematically disposed plan. These then became the basis for a series of sophisticated elevation drawings for the principal façades of the main house and the service wings, which, with some further modifications, must have been largely finalised by the time work began on the basement walls in August 1705.

### **Conclusion**

We can now begin to account properly for the complex pattern of similarities and differences between Blenheim and Castle Howard described in the works of Tipping, Hussey and Webb. As we have seen, the initial design for Blenheim seems to have been very closely based on the model for its predecessor, with the basic layout of the earliest plan closely adhering to the probable layout of the Castle Howard model except for the additions specifically requested by Marlborough. However, as the design evolved to make it more overtly martial and magnificent, it began to acquire a completely distinct architectural identity. The redesign of the hall, along with addition of the pavilions, the insertion of a double height saloon and the recasting of the overall disposition of the house and its dependencies, had collectively transformed the aspect of Blenheim, taking it increasingly far from the Castle Howard model with which the project had begun. This was accomplished by the collective labours of Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor. Vanbrugh took the lead, working closely with the duke and duchess of Marlborough and Lord Godolphin to establish the basic layout of Blenheim in the early months of 1705, just as he had previously done for the earl of Carlisle at Castle Howard. At this stage, then, Hawksmoor's functions were strictly secondary to Vanbrugh's area of responsibility, the design of the main house. He nevertheless seems to have had considerable scope to influence the overall disposition of the plan and its landscape setting, and in doing so was able draw on the experience of large-scale planning Hawksmoor had gained in the employ of Sir Christopher Wren and the Office of Works, making use of an array of

formal devices that had been employed first in the abandoned Grand Projects for the reconstruction of Hampton Court. The very significant additions and modifications made to the main house in the months between February and June 1705, however, must still have conformed closely to Vanbrugh's aesthetic priorities, even if they were not always his own initial ideas. These were in their turn deeply shaped by his desire to please his powerful patron, the duke of Marlborough, by giving him a residence appropriate to his exalted rank and martial renown and thus contribute to his 'magnificence'. This had two immediate consequences. The first was the introduction to Blenheim of the architectural vocabulary of fortification—massive, four-square angle towers in the house, and bastions and graffs in the gardens. The second was the pursuit of the kind of astounding architectural effect that would, to recall Vanbrugh's own vivid phrase, stare the viewer in the face, and 'knock him downe at Once'. The pursuit of such intense aesthetic effect, we can presume, underlay the introduction of an increasing number of lofty double- and—in the case of the enlarged hall—triple-height spaces, as well as the addition to Blenheim's entrance front of a mammoth freestanding portico, almost unprecedented in a domestic building. Vanbrugh had thus not only introduced a series of innovative formal elements to the building but in doing so had also established the distinctive aesthetic priorities that would govern the whole project. It seems likely that it was Hawksmoor who then translated the overall vision into a more precisely worked out and carefully integrated whole before resolving the details of the house's principal fronts in preparation for the beginning of construction in June 1705.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Great Transformation

#### Introduction

By the middle of 1705, Hawksmoor had completed the task of turning Vanbrugh's initial conceptions for the house into a series of coherent, fully-finished presentation drawings. Yet, as has long been appreciated, the building that was finally constructed was very different from the one shown in these early designs and upon which construction began in June of that same year (cf. figs 2 & 56).<sup>311</sup> Among the plethora of differences between the initial drawings and the executed design, several are particularly obvious. The first is the height of the building: the long, low façades of the original plans have been raised throughout their length by some six feet.<sup>312</sup> Between the initial design and the actual execution of the building, moreover, the service wings grew into courtyards (figs. 5 & 6), and alongside these it was decided to place monumental orangeries or 'green houses' overlooking the garden (fig. 60). The process of enlargement was accompanied, moreover, by a pattern of elaboration. To allow for the increased height of the centre block, the relatively squat and somewhat austere Doric columns of the drawing were supplanted by tall and deeply carved Corinthian columns; atop the corner pavilions, we find a richly ornamented Vignola-style entablature instead of the narrow cornice originally intended; while the relatively simple roofline of the original design has been loaded with a series of monumental lanterns and towers, Hawksmoor's famous 'eminencies'. These last are of astoundingly complex form, a dizzying ensemble of curved and planar faces, skeletal cubes and openwork cylinders (figs. 61 & 62), aptly described by Downes as 'the most fantastic roof town ever built'.<sup>313</sup> Taken together, then, these extensive modifications completely transformed the aspect of Blenheim, turning it, as David Green evocatively put it, from a 'staid château' into a 'heroically baroque palace'.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> See the section on 'The Revolution in Method' in the introduction to this thesis for a brief account of the historiography; for a more comprehensive description of the changes made to the initial design, see Downes, *Vanbrugh*, pp. 60-66.

<sup>312</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>313</sup> Downes, *Hawksmoor*, p. 80.

<sup>314</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 48.

What, then, underlay Blenheim's extraordinary metamorphosis, the wholesale reconfiguration of the palace's form? If we turn to the standard works of Green, Whistler, and Downes in search of an explanation, we find a fairly clear picture. In late 1706, Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor somewhat belatedly realised that if the house were to be built in its planned form it would appear excessively long and low.<sup>315</sup> They therefore persuaded the Duke of Marlborough during his visit to the site in the winter of 1706-1707 that height of the house should be increased by six feet.<sup>316</sup> From this simple change, it seems, all the other alterations progressively unfolded. First of all, it led to the change of order: since it was by then too late to change their diameter, the only way of lengthening the columns and pilasters of the main house while conforming to the grammar of classical architecture was to turn stubby Doric into lofty Corinthian columns.<sup>317</sup> The resultant increased emphasis on the centre of the house then led directly to the decision to counterbalance it by raising the pavilions and adding their great lanterns, for which models were made late summer 1707.<sup>318</sup> Then, no later than February 1708, came the proposal to add the new service courts and greenhouses to provide a fitting setting for the newly aggrandised house. This decision was again implemented over the following years, triggering strong objections from the Duchess of Marlborough, who had long harboured concerns about the ever-increasing extravagance of her husband's great house. Then, in face of continuing protests from the duchess, the process of enlargement culminated in 1709 with a series of further alterations and enlargements to the gateways and towers of the service blocks.<sup>319</sup> According to this interpretation then, Blenheim's transformation was the cumulative result of a long series of seemingly *ad hoc* modifications proposed over a period of years by the building's architects, John Vanbrugh and Nicholas Hawksmoor, in the face of Marlborough's complaisant acceptance and the duchess's increasingly vehement opposition.

It is my purpose in this chapter, however, to re-examine Blenheim's transformation and in doing so propose an alternative chronology for the design decisions of which

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<sup>315</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 84; Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 93; Downes, *Sir John Vanbrugh*, p. 309.

<sup>316</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 84; Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 64; and *idem*, *Sir John Vanbrugh*, p. 309. Downes suggests that a pretext may have been provided by various alterations required by the duchess to the fabric at around this time.

<sup>317</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 93; Downes, *Sir John Vanbrugh*, pp. 309-10.

<sup>318</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 84; Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, pp. 93, 99.

<sup>319</sup> Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 65.

it was the result. By coordinating all the available graphic and documentary sources, I will reconstruct in detail how Blenheim was transformed after construction began into the quite different structure that stands today. In doing so, I will seek to establish that existing accounts have been vitiated by a series of individually minor, but collectively significant, errors in basic chronology. Instead of occurring over a period of years, I will argue, the crucial design changes that led to Blenheim's transformation took place over a period of approximately six months in mid- to late 1707. On the basis of this revised chronology, I will seek to demonstrate that the palace's aggrandisement can better be seen as the product of a concentrated and cohesive process of redesign that can only have been undertaken with the duke of Marlborough's implicit consent or, more probably, at his explicit direction.

### **Beginning to Build Blenheim: May 1705 to August 1706**

As Hawksmoor was finalising the design of the house, preparations were already in hand for its construction. The contractor whom Marlborough had chosen for the landscaping and gardening, and therefore to undertake the first stages of work on the site, was Henry Wise (1653-1738). Wise was without doubt the most prestigious figure in his profession, superintendent of the Royal gardens and partner, with George London, in the largest plant nursery in the kingdom, Brompton Park.<sup>320</sup> Under his aegis, the area destined for the house and gardens began to be cleared, the foundations dug, and quarries opened in Woodstock Park from 16 April onwards.<sup>321</sup>

As Wise's clearing and digging began, Sidney, Lord Godolphin, Lord Treasurer of England, was beginning preparations of a different kind. In deference to Marlborough's regularly voiced desire to 'press on the work', Godolphin had two urgent problems: to secure the very considerable sums needed to keep operations moving steadily; and to ensure that the funds could be transferred, quickly and efficiently, to the people who were actually to build the palace. The first issue was in principle resolved by the Queen's agreement to fund the project, but would

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<sup>320</sup> For Wise's career, see David Green, *Gardener to Queen Anne*, esp. chs 11 and 12 on Blenheim, pp. 96-121.

<sup>321</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 96 and fn. 3, quoting from British Library Add MS 19592 f. 12.

nevertheless require careful management given the strain on royal finances imposed by the demands of the war. The second required some form of administrative structure to be established, and, in the expectation of an imminent flow of funds from the Treasury, Godolphin set about putting in place the necessary arrangements.

Although the funds from the Queen were to be issued to Marlborough himself to spend on the project as he saw fit, Godolphin set about making the whole operation as ‘official’ in character as possible, so that it closely resembled a normal Office of Works building project. To this end, a shadow administration was created for the project that made use of personnel from, and broadly followed the administrative protocols of, the royal household. Vanbrugh was the first to receive any kind of official position, in the form of a warrant of 9 June 1705 appointing him as Surveyor of the Blenheim works and empowering him to make contracts on behalf of Marlborough.<sup>322</sup> This warrant made him the nominal equivalent at Blenheim of Sir Christopher Wren, Surveyor of the Queen’s Works. Hawksmoor, then Clerk of the Works at Kensington Palace and Greenwich Hospital, was given the post of Assistant Surveyor. A series of other personnel were then appointed to manage the practicalities of financing and managing the work. At their head was the Surveyor General, who was to take responsibility for the ‘care & direction [of] the Paiments’ from the Treasury, in emulation of the position of Surveyor General of the Land and Revenues of the Crown. This position was assigned to the holder of the latter office, Samuel Travers, who would be assisted by his deputy at the Treasury, John Tailer.<sup>323</sup> Together, they would be responsible for settling some accounts—particularly those of the major contractors—directly in London, and arranging for large sums in *specie*

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<sup>322</sup> I have been unable to find any early evidence to support Green’s assertion (in his *Blenheim Palace*, p. 50), based on a later statement by Vanbrugh (Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, p. 181) that Joynes received his warrant from Godolphin before Vanbrugh, or for his related suggestion that Vanbrugh engineered the granting of Joynes’s warrant so that he could then secure his own on the same model. The sources are clear that Vanbrugh received his warrant first, on 9 June 1705, and that Joynes, although promised a similar warrant during his Treasury interview on 23 May, was not issued with one until 21 June; he did not finally receive it until Boulter’s arrival at Woodstock on 3 July, by which time Vanbrugh had already signed the most important contracts on the basis of his own warrant. See Joynes’s account of the warrants in British Library Add MS 19602 f. 1.

<sup>323</sup> British Library Add MS 61353 f. 5r-6v: Travers to the Duke of Marlborough, 8 July 1705. It is probably no coincidence that Godolphin wrote to Marlborough twice in the week before the sign manual was issued to assure the duke of his ‘care in pressing on the building at Woodstock’, as documented in Marlborough’s reply, 28 June/9 July 1705. See Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 455. Godolphin is likely to have been assuring Marlborough that he was about to raise the issue of funding with the Queen.

to be available in Woodstock so that the numerous lesser artisans, hauliers, and day labourers who would be needed on the project could be paid locally. The last requirement meant, of course, that another official would be required on the spot to both arrange contracts and take charge of payments, as well as to verify the quality and quantity of work done. Godolphin appointed two such clerks-of-works or ‘comptrollers’. The first was Henry Joynes, who was recommended by his former employer, Henry Wise. As we have seen, Joynes had probably already been involved in surveying Woodstock Park, but it was not until 23 May that he received his official appointment.<sup>324</sup> The second was William Boulter (d. 1708), who appears to have been a protégé of the Duchess of Marlborough.<sup>325</sup> Of the two, Joynes appears to have taken primary responsibility for making drawings and paying wages, which Boulter found difficult because of poor eyesight; Boulter, meanwhile, took on the tasks of monitoring materials and taking measurements of completed work.<sup>326</sup>

By the time Wise’s site preparations were complete on 16 June, Vanbrugh had evidently used his newly granted powers as Surveyor to good effect. On 18 June, the foundation stone was laid, indicating that the principal contracting stonemason, Edward Strong (1652-1724), had been formally engaged. Strong was hardly less eminent in his field than Wise was in his. He had been one of the principal masonry contractors at St. Paul’s and then at Greenwich Hospital, a position of eminence that built upon the Strong family’s ownership of important quarries at Little Barrington in Gloucestershire and Taynton in Oxfordshire.<sup>327</sup> Strong would take responsibility for the most valuable and extensive part of the work, the main house itself. His associate, Henry Banckes, took the next most prestigious part of the work, the colonnades, kitchen and chapel, as well as much of the garden walling. Banckes was another renowned mason, the son of Matthew Banckes, the Master Carpenter to the Office of Works and, perhaps not coincidentally, Henry Wise’s brother-in-law. The remaining mason’s work was divided—apparently by agreement amongst themselves—between two leading Oxford master masons, John Townesend (c. 1648-

<sup>324</sup> British Library Add MS 19602 f. 1.

<sup>325</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 58.

<sup>326</sup> For Boulter’s eyesight, see British Library Add MS 19607 f. 8; for Joynes’s drawings see *ibid.*, ff. 5, 8, 12. Boulter’s role in measuring is evidenced by Hawksmoor’s having to help Joynes complete a measurement left unfinished when Boulter died in May 1708. For more on this see British Library Add MS 19608 f. 86.

<sup>327</sup> Colvin, *Dictionary*, pp. 995-997.

1728) and Bartholomew Peisley (c. 1654-1715).<sup>328</sup> Townesend took on the office wing on the east side of the forecourt, while Peisley was to work on the remaining office wing and the ‘engine house’ that stood on the opposite side of the Glyme to pump water from the river to the house. The principle was that by contracting in this way the work could be accomplished more quickly, as the labour available to each of the several master masons could be employed simultaneously.

Godolphin had been no less active than Vanbrugh in his own domain of finance, turning the queen’s promise of support for construction into a steady flow of funding. There had been informal plans in place for raising money from the royal domain since April at the latest, and on 21 June 1705 he obtained the first ‘sign manual’ (document bearing the Queen’s orders under her own signature) for £20,000 ‘for and towards defraying the Charge & Expence of Building or making the Fabrick or Mansion House & Gardens lately begun by the Direction of ye said Duke of Marlborough within the Park of Woodstock’.<sup>329</sup> Until that time, Miles Parker, Receiver General of Taxes for Oxfordshire, had advanced money on the duke’s account; but now Travers was able to receive the first instalment of the grant, which was released on 25 June.<sup>330</sup> Two days later he set out with the money for Woodstock, where he had asked all the chief officers to assemble so that they could together resolve how the project would be managed.<sup>331</sup> Joynes was already there, having arrived shortly after his appointment in May; in due course, he was joined, one after the other, by Wise, Vanbrugh, Boulter, and, finally, by Hawksmoor and Strong, who both arrived on 7 July.

At the same time as the preparations were in train, Godolphin asked Sir Christopher Wren to provide some form of estimate of the cost of the house. On 20 June, shortly before the first sign manual was issued, Godolphin wrote to the duchess to tell her that he had

left the plan of the house with Sir Christopher Wren before I came out of town. He seemed to want the *upright*, as he termed it, the better to enable him

<sup>328</sup> British Library Add MS 19607 f. 7: Hawksmoor to Joynes, 14 August 1705.

<sup>329</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 1 p. 419: Marlborough to the duchess of Marlborough, 13/24 April 1705. See also *Calendar of Treasury Books*, vol. 20 (1705-1706), p. 313.

<sup>330</sup> British Library Add MS 19607 f. 1: Hawksmoor to Joynes, 23 June 1705.

<sup>331</sup> Bodleian Library MS Top. Oxon. c. 265 f. 89; British Library Add MS 61353, f. 5r-6v: Travers to Marlborough, 8 July 1705.

to judg of the expence. If you have that draught among your papers, you might send for him and show it him, and then command him to give you his opinion on the whole.<sup>332</sup>

The fact that Godolphin had apparently not yet seen an elevation drawing is a telling detail that hints at how recently the plans for the house had been resolved. Nevertheless, with or without an elevation, Wren seems to have provided an initial rough estimate that far exceeded Godolphin's and the duchess's expectations. In mid-July the duchess wrote to Marlborough expressing their joint misgivings at the likely cost of the project.<sup>333</sup> Marlborough feigned shock and wrote back to Godolphin in conciliatory terms, telling him that if they were both of the opinion that the Queen could not bear the expense then 'it will be no great uneasiness to me if it be lett alone'.<sup>334</sup> He wrote again, a few days later, to ask that 'whenever Vanbroke propose anything that you think unreasonable, that you would emediatly put a stope to it'.<sup>335</sup> Nevertheless, in a letter to Vanbrugh written almost exactly between his two letters to Godolphin, he told his architect that he was 'very much obliged for the account ... of the alterations you design in the building, which I am satisfied must be for the better', before exhorting him to press on the works.<sup>336</sup>

In spite of Marlborough's duplicitous protestations, Godolphin and the duchess evidently understood how determined he was to have his great house, and their alarm about the building's likely cost seems to have spurred attempts to contain it. The most important consequence seems to have been the reconfiguration of the chapel and kitchen, reported by Hawksmoor to Joynes on 28 July and by Vanbrugh to Marlborough a month later.<sup>337</sup> The changes were described in detail by Vanbrugh in his letter to the Duke, written on 24 August. 'There is a considerable alteration', he explained,

in the placing the Chappell & Kitchen but it appear'd to my Lord Treasurer so clear for the best that he thought there was no need of delaying the Work

<sup>332</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 452.

<sup>333</sup> Her letter is lost, but its nature and approximate date can be inferred from Marlborough's reply of 12/23 July 1705 to a related letter from Godolphin. See *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 461.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 467: Marlborough to Godolphin, 26 July/6 August 1705.

<sup>336</sup> Murray (ed.), *Letters and Dispatches*, vol. 2, p. 207.

<sup>337</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, pp. 74, 274.

while your Graces Opinion might be knowing, And so we have gone on as I propos'd it to him. The Chappell by this change is (instead of lying behind the Collonade) now at the end of it, in part of the Stable Wing, and the Kitchen the same on the other Side...

Vanbrugh went to say that there would be 'Six or Eight Thousand pound Sav'd by this, and the Figure of both of the Building and Court much improv'd'.<sup>338</sup>

This ingenious simplification of the original plan entailed the radical revision of the initial design for the service blocks (fig. 57, discussed in chapter two). Comparison of the early design with a tiny sketch included by Hawksmoor in a letter to Joynes from October 1706 shows that the structure must have been redesigned soon after in something like its extant form (figs 63-64). The main difference is in the scale of the building, which can be best appreciated if we note that the cornice line in the original design is at the same height as the string course in the built structure. Thus everything above the string course in the executed structure represents the additional height acquired as the service wings were redesigned. This increase in scale was presumably directly necessitated by the incorporation of the kitchen and chapel into the service wings. Their high vaulted ceilings must have required the southern pavilions of the wings, where they were now situated, to be made much taller than was originally envisaged. This in its turn led to the raising of the balancing pavilion at the opposite end of each wing in order to maintain symmetry; it then seems that the height of the recessed range between them had to be increased in order to prevent an unacceptable disparity in the dimensions of the several parts of the façade; finally, the blank space that consequently appeared over the central archway was filled by wide semi-circular window at first floor level. The resulting combination of forms was evidently pleasing to both architects: Hawksmoor would later recapitulate it almost exactly in the west front of St. Mary Woolnoth and in variant form in the designs for the rebuilding of King's College, Cambridge, while Vanbrugh was to echo it, in somewhat clumsier form, in the entrance front of Seaton Delaval (figs 65-66). The reconfigured façade still lacked certain elements that were to appear in the final structure: the great banded Doric columns on either side of the archway; the elaborately worked balustrading on the end pavilions; and, apparently, the upper

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<sup>338</sup> Whistler, *The Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 231.

parts of the towers. In other respects, however, the wings had largely gained their extant form, and are certainly much taller and more impressive than those planned in June 1705. It was presumably, then, the increased scope for architectural effect that came with the incorporation of the kitchen and chapel into the service wings that led Vanbrugh to assert that the change would improve ‘the Figure of both of the Building and Court’, although it is difficult to imagine that such a significant increase in scale would not have consumed most of the alleged cost savings that had served to justify the revision in the first place.

At the same time as economies were nominally being attempted by means of design changes, Godolphin was also making arrangements for Wren to go to Woodstock to make a more comprehensive, formal estimate of the costs.<sup>339</sup> On 26 July Hawksmoor wrote to Joynes warning him of the imminent visit and entreating him to ensure that the accounts were in good order.<sup>340</sup> It is not absolutely clear whether Wren did actually make the visit in person; but whether he did or not he in due course submitted an estimate generally reported to have been in the region of £90-100,000.<sup>341</sup> It is usually claimed that this was for the house alone, since that is what Vanbrugh implied in his letter to the duchess, and therefore excluded the cost of the gardens and any further outworks.<sup>342</sup> It is nevertheless worth noting the terms of Wren’s commission: to go to Woodstock to ‘inspect the contracts and view the works in order to estimate the charge of the whole’.<sup>343</sup> Wren was thus clearly instructed to give an estimate for ‘the whole’, not ‘the building’ alone. Given Godolphin’s primary concern, which must have been to assess the total burden the project would impose on the Treasury, it seems unlikely that he would have been satisfied with a part-estimate. A total of £100,000 was, moreover, an extraordinary sum of money even for the house and the gardens, again suggesting that Wren’s figures were based on the total cost of the enterprise as it was envisaged in 1705.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> *Calendar of Treasury Books*, vol. 20 (1705-1706), p. 356 (warrant books entry for 20 July 1705)

<sup>340</sup> British Library Add MS 19607 f. 5.

<sup>341</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, p. 31: Vanbrugh to the duchess of Marlborough, 11 June 1709.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>343</sup> *Calendar of Treasury Books*, vol. 20 (1705-1706), p. 356.

<sup>344</sup> For some useful context on the relative cost of great building projects in the eighteenth century, see R. G. Wilson and A. L. Mackley, ‘How Much did the English Country House Cost to Build?’, *Economic History Review*, vol. 53, no. 3 (1999): 436-68, esp. 439-40.

In the absence of original documentation detailing Wren's estimate, complete certainty on this last point is admittedly not possible. What is certain, however, is that Wren went beyond his immediate brief by raising at least two objections to the siting of the house. The first was the difficulty of arranging for a formal approach to the house directly from the north, because of the steepness of the ground as it rose from the base of the Glyme Valley towards the forecourt. The second was the fact that the orientation of the main rooms to the south failed to take advantage of the fine views over the river to the west. Marlborough displayed little patience with the second objection, telling the duchess that 'What Sir Christopher Rhen Says as to the watter not being seen in the two apartments is very trew, for that prospect is from the gallerie'. He did, however, find himself having to concede the point about the approach, and simply hoped that 'some way will be found to make that better'.<sup>345</sup> In future years, both difficulties were to haunt, in one form or another, all those directly involved in managed the construction of Blenheim.

Wren also made one further suggestion: that a model of the house should be built to act as a record of the finalised design and to prevent any further modifications that might increase the already vast estimate. Godolphin and the duchess accepted the suggestion with alacrity, and Marlborough, no doubt with some prompting, was persuaded to approve the suggestion. In late August he told the duchess 'that no time shou'd be lost in ordering Mr Vanbrook to have a model of the house made, so that every thing might be resolv'd, to prevent alterations'.<sup>346</sup> With Marlborough's permission granted, Godolphin told the duchess in September that 'I shall bee very pressing for a model when I can see Mr. Vanbrugge'.<sup>347</sup> Downes has found the bills for the sheds at Kensington 'for Joyners to make the Modells of Woodstock House', dated to October-December 1707; the resulting 'very large, Exact And intelligible Model' was then set up in the palace to be shown to Queen Anne and her consort Prince George.<sup>348</sup> This demonstration was presumably to ensure that the queen's approval for the model would give any subsequent changes the character of a snub to her royal judgment, providing a further disincentive for departing from the plans as they stood in late 1705. Nor did the model exhaust the precautions put in place to

<sup>345</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 481.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 486: Marlborough to the duchess, 27 August/7 September 1705.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 499: Godolphin to the duchess, 19 September 1705.

<sup>348</sup> Downes, *Vanbrugh*, pp. 60, 255 and *idem*, *Sir John Vanbrugh*, pp. 298-299.

maintain fiscal discipline. Godolphin and Samuel Travers implemented a remarkably close system of supervision over the construction process, which not only involved periodic visits to the site but the submission of regular progress reports and of minutely detailed monthly accounts of all expenditures by the comptrollers.<sup>349</sup>

Thus the whole way that the project was set up by Godolphin in 1705 was intended to ensure the essential fixity of the design once the model had been resolved and approved. This, of course, makes it even more remarkable that Blenheim was to undergo such extensive transformation in the course of its construction. Something, it would seem, must have occurred to cause the breakdown of this carefully monitored implementation of the model design. In order to grasp more completely how and why this happened, we must initially narrow our focus and consider the circumstances on the building site immediately before the long-drawn out process of modification and elaboration appears to have begun.

#### **‘Nothing to Please Her’: The Duchess of Marlborough at Blenheim in 1706**

By the late summer of 1706, the relative certainty provided by the model design, a well-organised and closely supervised administrative structure, and the massed concentration of human and financial resources directed at the building site by Godolphin had combined to produce astonishingly rapid progress.<sup>350</sup> Within a year of the beginning of construction, not only had the external walls of the entire basement been completed, but the eastern side of the main house, where the duke and duchess’s private apartments were to be situated, was on the point of being roofed and floored.<sup>351</sup> In August, we find Marlborough receiving glowing reports about his new residence and becoming increasingly impatient to see it for himself. Writing to his Oxfordshire neighbour, the Duke of Shrewsbury, in August, Marlborough confessed that

...the account you are pleased to give of it you may believe makes me long to be there. The misfortune is, I can only see it at the greatest disadvantage in

<sup>349</sup> See the correspondence of the Blenheim clerks-of-works, Joynes and Boulter, with Godolphin, Travers and Tailer, in British Library Add MSS 19608 & 19609 *passim*, and esp. 19608 ff. 6, 9.

<sup>350</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, pp. 56-59.

<sup>351</sup> British Library Add MS 19606 f. 5: Boulter and Joynes to Godolphin, July 30 1706; British Library Add MS 19607 f. 18: Hawksmoor to Joynes, June 22 1706 (partially quoted in Green, *Blenheim Palace*, pp. 60, 104).

the winter; but I hope the time will come when I may be so happy as to enjoy your Grace's good company there in the most agreeable season.<sup>352</sup>

So, all seemed to bode well: the walls of the palace were rising across the whole site; the first stage of the project—the completion of the private apartments—was seemingly imminent; and Marlborough had received a positive appraisal of the work from Shrewsbury, known as a shrewd judge of building.

This moment of relative confidence was not to last long. At almost precisely the time Marlborough was writing to Shrewsbury, his duchess was preparing to make her second extended visit to Woodstock, where she was to attend the socially and politically important race meeting on 11-13<sup>th</sup> September.<sup>353</sup> Arriving in the first week of that month, she took up residence in High Lodge, the Marlboroughs' principal residence on the Woodstock estate pending the completion of Blenheim.<sup>354</sup> And once settled in, she took the opportunity to review the works at the new house, which she had last seen as little more than rough foundations. Indeed, it was clearly a priority to do so: on Tuesday 3 September she was still in London but by the following Sunday she was already writing to Lord Godolphin to express her views on the house.<sup>355</sup>

The duchess's views were not positive, and she told Godolphin in no uncertain terms that she had 'found nothing to please' her there.<sup>356</sup> Godolphin's first reaction was to temporise. After first responding sympathetically, conceding that 'I am too much inclined to be of your mind in all that relates to that matter, that I am not surprised with the account of give of it', he went on to express the sanguine hope that things might yet improve.<sup>357</sup> But as he was to find out when he visited Woodstock himself later in the month, he had seriously underestimated the depth of the duchess's

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<sup>352</sup> Murray (ed.), *Letters and Dispatches*, vol. 3, p. 110: Marlborough to Shrewsbury, 18/29 August 1706.

<sup>353</sup> *London Gazette*, no. 4253, 12-15 August 1706; on the importance of the Woodstock race meeting, see Victoria County History, *Oxfordshire*, vol. 12, pp. 326-33.

<sup>354</sup> On High Lodge, see Green, *Blenheim Palace*, pp. 32-36.

<sup>355</sup> Marlborough to the duchess 9/20 September 1706 ('I have had the pleasure of yours ... of the 3<sup>rd</sup> from London'). The duchess's letter to Godolphin is lost; however, Godolphin makes reference to its date and contents in his reply to the duchess, dated 10 September 1706. See Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 676.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*

discontent.<sup>358</sup> Godolphin arrived on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> accompanied by William ('Willigo') and Henrietta ('Lady Harriet'), the children of the marriage of his son, Lord Royalton, to the duchess's daughter, Lady Henrietta Churchill. They stayed *en famille* with the duchess for several days and during this time Godolphin had the opportunity both to see Blenheim for himself and to hear the duchess's complaints.<sup>359</sup> At this point, he evidently realised that he could no longer put off broaching the duchess's views with the duke. He sat down to write on 25 September, and began by emphasising the positive. The garden, he observed, was 'already very fine and in perfect shape, the turf all laid, and the first coat of the gravell, the greens high and thriving, and the hedges pretty well grown'.<sup>360</sup> The building, too, was 'so advanced, as that one may see perfectly how it will bee when it is done', with the private apartments nearest to completion. But even Godolphin's tactful (and perhaps tactical) optimism could not conceal the duchess's discontent with the house. 'My Lady Marlborough,' he wrote,

is extremely prying into it and has really not only found a great many errors, but very well mended such of them, as could not stay for your own decision. I am apt to think she has made Mr. Vanbrugge a little [annoyed] but you will find both ease and convenience from it.<sup>361</sup>

By this time, however, Marlborough would have had little need of Godolphin's bland commentary to gain some intimation of the duchess's view of Blenheim. Even before Godolphin took up his pen, the duke had received no less than five letters in succession on the subject from his indignant wife.<sup>362</sup>

Although these letters are now lost—like almost all the duchess's intimate correspondence from this period—some sense of their contents can be gained from Marlborough's reply, which is sufficiently important to bear quotation at some length. After thanking the duchess for her letters, the duke wrote that:

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<sup>358</sup> On 12/23 September, Marlborough had written to express his concern that Godolphin might not manage to visit while the duchess was in residence. See Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 677.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 676, 694: Godolphin to the duchess of Marlborough, 10 September 1706; and Godolphin to Marlborough, 25 September 1706.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 694: Godolphin to Marlborough, 25 September 1706.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, Godolphin to Marlborough, 25 September 1706.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 695: Marlborough to the duchess of Marlborough, 26 September /7 October 1706.

I could wish with all my heart everything were more to your mind, for I find when you write most of them you had very much of the spleen, and in one I had my share, for I see I lye under the same misfortun I have ever done, of not behaving myself as I aught to 83 [the Queen]. I hope Mr. Ha[w]cksmore will be able to mend those faults you find in the house, but the great fault I find is that I shal never live to see it finished, for I had flattered myself that if the war should happly have ended this next yeare, that I might the next after have lived in itt, for I am resolved on being neither minister nor cortier, not doubting the Queen will allow of itt; but these are idle dreames, for whielst the war lastes I must serve and will do itt with all my heart; and if at least I am rewarded with your love and estime, I shall end my days happly, and without it nothing can make me easy. I am taking measures to leave the army about three weeks hence, so that I shall have the happyness of being above one month sooner with you than I have been for these last three yeares.<sup>363</sup>

Marlborough's words leave us in no doubt of the depth of the duchess's discontent. Not only are we told of her anger—her 'spleen'—but also of her willingness to hold the duke himself to account for at least some of the problems with Blenheim. The specific accusation that Marlborough was not conducting himself towards the queen in an appropriate way should undoubtedly be related to the duchess's earlier complaint that, by encouraging her to underwrite the cost of so excessively grandiose a house, he was imposing an unacceptable strain on the royal purse at a time when all its resources were needed to finance the war effort.<sup>364</sup> Vanbrugh, too, had clearly not escaped her ire, for it is noteworthy that Marlborough pointedly avoids mentioning him in his reply. Instead it is Hawksmoor upon whom he pins his hopes for rectifying the house's faults, suggesting that the duchess had already come to regard him as a more sober and dependable source of advice than the project's nominal architect.<sup>365</sup> But perhaps the most striking evidence of the severity of the duchess's reaction comes in the final sentence, where Marlborough implies that it was the cause of his decision to return early from his military duties. Given the

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, Marlborough to the duchess, 26 September / 7 October 7 1706.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 461, 495: Marlborough to Lord Treasurer Godolphin, 12/23 July 1705; and Godolphin to the duchess of Marlborough, 13 September 1705.

<sup>365</sup> It is clear that Hawksmoor was present in Woodstock in late September or early October. See British Library Add MS 19607 f. 26: Hawksmoor to Joynes, 2 October 1706.

weight of his responsibilities at this time as captain-general of the queen's forces and commander-in-chief of the allied armies, this is a remarkable testimony to the extent of the duchess's disgruntlement and perhaps also his concern at the condition of his future home.

What, then, was the nature of these 'faults' that the duchess had found and that it was hoped Hawksmoor would be able to mend? These are somewhat difficult to piece together, as there is an almost complete lack of direct sources for the duchess's concerns. Nevertheless, there is a single piece of contemporaneous evidence that does enable us to make some initial inferences. In mid-October 1706, while the duchess was still in residence at Woodstock, she ordered Henry Joynes to calculate, in painstaking detail, the size of the area that would be occupied by the main block of the house.<sup>366</sup> This strongly suggests that one of the most important issues was the sheer scale of the enterprise—what the duchess would later refer to as 'the madnesse of the whole Design'.<sup>367</sup> This had long been a source of anxiety to her, but we can readily imagine that her first sustained encounter with the real building—actual walls as opposed to mere drawings or the bare foundations she had earlier seen—must have made more vividly apparent than ever just how stupendously enormous the proposed house was to be. In this context, Joynes's total figure of 46,958 square feet for the *piano nobile* alone is hardly likely to have reassured her.

No less significantly, we find that Joynes, presumably at the duchess's explicit request, has carefully disaggregated the total figure to reveal the varying proportions of the building's area that were to be occupied by rooms, passageways, and walls.<sup>368</sup> This should probably be seen in relation to the very specific design characteristics of Blenheim, which was intended to have stupendously thick walling even by the generous standards of the early eighteenth century, with most of the main fronts set out at depths of four or five feet. Similarly, the vast lengths of corridor that stretched around the building were also an unusual and potentially controversial feature of the house, and it seems reasonable to assume that the duchess may have regarded these features as extravagant and unjustified. If so, she would presumably have felt amply

<sup>366</sup> British Library Add MS 19602, f. 16: 'A Calculation of ye Sup. of ye House for hir Grace ye Dutchess of Marlborough. October. 13<sup>th</sup>. 1706'.

<sup>367</sup> In a letter to the Earl of Macclesfield, quoted in Green, *Blenheim Palace*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>368</sup> British Library Add MS 19602, f. 17: 'A Calculation made how many superfiell feet cont[ained] in ye walls rooms & passages of Blenheim Castle. October. 15<sup>th</sup>. 1706'.

justified when Joynes's figures showed that the cumulative area of the rooms was only just over half the area of the house; that the walling alone accounted for a further third; and the remaining area, consisting principally of passageways, covered more than five thousand square feet alone.<sup>369</sup> We can reasonably conclude, therefore, that both Blenheim's basic spatial layout and its exceptionally heavy construction were also troubling the duchess. Clearly, she expected her concerns to be addressed—as far as they could be—after Marlborough's return from campaign in the winter of 1706-1707.

### **Fixing Blenheim's Faults: January to May 1707**

As good as his word, Marlborough arrived back in England that year some weeks earlier than usual. After landing at Margate on Saturday 16 November, he first made his way to London, where he stayed for several days to receive crowds of visitors, and to stand godfather to his grandson Lord Montague, son of the marquis of Mounthermer and Lady Mary Churchill, on 25 November.<sup>370</sup> It was nevertheless a high priority to address the situation that the duchess had left in her wake at Blenheim. As soon as the formalities in London were over he set out for the building site himself, departing from London at some point after 26 November and returning by 6 December.<sup>371</sup>

As is so often the case in the history of the Blenheim, we have no direct evidence of what transpired during Marlborough's visit. What is clear, nevertheless, is that it was directly followed by a whole series of retrospective modifications to the building fabric. The first changes are recorded in the building accounts for February, 1707, when we find an invoice for improvements to the duchess's private apartments. The walls of her backstairs were originally intended to be finished with finely cut ashlar from the ground floor upwards but with plastered rubble in the basement, where they would have been visible principally to servants. The accounts record that the rubblework in the basement storey was painstakingly cut back and cased in ashlar,

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, Joynes's figures are 26,408, 15,360, and 5,130 square feet respectively.

<sup>370</sup> Van 'T Hoff (ed.), *Correspondence 1701-1711*, letter 470, p. 281: Cardonnel to Heinsius, 19/30 November 1706. See also *Post Boy*, no. 1800, 23-26 November 1706.

<sup>371</sup> Van 'T Hoff (ed.), *Correspondence 1701-1711*, letter 473, p. 282: Marlborough to Heinsius, 6/17 December 1706 – 'Since my last I have been at Woodstock, which is the reason of my not having write [*sic*]'. Note that Marlborough's previous letter to Heinsius is dated 26 November/7 December 1706 (see *ibid.*, letter 471, p. 281).

ensuring that a continuous shell of smooth stonework extended through the full height of the staircase.<sup>372</sup> Since this alteration involved the duchess's own rooms, we can assume that it was carried out at her request.

In the same month, more extensive alterations also began on the basement windows in the south front. Here, by 'My Lord Duke's order', twelve of the small oculi of the original design were replaced with new, more generously dimensioned, rectangular windows (figs 67 & 68).<sup>373</sup> The process took place in a number of stages, beginning with the complete removal of the window under the plinth of the engaged columns on the west side of the south portico.<sup>374</sup> Further alterations were undertaken to the inside face of the second window away from the south east pavilion, where the splay of the jambs was greatly enlarged to allow more light able to enter the basement rooms.<sup>375</sup> A new design for the basement windows—probably the work of Hawksmoor—was then developed and turned into a model 'at full Bigness'. The model was set up in late January ready for the duke to inspect at his next visit, which was expected to take place imminently.<sup>376</sup> By the middle of March all involved clearly understood that the duke had given his command that these alterations should take place as proposed.<sup>377</sup>

The accounts for April are even more intriguing, as they contain a remarkable invoice from Strong for dismantling extensive sections of the partially constructed south front.<sup>378</sup> The lengths of the façade affected include the two intermediate stretches that lay on either side the central block of the façade between the two great pavilions, each sixty foot long and now, in parts, nearly thirty feet high. In addition, at least one 37½ foot long section of basement wall, that on the east side of the south portico, was taken down, meaning that no less than 157½ feet of the 325 foot long façade had been completely demolished, all within eighteen months of having been

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<sup>372</sup> British Library Add MS 19594 f. 9r-9v.

<sup>373</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 85.

<sup>374</sup> British Library Add MS 19594 f. 9r.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.* f. 9v.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.* See also British Library Add MS 19607 f. 51: Hawksmoor to Joynes, 23 January 1706, in which Hawksmoor demands to know how well the new window looked. For the duke's visit, Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, p. 208: Vanbrugh to Boulter, 11 January 1707. Here, Vanbrugh implies that Marlborough had been expected earlier, but that he would be delayed for some weeks.

<sup>377</sup> British Library Add MS 19607 f. 43: Hawksmoor to Joynes, 15 March 1707.

<sup>378</sup> British Library Add MS 19594 f. 29r.

built.<sup>379</sup> The work was done with great care in order to ensure that ashlar facings of the walls were not damaged as they were taken down; only after they had been carefully cut out and lowered with tackle was the rubble core of the walls demolished with pickaxes and crowbars.<sup>380</sup> The stones that could be salvaged were then carefully reworked and reset around the twelve new, rusticated basement windows and the walls then rebuilt to the level they had reached before they were dismantled.<sup>381</sup>

The remodelling of the basement windows was followed by a series of further alterations, recorded in the accounts for May 1707. These include several more modifications to windows. A corner of the eastern internal courtyard was rebuilt to ‘to make a Window for Light to the East Oval Back Stairs’.<sup>382</sup> At around the same time, the nearly completed walls of the great bow window on the east front were demolished in order to ‘make 3 lights of the said Bow Window lighter’, again at basement level.<sup>383</sup> This last alteration is explicitly recorded as having been carried out ‘by my Lady Dutchess’s Order’, and it therefore seems reasonable to infer that the earlier alterations to the basement windows, although ordered by the duke, were actually carried out in conformity with the her desires. This was certainly the conclusion reached by Downes, who speaks of the duchess’s ‘passion for light-filled rooms’.<sup>384</sup> The duchess also appears to have been behind the last of the various alterations that took place at this time. This involved yet more demolition and reconstruction, this time involving the thirty-two foot length of the west wall of the east internal courtyard. The purpose of this work was to reduce the wall’s thickness from four to two and a half feet, in the process increasing the width of the dining room by eighteen inches.<sup>385</sup> This must surely be related to the duchess’s apparent discontent with the house’s extraordinary mass of wall relative to useable room space.

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<sup>379</sup> Although not explicitly described in the accounts, it is very likely that the corresponding 37½-foot section on the west side of the south portico was also demolished at this time. If so, that would mean that all but the end pavilions and the base of the central portico were reconstructed in 1707 – a total of 195 feet of the façade in varying states of completion.

<sup>380</sup> British Library Add MS 19594 f. 29r.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 30, 41.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>383</sup> British Library Add MS 19594 ff. 38v, 41r: accounts for May 1707.

<sup>384</sup> Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 64 and *idem.*, *Sir John Vanbrugh*, pp. 308-309; Gladys Scott Thomson, *Letters to a Grandmother* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943), p. 54.

<sup>385</sup> British Library Add MS 19594 ff. 38v, 41r: accounts for May 1707.

It seems reasonable, then, to infer that all of the various alterations of early 1707 were attempts to remedy the faults that the duchess had identified in the fabric, and this appears to be confirmed by the events that followed them. In June 1707 the duchess returned to Woodstock to review the work that had been carried out since the duke was last there. During her visit, Marlborough wrote her a series of letters, full of evocative intimations of the contented life they would lead at Blenheim when the war was over.<sup>386</sup> The duchess evidently failed to get the hint, because he finally gave in and stated his true meaning: ‘...as I find you intend to return from Woodstock in a weeke, I shall be impatient to hear you approve of what has been done’.<sup>387</sup> A similarly illuminating sidelight comes from Vanbrugh’s correspondence. Writing to the Duke of Manchester shortly after the duchess’s departure he summed up the changed situation at Blenheim following the round of modifications:

My Lady Dutchess was there lately, And return’d to Windsor, so entirely pleas’d, that She tould me, she found She shou’d live to Ask my pardon, for ever having Quarell’d with me, And I find she declares the same to My Lord Treasurer and every body. So I hope I shall come Off in her good graces at last.<sup>388</sup>

If we pause at this point to review these events, it seems that they can be summarised as follows. After proceeding rapidly in 1705-1706 according to the original plans, the works at Blenheim were hit by something of a crisis when the duchess visited in September to October 1706. Concerned at the gargantuan size of the building, its impractical and uneconomical layout, and the insufficient supply of light to the basement, the duchess did not hesitate to convey her displeasure both to Vanbrugh and to the duke. Their reaction was to take every possible measure to address the faults that she had identified. This led to a complex series of remedial works to the fabric, which focused primarily on improving the level of finish in her private apartment; increasing the size and number of windows in the service areas of the house; and thinning the massive walls of the state rooms where this was practicable and desirable. Both Marlborough and Vanbrugh were kept waiting

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<sup>386</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 829: Marlborough to the duchess, 23 June / 4 July 1707.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 837: Marlborough to the duchess, 30 June / 11 July 1707.

<sup>388</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 14: Vanbrugh to the Earl of Manchester, 18 July 1707.

anxiously until the duchess had finished reviewing the modifications in June to early July of 1707; they were then relieved to find that her concerns had, at least for the moment, abated.

This re-reading of the evidence has considerable implications for our understanding of the transformation of Blenheim from Doric château to Corinthian palace. The first major steps in this transformation it should be recalled, are supposed to have been taken at Vanbrugh's suggestion in the winter of 1706-1707. Yet it would be difficult to imagine a less propitious moment for Vanbrugh to propose substantive changes to the design. With the duchess in exasperated mood and his relationship with her under severe strain, it hardly seems likely that he would have risked further inflaming her wrath by proposing to enlarge a building that she already regarded as grotesquely overambitious. It seems, therefore, that we must revisit the chronology of the conventional interpretation and reconsider its grounds.

When we do this, we find that the only direct evidence cited by Green and Downes for the re-design of the south front having taken place at this time is the demolition work that took place there that is recorded in the accounts for April 1707.<sup>389</sup> Both, therefore, implicitly reject the idea that something as simple as the remodelling of the basement windows could, on its own, have required such extraordinary lengths of the façade to be dismantled and reconstructed *de novo*. Instead they hold that the only reasonable explanation is that the demolitions must have been prompted by the decision to raise the house and change the major order from Doric to Corinthian. This contention must now be re-examined critically.

The first point to make is that the building accounts—which are generally fairly explicit about such matters—make no mention whatsoever of either the demolition work or the subsequent rebuilding having any relationship to the redesign of the south front. They are instead very clear that it was ‘worke p[er]formed by [Edward Strong] in the alterac[i]on of 12 [basement] windows in the Garden front on each side of the Middle Facade’.<sup>390</sup> The same explanation was then later given in specific relation to the reinstatement of the higher sections of the wall, which had been ‘taken

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<sup>389</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 84; Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 64 and *idem*, *Sir John Vanbrugh*, p. 309.

<sup>390</sup> British Library Add MS 19594, f. 30.

down to make the Rustick windows in the Basement by my Lord Duke's Order'.<sup>391</sup> Such unambiguous statements must surely be taken seriously.

The idea that the demolition and reconstruction of the walls was occasioned by the insertion of the basement windows, rather than the decision to raise the height of the central block and change the order, is further reinforced by an entry in the accounts that Green himself transcribed in his book on Blenheim. In September 1707, the joiner, John Smallwell Jr., submitted an invoice for a model of the central part of the house with 'Dorick Columms on the outside'.<sup>392</sup> It is difficult to understand why a model that still showed the exterior of the house as Doric should appear in the accounts at so late a date if the original design had become obsolete some eight or nine months earlier. Still more indications to this effect are to be found in an invoice submitted by Strong in July 1708, previously noted by Whistler although without any indication that he grasped its implications, for altering the column bases of the south portico, 'the Order of the Capitals being made Corinthian which was intended Dorick'.<sup>393</sup> This self-evidently begs the question of why these alterations were deferred for so long when almost the entire south front had already been extensively rebuilt more than a year earlier, putatively for the specific purpose of adapting it to the new designs. Admittedly, neither these changes nor Smallwood's Doric model constitute absolutely decisive proof in themselves, as there were occasionally considerable delays between the execution of work and the submission of invoices and similar delays between design decisions being taken and implemented. Nevertheless, when taken together with the circumstantial evidence it does seem to suggest that the decision to raise the house took place later than has been previously thought. This naturally begs the question of when it did, in fact, take place. To answer this question, we need to return to the building site and the drawing office to trace the work designed and carried out at Blenheim once the remedial works requested by the duchess had been completed.

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<sup>391</sup> British Library Add MS 19594, f. 41v.

<sup>392</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 85.

<sup>393</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 93 fn. 1.

### The Lanterns, the Great Hall and Saloon, and the Change of Order

Strong's invoice of July 1708 for altering the column bases of the south front provides an important *terminus ante* for the decision to heighten and change the order, but cannot tell us when it did in fact take place.<sup>394</sup> As this is the earliest unambiguous documentary reference to the substitution of Corinthian columns for Doric, we are consequently forced to rely on inference to refine the dating further. In general terms, the documentary evidence takes back into the previous year. For it is a striking fact that from the middle of 1707 onwards we find the most concentrated discussions of architectural drawings in the correspondence between the architects, patrons and clerks-of-works of any period after Blenheim's construction began. When Vanbrugh wrote to Marlborough on 15 July to describe the works planned for that year's building season, he mentioned that he hoped 'in a Weeks time to have Some Drawings ready to send your Grace...'; Marlborough immediately replied that he would be 'grateful for a sight of the drawings you mention'.<sup>395</sup> At around the same time, we find the Blenheim clerk-of-works and draughtsman, Henry Joynes, writing to Vanbrugh about these drawings, enclosing the first—a perspective view—in his letter and apologising for delays in finishing the others.<sup>396</sup> Writing again on the 22 July, he announced their imminent dispatch by the Oxford coach.<sup>397</sup> Vanbrugh acknowledged their receipt on 25 July, and at the same time requested yet another drawing of the 'south front as it is now determin'd, which Mr. Strong can inform him in'.<sup>398</sup> A suggestive exchange—but even more so because Vanbrugh's last comment makes it clear that the south front of the house had been very recently revised. Why else, after all, would Joynes, who as one of the two comptrollers at Blenheim would normally be among the first to learn of any changes, need to be instructed by the mason, Edward Strong? In September, moreover, the comptrollers sent Marlborough a new general plan of the house and offices, again suggesting that the design had been significantly revised and that the duke expected to be kept apprised of the changes.<sup>399</sup> So we can be reasonably certain not only that there was a

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<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232: Vanbrugh to Marlborough, 15 July 1707; Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, pp. 500-501: Marlborough to Vanbrugh, 24 July / 4 August 1707.

<sup>396</sup> British Library Add MS 19605 f. 22: Joynes to Vanbrugh, 18 July 1707.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 27: Joynes to Vanbrugh, undated but 22 July 1707.

<sup>398</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 212: Vanbrugh to Boulter, 25 July 1707.

<sup>399</sup> British Library Add MS 19606 f. 12: Boulter and Joynes to Marlborough, 1 September 1707.

concentrated run of presentation drawings being produced for Marlborough from mid-1707, but also that those drawings were directly related to Blenheim's re-design.

This broad dating can be refined and enriched by looking at the surviving evidence for the construction of the house. This is because in both the original design for Blenheim and in the final structure we find that, the entablatures of the central pile of the house and of the corner pavilions are placed at precisely the same height, implying that the design pavilions and the central part of the house must have coevolved. In addition, in the structure as finally built, the level of the cornice above the hall corresponds exactly to that of the lanterns over the pavilions, suggesting that the designs for the upper parts of the hall and the lanterns are likely to have been similarly interdependent. A firm date for the design or realisation of any one of these components of the building is therefore able to offer valuable guidance to dating the rest.

There is good evidence that these very areas of the house—the eastern pavilions and the central part of the house containing the hall and saloon—were the primary focus of activity in the 1707 building season. Vanbrugh would have known from his discussions with the duke the previous winter that there were several major priorities for the works that year. The first was the completion of the east end of the house, where the duke and duchess's private apartments were to be situated, including the two pavilions that terminated the northern and southern ends of that part of the house. The next, and the one that Marlborough seemed particularly to cherish, was that the central pile of the house and in particular the two great rooms at its heart, the entrance hall and the saloon, should be brought to their full height and covered in before the end of the year.<sup>400</sup> He was also keen to see the kitchen and offices advance more quickly, and requested that the northern half of the stable block should be pursued as a matter of priority over the coming building season. The common denominator of all these requests, it would seem, is that the duke wanted to have everything in place—the private apartments, the great rooms of state, the kitchen and offices, and at least one half of the stables—to allow him to take up residence in one or at most two years. His sense of urgency was no doubt driven by his belief that in the wake of a brilliantly successful campaign in 1706, France would soon be forced

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<sup>400</sup> British Library Add MS 19606 f. 30: the duchess to Boulter, Saturday 26 July [1707]; British Library Add MS 19606 f. 1: Boulter to the duchess.

to sue for a humiliating peace that would release him from his military duties and enable him to retire and live out the rest of his days at Blenheim.<sup>401</sup>

In deference to the duke's wishes, as soon as funds began to flow Vanbrugh put Banks back to work on the colonnade and kitchen; Townsend resumed the final stages of work on the offices; Peisley began to work far more intensively on the stables; and Strong moved on to the section of the house between the east range and the central pile.<sup>402</sup> However, when Vanbrugh wrote to Marlborough on 15 July outlining the works that he thought could reasonably be completed by the end of the building season, he was already doubtful that the pavilions would be among them. He observed that 'all the difficulty will be in quite finishing the Towers', before adding hopefully that 'I am very earnest to get 'em done and I believe I shall'.<sup>403</sup> As for the hall and saloon, they were left wholly without mention.

Marlborough was not impressed, writing to the duchess that

by what Vanbrugh says in his letter I am afraid my life will be to[o] short for the seeing the house finished. I would advise you to let him know that you can't with any quiet or satisfaction lye in the house til the two great rooms are finished. I mean the hall and sallon. Thay did make me hope the hall and sallon would be covered this yeare, but by his letter I see it is quit[e] otherways.<sup>404</sup>

The duchess evidently took the duke's concerns to heart, and wrote immediately to Boulter to order him to stop all work except that conducive to the completion of the 'two great rooms':

I received the last post a letter from my lord Marlborough in which he tells me that I should order that work in the building to goe on that I think most proper & noe other & in the same leter he tells me that m<sup>r</sup> vanbrugh had

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<sup>401</sup> Apart from the perceptible urgency to see Woodstock finished as quickly as possible noticeable in his letters of this time, see also Marlborough's letter to the duchess of 18/29 August 1707, in which the disastrous failure of the allied descent on Toulon led Marlborough to change his view somewhat, lamenting that there would be time enough to complete the hall and saloon the following year as a result of the setback: Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 886.

<sup>402</sup> British Library Add MS 19608 f. 60: 'The Progress of Blenheim Castle to May 1707'.

<sup>403</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 195.

<sup>404</sup> Marlborough to the duchess, July 17/28 1707 (Snyder, 1975: 853 (no. 856, *ibid.*)).

made him hope, once, that the Hall & Sallon would bee cover'd this year, hee expresses a good deal of concern att the thought that it will not, saying his life will not bee long enough to injoy much of the huos [*sic*] if it is not carry'd up as fast as can bee, & since it is my lord Marlborough's desire, as well as my owne to have that don in the first place, I desire you will give derections that all the mony & hands may be Employ'd that way & that it may be cover'd this year if it bee possible, at least let it bee indeavour'd, & when all the mony is Employ'd the right way, if it falls short of my wishes, I shall be contented.<sup>405</sup>

The duchess had spoken—albeit with a hint of compromise—and in a way that was to become characteristic of her approach to managing Blenheim: direct all ‘mony & hands’ to those parts of the work that the duke most wanted to see completed. In reply, Boulter told the duchess that he would use his best endeavours to advance the work on the body of the house, but warned that ‘there will be but little done to the Hall and Greate Salloone this yeare notwithstanding the Incourradgm<sup>t</sup>: M<sup>r</sup>: Vanbrugh gave my Lord Duke’.<sup>406</sup>

Shortly afterwards, in around the middle of August, we find Vanbrugh writing to Joynes to tell him that he had been the recipient of a letter from the duke, who was, ‘mighty desirous to have the Building that is up made habitable.’<sup>407</sup> However, the architect had ‘consulted M<sup>r</sup> Strong before I left London, About doing something towards the Great Hall & Salon this Season; but found it was impossible’. Even worse, Strong had told him that ‘it can’t be hoped [to] have the Great Pavilions compleated this Year’. With a touch of desperation, Vanbrugh instructed Joynes to ‘let him [Strong] be very much pressed to finish the Lantern on that towards the Colonnade and to get the Cornish at least up on the other [that] the Lead may be lay’d and so all kept dry wi[thin]’.<sup>408</sup> In the end Strong could only be persuaded to complete the work as a result of the direct intervention of the duke’s son-in-law, Lord Royalton, and the surveyor general of the works, Samuel Travers. During a

<sup>405</sup> British Library Add MS 19606 f. 30: duchess to Boulter, 26 July [1707].

<sup>406</sup> British Library Add MS 19606 f. 11: Boulter to the duchess, 28 July 1707.

<sup>407</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 212: Vanbrugh to Boulter, 25 July 1707.

<sup>408</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, pp. 223-24; undated in Webb’s transcription as a result of damage to the original manuscript, BL Add MS 19605 f. 195r; close inspection of the page shows, however, that it was written in August. It must date from around the middle of the month as the letter begins ‘I had y<sup>r</sup> Letter of y<sup>e</sup> 3<sup>d</sup>, and by the last Post we sent you full Instructions for M<sup>r</sup> Townsend’.

visit to the site, they interviewed Strong who ‘pretended ’twas almost impossible to be done this year’; however, they

suspected ’twas want of Encouragement made him so backward, & my Lord asking what sum would enable him to go through with it, he demanded 1000£, which his Lordship promised to use his Interest with My Ld Treasurer to advance him in part of his Arrears. And I engaged as soon as it could be received, which I hoped might be in ten days to pay him 500£ & the rest as soon as he was near finishing it.<sup>409</sup>

It therefore seems clear that there was intense pressure upon the architects and the builders to complete the east end of the house, including the pavilions and lanterns, and make as much additional progress as they could on the central part of the house, before the winter set in. This, then, would again appear to make the summer of 1707, as the discussion of plans implied, the most likely period for the raising of the house and the change of order. Indeed, it would seem that by the time Vanbrugh wrote his letter to Joynes in August, the redesign of the south front must have reached a fairly advanced stage, with height of the building have been resolved and pavilions having been given the deep cornices and lanterns that the architect refers to in his letter. This dating gains further support from entries in the building accounts for September 1707, when, as Green and Whistler noted, Edward Strong submitted bills for a series of enormous 1:12 scale masonry models. One was of the whole of the north east pavilion, from the basement to the top of the entablature.<sup>410</sup> This shows that the that the design to the top of the cornice had already been finalised by the time the models were constructed, presumably in August 1707, and therefore that the decision to raise the house must have been made at some point before that. However, at around the same time Strong was also producing a series models of alternative designs for the lanterns made to the same scale, presumably so that they could stand on top of the model pavilion and thus enable the architects and masons to analyse the aesthetic and structural implications of different approaches its completion.<sup>411</sup> This narrows the likely window of time for the re-design of the house to between June and August 1707, with substantial design work still apparently going on towards the end of this

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<sup>409</sup> British Library Add MS 61353 f. 25v-26r: Travers to Marlborough, 19 August 1707.

<sup>410</sup> Whistler, *Imagination*, p. 99, quoting from British Library Add MS 19594 f. 74.

<sup>411</sup> British Library Add MS 19594, f. 74.

period. The redesign must have been in its essentials complete, however, by early December when Strong was completing the last sections of the lantern in preparation for the duke to make his winter visit to the building site.<sup>412</sup> After this date, there were only a few refinements to the parapet and ornaments of the lanterns, undertaken while the second lantern over the east end of the house was being constructed the following year.

The immediate prompt for some of these refinements may have been fear of structural problems, as the rapid completion of the first lantern had been immediately followed by ominous signs of structural failure in the pavilion below: ‘great weights which was hastily laid upon it ... Indanger’d the splitting of the wall’.<sup>413</sup> Strong hurriedly let a series of chains and bars into the upper part of the north west pavilion to take the strain, and with the immediate danger of collapse passed, work was able to commence on the south east pavilion and on the central pile of the main house at the beginning of the next building season.

With the memory of potential collapse no doubt vividly in mind, the construction of the next pavilion proceeded cautiously and with yet more use of very large scale models. We can presume that this was at least partially to address structural issues as well as to refine the aesthetics of the building. Various detailed aspects of the design of the were changed, seemingly to reduce the stresses they imposed on the substructure. The most important was the introduction of double arches through the diagonal walls—the principal source of the lateral thrusts—to lighten them. In addition, it seems from alterations made to the north east tower in late 1708 that the height of the parapet was also substantially reduced and in the process a band of moulding was removed. The current parapet of the north east lantern is the result of retaining only two of the original five courses of stone, laying the original drip moulded course straight over a single, retained course that happened to have the

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<sup>412</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, pp. 213-14: Vanbrugh to Boulter, 11 November 1707; *ibid.*, p. 214: Vanbrugh to Boulter, 18 November 1707; *ibid.* Vanbrugh to Boulter, 18 December 1707.

<sup>413</sup> British Library Add MS 19595 f. 98.

same measurements as the lowest course in the new south east pavilion, as can be seen in the diagram appended to the original building accounts (fig. 69).<sup>414</sup>

Even though the final design of the lanterns took some considerable time to resolve, it need not be assumed that they were in any sense an afterthought that occurred subsequent to the decision to raise the house. There is, in fact, a case to be made that it was the addition of the lanterns to the pavilions that caused the height of the house, and with it the dimensions of the giant order, to steadily grow. If we assume that the lanterns were given something like their final form, consisting of a central octagon framed by detached piers at each corner, in mid-1707, keeping the pavilions at their planned height would have entailed significant structural challenges. Because neither the diagonal walls nor the corner piers of the lantern were directly coincident with the bearing walls beneath, there would have to be some form of intervening structure to safely transmit the vertical and lateral thrusts they would otherwise impose upon the external walls of the pavilion. For this reason, trumpet arch, a type of vault consisting of a series of segmental arches that are set diagonally into and across a corner, were built into the upper parts of the pavilions.<sup>415</sup> These could then be set with their widest span under the diagonal elements that required support. In order to fulfil their function of transmitting the lateral thrusts of the diagonal piers of the lantern into the walls of the pavilion, these vaults would need to have a reasonable amount of depth. Moreover, they would have to be set fairly high within the shell of the pavilion if they were not to interfere unduly with the ceilings of the first floor rooms immediately below. This would naturally require a considerable increase in the height of the pavilion, with the increase in height occurring contemporaneously with the increasing elaboration of the lantern.

It should be noted that the height of the main house was already starting to creep upwards even before the formal decision to change the order from Doric to Corinthian. Joynes habitually referred to the height of the external walls above the principal floor as thirty-five feet—already one foot higher than the thirty-four Doric order envisaged in 1705. But in fact, measured drawings of the executed structure

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<sup>414</sup> Bodleian MS Top. Oxon. c 230 f. 43. These early copies of the building accounts for December 1708 include diagrams of the changes, partially omitted from the fair copies in the British Library.

<sup>415</sup> See the building accounts for January 1708, describing the insertion of the arches into the upper part of the south east pavilion, British Library Add MS 19595 f. 4v.

show that the height to the springing of the arches of the first floor windows in the pavilions had already somewhat exceeded thirty-six feet by the time they were constructed, probably in the early part of 1707.<sup>416</sup> This means that the four foot wide columns of the major order, which were to occupy the same height on the central pile, would have been some nine diameters high, a proportion more usually associated with the Ionic or Corinthian orders than the Doric.<sup>417</sup> Nevertheless, we can infer that the use of Doric remained the assumption at this point. This is because the impost mouldings of the first floor windows in the pavilion, which corresponded exactly to the level of the capitals of the major order, were cut to match in the profile of a Doric capital, complete with the astragal under the necking. This suggests that there was already some thought of a rather grander termination to the pavilions than that shown in the early drawings for the south front before early 1707 (figs. 1 & 56).

The much greater increase in height that took place in 1707, however, required more drastic modification to the design of the pavilions. It appears to have been incorporated by replacing the shallow cornice of the original Doric design with a deep and heavily enriched Vignola-style entablature. There are a number of possible reasons for this particular choice of entablature. The elaborate console brackets help relieve what would otherwise have been a perhaps over-insistent verticality of form by means of a strong horizontally-oriented accent; they also help give an impression of substance and strength immediately below the massive lanterns, ensuring that the upper part of the pavilion appears robust enough to bear the immense structure above. In addition, the enrichment of the entablature ensures that surface detail of the pavilion does not appear to be a relentless pattern of fine horizontal lines, as it inevitably would were a normal Ionic or Corinthian entablature placed immediately above the channelled masonry below. The incorporation of this cornice and the consequent sudden increase in the height of the house would then have been the direct prompt for rethinking the central part of the house.

If the advent of increasingly heavy lanterns was indeed driving the increased height of the house, we would expect to find attempts to adapt the central pile, and in

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<sup>416</sup> Mervyn E. Macartney (ed.), *The Practical Exemplar of Architecture, being Measured Drawings & Photographs of Examples of Architectural Details* (London, 1928), pl. 60; British Library Add MS 19608 f. 60: 'The Progress of Blenheim Castle for y<sup>e</sup> year 1707 to May 1707'.

<sup>417</sup> Nevertheless, we can infer that Doric was still intended because the moulding of imposts of the pavilions windows matched that of a Doric capital.

particular the hall, to the changes. It is therefore probably no coincidence that a series of fine drawings of the interior of the central sections of the house, all apparently by Hawksmoor, can be associated with this phase of the design process. These drawings, as Whistler and Downes have noted, show the design of the central part of the house in a transitional state.<sup>418</sup> Indeed, they show the hall increasing in height in tandem with the external walls in ways that can—just—be correlated with firmly dateable evidence.

The upward pressure is already evident in a working drawing for the hall by Hawksmoor (fig. 70). The drawing is accurately scaled at ten feet to the inch, and the height of the external order can be inferred from the sills of the clerestory windows, as they appear to be at the same level relative to the external entablature in every one of the working drawings for the hall. Measurement of this dimension gives a total height of forty-six feet, which is consistent with a thirty-eight foot major order crowned by a (relatively narrow) eight feet deep, two-diameter entablature—still two feet less than the forty-eight feet required by the Corinthian columns with their entablature. Assuming steady growth in the height of the house, this scheme must date from relatively early in the period of redesign. The scheme represented here seems to be based on the use of a large arch in front of the innermost bay of the hall to bear the clerestory's southern wall, which I argued in Chapter 2 was introduced relatively early in the design process as a means of enabling the hall clerestory to rise symmetrically between the four pavilion towers in the manner envisaged by Vanbrugh in his letter to Marlborough of 22 August 1705. The drawing seems to show Hawksmoor placing this feature in the somewhat taller space now envisaged at the centre of the building. He has considered two treatments for the end wall and arch, both based on the same essential underlying conceptual approach and both involving two sizes of Composite columns. We cannot be sure of the treatment of the lateral walls as they are not clearly shown in the drawing, but if it followed the principles set out in the Soane floor plans (figs. 14 & 50), it would probably have consisted of a series of either giant columns or giant pilasters, depending on whether the treatment outlined on the left or right was followed. We might suppose, then, that before Hawksmoor started reworking its design, the internal effect of the arched ground floor openings and the square-headed openings at first floor level would have

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<sup>418</sup> Discussed in Downes, *Hawksmoor*, p. 77.

resembled the effect of the hall at Duncombe Park (figs 71-73, the first two showing the hall in its extant restored state and the last showing the state immediately after the fire of 1879). The resemblance would have been even stronger had Duncombe's hall been executed on a rectangular, rather than square, plan, as shown in *Vitruvius Britannicus*. In this first sectional drawing of the interior of the hall, then, we see Hawksmoor attempting, and judging by the subsequent development of the room, failing to adapt the initial plan for a screen to the taller proportions required as the house began its growth upwards.

Another group of drawings showing interior treatments for the great hall must somewhat postdate this sectional drawing. The most impressive of these drawings are two carefully defined longitudinal sections, one showing the hall alone and the other the hall and saloon. Their dimensions make it clear that when they were drawn the decision to raise the centre of the house had now been finalised, as they are all consistent with a forty foot major order on the exterior that was eventually executed. The external design has as yet to be fully resolved, however, as the order is not yet Corinthian. Instead, it is an unusually etiolated version of Ionic (figs 74 & 75). We can nevertheless infer that the final choice of the order is imminent because—as Whistler pointed out—the astragal of a Corinthian capital has already been marked in on the larger of the two drawings (fig. 75).<sup>419</sup> Further precision in relative dating can be obtained from the presence of the modillion cornice that was to become one of the characteristic features of the pavilions. These drawings for the hall must consequently almost certainly postdate the design of the pavilions and their cornices. Both these drawings therefore provide invaluable visual evidence of the way that the design of the hall and saloon was being resolved in response to upward growth of the house from mid-1707 onwards.

These drawings clearly attempt to maintain the principle evident in the early Soane plans (figs 14 & 50) that the hall should be lined with a giant order, either in the form of columns or pilasters. The most striking thing about them, however, is their apparent abandonment of the idea of bringing the rear wall of the clerestory one bay forward from the back of the hall by placing it over a supporting arch. It also seems that the idea of a portico was abandoned at the same time: we see that the exterior of

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<sup>419</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 101.

the north wall of the hall rises without interruption to the top of the attic storey. In place of the portico, we see the revival of a device initially proposed for the southern frontispiece: free-standing coupled columns placed at either side of the hall, framing engaged columns between the inner and outer bays of the three bay unit (fig. 1). The concurrent loss of the portico and the internal arch is not coincidental, because they are aesthetically interdependent. I have already sought to show that the common purpose of the two devices was to support an attic that would rise centrally and symmetrically between the pavilions when the house was viewed from the east and west. This aim had clearly been abandoned at this point, depriving both the arch and the portico of their aesthetic rationale, as only the two together could permit the symmetrical placement of the clerestory.

Further documentary and graphic evidence, this time related to the design of the saloon, can be used to both enrich our understanding of Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor's proposals for the centre of the house and, indirectly, to refine the dating of the drawings for the hall. Green and Whistler discovered an important letter in the Blenheim archives about the saloon that was written to Marlborough on 20 September 1707.<sup>420</sup> The author was Pierre Silvestre (d. 1718), a Huguenot physician, *virtuoso* and Fellow of the Royal Society, who had evidently been consulted by the duke about the design of the saloon. Significantly, he apologised for a delay in responding to the duke's request by stating that 'j'ai cru qu'il falloit premierement examiner le Dessein de Messieurs Van Brug et Haksmere'. The fact that Sylvestre was kept waiting to see the drawing makes it probable that the two architects were working on the interior scheme for the saloon well into mid-September.

Sylvestre's account of is particular value because, in the course of providing the duke with a lengthy and sententious critique of the proposal, he gives a fairly detailed description of its design. He speaks of a tall room decorated with a giant order of Composite pilasters, the entablature lacking a frieze, and the walls punctuated by two ranks of niches placed one above the other.<sup>421</sup> Sylvestre found

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<sup>420</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 85; Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 102, quoting from British Library Add MS 61353 ff. 27r-35v. Both misidentify the author of the letter as Louis Silvestre, professor at the French *Académie royale de peinture*; but it is clearly signed 'P. Silvestre', who must be identified with the Pierre Silvestre whose petition for naturalisation was debated in the Commons at around this time.

<sup>421</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 102.

the double rank of niches offensive, complaining that they were redolent of gothic churches; he was also repelled by the heterodox treatment of the entablature; but of rather more interest in the present context than his detailed criticisms is the close resemblance of the scheme he outlines to a particularly magnificent coloured wash drawing for the Saloon now preserved in the Bodleian Library (fig. 76). The drawing shows the walls of the saloon lined with giant Composite pilasters surmounted by an elaborate contracted entablature and framing an array of niches, exactly as Silvestre describes it.

This conforms closely to the saloon's finalised design as it can be inferred from later engraved plans of the house. For example, the ground plan in the first volume of *Vitruvius Britannicus* (fig. 52) shows rows of pilasters and niches around the room just as in the drawing.<sup>422</sup> Since the *Vitruvius Britannicus* engravings were carefully revised in consultation with Vanbrugh, we can be confident that, Silvestre's hostile reception notwithstanding, something like this design remained current even after the design of the house was in other respects largely finalised.<sup>423</sup> It was certainly still so regarded in July 1709, when Vanbrugh told the duchess that 'The Pillasters and Dore Moldings are to be of Marble, with the Moldings about the Niches where the figures stand'.<sup>424</sup> The niches were even cut into the wall and—so it is said—still survive behind Louis Laguerre's later paintings. This makes it clear that once the treatment of the saloon had been resolved it remained a constant feature of Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor's architectural thinking. We can therefore conclude that by September 1707 the design of the saloon had reached a state that was, at least in its basic features, regarded as complete.

For a number of reasons, we can assume that the three sectional drawings of the hall discussed above predate the finalisation of the design for the saloon. The most compelling is that the longer and probably later full section through the whole house shows the saloon in a notably undeveloped state, suggesting that it was as yet to reach the state of resolution documented by Silvestre's letter and the related wash drawing. In addition, it seems unlikely that Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh would have

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<sup>422</sup> The official set of Blenheim engravings are preserved in an apparently unique set in the Clarke collection of engravings at Worcester College, Oxford, LIII: 76-83, and are discussed below, chapter 4.

<sup>423</sup> Colen Campbell, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, 3 vols (London, 1715-25), vol. 1, p. 5.

<sup>424</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 103.

contemplated both a hall and a saloon with nearly identical treatments, that is to say arched openings (the arcades in the hall and the niches in the saloon) separated by giant pilasters, as the two succeeding spaces would have appeared monotonously similar. As Whistler commented,

To be invited to move from a hall like that in [fig. 75] to a saloon like that in [fig. 76] seems to show an unwonted lack of inventiveness in the architects, since we should be faced on all sides with round-headed openings or recesses, between Corinthian pilasters. But probably that early design for the hall was very quickly superseded, and the two ideas were never entertained at once.<sup>425</sup>

Whistler's contention would appear to be justified by the existence of a final group of drawings for the hall, all of which show an entirely different approach to its decoration (figs 77-79). Here we find a rigorously astylar treatment, with ornament stripped to its barest essentials. In place of giant columns, we simply have two ranks of round-headed arches. Certainty in such matters is again difficult to attain, but it seems reasonable to associate the move from a highly decorated to an exceedingly plain hall with the finalisation of the design for the saloon: a plain but majestic great hall would have greatly increased the psychological impact of suddenly entering the marble lined room beyond it, with its elaborately carved and gilt entablature and ranks of full-size bronze statues in the niches.

Given that the design for the saloon appears to have remained consistent until at least 1709 and most probably beyond, is unsurprising to find that the contrasting, astylar treatment of the hall was in its essentials the one that was subsequently put into execution. Comparison between the drawings and the hall as built show clear affinities, with the same unadorned arcades lining its walls (fig. 80). At some point, however, Hawksmoor must have realised that the abandonment of a columnar or pilastered hall did not preclude, and may even have facilitated, the reintroduction of the ingenious combination of screen and portico that enabled the building's dominant external feature, the hall clerestory, to be placed centrally within the four pavilions (fig. 81). Thus the final structure represents a conflation of the initial design for the hall documented in the early Soane ground plans and the simple

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<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

astylar box proposed, presumably, in late 1707. There appears to have been some considerable debate about whether the portico should be reintroduced, and it was not until 16/27 April 1708 that the Duke wrote to the duchess about the matter, remarking casually that

I omitted telling you that I am advised by everybody to have the portico, so that I have writ to Vanbrook to have itt, and which I hope you will like, for I should be glad we were allways of one mind, which shall always be endeavoured, for I am never so happy as when I think your are kind.<sup>426</sup>

The phrasing gives a clear indication that he expected the duchess to be displeased by his decision and, with his characteristic combination of evasiveness and manipulative charm, adroitly placed her in a position where disagreeing with his decision would disrupt that harmony of minds ‘which shall always be endeavoured’—though not always by the Duke himself.

The association between the arch and the hall appears to be confirmed by the fact that shortly after receiving permission from Marlborough to proceed with the portico, work on the hall began.<sup>427</sup> The starting point of the construction process was revision work to ‘several parts of the foundations on account of the last Designe for the great Hall’.<sup>428</sup> Without close analysis of the fabric, which I have been unable to undertake for the present study, it is difficult to say what those changes entailed; but comparison of the early basement plan (fig. 51) with a later working drawing (fig. 82) suggests that the work may have consisted of infilling the spaces between the piers that supported the vault of the basement and those that stood under the columns that supported the arch in the hall. This would have presumably been necessary to bear the additional weight imposed by the height of the rear wall of the clerestory following the raising of the façade.

The other component of the finalised design, Blenheim’s portico (fig. 83), is amongst the most remarkable features of the building, and with an awareness of the aesthetic rationale behind it we can analyse its forms in a particularly illuminating

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<sup>426</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 956

<sup>427</sup> By the end of July, Joynes was able to report that the walls of the hall were already fourteen feet above the level of the principal floor: British Library Add MS 19608 f. 99.

<sup>428</sup> British Library Add MS 19595 f. 61.

way. The unique feature of the portico is the treatment of the pediment, which is framed between two narrow lengths of attic at each side. This treatment is a direct result of Hawksmoor's attempt to maintain the apparent symmetry of the clerestory in relation to the lateral façades. Close scrutiny of the articulation of the attic above the hall and portico shows how ingeniously symmetry has been maintained. When viewed from the side, the attic is broken down into three sections. The centremost three-bay section projects further than the recessed two-bay sections on either side. Only this central part of the attic has a visible roof, with two great gilded copper balls crowning the gables at each end. This three bay section, together with the two recessed bays to the south, forms the five-bay clerestory of the hall. The remaining two bays, to the north, stand directly over the portico. They continue the rhythm of the clerestory windows in the form of an arcade, one bay closed and the other, outer bay open, and serve to counterbalance the two southern bays of the hall. The completeness of the effect when viewed from the east and west is now marred by the fact that the parapet of this part of the attic was left incomplete, and by the much later addition of chimney stacks over the southern corners of the hall clerestory; but provided those limitations are rectified in one's imagination, the aesthetic intent is clearly perceptible (fig. 84). The extraordinary, archetypally 'baroque' form of Blenheim's portico can therefore be primarily accounted for as an attempt to fulfil the aesthetic programme defined many years before in Vanbrugh's letter of 18 June 1705, when he promised that the redesign of the hall would enable its attic storey to rise regularly between the four great pavilions.

It therefore seems clear that the design of the central part of the house was, in its essentials, finalised in the second half of 1707 in a series of stages. After first struggling to adapt the previous design for the hall, with its rows of giant Corinthian columns and giant arched screen, to the increasing height of the house, it seems that Hawksmoor fundamentally rethought his approach. He abandoned the arch and with it the possibility of a centrally placed attic in order to create a vast columned hall close to that envisaged by Vanbrugh in the very early Joynes plan. This in its turn led to the removal of the portico, its magnificence no longer justified by its role in supporting the northern bays of the attic. As the design of saloon developed, however, it was decided that this should be treated in essentially the same way, with rows of tall pilasters framing niches; and it was this that apparently led to the

abandonment of the columnar approach to the hall and its replacement by a more austere, astylar design in order to avoid an unacceptably monotonous effect. Finally, in late 1707 or early 1708, it became evident that with the adoption of an astylar treatment it would be possible to reinstate the arch, and with it the portico, so as to restore the centrally placed attic that Vanbrugh had first sought to introduce in 1705. All the available evidence, then, seems to converge on the same basic conclusion: that the heightening of the house and the change of order, as well as the redesign of the hall and saloon, occurred in the period between June 1707 and early 1708, with the most intense activity occurring in July to August of 1707, and a small number of subsequent refinements being implemented over the following year.

### **The Addition of the Service Courtyards**

The documentary record provides abundant evidence that the major phase of the main house's redesign should be placed in the second half of 1707. Careful scrutiny also shows that many of the additional features that were to be implemented from 1708 onwards must also have been planned, at least in outline, in this period. Of these, the most important are the courts, offices and greenhouse that were built behind the kitchen wing and the similar buildings planned—though never executed—behind the stable block. As Whistler noted, they are first referred to in Vanbrugh's letter to Marlborough of 15<sup>th</sup> July 1707, where he mentions that the masons will soon have nothing more to do in the area around the kitchen 'til we come to make the Walls, & Some out Offices in the Kitchin Court, which may be done early next Summer'.<sup>429</sup> This reference was regarded by Whistler as merely casual, but it should now be clear that it conforms so closely to the date at which the reworking of the south front occurred that we can reasonably assume that the proposed buildings were part of the same architectural programme.<sup>430</sup>

Further evidence to this effect can again be found in Vanbrugh's correspondence, this time in a famous letter to the duchess of Marlborough dating from June 1709.<sup>431</sup> The tone and phrasing of Vanbrugh's letter makes it quite clear that the duchess had had no intimation until this point that the kitchen court was to be filled with 'New

<sup>429</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 232.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>431</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 31: Vanbrugh to the duchess, 11 June 1709.

Building'. She was clearly not all impressed, as her priority was to complete the main house as quickly as possible and regarded work any other part of the site as an unjustifiable distraction. She had also evidently charged Vanbrugh with putting the work into execution without showing the plan to the duke. This was not all the case, he replied to the disbelieving duchess, before stating that a plan with all the proposed additions—new courtyards behind the kitchen and stable blocks and long greenhouses between the courtyards and the gardens—had been personally approved by the duke. 'I do positively Affirme that I did shew it to him', he protested with a touch of desperation, 'And can bring I believe those people to Swear they saw me do it'.<sup>432</sup> He offered further self-justification in a more formal memorandum that he sent with his next letter to the duchess, where he specifically recounted having discussed the plans in detail with Marlborough 'last winter was twelve month'—that is to say, when the duke visited in late December 1707.<sup>433</sup> 'The Plan of these Designs', he went on,

being shew'd to my Lord Duke when he was at Blenheim, He objected against a little kind of Salon which was drawn at the end of the Greenhouses, and ordered me to throw it into the rest of the room .....And thought in the Stable Court there was not provision enough for Coach houses. I remember no other objection he made.<sup>434</sup>

According to this account, then, the Duke had not only seen the plans in the winter of 1707 to 1708, but had actually intervened in their design. Assuming Vanbrugh's account is truthful—and in spite of the duchess's suspicions there are no substantive reasons to doubt it—then this would seem to decisively confirm that the re-planning of the service courts was in its essentials complete by the end of 1707.

In this context, a set of previously neglected letters about the treatment of the towers and chimneys of the kitchen and stable blocks gains additional meaning. In early August 1707, when work on the great tower and chimney stacks of the kitchen wing was finally ready to begin, Joynes wrote to Vanbrugh complaining that Hawksmoor had briefly shown the mason, William Townsend, the relevant drawings only to take

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, Vanbrugh to the duchess, 11 June 1709.

<sup>433</sup> His long-delayed visit was finally arranged for 22<sup>nd</sup> December. See British Library Add MS 19605 f. 35: Vanbrugh to Boulter, 18 December 1707.

<sup>434</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 33: Vanbrugh, 'Memorandum', 8 July 1709.

them away again. Joynes had therefore written to Hawksmoor to ask for the drawings but had received no reply.<sup>435</sup> Hawksmoor finally sent the draughts a week later, presumably after some prompting from Vanbrugh.<sup>436</sup> Hawksmoor's seemingly erratic behaviour becomes explicable if we assume that these 'eminencies' too were being rethought at this time and that the Assistant Surveyor had not as yet had time either to finalise the design or have working copies made. They are certainly stylistically of a piece with the enlarged pavilions and especially the lanterns (fig. 85).

It therefore seems likely that the service wings were being enlarged and aggrandised at exactly the same time that the main block was increasing in height, the pavilions were gaining their cornice and lanterns, the order of the main house was being changed from Doric to Corinthian, and the design of the hall and saloon resolved. Nor, in fact, do the service wings exhaust the process of reconfiguration. There is also evidence to suggest that another part of the project is likely to have been reconceived around the same time: the Grand Bridge.

### **The Design of the Grand Bridge**

Thanks to the researches of Howard Colvin and Alistair Rowan, it is now known that the grand bridge was constructed in two distinct phases.<sup>437</sup> The first part dates from 1706, when the construction of the engine house for the pump to supply the house with water was accompanied by the construction of a single arch of the proposed bridge. The arch is embedded within the extant Grand Bridge, where it forms approximately two-thirds of the length of the northernmost of the three arches. The rubble construction of this part of the bridge is quite different from the ashlar used for rest of the bridge, and was almost certainly part of a design less large and ambitious than that finally constructed. By contrast, the remainder of the bridge, though never fully completed according to the original design, is a spectacular achievement centred on a great one hundred foot arch that was 'unprecedented [in

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<sup>435</sup> British Library Add MS 19605 f. 30: Joynes to Vanbrugh, 3 August 1707.

<sup>436</sup> British Library Add MS 19607 f. 47: Hawksmoor to Joynes, 10 August 1707.

<sup>437</sup> Howard Colvin and Alistair Rowan, 'The Grand Bridge at Blenheim', reprinted in Howard Colvin, *Essays in English Architectural History* (New Haven and London, 1999), pp. 243-62, esp. p. 248.

Britain] both in size and in design'.<sup>438</sup> Colvin therefore concludes that the bridge's design was reconceived at some point in the period between the middle of 1706 and the beginning of the main phase of construction in July 1708.<sup>439</sup> Moreover, although Colvin did not attempt to attain further precision in his dating of the redesign, if we follow through the story of the bridge's development from the beginning of the project to that point, we again find that mid-1707 is the most likely period for the redesign.

The question of a northern approach to the house had provoked much anxiety almost from the moment Wren pointed out the difficulty of running a driveway over the steep ascent from the bottom of the Glyme valley to the entrance court of the house. The driveway would have to be contrived in spite of a drop of around seventy feet from the brow of the hill on which the house sat to the water meadows at the bottom of the valley. Such was the degree of concern this provoked that in the autumn of 1705 a series of aristocrats and connoisseurs were consulted in an attempt to find a solution, including the Duke of Shrewsbury, Lord Montague, and—quite naturally—Wren himself. Montague, for example, suggested that the sharp fall from the brow of the hill to the valley bottom could be dealt with by fronting the entire face of the hall in stone and attaching winding passages to each side, in the manner of the Château de Meudon near Paris.<sup>440</sup> Wren's solution, however, was the first to find favour. He advocated inscribing a great circle with a diameter of 1200 feet and its centre just in front of the 'parade', the area of flat ground in front of the forecourt. The drive would split and descend in two quarter circles, each approximately 900 feet in length, from the east and west extremes of the parade. The quadrant paths would descend approximately sixty-one feet from the parade to the bridge over the meadow, which if disposed evenly would give a gradient of about eight inches in every ten feet, 'So that', Wren wrote, 'this great Difficulty will appear to be none, being so disposed'.<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 248-52.

<sup>440</sup> William Coxe (ed.), *Private and Original Correspondence of the Charles Talbot, Duke of Shrewsbury* (London, 1821), p. 656. I am indebted to Frances Harris for bringing this reference to my attention.

<sup>441</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 253.

Viewed purely as a functionally efficient and conceptually elegant solution to the problem of making a gentle path from the valley bottom, Wren's proposal was highly effective. It would be difficult to argue, however, that it was an aesthetically inspired one, and Vanbrugh, Hawksmoor and Wise all advocated alternatives. Vanbrugh reported a proposal from Hawksmoor in his letter to Marlborough of 24 August 1705, saying that he had broached it with Godolphin and the duchess, but without success. Hawksmoor's second site plan of around July to August 1705 shows what must be an attempt to sketch out his solution to the problem (fig. 4). One of its more notable features is that it shows the entire front of the hill as having been cut back, and this correlates with Vanbrugh's description of the project in his letter to Marlborough. 'I think that Hill', he wrote, 'whc has seem'd a considerable exception to the Situation will give Occasion for One of the greatest Beautys of the Whole thing; And it being all a Rock of usefull stone for inside walls, 'tis but Opening a Quarry there, instead of fetching our Materialls farther off, and by that means the whole formation of the Hill will not cost one penny, wch else wou'd have prov'd a most expensive work.'<sup>442</sup> The implication is that the face of the precipice would be literally quarried away for building stone, and comparison of Hawksmoor's first site plan with this later plan does indeed suggest that he entertained the idea of cutting away the fore part of the slope to make it steeper and tidier. The drawing is otherwise difficult to decode, but the very long, narrow pathway approaching the house is presumably a bridge with a constant incline all the way from the north bank of the valley to the 'Parade'. As it nears the southern side of the valley, the pathway grows broader. Again the marks are difficult to decode, but the impression given by the drawing is that the point at which the path grows wider marks a transition from bridge to causeway. The causeway then opens into an ellipse, half of which would form a kind of platform projecting over the side of the valley, and the other half of which would be embedded into the parade. The quarter circles attached to the ellipse apparently represent walls holding back the edge of the parade, as shown in my hypothetical reconstruction (fig. 86).

The principal aesthetic advantage of Hawksmoor's proposal over Wren's was that it replaced the two arms of Wren's circular drive with a single, dramatic approach consistently focused on the palace's central axis. In spite of its advantages, its

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<sup>442</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 232.

potential cost seems to have prevented its adoption. The issue was evidently not resolved during the Duke's visit that winter of 1705-1706, and in April we find the issue cropping up again in Godolphin's correspondence.

I am tomorrow to see Vanbrook, Hawksmore and Wise, with their severall modell of the *parade* at Woodstock as they call it. I find they are against Sir Christopher Wren's design for the coming to the house and have brought some others of their own, which I am very confident will not please mee so well. They tell mee you left that matter to my determination, but I am resolved not to determine for any alteration of Sir Christopher Wren's modell (unless to make the way broader), without lady Marlborough's opinion, who said she would certainly bee in town before next post<sup>443</sup>

There is little surviving evidence by which to judge Wise's approach, although it is possible that, as William Alvis Brogden, has noted, the illustration of a remarkably Blenheim-like landscape in the 1742 second edition of Stephen Switzer's *Ichmographia Rustica* may represent a scheme connected with the informal competition (fig. 87).<sup>444</sup> The plate shows the entire breadth of the Glyme valley filled with a giant circular platform around which separate pathways climb towards the parade, clearly reusing the essential principles of Wren's solution but in a more compact and grandiose—and presumably rather more costly—manner.

The scheme proposed by Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh seems ultimately to have been the one adopted in 1706, as Vanbrugh recalled that Wren's model 'was quite rejected, and that I propos'd was resolv'd on'.<sup>445</sup> Nevertheless, in the building accounts for September 1707 we find an invoice from John Smallwell Jr. for seven models of the northern approach to the house, two 'showing the Meadow and the Hills on both sides, with the Bridge and Causeway made out of Sollid Deal'.<sup>446</sup> The sheer number of these models suggests that the whole question of the approach to the house had been reopened that year and that a number of different alternatives were under consideration. Moreover, it is clear that as early as July Vanbrugh was

<sup>443</sup> Partially transcribed in Green, *Blenheim Palace*, pp. 80-81; fully transcribed in Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 2, pp. 533-23.

<sup>444</sup> Brogden, 'Stephen Switzer', pp. 156-57.

<sup>445</sup> Colvin, 'The Grand Bridge', p. 248.

<sup>446</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 85.

pressing the duke and duchess to give permission for construction of the bridge's foundations to begin.<sup>447</sup> He even told the duchess that if the duke's permission for the work was to be forthcoming she need only write straight to the clerks-of-works, 'there being full Instructions left to proceed'.<sup>448</sup> Vanbrugh's anxiety to begin work at that time suggests that a basic design, at least at the level of a ground plan that defined the location and scale of the bridge piers, was in place by late June or early July 1707.

Unfortunately, there are no known working drawings for the bridge itself that can be correlated with this or any stage of the design process beyond Hawksmoor's initial general site drawing. At best we can make uncertain inferences, but the early drawing may provide some intimations of how the process was to develop. It seems that both the key components of the earliest scheme became grander. To begin with, the bridge itself became shorter but far more ambitious in treatment, and in place of the series of small arches that were probably envisaged originally, it was reduced to two small arches framing one gigantic arch. The remarkable disparity in the proportions of the outer arches relative to their enormous neighbour presumably reflects the need to retain the northernmost arch of the original bridge. Indeed, several characteristics of the design can be accounted for in precisely these terms. The most obvious is the treatment of the lesser arches. They are placed within wider framing arches punctuated by a series of heavily modelled voussoirs. These fictive arches endow the lesser arches with a more monumental appearance and so reduce to some degree the impression of contrast between them and the central arch (fig. 88).

The correlative of shortening the bridge was the lengthening of the causeway. In the final design this was to penetrate half way across the Glyme valley in a series of progressively narrower rectangular sections. While no early designs for the bridge survive, there is an important plan in the Bodleian showing the proposed dimensions of the northern causeway. This is a large-scale working drawing more than four feet long that has never, to the best of my knowledge, been published (fig. 89). It is carefully labelled in two hands, probably Joynes's and Hawksmoor's, with all the dimensions and the connecting gradients of the planned approach, and shows the

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<sup>447</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 2, pp. 851, 853: Marlborough to the duchess, 16/27 July 1707 and 17/28 July 1707.

<sup>448</sup> British Library Add MS 19605 f. 28: Vanbrugh to Boulter, 25 July 1707.

grandeur of conception of the landscape scheme of which the new bridge formed a major component. The plan, moreover, has certain features that suggest that it may be of a relatively early date. The evidence for this is far from demonstrative, but in the block plan of the house that appears on the drawing (fig. 90), the gateways through the service blocks are shown with only shallow projections towards the courtyards behind them. As finally built, these gateways were much deeper than the rest of the block. The gateways were redesigned because the middle range of the service blocks is not placed centrally relative to the end blocks, but displaced towards the forecourt (cf. the kitchen court in fig. 6); the additional depth of the gateways compensates for this in order to provide a platform wide enough to support towers that are symmetrically placed over the centres of the end blocks when seen from the north or south, as in the *Vitruvius Britannicus* double-plate of Blenheim's entrance front (fig. 91). The fact that the towers still have their early forms suggests that the drawing is more likely to have been completed before their design was finalised—which, as we have seen, appears to have taken place in August 1707, when Hawksmoor reported that he had sent the drawings for Townsend to work from, and was certainly complete by early 1708, when work on the towers began.<sup>449</sup> The drawing may well, therefore, form part of the plans put together before July 1707.

In the event, the plans were disrupted as a result of the direct intervention of the duchess. By piecing together fragmentary sources, we can build up a picture of what happened. It seems clear that the duchess had not been fully informed about plans to start work on the bridge during her June visit to review the remedial works already undertaken. Instead, after her return to Windsor Lodge—her official residence as Warden of Windsor Great Park—Vanbrugh wrote to suggest that work on the bridge foundations should begin immediately. She seems to have been uncertain of how to respond, and wrote to the duke enclosing Vanbrugh's letter and asking for his

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<sup>449</sup> Downes, *Hawksmoor*, p. 237.

opinion.<sup>450</sup> In the meantime, she told Vanbrugh to stop any further work until the arrival of the Duke's response.<sup>451</sup>

Vanbrugh, mindful of the need to take care of his reputation in the wake of the duchess's recent discontent, wrote to Boulter to keep him abreast with developments, evidently worried that her caution would be interpreted as continuing discontent with his ability to manage Blenheim's construction. 'I believe,' Vanbrugh told him,

there will be Orders soon, to proceed again Upon the Foundations of the Bridg, but pray let nothing [*illegible*] done more [until there] is My Lady Dutchesses [word] for it. She was pleas'd to write to me, when She sent to Stop it upon the Account I gave of what was intended, because she writ me word, that she found what I said very reasonable, but that having writ to my Ld Duke, she thought 'twas best to obey his Orders; especially Since his Answer cou'd not [at this] time a Year be long aComing. I give you this Acct: [upon it] that if you find People fancy she is Angry, you may satisfy 'em to the contrary, for there's nothing of it.<sup>452</sup>

On Sunday 20 July Vanbrugh visited the duchess at Windsor shortly before setting off for his annual visit to see the Earl of Carlisle at Castle Howard. The duchess told Vanbrugh that she would write to him in York when she heard from the duke, but Vanbrugh, evidently still confident that the duke's permission would be forthcoming, advised her to write straight to the comptrollers, Boulter and Joynes, 'there being full Instructions left to proceed'.<sup>453</sup>

Vanbrugh was proven right in principle, but wrong in practice. The duke replied to the duchess on 17 July, telling her that he was favourably disposed to Vanbrugh's request, but giving her complete discretion to do what she thought best. Knowing,

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<sup>450</sup> Vanbrugh's letter and the duchess's are both lost, but are documented in the duke's replies of 16/27 July and 17/208 July, in Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 2, pp. 851, 853.

<sup>451</sup> This letter is lost, but it is mentioned in Vanbrugh's letter to Boulter of 18 June, quoted below.

<sup>452</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 211, and British Library Add MS 19605 f. 23-24v: Vanbrugh to Boulter, 18 July 1707. Webb's transcription is faulty in several respects: he has dated the letter to 10 July when it is clearly inscribed otherwise; and there appear to be errors in his transcription of several badly worn passages in the postscript quoted here. The quotation given here has been corrected against the original, but there remain a number of doubtful words, which I have placed in parentheses.

<sup>453</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 213, quoting from British Library Add MS 19605 f. 28: Vanbrugh to Boulter, 25 July 1707.

however, that the duke was deeply concerned about the completion of the hall and saloon, she ordered that work on the bridge should stop and all attention be focused on that part of the house.

There are a number of curious aspects to this sequence of events. The first is Vanbrugh's seemingly complete confidence that the duke would indeed give permission for the Bridge to go ahead. This gives the distinct impression that the matter had already been discussed with the duke and permission granted—explicitly or implicitly—to begin work. A potential hint that this was indeed the case is given by a comment in duke's reply to the duchess when justifying the work on the foundations of the Bridge: the 'work aught to have one hole yeare to drye before any weight is laid upon it. Besides, til this be done it will be impossible to know what the foundation in that bottome will bare'.<sup>454</sup> The implication is far from certain, but his words do seem to imply that he was well aware that Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor were contemplating something that would, potentially, prove too heavy to be supported on the marshy ground of the valley bottom. Taken together, and with due note taken of the inevitable uncertainties due to the fragmentary evidence, it is difficult not to suspect that the sudden prioritisation of the bridge in 1707 reflected a move towards a grander conception of Blenheim in which the duke was, at the very least, complicit.

## **Conclusion**

It must now be clear that the process of incremental revision and expansion presented in previous accounts of Blenheim's construction obscures a quite different reality. Rather than being a long-drawn out process, the almost all the crucial elements of the palace's transformation date from mid- to late 1707, with only a limited number of further refinements taking place beyond that period. During this time the whole scheme was dramatically magnified, both literally and figuratively. To begin with it was literally made bigger, both vertically and horizontally, as the raising of the pavilions and the central pile, the addition of the lanterns and chimney towers on the main pile, and the increasing elaboration of the towers on the kitchen wing transformed the façades almost beyond recognition, while the bridge and causeway grew vastly more ambitious. And in addition to the narrowly physical

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<sup>454</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 856.

enlargement of the building, it was also magnified in the sense of growing still more magnificent, as the pavilions came to be crowned with their elaborate cornice, the rich Corinthian order was substituted for sober Doric, and the saloon was given, in intention if not in reality, a sumptuous encrustation of marble pilasters and gilt ornament, and an array of impressive statuary.

The change of order of the main house; the re-design of the pavilions and lanterns; the addition of the greenhouses and service buildings around the kitchen and stable courts; the finalisation of the chimneys and towers of the kitchen and stable wings; and the recasting of the bridge and approach—this is a formidable list, and all of it seemingly the result of a single, six-month fever of architectural reinvention. So highly concentrated and cohesive a process can only reflect a level of single-minded and self-conscious purpose in the pursuit of architectural spectacle that almost defies belief and certainly demands explanation. The critical question, then, is whether the traditional assumption that Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor were the main motive force for the changes is still sustainable. Clearly, the overall direction of the redesign exhibits a quite exceptional degree of formal adventurousness and a strong concern with enhancing the emotional impact of the building. Both of these can be associated with Vanbrugh's architectural aesthetic. Equally, there can be little doubt that many aspects of the changes bear the impress of a mind deeply—almost obsessively—concerned with formal precision, with a desire to attain the highest levels of geometrical perfection even at the cost of breaking the normal constraints of classical design. These can readily be associated with Hawksmoor's particular predilections and abilities. However, we have already seen tantalising hints of Marlborough's complicity in the changes. His receipt of new sets of drawings, and his eagerness to see them, suggests that he must have been at least in outline aware that substantial changes were to be expected that summer. His response to proposals to begin work on the foundations of the Grand Bridge readily bear a similar interpretation, suggesting that he was already familiar with the basic principles of the enormous bridge and causeway upon which construction was finally to begin in mid-1708. This all suggests that Marlborough was at least aware of the changes that were taking place and, perhaps more likely, was actively involved in precipitating them. It is with this possibility firmly in mind that we can now go on to consider anew the means and motivations which lead to Blenheim's transformation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Prince of Mindelheim's Palace

#### Introduction

If Blenheim's transformation was not the result of a series of more-or-less incremental changes, but a deliberate process of aggrandisement undertaken by Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor with, at the very least, the complicity of the Duke of Marlborough, this begs a number of obvious questions. What made it possible to entertain such a grandiose vision only a few months after the crisis precipitated by the duchess? What motivations were so pressing that they required Wren and Godolphin's elaborate precautions to be disregarded? And what meanings were contemporaries intended to derive from Blenheim's transformed appearance?

The purpose of this chapter is to attempt to answer to these questions, which I will seek to do through two basic approaches. The first consists of an analysis of the material circumstances and socio-political context in which Blenheim's enlargement and aggrandisement took place. I will first return to the winter of 1706-1707, in an attempt to reconstruct the material circumstances of Blenheim's transformation. Through a close analysis of the funding arrangements for the project, I will show that the early months of 1707 saw a fundamental change in the level of financial resources that both patron and architects expected to be available in the coming months and years. In doing so I will also advance circumstantial evidence that this resulted from Marlborough's direct intervention. This provides the background for an extended consideration of the ways that the duke's military reputation and political status were further heightened as a result of the brilliantly successful campaign of 1706 and of his elevation that same year to the territorial principality that he had been promised in 1704. It was this change in status, I argue, that both motivated and made possible Blenheim's aggrandisement.

I then move on to the second approach, which consists of an attempt reconstruct and analyse the iconographic programme for which the palace was intended to be the vehicle. In order to do this, I look first at one of the most important means through

which the intended appearance of the palace and the ‘message’ that it was supposed to embody, were disseminated: the previously neglected set of engravings of the palace commissioned by Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor between 1709 and 1711. These remarkable plates, among the grandest of their type ever produced in England, provide a remarkable record of the architects’ plans for the palace at their most advanced stage of development. They also provide important evidence of the sculptural programmes envisaged for the palace but never completed. By combining these visual sources with the information provided in the building accounts, I attempt to reconstruct the intentional meanings that the patron, the architects and their associates developed for the palace. After first considering and disputing the recent iconographic interpretation of Blenheim advanced by Vaughan Hart in his recent monograph on Vanbrugh, I attempt to provide an alternative approach that leads to very different conclusions. The result of this reinterpretation, I hope, is that Blenheim emerges even more strongly as a courtly, indeed a princely, building that consciously sought to represent Marlborough’s increasingly exalted rank and reputation to the widest possible audience.

### **‘So Expensive a Palace’: the Transformation of the Blenheim Finances**

Since the beginning of Blenheim’s construction, Marlborough had ceaselessly exhorted the duchess and Godolphin, and through them the officers, artisans and labourers, to make progress on construction as rapidly as possible.<sup>455</sup> Their efforts to conform to his commands had resulted in expenditures continually exceeding the project’s generous income from Treasury grants, with the result that a substantial debt soon began to accumulate. There were already signs of problems in 1705, but correspondence to and from the clerks-of-works shows that funds were running very low in the late summer of 1706, and that by the winter the payment of arrears had become a pressing issue.<sup>456</sup>

These desperate financial straits were an obvious source of concern to the Duke, and he took measures to take control of the situation before he returned to the Continent for the 1707 campaign season. Writing to Boulter on 24 January 1707, Vanbrugh

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<sup>455</sup> See Chapter 1 above.

<sup>456</sup> British Library Add MS 19608 ff. 43, 53: Joynes to Tailer, 10 August 1706; and Boulter and Joynes to Travers, 13 December 1706.

recounted that ‘My Lord Duke has Spoak to me within these two days to prepare a true State of things to lay before him with what I wou’d propose for this Years execution’.<sup>457</sup> The estimate, or a document preparatory to it, survives in the Joynes papers in the British Library, and can only have made the situation seem even more pressing. According to this document, there was to be an extremely ambitious programme of works for that year.<sup>458</sup> These included raising the entire main house to the level of the top of the grand storey, that is to say twenty-two feet above the level of the principal floor; raising and roofing the entire eastern half of the house and finishing the east pavilions; and entirely completing the east colonnade and the kitchen wing. This array of works was expected to cost £32,490, and this was on top of the sums that would be needed to pay the steadily accumulating debt, which had by this time risen to £27,702.<sup>459</sup> Thus, if all the work was to be paid for and the debts discharged, some £60,000 would be needed before the end of the year. When combined with the £50,000 that had already been remitted to the project in 1705 and 1706, this takes the total expenditure by January 1706 to some £10,000 beyond Wren’s original estimate, which as we have seen, appears to have suggested that ‘the whole’ would cost in the region of £90,000 to £100,000.

Some conception of the duke’s approach to resolving these difficulties can be found in Vanbrugh’s immediate request that Boulter and the rest of the officers should come to London together for a meeting, ‘and the Sooner the better’.<sup>460</sup> He went on:

’Twill be necessary in order to lay before My Lord Duke what he desires, that I shou’d have such an Abstract of the Severall heads of the past expence; that I may distinguish between what has been Spent upon the Gardens and Other outworks, and that part of the Building that comes within the Estimate that was given in about a Year Since.

The reference to Wren’s original estimate—that the works should cost in the region of £90,000-100,000—is of particular interest. Although only hinted at here, it is reasonable to see in the careful division of the costs a reflection of the duke’s

<sup>457</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 209.

<sup>458</sup> British Library Add MS 19602 f. 25: ‘An Estimate of the Workes to be done at Blenheim in the year 1707’.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*; British Library Add MS 19602 f. 21: ‘Abstract of the Sev<sup>ll</sup> Bills & c. Due at Blenheim’.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*

evolving strategy for handling the finances of Blenheim, which was probably much along the lines of those that Vanbrugh used when he was later forced to justify additional cost of the service courts to the duchess. The estimate, he protested, was only for the central part of the building, whereas

the Back Courts, Garden Walls Court Walls, Bridge, Gardens, Plantations & Avenues were not in it, which I Suppose nobody cou'd Immagine cou'd come to less than as much more. Then there happen'd One great disappointment. The Freestone in the Park Quarry not proving good, which it had wou'd have sav'd 50 p<sup>r</sup>. Cent in that Article.<sup>461</sup>

In this particular way of understanding the initial estimate, the sum of £90,000-£100,000 had always been far less than would be needed to complete Blenheim, and the £50,000 received from the Treasury since the beginning of construction was a mere prelude to the total amount to come.<sup>462</sup> It seems likely, then, that Marlborough was now preparing to use such reasoning to justify a radical increase in the amount of money earmarked for his new house so that it would be sufficient to cover almost any expenditure he and his architects cared to make.

Indirect but compelling evidence to this effect can be found in the correspondence to and from the Blenheim building site in the early part of 1707. In Hawksmoor's letters to Joynes there are repeated references to the imminent grant of new funds. On 15<sup>th</sup> March he commented that 'the main matter is mony relating to Woodstock and I hope we shall shortly have good tydeings about it', and on 25<sup>th</sup> April that 'I doubt not but monye will come shortly'.<sup>463</sup> Vanbrugh reported on 7 March that 'There's no more money Order'd yet, tho' we are in daily expectations of it'.<sup>464</sup>

In spite of all expectation, however, the flow of money that came in the first months of 1707 proved disappointing. In the meantime, only Strong, whose long pockets meant that he was able to extend a very considerable amount of credit to the project, was able to keep his men on site to take care of the remedial works needed to address

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<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32: Vanbrugh to the duchess, 11 June 1709.

<sup>462</sup> This figure calculated on the basis of 'Money Issued for Blenheim House'. See Bodleian MS Top. Oxon. c 265 ff. 89-90; Soane Museum SM 166, *passim*; and *Calendar of Treasury Books*, vols 22-25, *passim*.

<sup>463</sup> British Library Add MS 19607 ff. 44, 43: Hawksmoor to Joynes.

<sup>464</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 210.

the complaints voiced by the duchess in the autumn of 1706. The situation continued to deteriorate until by 8 May 1707 we find Joynes telling John Tailer, the Treasury official in charge of making cash payments to Blenheim, that unless money was received immediately the work would be brought to a complete standstill.<sup>465</sup> Samuel Travers even wrote to the duke's secretary, Adam Cardonnel, to warn him that they were on the point of turning people away from the building site.<sup>466</sup> Marlborough himself was nonplussed, writing to the duchess that

I have a great many things that vex me, I mean here abroad, but none more than what Mr. Travers writes to Cardonnel, that they must be obliged to turn the workmen off for want of mony to pay them. This gives me a double trouble, for I am sure their must be great want of mony or Lord Treasurer would not let this bee, therefore pray do not take notice that I know anything of it, for I am sure he must have many troubles, and I should be very sorry to add to any to them.<sup>467</sup>

Within days, however, came the long awaited news that 'the work and the money begins to move', enabling works to go on with 'new vigour'.<sup>468</sup> Finally, on 17 May Hawksmoor was able to report that '...there is mony directed for the Building at Blenheim which will give new vigour to the Worke'.<sup>469</sup> The amounts were still less than those sought, and in late July Vanbrugh told the Earl of Manchester that 'My L<sup>d</sup> Treasurer can't Afford us at Blenheim half what we want'; but he remained optimistic enough to claim that there would nevertheless be 'a great deal be done; And two Summers more will finish it'.<sup>470</sup> The claim of half as much money as was needed was to be almost literally true: in place of the more than £60,000 needed to discharge the debt and pay for all the work that Vanbrugh had planned, only £30,000 was to be dispensed, exactly the sum paid out the previous year.

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<sup>465</sup> British Library Add MS 19608, f. 56: Joynes to Tailer, 8 May 1707.

<sup>466</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 796: Marlborough to the duchess, 19/30 May 1707.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>468</sup> The phrases are, respectively, those of Travers, British Library Add MS 19608 f. 69; and Hawksmoor, British Library Add MS 19607 f. 41.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 41: Hawksmoor to Joynes, Saturday [17 May 1707].

<sup>470</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 14.

Nevertheless, the funds were sufficient to allow works to resume in the knowledge that the limitations of the original estimate had, to all intents and purposes, been abandoned. Seizing the opportunity presented by the new flow of money, Hawksmoor and the clerks-of-works then sought to secure some of the benefits for themselves. On the advice of Vanbrugh and the Treasury agent Samuel Travers, they took this moment to petition Lord Treasurer Godolphin for the payment of their accumulated allowances and expenses and for the grant of new salaries.<sup>471</sup> As Hawksmoor put it:

There being mony now orderd for the workes at Blenheim, I cannot but think it is a fitt time to renew our Applications to obtain some appointm<sup>ts</sup>. of mony for ourselves, we having bin long out of mony and at great expences.<sup>472</sup>

The same sense of the reins being loosened is still more apparent in Vanbrugh's letter to Marlborough of 15 July 1707. After describing the great quantity of stone that had been obtained in preparation for the next phase of building, he let slip that 'by that means [we] shall yet be Able to spend at least as much money as we can get'.<sup>473</sup> There is therefore a clear picture emerging that May 1707 marked a sea-change in the financial resources available for building Blenheim. It is now possible to see that the redesign of the palace in mid-to-late 1707 was a direct response to the transformed financial situation of the project engineered by Marlborough in the early part of that year. With the expectation of a large flow of funds in the immediate future and the abandonment of any residual commitment to completing the project within Wren's original estimate, it must have seemed appropriate to use some of ample means now available to make improvements to the original scheme.

The question remains, however, quite why the project was so completely reconceived in such a short period when the additional funds could have been used in other, apparently more sensible ways—such as accelerating the pace of work, in accordance with the duchess's wishes. To answer this, we need to look in more detail at Marlborough's evolving military and socio-political status. Only then does it

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<sup>471</sup> British Library Add MS 19608 f. 69: Travers to Boulter, Saturday [17 May 1707].

<sup>472</sup> British Library Add MS 19607 f. 32: Hawksmoor to Boulter, Saturday [17 May 1707].

<sup>473</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 231.

become clear why he might have thought it both possible and desirable to secure additional funding for the specific purpose of aggrandising Blenheim.

### **Marlborough's Year of Victories**

Marlborough returned to England in the winter of 1706 after a veritable *annus mirabilis*. On 12/23 May of that year he had won the battle of Ramillies, utterly crushing the French forces under the command of Marshall Villeroi. This opened up the whole of the Spanish Netherlands to allied conquest, and in the ensuing months one Flemish city after another fell to the allies almost without a struggle—Brussels, Ghent, Bruges and Antwerp to name only the most important. ‘So many towns have submitted since the battaile’, Marlborough wrote to the duchess, ‘that it really looks more like a dreame then truth’.<sup>474</sup> The victories opened up vast prospects for Marlborough: the total defeat of France; priceless booty in the forms of works of art from the palaces of the Governors of the Spanish Netherlands; and even, if Marlborough played his cards right, the Governorship itself—which was reputed, with its income of £60,000 a year, to be the richest office in Europe.<sup>475</sup>

At almost precisely the same time, Marlborough had also finally attained his ambition of becoming a sovereign territorial prince of the Holy Roman Empire. This remarkable elevation was accomplished in spite of its having been made clear to Marlborough—shortly after he had managed to bully the Emperor Leopold I into promising him the honour—that it was to be ‘mehr ein Namen als Etwas in sich selbsten’.<sup>476</sup> As Peter Barber has shown, Marlborough, who was never one to be discouraged in matters concerning his wealth and status, was not prepared to rest content with that. Having secured in principle the grant of the princely title and the promise of an accompanying territory in November 1704, he spent the next fourteen months applying continuous pressure to the Emperor to turn them into a reality.<sup>477</sup> In

<sup>474</sup> Trevelyan, *England under Queen Anne*, vol. 2, *Ramillies and the Union with Scotland*, p. 122; this transcription from Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 556.

<sup>475</sup> The Habsburg candidate for the Spanish throne, Karl von Habsburg or ‘Carlos III’, had already offered Marlborough the titular governorship but he was unable to secure its full powers because of the resistance of the Dutch. See E. Gregg, *Queen Anne* (New Haven and London, 2001), p. 216. On booty, see the description of Marlborough’s acquisition of paintings from the residence of the Governors of the Spanish Netherlands in Cust, ‘The Equestrian Portraits of Charles I’.

<sup>476</sup> Barber, ‘Marlborough as Imperial Prince’, p. 50. Useful additional information can also be found in Klopp, *Der Fall*, vol. 11, esp. pp. 187-89; and Churchill, *Marlborough*, vol. 2, pp. 485-89.

<sup>477</sup> Barber, ‘Marlborough as Imperial Prince’, p. 56-58.

the end, it was only after the death of Leopold I and the succession of his somewhat more pliable son, Joseph I, that a vacant territorial principality was identified: the town of Mindelheim in Swabia and its hinterland. Letters patent were eventually issued by the Austrian and Imperial chanceries in December 1705, a process that was no doubt encouraged by Marlborough's personal presence in Vienna that winter to undertake diplomatic negotiations. Finally, on 24 May 1706, Marlborough's representatives at last took formal possession of the territory.<sup>478</sup>

Marlborough therefore arrived back in England with a unique position perhaps most akin to that of the *princes étrangers* at the French court, as well as with a level of military prestige undreamed of even after his first spectacular victory at the Battle of Blenheim.<sup>479</sup> This greatly increased status seems to have unleashed Marlborough's always perceptible taste for grandeur, what the Duchess of Marlborough would later call 'the glory hee has seemd to be very fond of'.<sup>480</sup> Perhaps the most telling exemplification of this is a remarkable modello for an allegorical portrait of the duke by Sir Godfrey Kneller (fig. 92). The painting depicts, according to an early (though not contemporary) inscription, 'His Grace the Duke of Marlborough/Painted by S<sup>r</sup> Godfrey Kneller/soon after the Battle of Ramilies 17[06]/when Flanders & Brabant surrender'd'.<sup>481</sup> This remarkable and impressive painting, showing Kneller's bravura brushwork at its best, contains a complex iconographic programme that, in general terms, is clearly intended to provide a suitably prestigious visual representation of Marlborough's new status.

Kneller shows the great general astride his charger, marshal's baton in hand and garter sash across his chest, with the rage of battle behind in the background. From a torrid sky above, Mercury reaches down to crown Marlborough with the laurels. To the right, the black eagle of the Holy Roman Empire hovers with a crown upon his back, while two putti carry the palms and flowers of victory. Behind them, Fame trumpets Marlborough's deeds to the universe, while on the upper left of the picture Justice sits bearing the scales and fasces. To the left of the image, we see Hercules,

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60.

<sup>479</sup> For a valuable summary of the status of the *princes étrangers*, see Jonathan Spangler, *The Society of Princes: The Lorraine-Guise and the Conservation of Wealth and Power in Seventeenth Century France* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 19-41.

<sup>480</sup> British Library Stowe 751 f. 7v.

<sup>481</sup> Elizabeth Einberg, *Manners and Morals: Hogarth and British Painting 1700-1760*, exh. cat. (London, Tate Gallery, 1987), p. 32.

the symbol of heroic virtue, holding his club and a set of keys. Beside him kneels a female figure clad in an ermine-trimmed red velvet cloak. She lifts a conquered citadel towards the victorious general, the manacles of slavery lying shattered at her feet. Then, in the right foreground of the picture, as if about to be trampled under the hooves of Marlborough's steed, we see the repulsive visage and serpentine coils of Medusa, symbolising discord or envy, and beside her a dog that presumably signifies war. And in front of these two figures, straight beneath the horse's forequarters, we see the white and gold standard of France, a shield bearing Louis XIV's emblem of Phoebus Apollo, a halberd, and a blue baton adorned with fleurs-de-lis, the badge of office of the Marshalls of France—the symbols of French martial might.

The key to understanding the primary theme of the portrait is the presence of the closed crown on the back of the black Imperial eagle (fig. 93). The closed crown was a particularly important signifier of status in early modern Europe.<sup>482</sup> As Robert Oresko has noted,

The shape and form of official headgear, when actually worn by its owner or when used symbolically as the emblem of his power, was one of the easiest and most directly recognisable ways of indicating a precise hierarchical level within the structure of European sovereignties and titled nobilities during the early modern period.<sup>483</sup>

The closed crown—a crown with an arch—was a symbol of sovereign status, of the possession of *imperium* or empire, that is to say independent sovereignty.<sup>484</sup> The right to bear a closed crown was consequently one of the most sought after symbols of elevated social and juridical status in early modern Europe, and it is clear that this prestige is being exploited here. Its presence, poised next to Mercury as if it is waiting to be placed on Marlborough's head in succession to the victor's laurels, is

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<sup>482</sup> For an insightful overview of the symbolism of the closed crown in early modern Europe as well as an extended discussion of sovereign status, titlature and image-building in the context of the Duchy of Savoy, see Robert Oresko, 'The House of Savoy in Search for a Royal Crown', in Robert Oresko, G. C. Gibbs and H. M. Scott (eds), *Royal and Republican Sovereignty in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Memory of Ragnhild Hatton*, Cambridge, 2006, pp. 272-350, esp. pp. 279-80.

<sup>483</sup> Oresko, 'The House of Savoy', p. 279.

<sup>484</sup> There is a valuable discussion of the closed crown as an emblem of *imperium* in Philip Grierson, 'The Origins of the English Sovereign and the Symbolism of the Closed Crown', *British Numismatic Journal*, vol. 33 (1964): 118-34, esp. pp. 127-34.

therefore an extremely clear assertion of Marlborough's status as a man of quasi-royal status in his own right.

The regal resonances of the image are, moreover, greatly enhanced simply through its being an equestrian portrait of an armoured soldier. This form had long been associated with sovereignty, deriving as it did from Titian's great portrait of the Emperor Charles V on horseback, before becoming a *leitmotiv* of Spanish royal imagery and thence of European royal portraits in general. Kneller's composition clearly derives specifically from Velazquez's famous equestrian portrait of Philip III of Spain. The obvious conclusion to be drawn is that the presence of the closed crown refers to Marlborough's elevation to Mindelheim, and that this is the primary theme of the painting. This emphatically celebratory image, in sum, portrays Marlborough as a virtuous hero who has justly (justice with her balance) defeated the enemy (the standard of France and the French marshal's baton), liberated the citadels and towns they held in oppression (the woman in ermine released from her shackles), and by his actions earned both eternal fame and elevation to sovereign princely status.

The fact that Kneller's modello was never apparently executed at full-scale may suggest that even in the happy circumstances of 1706 Marlborough had second thoughts about such an ostentatious assertion of his power and status. But it is nevertheless a vivid indication of the world of symbols and ideas in which he lived, and in particular of the cultural power of the sovereign status which he had pursued with such determination. It also—even as a mere sketch—forms a conspicuous contrast with the assiduous avoidance of any hint of hubris that he had sought to maintain in the period immediately following the battle of Blenheim in 1704. As we have already seen, not only did a run of propaganda from Marlborough's circle deliberately misrepresent his role in soliciting his princely title and present him as the reluctant recipient of unsought honours, but similar care was taken to conceal the royal source of the funds that were paying for the new house on the Woodstock estate.<sup>485</sup> The distinct impression in 1704, then, is of great care to avoid giving substance to accusations that Marlborough was monopolising power and favour. But

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<sup>485</sup> See Harris, 'Parliament and Blenheim Palace': 43-44, and also Chapter 1 above.

after his spectacular run of victories in 1706 he can only have felt that such modesty was no longer wholly necessary or even appropriate.

There is, however, still more to it than this. In the winter of 1706-1707, Marlborough's customary pursuit of an appropriate 'reward' for his victories from the Queen-in-Parliament provides a valuable insight into his priorities. At this point, Marlborough successfully renewed an earlier attempt to secure his ducal title, estate and post office pension of £5,000 a year to his heirs—male and female—in perpetuity. Because of this, it was now clear that even though Marlborough had lacked a male heir since the death of the Marquis of Blandford in 1703, his house, estate titles and pensions would be inherited through the female line and be passed on to his posterity. At the same time he obtained Parliamentary recognition of that the construction of Blenheim as a Crown gift in the Commons Address and Preamble related to that Act. For the first time there was formal, public acknowledgement that 'Your Majesty is at your Expence graciously pleased to erect the House of Blenheim, as a Monument of his glorious actions...'<sup>486</sup> Thus in early 1707 the construction of Blenheim could now be seen as a formal royal responsibility rather than a personal mark of favour granted informally by Queen Anne. These various privileges should almost certainly not be dissociated from each other, and present us with the outlines of a conscious programme of social aggrandisement that was founded in dynastic as much as personal ambition—Marlborough was clearly seeking to ensure that his uttermost descendants would inherit his privileges intact and thus perpetuate his name and achievements for posterity.

Such a programme is clearly evident in Marlborough's subsequent relentless pursuit of female heritability for his territorial principality. Under the terms of the original grant, succession to Mindelheim was restricted to Marlborough's heirs-male of the body, in effect ensuring that his princely status would die with him.<sup>487</sup> His first tack was to try to change the terms of inheritance when he was formally received into the Imperial Diet, but he was supported in this only by his close allies the Prince of Anhalt Dessau and the Elector of Brandenburg. It seems that the duke then turned to the regional military confederation, the Swabian Circle, to continue pressing his

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<sup>486</sup> Anon., *Sense of the Nation*, p. 17; *House of Commons Journal*, vol. 15, pp. 221, 230.

<sup>487</sup> British Library Add MS 61344 ff. 12-16v.

case.<sup>488</sup> In the meantime, Marlborough instructed his agents to undertake historical and genealogical research to prove that Mindelheim had historically been inherited in the female line.<sup>489</sup> In this light, it is unsurprising to find Marlborough writing to the Emperor's diplomatic representative, Wratislaw, within days of the passage of the new Act of Parliament to share the news of the honour, 'sans exemple chez nous', of a duchy heritable in the female line, and to solicit the same privilege for Mindelheim.<sup>490</sup> This effort was subsequently sustained over a period of years, forming a constant ground-bass of Marlborough's negotiations with the Emperor, and at one point very nearly succeeded.<sup>491</sup> All this converges upon the conclusion that Marlborough's overarching goal was to forge his English dukedom, Continental principality, superb house, and lavish pension into an inextricably intertwined whole that would make the Marlborough dynasty into an eternal memorial of his achievements.

In this perspective, it seems highly likely that Marlborough returned to England in 1706 feeling that the Blenheim planned in 1705 no longer corresponded to his greatly enhanced social and political position. For the Queen's Captain General, a castle may well be appropriate; but decorum demanded that a sovereign prince should have a palace. There are, moreover, some small instances of re-planning that took in the course of 1707 that seem to manifest this change quite directly. When Hawksmoor wrote to Joynes in the summer of 1706 to describe the flooring of the private apartments, he made it clear that both the duke and duchess's apartments would have mezzanine floors, meaning that the ceilings of their bedrooms and dressing rooms would be lower than those of the other rooms on the ground floor.<sup>492</sup> The ground plan in the Soane Museum that is, as we have seen, dateable to the transitional period at the beginning of the re-planning of the house, shows that this had now changed. The duke's apartments are labelled 'no Entresole' in Hawksmoor's hand (fig. 50), meaning that the ceiling had been raised, presumably to make the room loftier and more impressive. In addition it seems that the disposition of the apartment was changed shortly afterwards, with what had been the duke's

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<sup>488</sup> Coxe, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, p. 309.

<sup>489</sup> BL Add MS 61344 ff. 12-16v.

<sup>490</sup> Murray (ed.), *Letters and Dispatches*, vol. 3, p. 265.

<sup>491</sup> Barber, 'Marlborough as Imperial Prince', p. 68-69

<sup>492</sup> British Library Add MS 19607 f. 18: Hawksmoor to Joynes, 22 June 1706.

bedroom changed into an ante-room, and the room originally intended to be his dressing room enlarged and turned into the bedroom; this meant that the Grand Cabinet of the neighbouring state apartment was now apparently to be shared between the two apartments, so enlarging Marlborough's apartment considerably. In other words, Marlborough's private apartment was being turned into a complete formal suite of full-height rooms consisting of anteroom, bedroom, and Grand Cabinet.<sup>493</sup>

A similar concern for increased scale and grandeur can be found in several other sources. In relation to the façades, there is brief aside in a letter written by Travers to the duke in 1707 reporting that it would soon be possible to clear the earth from in front of the private apartments 'which now makes that Front appear low'.<sup>494</sup> The very casualness of the comment implies that the apparent 'lowness' of Blenheim's façades was something he expected Marlborough to recognise immediately. Presumably, then, it had been a matter for discussion when the duke last visited. Is it too much to see in such murmurings the trigger for the raising of the house that year?

A similarly suggestive comment came from Vanbrugh about the unsatisfactory appearance of the new stud in the park: 'Nothing in my Opinion should Appear within the Bounds of so fine a Park and where so Expensive a Palace is plac'd; that shou'd not at least look as if it belong'd to it'.<sup>495</sup> The reference to 'so Expensive a Palace' surely gives some intimation of the patron and architect's intentions in 1707. In this connection, it is also worth noting the periodic occurrence, from this time onwards, of asides in letters that imply an increasingly international frame of reference for the palace and gardens. Sylvestre's critique of Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor's design for the saloon advocates an alternative scheme that, if followed, would 'rendre ce Sallon aussi magnifique qu'il y en ait en Europe'.<sup>496</sup> Vanbrugh later explained—somewhat implausibly—to the duchess's fixer, Arthur Maynwaring, that his job was to build 'the Cheapest, as well as ... the best Hous in

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<sup>493</sup> Vanbrugh reported the heightening of the duchess's ceiling to match in his letter to Marlborough of 15 June 1707: see Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 232. On the reversion to the original plan for lower ceilings, see the duchess's annotations on 'Mr Vanbrugh's Book of the Derections for Blenheim' [1709], British Library Add MS 61354 f. 19r.

<sup>494</sup> British Library Add MS 61353 f. 26r: Travers to Marlborough, 19 August 1707.

<sup>495</sup> Whistler, *Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 232.

<sup>496</sup> British Library Add MS 61353 f. 27r: Sylvestre to the Duke of Marlborough, 20 September 1707.

Europe, which I think my Ld Dukes Services, highly deserve'; and said of the new greenhouse that 'there is not in Europe a finer [building] than this'.<sup>497</sup>

The circumstantial evidence, then, appears to support the idea that the main motivation for Blenheim's transformation was rooted in Marlborough's evolving status as both a military hero and, especially, a sovereign prince of the Holy Roman Empire. We will now turn to a source of evidence that will open up both these aspects of Blenheim in more detail: the use of engraved representations to disseminate the palace's forms as Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor intended them to be.

### ***Vitruvius Blenheimensis: Vanbrugh and the English Architectural Plate Book***

In a letter of 22 September 1710, Vanbrugh announced to Marlborough that 'Lieut. Genl. Withers has done me the favour to charge himself with a little Bag for your Grace in which are the designs of the Bridge and the whole North front of the Building, the utmost extent of the offices included which is altogether about 800 feet'.<sup>498</sup> This marks the first recurrence of a discussion of drawings in Vanbrugh's correspondence with Marlborough since 1707, and it is of considerable significance that at the same time he told the Duke that 'I have got the East Front already engraved here, and the South Front is doing'.<sup>499</sup> The decision to engrave the work marks an important turning point in the long and complex story of Blenheim's design, as such formal publication would only have been considered when Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor felt that the design had reached its definitive state. This was not, admittedly, the first time that Blenheim had been publicly displayed. In early 1707 Vanbrugh's fellow Kit-Kat Club member and Whig propagandist Joseph Addison had written a play specifically intended to publicise the increasingly grandiose rebuilding of Blenheim. Indeed, the dramatic culmination of the play consisted of a depiction of the north front rising in front of the audience.<sup>500</sup> But the process of engraving announced in 1710 was an entirely different enterprise. Vanbrugh told Marlborough that 'I propose to adjust all the prints to a scale that they may form a book as is usually practised abroad in such cases,' indicating his desire to

<sup>497</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, pp. 23, 33: Vanbrugh to Maynwaring, 8 July 1708; and 'Memorandum', 8 July 1709.

<sup>498</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 43.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>500</sup> Joseph Addison, *Rosamond: An Opera* (London, 1707), p. 28.

disseminate the appearance of the building through a lavish publishing enterprise.<sup>501</sup> The announcement, moreover, came at the end of a long process of preparation. The earliest evidence of the project dates from 18 December 1708, when Vanbrugh received a copyright licence for ‘the Delienations [sic] or Descriptions of ye Plan and Uprights of ye Duke of Marlborough’s house of Blenheim’.<sup>502</sup> The licence granted Vanbrugh an exclusive copyright for a term of fifteen years and prohibited counterfeiting of these ‘or any other Views or Representations of the ye Fabrick aforesaid’, on condition the work was entered at the Stationer’s Company in the normal way.<sup>503</sup> This date coincides neatly with the point at which final details of the redesign must have been resolved. Both of the eastern lanterns had been completed in their final form and the central pile, including the porticos, had reached the top of the principal storey ‘and in some places higher’. The construction of the house was therefore so advanced that further significant modifications would have been difficult to contemplate.<sup>504</sup>

A number of entries in the accounts record the long process by which these engravings were executed. The first occurs in July 1709, when Hawksmoor was reimbursed the sum of £45 for ‘Copper plates to Engrave the planns of Blenheim house, the East front and the plann, and Front of the Great Bridge, and mony Disburst to the Engraver for Engraveing the said Fronts & planns respectively’.<sup>505</sup> A few months later, we find references in Vanbrugh’s correspondence to drawings by one Andrews that may well be related to the process of engraving the building.<sup>506</sup> On 6 December, he wrote to Joynes to ‘desire you will hasten Andrews with the South Front of the Building which we Spoak to him for’.<sup>507</sup> By 18 December, Vanbrugh had received the drawing of the south front and requested that Andrews now begin on a drawing of the north front to the same scale.<sup>508</sup> These drawings were probably related to the process of engraving the building. At the same time, he seems

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<sup>501</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 4.

<sup>502</sup> Shef Rogers, ‘The Use of Royal Licences for Printing in England 1695-1760: A Bibliography’, *The Library: Transactions of the Bibliographical Society*, 7<sup>th</sup> series, vol. 1, no. 2 (2000): 133-92, quoting from SP/44/353, pp. 421-22.

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>504</sup> British Library ADD MS 61353, f. 48v: Travers to Marlborough, October 19 1708.

<sup>505</sup> Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 255, quoting from British Library Add MS 19596 f. 61.

<sup>506</sup> For more on Andrews, see Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 80, fn. 7.

<sup>507</sup> British Library Add MS 19605 f. 81.

<sup>508</sup> Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 255.

to have been gathering in drawings of other parts of the building: 'I have the plan Kit Cash sent, and believe 'tis right ... I have just now rec'd Mr Peisley with Mr Rowney's Draught'.<sup>509</sup> The 'plan' sent by Cash is likely to refer to a floor plan of the basement or principal floor. Since the draught by Mr Rowney was delivered by Peisley, it is likely that this refers to the Grand Bridge, which Peisley was then in the midst of constructing. If these hypotheses are reasonable, it would in its turn seem probable that Vanbrugh was collating accurate, up-to-date draughts of the various parts of the house so that they could be professionally redrawn for the engraver to work from.

Further detail is provided by the building accounts for September 1711, when Vanbrugh finally submitted invoices for various expenses. The date is probably not contemporaneous with the engraving process itself, as it occurs in a list of minor, out-of-pocket expenses that appears to have been put together retrospectively. Thus, among payments of five shillings to 'a Custome house officer who came up with some Blocks of Marble' and eighteen shillings 'To a Literman for 2 Blocks Car<sup>g</sup>', we find a series of costs connected with the commissioning and execution of drawings and engravings. The entries include 'Paper for Drawings', 'for Fframes omitted in the last Bill', and 'Drawings sent my L<sup>d</sup> Duke with a Box'. These are most likely to refer to the drawings of the Grand Bridge and north front of the house mentioned by Vanbrugh in his letter to Marlborough of September 1711. There is then a series of entries 'ffor Copper plates' (£2 5s 0d), 'ffor a Copper plate for ye Generall plan' (£1 5s 8d); and 'To Mons<sup>r</sup> Auber, According to Agreem<sup>t</sup> for engraving the South Front of Blenheim' (£35).

The majority of the plates were apparently complete by early 1711, as the publication of the first prints was announced by Vanbrugh's good friend and fellow Kit-Kat member, Jacob Tonson, in the *Spectator* for 17 March 1711:

With her Majesty's Royal Privilege and Licence, there is now printing an exact Description of the Palace of Blenheim in Oxfordshire, in a large Folio, Illustrated with the Plans, Elevations, Sections and Perspectives, Engraven by the best Hands on Copper Plates; several of which being already finished are

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<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*

just Published in distinct Sheets by Jacob Tonson at Shakespear's Head over against Catherine-Street in the Strand.<sup>510</sup>

It seems unlikely that the full publication was ever completed. The advertisement implies that the complete set of plates had not yet been produced and there is no known surviving copy of the whole work. Moreover, as we shall see shortly, the Queen's support for Blenheim had already begun to falter and the very considerable cost of engraving such fine-quality, large-scale architectural plates was prohibitively high without the financial freedom that royal favour had afforded.

There is, however, a multiplicity of early engravings of Blenheim, generating some confusion over the identity of those referred to by Vanbrugh. Downes tentatively suggested that the engravings for which Hawksmoor sought reimbursement in July 1709 were 'perhaps the single plate, 18¼ × 23½ in., engraved by H. Terasson and sold by Thomas and John Bowles, showing the south and east fronts, plans of the basement and main floors, and the elevation of the bridge'.<sup>511</sup> This is unlikely, however, as John Bowles traded from the address listed on the plate, the Black Horse in Cornhill, only from 1733 onwards.<sup>512</sup> This need not in itself preclude the possibility that the print is a re-strike of an earlier plate, but the reference in Vanbrugh's account to Monsieur Auber confirms that another series of plates, from the print collection of Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor's Oxford collaborator, George Clarke (1661-1736), that is now preserved in the library of Worcester College, Oxford, were correctly identified by their cataloguer as the 'official Blenheim set'.<sup>513</sup>

These plates give some flavour of the exceptional ambition of the enterprise. To begin with, all are of exceptionally large size. The largest single plate, that of the south front (fig. 94), significantly exceeds one metre or some three-and-half feet in width; while the elevation of the north front was to be a composite made of three folio sized plates, corresponding to a single image in excess of one-and-a-half metres

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<sup>510</sup> Joseph Addison and Richard Steel, *The Spectator*, 15 (17 March 1711), p. 2; cited in the Worcester College, Oxford, Online Catalogue of the George Clarke Print Collection, <http://prints.worc.ox.ac.uk/index.html>, entries for volume LIII, prints 76-84.

<sup>511</sup> Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 255.

<sup>512</sup> See Timothy Clayton's entry on the 'Bowles Family' in H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (60 vols) (Oxford, 2004).

<sup>513</sup> Online Catalogue of the George Clarke Print Collection, Worcester College, Oxford, entries for volume LIII, prints 76-84.

or four-and-a-half feet long (figs 95-97). These must therefore number among the grandest architectural engravings ever attempted in England, if not in Europe.

Their size alone, however, is only one aspect of their exceptionality, as their execution exhibits a chiselled precision that makes the relatively small Hulsbergh plates for *Vitruvius Britannicus* seem almost pedestrian by comparison. These highly accomplished engravings were produced by several hands, all with established reputations for architectural and technical engraving. The ground plans of the main house at the levels of the basement and principal floor and the elevation east front are by Joseph Nutting (figs 98-100); two versions of the elevation of the Grand Bridge by Peter van der Gucht and Peter van Gunst (fig. 101) survive, and it is uncertain which should be given priority. These four plates probably correspond to the engravings commissioned by Hawksmoor. The view of the south front, although unsigned, must correspond to the engraving by Auber for which Vanbrugh claimed reimbursement in 1711 (fig. 94), and this is apparently confirmed by the appearance of Auber's name on the corresponding group of three plates that together form the elevation of the north front. With the sole exception of the engraving of the bridge, all the plates are numbered sequentially from four to eight. They must therefore have been only some of the 'plans, elevations, sections and perspectives' originally envisaged and announced by Tonson in 1711. As we have seen, the entries in the Blenheim accounts make it clear that there was also to be a general plan, presumably much the same as the plan of the whole house and its dependencies later published in *Vitruvius Britannicus*. It is possible that a rare surviving perspective drawing of the Grand Bridge was also a preparatory drawing for the plate series (fig. 102). In addition, it seems likely that a quite remarkable large-scale perspective view of Blenheim's north front and forecourt, also preserved in a copy in the Clarke Collection and as a later restrike in the Bodleian Library, had its origins in this project. This plate is again on a quite gargantuan scale, measuring more than fifty centimetres high by some one hundred and twenty centimetres wide, and is no less spectacular than the other Blenheim plates (fig. 103). The plate is signed by the engraver John Harris, and its direct connection with Vanbrugh is attested by the original advertisement: this 'Curious Print, being a Perspective View of Blenheim',

it stated, had been ‘Drawn and Engraven with the Great Exactness by the Directions of Sir John Vanbrugh, Knight, in a Different Manner from any yet performed’.<sup>514</sup>

The existence of such an ambitious suite of engravings, coupled with the intention, if not necessarily the actuality, of their publication in the form of a plate book, inevitably entails consideration of their relationship with the first true English architectural plate book, *Vitruvius Britannicus*.<sup>515</sup> The origins of *Vitruvius Britannicus*, in spite of the labours of generations of architectural historians, remain tantalisingly obscure. In particular, there have been varied interpretations of the role played by its named author, Colen Campbell, in its inception, as well as of his relationship with the group of publishers who sponsored the first volume. At one extreme we have the idea propounded by Eileen Harris that Campbell was a mere executant of the drawings for the group of publishers who were the driving force of the enterprise; at the other extreme, we have the exactly contrary perspective, implicit in the work T. P. O’Connor, that Campbell was its major proponent from the outset.<sup>516</sup> There has, moreover, been considerable disagreement about the implicit stylistic agenda of the publication. The most influential view has undoubtedly been that of Sir John Summerson, who saw in *Vitruvius Britannicus* the harbinger of the imminent Palladian revolution in English architecture.<sup>517</sup> This view has been disputed in recent years, with Giles Worsley arguing that the idea of the work as a Palladian manifesto makes little sense of the prominent representation of the works of Sir John Vanbrugh within it, a claim that plays an important role in his thesis that the story of English architecture in the eighteenth century is far more complex and ambiguous than the image of Manichaean struggle between Baroque and Palladian associated—fairly or unfairly—with Summerson’s interpretation.<sup>518</sup>

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<sup>514</sup> *Daily Courant*, no. 5605 (14 January 1718), p. 2.

<sup>515</sup> Eileen Harris points out a single rival to *Vitruvius Britannicus*’s precedence in the form of Henry Wynstanley, *Ground: Plotts, General and Particular Prospects ... of Audley End* (1676) – see her *British Architectural Books and Writers 1556-1785* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 144, fn. 5.

<sup>516</sup> Harris, *British Architectural Books*, pp. 140-41; T. P. O’Connor, ‘The Making of *Vitruvius Britannicus*’, *Architectural History*, 29 (1977): 14-30, 81.

<sup>517</sup> Summerson, *Architecture in Britain*, pp. 318-19.

<sup>518</sup> Giles Worsley, *Classical Architecture in Britain: The Heroic Age* (New Haven and London, 1995), pp. 95-98 and *passim*.

Irrespective of the merits of Worsley's wider claims, it is difficult to deny the conspicuous prominence of Vanbrugh within the work, and it is precisely this point that is of interest in the present context. All his major works were represented in multiple plates, with Castle Howard, Blenheim and King's Weston featuring extensively in the first volume. Moreover, Vanbrugh figured prominently in the list of 'learned and ingenious Gentlemen' whose architectural labours were embellishing the nation.<sup>519</sup> No less conspicuous were the extravagant thanks that Campbell bestowed upon Vanbrugh, stating that

I am at a Loss, how to express my Obligations to this worthy Gentleman for promoting my Labours, in most generously assisting me with his Original Drawings, and most carefully correcting all the plates as they advanced. All I can say, falls infinitely short of what I owe; and yet am afraid, what is already said is much more than he will approve.<sup>520</sup>

On any straightforward reading, this would appear to be testimony of an unusually close association. What seems never to have received consideration is the possibility that it was Vanbrugh himself who was the progenitor of the core idea of *Vitruvius Britannicus*, and that the work is the product of a private collaboration between the two authors in which Vanbrugh, with his wide-ranging contacts in the architectural world, provided original drawings that Campbell then prepared for the engraver's use. As O'Connor has noted, Vanbrugh had already conceived of plans to publish engravings of Castle Howard, and, as I have shown, he had clearly managed to bring them tantalisingly close to fruition for 'The Palace of Blenheim'. Vanbrugh is, moreover, a potential link between Campbell and earlier attempts to create a British architectural plate-book identified by O'Connor. In particular, Sir Christopher Wren obtained a copyright licence from William III in 1698, which stated that the architect had

With expence of much time and Charge but also with much Truth and Exactness according to the Rules of Art delineated, described and accurately Engraven on copper Severall Designs of the Cathedral Church of St. Paul's as it is rebuilt and to be finished and is proceeding to Compleat severall other

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<sup>519</sup> Campbell, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, vol. 1, p. 2.

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 5.

Views and Ornaments of the said Church and also the Severall Parochial Churches of London rebuilt since the Conflagration of 1666 together with Severall of our Royal Palaces (viz<sup>l</sup>) Winsor Hampton Court Our Royall Hospitalls of Chelsey and Greenwich with all others as well Publick as Private Works designed by the said S<sup>r</sup> Ch<sup>f</sup> Wren which are or shall be hereafter performed by his Care and Conduct.<sup>521</sup>

It is important to note that Wren's licence—like Vanbrugh's a decade later—would have applied to individual engravings and need not necessarily imply the production of a plate-book. Nevertheless, the possibility of such a publication is implicit within it, and Hawksmoor would have formed the obvious vector between Wren's proposals and Vanbrugh's, especially as he had himself been responsible for producing highly finished drawings of St. Paul's for the engraver to work from.<sup>522</sup> Moreover, Vanbrugh had already had thoughts of publishing engravings of Castle Howard, as a letter to Joynes concerning the production of drawings for this purpose testifies, and the Blenheim engravings form a natural extension of these earlier, apparently abortive, attempts at architectural publication.<sup>523</sup>

The possibility suggests itself that, in its turn, *Vitruvius Britannicus* was a similarly natural extension of Vanbrugh's Blenheim plate-book. It has long been appreciated that Campbell and Vanbrugh could have met through their involvement in the project for the Fifty New Churches, at exactly the time when Vanbrugh was in the midst of his attempts to publish *The Description of the Palace of Blenheim*.<sup>524</sup> Is it too much to imagine that Vanbrugh supplied the germ of the idea to Campbell and went about 'promoting Campbell's labours' in the most literal sense of helping first to define the book project and then piece together the consortium of publishers capable of providing the financial backing for so costly a project?<sup>525</sup> This would at least go some way to accounting for the extraordinary prominence of Vanbrugh's works, not only in the first volume but in its two 'official' successors of 1717 and 1725.

<sup>521</sup> O'Connor, 'The Making of *Vitruvius Britannicus*', p. 15; National Archive, SP 44/347, pp. 383-85.

<sup>522</sup> See, for example, Geraghty, *Architectural Drawings*, cat. nos. 81 and 82, pp. 68-69.

<sup>523</sup> O'Connor, 'The Making of *Vitruvius Britannicus*', p. 15; Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 209.

<sup>524</sup> O'Connor, 'The Making of *Vitruvius Britannicus*', p. 15.

<sup>525</sup> On the likely costs of *Vitruvius Britannicus*, see O'Connor, 'The Making of *Vitruvius Britannicus*', pp. 16-17, 26.

Further circumstantial evidence to this effect has been highlighted by Joanne O'Hara in a recent analysis of the preparatory drawings for *Vitruvius Britannicus*.<sup>526</sup> O'Hara has drawn attention to the largely unremarked, but nevertheless remarkable, survival of a considerable number of original drawings from Vanbrugh's office in the collection of Campbell drawings now preserved in the RIBA library. She has further drawn attention to the number of such drawings that display minor but noticeable differences to the executed plates, commenting that

The discovery of these drawings alongside Campbell's own indicates that they were not all returned to the architect, although the reason why is unclear. Of course, it may have been mere oversight on the part of either of them. However the retention of the drawings by Campbell may actually indicate greater control from Vanbrugh in the production of *Vitruvius Britannicus* than has previously been realised.<sup>527</sup>

She goes on to discuss a number of examples, noting particularly a drawing of Eastbury House that had evidently already been copied by Campbell before it was superseded by a different version before publication. She concludes that Vanbrugh seems to have required Campbell to redraw certain elevations that had undergone modification, thus forcing him to duplicate his work.<sup>528</sup> This certainly conforms to a pattern discernible in the first volume of *Vitruvius Britannicus* where faulty or superseded elements of Vanbrugh's designs were corrected, with ground plans of Castle Howard being substantially recut and possibly even replaced, in both cases while the edition was being printed.<sup>529</sup> This kind of costly and inconvenient exercise is surely testimony to Vanbrugh's *de facto* superiority in his collaboration with Campbell, at least with regard to the publication of his own designs.

A hypothesis—which I advance only tentatively—that may explain this particular pattern of evidence is that, from the beginning, Vanbrugh was the primary motive force behind the project, while the source of Campbell's prominence within it was

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<sup>526</sup> Joanne O'Hara, 'Colen Campbell and the Preparatory Drawings for *Vitruvius Britannicus*', unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 2010.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.* p. 128.

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 129-30.

<sup>529</sup> See Paul Breman and Denise Addis, *A Companion to Vitruvius Britannicus: Annotated and Analytic Index to the Plates* (New York, 1972), pp. 73-74, which lists the known variant states and includes reproductions of the most important variant plates.

his provision of high-quality drafting services. Vanbrugh struggled to draw to professional standards himself and never seems to have engaged in the production of highly finished drawings. These were, however, indispensable for the production of high-quality architectural engravings, as Vanbrugh was well aware: he specifically asked Joynes to make his drawings of Castle Howard ‘pretty exact they being for the Engraver to work from’. He also asked Marlborough to avoid circulating the drawings he was sending, as they were ‘true but in no measure prepared for an Engraver to work after’, and if they were copied they might ‘be published (as it often happens) to great disadvantage’.<sup>530</sup>

One can therefore imagine a mutually advantageous *quid pro quo* in which Vanbrugh made use of Campbell’s drafting abilities to forward the publication of his works in exchange for giving Campbell the opportunity firstly to include a large number of his own designs in the proposed work and secondly to gain a considerable degree of authorial credit. Finally, it may be noted that even if we reject the idea of such a directive role, it is to say the least striking that every one of the three architects who were to publish major early plate books—Campbell, Gibbs, and Leoni—seem to have conceived of their projects around 1712, that is to say at almost exactly the moment that Vanbrugh was attempting to publish his Blenheim book.<sup>531</sup> In such circumstances, the likelihood of direct influence is considerable; and if it was something more, we do indeed, as recent scholarship has begun to suggest, need to significantly rethink the received views of Campbell’s—and Vanbrugh’s—relationship with the Palladian movement.

### **‘Reading’ Blenheim Palace: Vaughan Hart and Narrative Architecture**

Regardless of their relationship with *Vitruvius Britannicus*, the Blenheim plates are of unique value as a source for understanding Blenheim as Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor wished it to be completed. More particularly, the engravings can be combined with the small corpus of Blenheim drawings and the evidence of the extant structure to begin the process of reconstructing the iconographic programme intended for the building. This is a matter of particular current interest given the

<sup>530</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 43.

<sup>531</sup> O’Connor, ‘The Making of *Vitruvius Britannicus*’, p. 15.

stress on a primarily iconographic reading of Vanbrugh's work evident in Vaughan Hart's recent monograph, *Vanbrugh: Storyteller in Stone*.

Hart's essential argument is that Vanbrugh sought to represent the distinctive personalities and achievements of his patrons through the iconographic content and symbolic character of his works. Blenheim plays a centrally important role in this interpretation, since the very idea of the architect as a 'storyteller in stone' derives from Vanbrugh's celebrated plea for the preservation of the ancient manor house of Woodstock as a beautiful and historically resonant feature of the Blenheim landscape, the 'Reasons Offer'd for Preserving some Part of the Old Manor'.<sup>532</sup> The immediate occasion of Vanbrugh's writing was the Duchess of Marlborough's order that the remains of the old Palace of Woodstock should be demolished. In response, Vanbrugh advances various arguments in favour of the preservation of the ancient structure, of which one is of particular interest to Hart. After briefly outlining the historical associations of the manor house with Henry and his celebrated mistress, Rosamond Clifford, Vanbrugh goes on to observe that 'it cannot be doubted, but if Travellers many Ages hence, shall be shewn the Very House in which so Great a Man Dwelt, as they will then read the Duke of Marlborough in Story'.<sup>533</sup> Hart concludes from this that Vanbrugh's intention is precisely to enable the visitor to Blenheim to 'read the Duke of Marlborough in Story'. By his use of the word 'story', Hart further tells us, 'Vanbrugh meant nothing short of a 'legend'. Thus for Hart, Vanbrugh's attitude to architectural meaning is fundamentally narrative-based: there are a series of forms that can be read or decoded by a suitably expert and informed beholder, betraying a prioritisation of the narrative over the aesthetic. Vanbrugh, indeed, 'here makes unambiguous reference to the narrative role of architecture [that is] fundamental to the reading of all his buildings'.<sup>534</sup>

Hart goes on to provide a reading of Blenheim based on this exposition of Vanbrugh's argument. He begins by acknowledging the memorial function of Blenheim, citing various statements by Vanbrugh as well as Kneller's sketch of the *Presentation of Blenheim* as evidence that, 'At least publically, both Marlborough

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<sup>532</sup> The full text of Vanbrugh's plea is published in Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, vol. 4, pp. 29-30.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>534</sup> Hart, *Storyteller in Stone*, p. 138.

and his architect considered the house a memorial to the deed ... and not the doer'.<sup>535</sup> He nevertheless asserts that 'Vanbrugh clearly also saw his role at Blenheim as helping to represent the Duke's legend in stone...'.<sup>536</sup>

Hart goes on to provide a brief tour of specific elements of the building to support his thesis. He first highlights the gateways from the forecourt into the kitchen courtyard and particularly their giant rusticated columns (fig. 104), suggesting that they are notable for 'recalling in style Giulio Romano's "Porta Cittadella" in Mantua and Serlio's fortified gates in his Book VII' (fig. 105). He draws attention to the sculpture of the 'British lion savaging the French cockerel' as a 'verbal pun translated into the decoration', and mentions the Duke's heraldic achievement in the tympanum of the pediment. Otherwise, he offers little comment on the sculptural ornament of the north front, apart from noting the presence of Pallas Athene 'in her warlike guise' on the acroterion of the pediment and the manacled slaves on the broken pediment above, which are significant for 'recalling the iconography of imperial Rome'.<sup>537</sup>

Hart then turns to the pavilion towers with giant finials 'of upside-down French fleurs-de-lys supported by cannon balls' which tell the same story of Marlborough's great victory over the French as well as speaking of Marlborough's role as Master of the Ordnance (fig. 106). These elements he likens to 'Heraldry'; indeed, the idea that architecture has the potential to be a symbolic language, akin to the visual puns sometimes used by heralds to represent the armiger's name or deeds, is fundamental to Hart's wider interpretation of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century architecture. He goes on to liken the forecourt of Blenheim with its sweeping quadrants to 'the apse of a Roman forum', but ultimately prefers to focus on its 'striking similarity to that of the temple of Mars Ultor as illustrated by Palladio's *Quattro Libri*' (fig. 107). Indeed, he implicitly suggests that Vanbrugh's use of 'the French book of Paladio' makes its derivation from this source highly likely, and further notes that 'Palladio's illustration of the ancient temple to war would have been perfectly appropriate as a model at Blenheim'.<sup>538</sup> Citing Wren's commentary on

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<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>537</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138-40.

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138-42.

the temple as an embodiment of war as evidence that his reading of Blenheim's forms is by no means anachronistic, he states that 'It is tempting to imagine the heroic British General and Master of the Ordnance viewing his Blenheim façade in the same way'.<sup>539</sup> The garden front, too, continues the 'triumphalism of the front'. The original order was intended to be martial Doric, and 'an actual trophy of victory', the bust of Louis XIV that Marlborough had seized from the citadel of Tournai, is placed above the portico (fig. 108). Recognising, however, that it was not Vanbrugh's original intention that the south front should be so ornamented, he also cites the plate of the south front from *Vitruvius Britannicus*, where we see instead an equestrian statue of 'Marlborough crushing his enemies, either side of which stand the lion and eagle of the Duke's crest' (fig. 109).<sup>540</sup>

Finally, Hart turns his attention to Blenheim's wider setting, beginning with the Grand Bridge. He makes reference to Frank McCormick's suggestion that 'Vanbrugh's magnificent, if somewhat useless, bridge at Blenheim' was built to 'recall the Duke's crossing of the Nebel that had preceded victory near the Belgian [*sic*] village of Blenheim'.<sup>541</sup> Nevertheless, in Hart's view the broader Blenheim landscape was intended to break entirely with this martial mood. Hart uses Addison's play *Rosamond*, which was not only written by a playwright closely connected to Vanbrugh but also dedicated to the Duchess of Marlborough, as his guide to Vanbrugh's intentions. Citing various verses that, in Hart's paraphrase, extol 'the garden, and the bower in particular, as a paradise', he claims that 'Addison's opera surely reflects the intentions behind Vanbrugh's proposals for the landscape at Blenheim as a refuge from, rather than a celebration of, martial conflict'.<sup>542</sup> Indeed, Addison's verses describing flowered gardens and wandering paths 'might be taken for a description of the garden at Blenheim as planned and in part realised by Vanbrugh and others'.<sup>543</sup>

Given the central role of Blenheim in Hart's wider, and in some quarters well-received, account of Vanbrugh's architecture, his interpretation of its meaning must be reviewed carefully. We must begin with Vanbrugh's attempt to defend

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<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143-44; the Battle of Blenheim took place in Bavaria.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

Woodstock Manor from demolition. The first point to make is that Hart's argument, if it is to be sustained, depends on the existence of a double metaphor in Vanbrugh's statement. Firstly, there must be a metaphorical sense of the word 'read', which is used here in the sense of 'reading' or decoding the building to extract the 'Duke of Marlborough in story'. Then there is a second metaphorical, or at least idiosyncratic, usage in which the word 'story' refers to 'the Duke's legend'.

It is, however, by no means clear that this kind of metaphorical reading is plausible or even possible when Vanbrugh's words are seen in their original context. While the metaphorical sense of 'read' in the sense of 'the interpretation of visual impressions by means of concepts' was undoubtedly current in the eighteenth century and indeed much earlier, the idea of 'reading' a building or work of art appears to be a recent one. The Oxford English Dictionary cites an ambiguous usage from 1923, but it is not until 1969 that we find a well-defined example of the word being used with this meaning. It is, moreover, a usage that remains largely the preserve of art historians and cultural analysts.<sup>544</sup> Nor is it clear that 'story' means 'legend' in this context. Its primary meaning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries corresponded more or less to the current French *histoire*, sharing in the meaning of the modern English usages of the words 'story' and 'history'. In essence, it refers to a coherent chronological narrative, factual or fictional, often with some kind of moral force, and it is notable that the OED cites no example of the word 'story' in the Romantic sense of 'legend' that predates 1794.<sup>545</sup> Vanbrugh's grammar and syntax are somewhat contorted, but it is surely more probable that his use of the word 'read' and 'story' should be taken quite literally: that travellers who see such a structure will go to their history books and, upon discovering Marlborough's great deeds, take pleasure in his house of Blenheim, just as those who know the history of Henry II and his *amours* with Fair Rosamond take pleasure in the modest remains of the ancient manor house of Woodstock. Moreover, even if we allow that Vanbrugh may have anticipated more recent meanings in his words, it is difficult to see how he can be considered to have made in these passages an 'unambiguous' claim for the priority of narrative over aesthetic aims in architecture.

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<sup>544</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary*, hereafter referred to as OED, notes this as a specialist usage in its entry for 'read'.

<sup>545</sup> OED, s.v. 'story *n.*'.

Notwithstanding the potential problems with Hart's exposition of Vanbrugh's discussion of Woodstock Manor, it is upon the soundness of his individual readings of buildings that his interpretation must ultimately stand or fall. In what follows I will therefore begin by considering the adequacy of Hart's interpretation of Blenheim before advancing an alternative account of the palace's iconography and its relationship to Vanbrugh's—and Hawksmoor's—architectural aims. I will also touch on the landscape garden, although only sufficiently to address the general idea, presented by Hart, that it was an Arcadian counterpoint to the martial forms of the palace.

Hart's broad claim that Blenheim was initially designed as an unmistakably 'martial' building is certainly one that resonates with my own view of Vanbrugh's early intentions as expounded in Chapter 2 of this thesis. However, it is questionable whether the examples cited by Hart are adequately justified. The general resemblance of the gateways into the service courts at Blenheim to Serlio's fortified gate is obvious; but it can hardly have been planned. As we have seen, the banded Doric columns cited by Hart, and the source of much of the resemblance he notes, were a late addition that cannot be directly documented before 1709.<sup>546</sup> In addition, there is a plausible aesthetic rationale for their addition. In 1707 to 1708, the towers above the gateways seem to have grown considerably in height and elaboration in tandem with the rest of Blenheim, and, given their late advent, the Doric columns are as likely to represent an attempt to provide adequate visual support for the towering superstructure as much as an intentional evocation of fortified gates.

A more plausible case for the deliberate evocation of martial imagery can be made for the massive forms of the outer gate of the kitchen courtyard (fig. 110). Here, fortifications are evoked by the extreme simplicity of treatment and the massively thick walls, and perhaps most clearly of all, by the use of metaphorical cannon balls to support the corner pilasters, which themselves proclaim the same message through their almost grossly squat proportions and extraordinary, exaggerated entasis. These features do not need to make any specific reference in order to symbolise martial qualities: the gateway seems strong and fortress-like because it actually is massive, weighty, unadorned. At the same time, however, we should not entirely forget the

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<sup>546</sup> Downes, *Vanbrugh*, p. 65.

purpose for which this gateway was built. In addition to forming a ceremonial east entrance to the house, it was intended to be a cistern tower to store the water pumped from the River Glyme to supply the house. For purely functional reasons, cistern towers must be massive in order to support the immense weight of the large quantities of water stored in them, and we can surely see Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor exploiting the aesthetic potential of massive forms—as Piranesi would later do in his prison scenes—as well as symbolising the achievements of the Duke of Marlborough.

We must exercise similar caution with the rather generalised resemblance between the entrance of Blenheim and Palladio's reconstruction of the Temple of Mars. The essential flaw in this argument lies in the complex evolution of the north front. As we have seen the portico arrived somewhat later than the quadrants, so the idea that it was an intentional parallel seems to be out of the question. In addition, we have seen that the addition of the massive portico was initially justified by a more generalised concern to add to the 'beauty, regularity and magnificence' of the building, rather than to emphasise its warlike qualities. It was presumably for similar reasons that the architects of Blenheim appear to have drawn on the model of Bernini's colonnades for the quadrants; and the apparent suitability of such an overtly Roman Catholic model for the residence of a great Protestant hero is surely rather evidence of the degree to which the 'aesthetic' trumped the 'narrative' in the everyday realities of architectural design. Thus while Hart's general claim that Blenheim has aesthetic qualities that are appropriate to the residence of a great general is plausible, his specific examples arguably lack force.

We are on even firmer ground with some of Hart's more detailed iconographic analyses. The first aspect to consider is the great pinnacles on the lanterns of the four pavilions (fig. 106). Hart, drawing directly on Downes, describes these as upside-down French fleur-de-lys supported by cannon balls, and sees in them a direct parallel to the punning sculptures of British lions mauling French cockerels. The inverted fleur-de-lys are attested by the early evidence, and their symbolism is obvious; but it is by no means certain that the spheres should be identified as cannon balls. They are referred to in most of the early Blenheim correspondence as 'globular vases'. Indeed, Samuel Travers explained that

The Southeast Tower is finish'd, & two large Vases of stone set up, one the same with the wooden Vase that was on the Cap which is taken away, the other a large Pedestal on which is a globe, & on that a Ducal Crown Supported by a kind of a Flower de luce turned upside down, which I like much the best of the two.<sup>547</sup>

Travers' description suggests that the pinnacles are more likely to represent the terrestrial 'globe' than cannon balls, a meaning that is, moreover intrinsically likely given the familiarity of the coronation orb as a symbol of (Christ's) dominion over the earth. This interpretation also makes better sense of the iconography of the pinnacles, which can now be readily understood to signify the overthrow of French dominion, symbolised by the fleur-de-lis that formerly ruled the globe, by the agency of the Duke of Marlborough, represented by his ducal coronet.

There can be little doubt that this kind of ingenious visual trope is intended to provide a fitting symbol of Marlborough's martial achievements; but it is once again questionable whether this should be seen as embodying the priority of narrative over aesthetic aims. Throughout the discussions on the gradual resolution of the treatment of the lanterns, the symbolic meaning of the various alternatives was barely discussed. Instead, the constant emphasis was on visual effect, with the 'globular vases' repeatedly presented as one of two main possibilities, of which the other appears to have been a more conventional urn; indeed, Travers made it clear to the duke that 'the choice of the Ornaments is to be left to Your Graces determination upon view'.<sup>548</sup> Thus, while the symbolic potential of the proposed pinnacles cannot be doubted, it is far from the only motivation for their form.

If we move onto Hart's discussion of the south front, it would be difficult to deny the 'triumphalism' of the equestrian statue of Marlborough that was at first intended to stand on the attic above the south portico. He lapses seriously, however, in identifying the lion and the eagle on either side of the attic as 'the Duke's crest'. The Churchill crest, as borne by the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Marlborough, was indeed a lion, but more specifically a lion couchant guardant—that is to say resting on the ground with its head turned toward the viewer—holding a banner charged with a hand turned

<sup>547</sup> British Library Add MS 61353, f. 48v.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*

palm outwards. There is no indication, in either the *Vitruvius Britannicus* plate to which Hart refers or the more detailed Auber engraving of the front, of the banner. This makes it very unlikely that this should be read as Marlborough's crest. The identification of the eagle as part of Marlborough's armorial achievement is even less probable. Hart seems here to be under the impression that the second crest visible in the armorial achievement of the present Duke of Marlborough was borne by the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Marlborough. This is a doubly erroneous reading. The crest is not an eagle but a griffin, and is part of the arms of the Spencer family. This crest has been borne as part of the heraldic achievement of the Dukes of Marlborough only since the time of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke, the son of Marlborough's daughter, Anne, by her marriage to Charles Spencer, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Sunderland and heir to both the Spencer and Churchill titles.<sup>549</sup>

Finally, we turn briefly to consider the meaning of Blenheim's landscape setting. This is arguably the least convincing part of Hart's discussion, depending as it does on the claim that Vanbrugh conceived Blenheim's gardens in opposition to the martial iconography of the house. We have already seen that the original Blenheim garden is well recognised in the literature to be an early example of a fortified garden, and that this interpretation is well attested in contemporary or near-contemporary sources. This makes it difficult to see how Hart's argument could possibly be sustained without serious qualification.

### **The Prince of Mindelheim's Palace: Iconography and Intentional Meaning**

In order to gain a surer grasp of Blenheim's iconography, we must first consider more carefully an aspect of the palace that received relatively little attention from Hart: the planned sculptural schemes that were to form such an important component of the overall effect of the palace as it is presented in the Blenheim plates but which were executed only in a very incomplete form. The development of the scheme can be traced back into the first Blenheim elevation drawings (figs 1 & 56). On the earliest scheme for the south front we see at the centre the Duke's armorial achievement supported by putti (fig. 111). Then, over the coupled columns on either side of the frontispiece, we see a pair of sculptural groups. Although tiny, they are

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<sup>549</sup> Charles Mosley (ed.), *Burke's Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage* (3 vols) (Wilmington, 107<sup>th</sup> ed., 2003), vol. 2, p. 2620, s.v. 'Marlborough'.

clearly recognisable by their attributes as the figures of Fame, with her trumpet, and History with her pen and scroll, who is presumably recording Marlborough's great deeds. Finally, we find a series of four trophies crowning the attics and balustrades over the double columns and the pilasters at the corners of each terminal pavilion. These are of overtly Romanising form and bring to mind the so-called Trophy of Marius erected on the balustrade of the Campidoglio in 1590 (fig. 112), the most widely known ancient model in Hawksmoor's lifetime. Of more direct relevance in the present context, however, is the particular form of the trophies in this early drawing. The various weapons and shields that make up the trophy are hung on a club, the weapon of Hercules. They are not simply, then, a sign of victory, but can be read as symbols of Hercules, who it will be recalled, figures prominently in both of Kneller's allegorical portraits of Marlborough. The specific signification of Hercules is not detailed by the artist in his account of *Queen Anne Presenting the Model of Blenheim to Military Merit*; Thornhill, however, in a sketch for his proposed interior scheme for Blenheim, identifies him as the personification of 'Heroick Virtue' (fig. 113), and it is probably this idea that the Herculean component of the trophies is intended to symbolise.

The sculptural ornaments on the second of the early schemes for the south front are much simpler (fig. 114). Trophies occur only above the attic of the frontispiece, and the ducal coat-of-arms and figures of Fame and History have been abandoned. Instead, much of the skyline is punctuated with urns of classic Vanbrughian form, creating an effect akin to that of the south front of Castle Howard. More significantly, however, we find the stretches of wall between the pavilions and central pile topped by a set of eight female statues. With the exception of the figure with a lance, they lack identifiable attributes. However, comparison with the 1707 drawing for the interior of the saloon (fig. 76) may provide a hint of their most likely identity. Like the early elevation, this too shows a group of statues, all of female figures with very exactly delineated attributes, and all readily identifiable. At the centre we see Charity with her children, represented much as in Ripa's *Iconologia* (fig. 115); on the left we see Hope with her anchor and Fortitude with her spear; on the right, Justice with her scales and Prudence with her mirror, also drawn from Ripa (fig. 116). The figures are therefore clearly intended to represent the Virtues, and this

is broadly consonant with the theme of Heroic Virtue that is the most likely primary meaning of the Herculean imagery already discussed.

The figures of the virtues were not to be executed for the saloon at Blenheim, as in early 1709 the Florentine envoy made it known to Marlborough that a set of exceptionally fine statues by Pietro Francavilla were being offered for sale by their owners, the Bracci family.<sup>550</sup> Then, when the Bracci proved unwilling to reduce their extravagant price sufficiently, the Duke decided to commission a set of new copies in bronze of antique statues in the collection of the Grand Duke of Tuscany.<sup>551</sup> The idea of displaying statues of the virtues at Blenheim nevertheless persisted into the final scheme represented in the official Blenheim engravings, but on the north rather than the south front. Both the engravings (figs 94-97) and the account books make it possible to identify some of the figures. The most obvious are the figures of Prudence, who appears on the east (left-hand) quadrant just next to the central pile; and of Charity, who appears above the eastern end of the west (right-hand) quadrant, and whose completion is recorded in the Blenheim account books for October 1709.<sup>552</sup> In the same month's accounts, there is a bill submitted for three more figures, successors to another three completed in April; but they are all left unidentified.<sup>553</sup> The accounts for September 1710 are more informative, and record the completion of statues of 'Peace', 'Truth' and 'Fortitude'.<sup>554</sup> Although the evidence is fragmentary and the remaining figures too small to identify with any certainty, all conform to the pattern set in the design for the saloon and must be seen as part of a highly conventional, though unusually extensive, scheme for representing Virtue and the Good.

Of considerably more interest are the figures that crown the pediments (fig. 117). The most obvious explanation for the presence of the two slaves is to suggest Marlborough's role as their future liberator. This interpretation is certainly consonant with the Duke's vision of himself as a defender of 'liberty', and also with the presence of a figure in Phrygian cap, the cap of liberty, standing on the balustrade of the central pile. The figure of Pallas, whose identity is confirmed in Grinling

<sup>550</sup> Avery, 'Marlborough as Patron of Sculpture', pp. 427-64, esp. pp. 430-31.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 443.

<sup>552</sup> British Library Add MS 19596 f. 116.

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*, and *ibid.*, f. 30.

<sup>554</sup> British Library Add MS 19597 f. 90.

Gibbons's bill of September 1710, must be intended to represent the mythological *alter ego* of Queen Anne that we have already observed on her coronation medal in chapter 1 (fig. 9), and which appeared on other medals commemorating her reign. A medal issued in 1707, for example, that celebrated Great Britain as the *novae palladium Troiae*, apparently in reference to aid to the United Provinces in the war against France, also showed Anne in guise of Pallas on the reverse, very much as she is depicted at Blenheim (fig. 118).<sup>555</sup> This statue therefore marks the entire entrance front of the palace as Queen Anne's realm, and clearly asserts the palace's function as a 'Royall and a National Monument', as Vanbrugh would later put it, as well as a memorial to Marlborough's victories.<sup>556</sup> Indeed, it places Blenheim quite literally under the aegis of Anne, given that the *aegis* is Latin name for the shield she carries

The presence of the Duke of Marlborough's coat of arms immediately beneath her, however, is no less assertive of Marlborough's eminence within that realm, especially as it incorporates his full heraldic achievement as a sovereign prince of the Holy Roman Empire (fig. 119). The specific form of crown displayed by Marlborough is that of the Holy Roman Imperial crown itself, with its combination of a central arch and mitre-like plaques, an unambiguous symbol of Marlborough's status within Europe's premier monarchy.<sup>557</sup> Marlborough's very public adoption of the accoutrements of sovereignty therefore marked him out as a figure unlike any other in England.

These themes were, moreover, carried inwards into the Great Hall before which these sculptures stood. Once again, the supremacy of Queen Anne is asserted through the representation of her coat of arms on the keystone of the stupendous arch that screens the innermost bay of the hall, where it is flanked by Fames trumpeting the achievements of her reign (fig. 120). Within the arch, however, we again see Marlborough's sovereign status asserted through the presence of the closed crown; although now hidden by a portrait, the crown originally floated above the Duke's full

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<sup>555</sup> For the medal and its commemorative purpose, see 'The History of the Medals of Queen Anne and George I', separately paginated appendix to Nicholas Tindal, *The History of England by M. Rapin de Thoyras, Continued from the Revolution to the Accession of George II* (4 vols; vol. 4 in two parts) (London, 1744-47), vol. 4, pt. 2, p. 1.

<sup>556</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, p. 45; Hart, *Storyteller in Stone*, p. 137.

<sup>557</sup> Dobrée and Webb, *Complete Works*, p. 128.

armorial with ‘ye Gart:<sup>f</sup>, his Coronnett, motto, Spread Eagle, & Imperial Crown’ (fig. 81).<sup>558</sup> The Duke’s achievements and the glories of Queen Anne’s reign are also implicit in the unusual choice of palm fronds for the foliage of the hall’s giant Corinthian columns. Hawksmoor would have been well aware of Villalpando’s claim, in his *In Ezechielem explanationes*, that the Corinthian order was first used at the Temple of Solomon and had palm-leaf capitals; but the Blenheim capitals here have little resemblance to Villalpando’s and it is more likely that the primary reference is instead to the victor’s palm, just as in Kneller’s *Presentation of Blenheim*.<sup>559</sup>

Perhaps the most uncompromising assertion of Marlborough’s exceptional status—never installed at Blenheim because the duchess refused after his death to make the final payment owed to the sculptor—would have been the two statues that can only have been intended to occupy the two great niches in the south wall of the hall. These works were commissioned from the Florentine late Baroque sculptor Giovanni Baratta. Vanbrugh’s initial thought was that the statues could be commissioned ‘for a trial’ so that Baratta could fill the niches in the saloon if attempts to purchase the Francavilla sculptures should fail; and he suggested that the subjects should be left to Baratta’s ‘own fancy’.<sup>560</sup> As Charles Avery has shown, Baratta responded by producing two sculptures representing ‘Glory’ and ‘Valour’, of which the former alone is known to survive, and is now in the collection of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge (fig. 121).<sup>561</sup> Avery has identified its subject as *Gloria de’Principi*, the Glory of Princes, as represented by Ripa in his *Iconologia*, and cites the Padua edition of 1630 as the source (fig. 122). However, the wreath she bears in her hand takes her closer to the corresponding image in the Paris 1643 edition (fig. 123) or its later Dutch and German imitators.<sup>562</sup> The use of a French edition perhaps suggests that Marlborough was less willing to indulge the sculptor’s fancy than Vanbrugh—

<sup>558</sup> British Library Add MS 19597 f. 90v.

<sup>559</sup> On Villalpando’s palm-leaf capital, see Alberto Pérez-Gómez, ‘Juan Bautista Villalpando’s Divine Model in Architectural Theory’, in Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Stephen Parcell (eds), *Chora 3: Intervals in the Philosophy of Architecture* (Quebec, 1999), pp. 125-56, esp. pp. 142-43.

<sup>560</sup> Avery, ‘Marlborough as Patron of Sculpture’, pp. 437-38.

<sup>561</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 438.

<sup>562</sup> Cesare Ripa, *Iconologie, ou explication nouvelle de plusieurs images, emblemes et autres figures...* (trans. Jean Baudoin) (2 vols) (Paris, 1643), vol. 1, p. 79; the same image was copied in the 1698 Amsterdam edition of Baudoin’s text, vol. 1, p. 97 (no. 70); and a later Augsburg derivative, *Der Kunst-Goettin Minerva Liebreiche Entdeckung...* (Augsburg, 1705), p. 61 (no. 1).

presumably he took advice on the image's subject from someone more familiar with the French than the Italian tradition. Baratta's additions to the Ripa model are also illuminating. The cornucopia at her feet 'disgorges roses and coins with palm fronds', presumably as a legitimating reference to the vast wealth Marlborough had acquired in the course of his victorious career in British service. In addition, beside her right foot, we encounter what Avery interprets as a 'closed ducal coronet'.<sup>563</sup> By definition, however, a ducal coronet is open; a coronet that is 'closed' by arches becomes a crown, and therefore a signifier of the princely status implicit in the sculpture's subject. Marlborough's decision to commission a sculptor to produce such imagery demonstrates at the very least the extent to which his princely status was acknowledged by his contemporaries and may even reflect his conscious intent to assert that status within his own residence.

It was, however, on the south front that the planned imagery would have reached its most extravagant pitch in the form of the stupendous equestrian statue of Marlborough portrayed on both the official Blenheim engraving and on the later *Vitruvius Britannicus* plate (figs 109 & 124). This statue forms the most elevated component in a group of three that includes, as Hart noted, representations of a lion and an eagle. These are surely not heraldic motifs, however; the lion and the eagle would have been readily recognisable in the eighteenth century as symbols of Britain and the Holy Roman Empire respectively. Once again, we see spheres under the feet of both creatures that could, if we single-mindedly pursued a militaristic approach to Blenheim's iconography, be seen as cannon balls. In this case, however, it seems more likely that they are, like those in the pinnacles of the lanterns, globes or orbs, since this would make the sculptures emblems of the allied empires of Britain and Germany; the upward glance of the Imperial eagle may even be intended to suggest that the Holy Roman Empire must look up to Marlborough as its saviour.

The representation of Marlborough himself, though fairly clearly intended as an embodiment of victory, is also likely to have a more complex underlying meaning than the triumph of the Duke over his enemies. The iconography shown in the early engravings appears to belong to a distinct tradition of English imagery initially developed by Wren for the proposed Mausoleum of Charles I at Windsor (figs 125 &

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<sup>563</sup> Avery, 'Marlborough as Patron of Sculpture', p. 439.

126).<sup>564</sup> For this monument to the ‘Royal Martyr’, Wren developed an iconography that is both described in *Parentalia* and illustrated in the form of two surviving drawings, one probably by Grinling Gibbons and the other probably by Caius Gabriel Cibber.<sup>565</sup> In both drawings, the king is borne aloft on a shield by the ‘Emblems of Heroic Virtues’, which Robert Beddard has identified by as the four Cardinal Virtues of Prudence, Temperance, Justice and Fortitude.<sup>566</sup> These figures stand, in Gibbons’s drawing, on a massive slab and, in Cibber’s, on a rather less monumental circular plinth, under which we see four other figures being crushed: the Vices of Envy, Heresy, Hypocrisy and Rebellion.<sup>567</sup> The massive block under Marlborough’s equestrian statue appears to derive directly from Gibbons’s proposal for the sculpture in Charles I’s Mausoleum, and may have a related symbolic intent. It seems likely that we are intended to see Marlborough confining disruptive and destructive forces to the sepulchre where they belong. The prominent occurrence of the Virtues elsewhere at Blenheim further reinforces the impression that its iconography belongs within the tradition inaugurated by Wren, with Marlborough representing the hero whose virtues are the foundation of his achievements and who, ultimately, triumphs over envy and discord to re-establish peace, order and liberty. In this light, it is perhaps significant that the inscription on the Thornhill drawing mentioned above (fig. 113) goes on to identify the other elements in the proposed decoration in some detail:

Herc[ules] or Heroick Virtue holding y<sup>e</sup> Arms, the Hydra slain on w<sup>ch</sup> he Triumphs denoting y<sup>e</sup> difficulties y<sup>t</sup> he has overcome Envy at a distance waring her snaky hair &c. Little genii holdin y<sup>e</sup> Generall’s staff.

Again we have the same opposition between ‘heroic virtue’ and its destructive opponent, in this case envy. Indeed, ‘envy’ seems to have been of particular concern to Marlborough, as well it might be given the controversy that attended his meteoric rise to power and wealth. It is snaky-haired envy who can be seen in the background

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<sup>564</sup> See Robert Beddard, ‘Wren’s Mausoleum for Charles I and the Cult of the Royal Martyr’, *Architectural History*, 27 (1984): 36-49; and J. Douglas Stewart, ‘A Militant, Stoic Monument: The Wren-Cibber-Gibbons Charles I Mausoleum Project: Its Authors, Sources, Meaning, and Influence’, in W. Gerald Marshall (ed.), *The Restoration Mind* (Newark, Delaware and London, 1997), pp. 21-64.

<sup>565</sup> Stewart, ‘A Militant, Stoic Monument’, pp. 30-31.

<sup>566</sup> Beddard, ‘Wren’s Mausoleum’, p. 43.

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*

of Kneller's equestrian portrait of Marlborough as well as in Thornhill's sketch, and the implicit message seems to be that only the envious would deny that the Duke's military successes justly deserved the rewards in money, possessions and princely status that they had brought.

The iconography intended for Blenheim, though conventional in itself, does therefore seem to have been inflected in ways specifically intended to advertise Marlborough's extraordinary achievements and assert the legitimacy of the material and honorific status they brought him. He the sculptural schemes have been realised, the duke would have laid claim to a symbolic heritage that was more usually associated with the ruling dynasties of Europe. This was not only perceptible directly in the recurrent representation of the closed crown and the commissioning of works such as Baratta's *Glory of Princes*, but in the adaptation of the underlying iconographic scheme from Wren's mausoleum for King Charles I, and the more general utilisation of Herculean imagery. Thus for all its diversity, we can see a set of recurring themes within the iconographic programme intended for Blenheim. Marlborough is a modern Hercules, who has chosen the path of 'heroic virtue' rather than ease and leisure. His virtues have led to his great triumphs, which have confined the vices to the sepulchre, and more specifically, overcome the envy of his enemies. His triumphs have in their turn been justly met with great rewards, material and honorific. Of these rewards, the most extraordinary was his elevation to the principality of Mindelheim, and the symbols of this uniquely exalted rank were to be displayed without shame throughout the palace. At one and the same time, however, this sovereign prince in his own right remained a loyal subject of the queen under whose aegis the palace was built. It is an iconography, in sum, wholly resonant with the transformed aspect of Blenheim after 1707, and suggests that house's aggrandisement should indeed be read in conjunction with Marlborough's elevation to princely status.

## **Conclusion**

Cumulatively, all this evidence seems to me to point in only one direction: that Marlborough was the driving force for the transformation of Blenheim in 1707. After returning to England at the end of the campaign of 1706 as both a sovereign prince

and a victorious general, he had the confidence and the influence needed to secure the heritability of his lands and titles in the female line and so realise his ambition to give his dynasty a permanent place at the apex of the European social order. From this elevated position his descendants would act as a permanent memorial of his achievements. Blenheim was to play a central role in this process of dynastic aggrandisement, and in preparation for this he managed to secure public acknowledgment of the Crown's responsibility for the construction process at the same time as he secured the female succession of his duchy and pension. However, he found the building site in a state of crisis, partly as a result of the criticisms made by the duchess during her last visit and partly due to rapidly dwindling funds and an accumulating debt. The first priority was to secure the duchess's quiescence by implementing her numerous requests for modifications to the fabric. The next was to secure increased funding from the Treasury. Then, as soon as finances permitted, it must have been discreetly intimated to Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor that they should turn Blenheim into a palace that could match in sophistication and sumptuousness the very finest in Europe. Both the duke and Vanbrugh, however, failed to keep the duchess *au fait* with the rapidly developing design, no doubt aware of the degree of opposition she was likely to offer to any further aggrandisement of the building. Thus it was not until the middle of 1709, as construction on the new service courts advanced, that she grasped the true extent of Blenheim's aggrandisement. By then it was too late to prevent the transformation of the 'castle' of 1705 into a palace appropriate to the Duke of Marlborough's truly international status and ambitions. Through a rich and complex, if ultimately conventional, display of sculptural symbolism, the palace would have communicated the prince-duke's military supremacy and the princely rank that was its greatest reward. Two years after its construction had begun, then, the captain general's castle had become the prince of Mindelheim's palace, fitting in its formal qualities and its symbolic imagery to the exalted rank that its owner had succeeded in attaining through his Herculean exertions.

## EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION

The official Blenheim engravings represent the ultimate and most ambitious state of development of the design that Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor had embarked upon in 1705. At precisely the same time that the designs for Blenheim were reaching a peak of complexity and conceptual completeness, however, the preconditions of their realisation were beginning to falter. The whole Blenheim enterprise was built on Marlborough's continued enjoyment of royal favour. Marlborough possessed a dominant influence over government policy at both home and abroad, and as long as he continued to render the loyal service that Queen Anne regarded as her due and his duty, she was willing to indulge his wish for a great house to match his exalted title and generous pensions. Indeed, Anne displayed consistent determination that her intimate servants and loyal supporters should benefit richly from her largesse: 'as long as I live', she wrote to Godolphin, 'it shall be my endeavour to make my Country and my friends easy'.<sup>568</sup> No one benefited more richly than Marlborough, who well understood Anne's wish to secure the material and social status of the Churchill dynasty—'The Queen's goodness in being desirous to establish my family', as he once described it.<sup>569</sup> Marlborough and his wife were, after all, her most intimate and enduring friends, whose loyalty, support and counsel had helped steer her safely through the treacherous waters of the Glorious Revolution and the reign of William and Mary.

Nevertheless, the benefits reaped by Marlborough formed part of a clearly understood *quid pro quo* in which the queen, as the dispenser of largesse, ultimately expected to maintain the upper hand. This fundamental reality was to become all too evident as the relationship between the queen and her greatest subject gradually began to break down in the later years of the decade. Problems can be traced back as early as 1706, when Marlborough and Godolphin increasingly came to rely on the support of the 'Junto' of Whig aristocrats to maintain a parliamentary majority. Their need to conciliate the Whigs led to a crisis in 1707-8, when they openly opposed the queen's choice of Tory clergymen to fill the vacant bishoprics of Exeter and Chester.

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<sup>568</sup> Quoted in Gregg, *Queen Anne*, p. 402.

<sup>569</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 142 (to the duchess, 4/15 November 1702).

Since Anne regarded ecclesiastical appointments as her own prerogative, she stubbornly refused to countenance her ministers' objections. With Harley's connivance, the situation deteriorated to such an extent that by February 1708 she was actually prepared to contemplate accepting the resignations of both Godolphin and Marlborough and supporting a new 'moderate' ministry with Harley as Lord Treasurer. However, it rapidly became clear that Harley would not be able to secure the necessary Parliamentary majority, forcing the Queen to dismiss him and belatedly decline Marlborough and Godolphin's resignations.<sup>570</sup>

In the short term, the loss of Harley from the ministry and the subsequent landslide victory of their Whig allies in the election of 1708 enabled Marlborough and Godolphin to return to office with their authority not only intact but enhanced. Indeed, it was no doubt this background that made it possible for Marlborough to extract ever-growing sums for Blenheim in the months and years following Oudenarde and Malplaquet. Anne knew she had no real alternative to the *duumvirs* and therefore had little choice but to satisfy the duke's increasingly extravagant expectations. However, as time went on she seems to have done so with increasing reluctance and resentment, as she began to give credence to rumours, actively fostered by Godolphin's chief rival, Robert Harley, and his coterie of propagandists, that the duke was deliberately seeking to perpetuate the war for his own benefit. Such suspicions were hardly allayed by Marlborough's misguided attempt in 1709 to persuade the Queen make his military supremacy permanent by granting him his office of Captain General for life.

During the first half of 1710, Marlborough and Godolphin remained in office, but were now well aware that their grip on power was slipping. During this period, the Blenheim payments continued and even increased, with a warrant ordering a record payment of £9400 in June 1710.<sup>571</sup> Throughout this time, however, the Queen and Harley were watching and waiting, and were finally able to realise their previously frustrated plans for a new style of 'moderate' ministry in August 1710. Godolphin

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<sup>570</sup> Godfrey Davies, 'The Fall of Harley in 1708', *English Historical Review*, vol. 66 no. 259 (1951), pp. 246-254; G. S. Holmes and W. A. Speck, 'The Fall of Harley in 1708 Reconsidered', *English Historical Review*, vol. 80 no. 317 (1965), pp. 673-698; G. V. Bennett, 'Robert Harley, the Godolphin Ministry and the Bishoprics Crisis of 1707', *English Historical Review*, vol. 82 no. 325 (1967), pp. 726-46.

<sup>571</sup> MS Top. Oxon. c. 265, ff. 89-90; *CTB*, vol. 24, p. 25.

was forced to resign from the Treasury in August, and on this occasion Marlborough, recognising that Harley had secured sufficient control over the government patronage machine to be able to secure a Commons majority in a general election, chose to reconcile himself to the change as best as he could. Knowing that his services would be required for as long as the war continued, he strove for two things as the price of his acquiescence: first, for his wife to remain in her offices for as long as possible; and second, for the continued flow of funds to Blenheim.<sup>572</sup>

These changing circumstances led, in the final stages of the building campaign, to a further, fundamental reorientation in the iconography of Blenheim. As the Captain General's castle grew into the Prince of Mindelheim's palace in the course of 1707 to 1708, the memorial and commemorative function that had originally served to justify Blenheim's extravagant scale had been occluded by an increasingly unabashed quest to provide a residence appropriate to Marlborough's unparalleled position as a prince-duke, the sole English equivalent to the *princes étrangers* of France. Such architectural ambition could be contemplated only because of Marlborough's seemingly impregnable position in the queen's favour and his apparently endless series of great victories. As that favour began to fade, and as the prospect of peace under the new Tory, anti-war government arose, Marlborough's image as the modern Hercules, the unabashed exponent of princely magnificence, must have come to seem both an embarrassment and a liability. Harley's propagandists began to show signs of exploiting Blenheim as an example of Marlborough's unscrupulous exploitation of royal favour for his own enrichment. Might there not be something distinctly double-edged about the anonymous print of Blenheim (fig. 127) that, in its seemingly flattering inscription, tells us that the 'Offices are fit for 300 hundred in family and the outhouses for lodging a regiment of guards'? It certainly bears a suspicious similarity to the words with which Defoe, who was at the time one of Harley's most prolific Grub Street hacks, would describe Blenheim in his *Tour Through the Whole Isle of Great Britain*. After a similarly exultant description of the palace's grandiosity, his description culminates in the

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<sup>572</sup> On Marlborough's anxiety to protect the duchess, see Harris, *A Passion for Government*, p. 173; for his continued concern with Blenheim, see e.g. Marlborough to Godolphin, 17 August 1710, and Godolphin's reply, 25 August 1710, in Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 3, pp. 1607, 1615.

prophecy—or perhaps the threat—that ‘some time or other Blenheim may and will return to be as the old Woodstock once was, the palace of a king’.<sup>573</sup>

It is important to note that it was at precisely this time of declining influence that Marlborough and his entourage explicitly revived the idea that Blenheim was a national monument, a royal project rather than a personal favour. Vanbrugh in particular deployed the claim in September 1710 when he sought on Marlborough’s behalf to extract more funds for Blenheim from the Treasury, which had been placed in commission under the direction of Harley’s close ally Lord Poulett following Godolphin’s dismissal. The ploy worked, and the Treasury Commissioners replied in the affirmative on 6 October 1710 and asked Vanbrugh to specify how much money would be needed. The architect lobbied for £8000, though, as he told the duke, £1000 would have sufficed, and by this means he successfully obtained an additional series of payments in October and November totalling £7000. ‘Reflecting afterwards’, he later wrote,

how well the giving the Building that turn of a Publick Monument had workt even with those who were likely to make the greatest exception to it; I resolv’d to Spare no pains in cultivating that Notion in Generall, and have found so good Success in it, that I do not remember to have talk’d to any one body about it ... that has not own’d the Queen was right in what She had directed, and that her Honour was at Stake to see it completed.<sup>574</sup>

So it was primarily as a means of securing continued funding for the increasingly controversial construction works at Blenheim that Vanbrugh resurrected the very same idea of the palace as a public monument that Marlborough had used in 1705 to justify its ‘expense and unwieldiness’ to his wife and Godolphin.

With awareness of this, a hitherto unnoticed contradiction concealed in Kneller’s account of the commissioning of his *Presentation of Blenheim* gains greatly in significance. He dated his sketch to 1708, but also stated that he received the Queen’s orders to paint it from the Duke of Shrewsbury, her Lord Chamberlain. Yet Shrewsbury did not return to court to take up that office until April 1710 – his

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<sup>573</sup> Daniel Defoe, *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (2 vols) (London, 1962), vol. 2, p. 28.

<sup>574</sup> Whistler, *The Imagination of Vanbrugh*, p. 238-9.

appointment being the first harbinger of the impending change of ministry then being plotted by the Queen and Harley.<sup>575</sup> This suggests that Kneller's composition should in fact be dated to 1710 or 1711, and can be seen as part of the same propaganda campaign that Vanbrugh was waging on behalf of the duke with the Treasury. Indeed, according to Kneller it was Marlborough himself who dictated the terms of the commission, explicitly requesting that 'no person should be represented by the life Except the Queens Majesty But that the whole Picture should be Allegoricall'.<sup>576</sup>

For all the efforts of Vanbrugh and Kneller, this campaign was only partially successful. The Duchess of Marlborough, once she was finally forced to give up her court offices, left her lodgings at St. James's Palace in way that could hardly be better calculated to offend the Queen. On the grounds that she had originally paid for them, the duchess ordered the removal of all the locks and door fittings, and to this offence rumour added the untrue but extremely damaging charge that she had ordered the levering out of marble fireplaces and the removal of wainscoting.<sup>577</sup> Not unnaturally, Anne responded by refusing to sign another Blenheim warrant when Harley brought it to her in July, telling him that 'she would not build a house for one that had pulled down and gutted hers'.<sup>578</sup> Eventually, however, long and delicate negotiations for further payments bore fruit, and the queen allowed herself to be persuaded to sign the warrant on 17 July.<sup>579</sup> This was, however, to be the last such payment. Within months Harley had secured a provisional peace after secret negotiations with France conducted behind the backs, and against the interests, of Britain's nominal allies. With the coming of peace, Marlborough was no longer needed to sustain the campaign, and the queen's support for his great house was immediately abandoned.

Thus, by 1711, Vanbrugh and, in all probability, the duke himself, knew very well that the house would have to be completed in very different circumstances to those in which it was begun. Marlborough's disgrace, which culminated in his exile and trial

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<sup>575</sup> Gregg, *Queen Anne*, pp. 309-10.

<sup>576</sup> Green, *Blenheim Palace*, p. 298.

<sup>577</sup> Snyder, *Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, vol. 3, p. 1668, fn. 2; Harris, *A Passion for Government*, p. 183.

<sup>578</sup> Harris, *A Passion for Government*, p. 183.

<sup>579</sup> For a copy of the warrant, see Soane Museum SM 166 f. 12r.

*in absentia* for peculation, cast a long shadow. Although Marlborough returned to favour in 1714 following Anne's death and the succession of the House of Hanover to the British throne, the taint left by the accusations of self-enrichment at public expense remained and made the completion of the palace, from 1716 onwards, into an act of legitimisation, and, following the duke's death in 1722, of memorialisation. The brazen assertion of the duke's status that reached its zenith in 1707-1708 was replaced with the deliberate occlusion of his identity, as the depersonalisation first evident in Kneller's *Presentation of Blenheim* became a consistent feature of the interior decorative schemes. In Thornhill's ceiling painting the Great Hall, for example, Marlborough's place is once again taken by an abstract proxy. Even the great pillar in Woodstock Park later erected in the duke's honour by the duchess is marked by an anxious assertion of the legitimacy of his 'rewards': its base is covered with the texts of the Acts of Parliament by which the Woodstock estate was granted, the queen's construction of the house was semi-officially recognised, and Marlborough's estates, titles, and pension perpetuated to his descendants. The adroit repositioning of the palace's meaning that accompanied Marlborough's fall therefore continued to shape intentions long afterwards, and was so successful that it has ever since impeded a clear understanding of the palace earlier, and original, historical meanings.

It is precisely this earlier period that has been the focus of this present study, in which I have sought to reveal just how determined Marlborough's pursuit of magnificence really was, and just how completely Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor sought to realise it. In place of the conventional view of Blenheim as the spontaneous gift of the nation following the Captain General's first great victory, I have tried to suggest that the acquisition of Woodstock Park and the queen's decision to fund the construction of a great house were the result of Marlborough's careful calculation of the benefits that could be extracted from the political nation and the Queen in return for his signal services. Vanbrugh, too, I have argued became not simply the architect but a protégé of the duke, believing that Marlborough's support would secure him the Surveyorship of the Queen's Works. In seeking to shape Blenheim's architecture in order to realise his patron's wishes, Vanbrugh seems to have militarised the forms of Castle Howard, not simply to evoke Marlborough's great victories but in order to draw upon deeper set of social values that was deeply inflected by the ancient

warrior-aristocratic ideal. Marlborough's becoming a sovereign prince, moreover, required acknowledgment in a mode of imagery, both architectural and iconographic, even more magnificent. With Marlborough's tacit consent at least, and more probably at his prompting, Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor transformed the aspect of Blenheim to suit it for its palatial role as the residence of the Prince of Mindelheim. The pursuit of magnificent effect was redoubled both in the main house and its dependencies, as well as in the Great Bridge that was now planned for the northern approach. At the same time, the iconographic programme that was always intended to extol Marlborough's martial achievements and virtuous conduct became more emphatically assertive of the emblems of sovereignty, with the closed crown of a prince of the Holy Roman Empire functioning as the still more prestigious counterpart of his ducal coronet.

In the process of producing an architectural setting fitted to Marlborough's status and achievements, however, Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor did not simply rely on conventional formal and iconographic devices. The architects brought a degree of aesthetic adventure and of formal rigour to the enterprise that is little short of astonishing. The pursuit of symmetry and regularity are especially recurrent themes, and the emergence of such remarkable forms as those of the double pediment over the north portico and the great arch in the hall seemingly sprang from the desire to maintain the greatest possible degree of symmetry in the placement of the central block of the house with regard to the four pavilions. Indeed, the rigorous pursuit of the 'best effect', and the underlying aesthetic logic perceptible in the way many design changes unfolded, remind us that architecture always remained for both Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh fundamentally an aesthetic, rather than a narrative pursuit, however important it might be that forms should embody appropriate symbolic meanings. Indeed, it was the aesthetic qualities of the building, its regularity and proportion, its physical scale and richness of materials, that endowed it with the emotional power that made such 'magnificent' building one of the foremost vehicles for the communication of social meaning among the socio-political elites of early modern Europe. It was, moreover, this kind of 'magnificence' which Blenheim Palace, more than other English domestic building of its time, so deliberately and uncompromisingly evoked in its attempt to communicate Marlborough's elevated, and seemingly ever-growing, social and political status.

This picture of Blenheim's early history, if accepted, has implications both for and beyond the history of art and architecture. At the most basic level, it provides a substantially new picture of the architectural development and the intentional meanings of one of the most important buildings in the British Isles. It also provides, I hope, some new insight into the nature of the ever-elusive Vanbrugh-Hawksmoor partnership. The question of what defines or characterises 'English baroque architecture', or even whether such an architecture actually exists, has not been explicitly addressed here. Nevertheless, I hope that it is of some value to show how some of the most archetypally baroque features of Blenheim can be accounted for as the products of a deep concern to maintain the geometric regularity of the building. This may suggest that breaking of the 'grammar' of classical architecture characteristic of the baroque was by no means arbitrary, but the result of sacrificing conventional rules in order to serve higher aesthetic aims.

I would further suggest that this study may have certain methodological implications. Firstly, its findings, if robust, must call into question the increasingly pervasive belief that the 'empirical' base of British architectural history is now substantially complete. If there are new things to say about a building as thoroughly and expertly studied as Blenheim, this must surely apply *a fortiori* to the numerous other buildings that have not benefited from such extensive and intensive examination. Secondly, I hope it suggests that questions of architectural meaning become more amenable to analysis when a careful study of a building's historical context is undertaken alongside a detailed analysis of design process. By increasing the precision of our knowledge of Blenheim's development and situating it firmly within the context Marlborough's career as courtier, soldier and politician, it has proved possible to identify correlations and connections that might otherwise have remained obscure.

Finally, I would suggest that the findings of this research have some relevance to broader historical studies. In recent years, there has been a strong historiographical focus on the 'modernity' of eighteenth century British culture. This has tended to privilege the mercantile and industrial revolutions, the associated emergence of consumerist behaviours, the peaceful attainment of political reform along liberal and

democratic lines, and the eclipse of the court in favour of the city.<sup>580</sup> In this picture, the city was triumphant and the court was ‘in decline’, at the beginning of a relentless, irreversible process of relegation to the cultural and political periphery. The evidence of Blenheim, however, suggests that this emphasis on modernity reflects an implicit and anachronistic prejudgment that the most interesting aspects of the early modern world are precisely those that most closely resemble our own.<sup>581</sup> Blenheim functioned in a fundamentally *ancien régime* state, a state which was in its basic disposition theocratic, traditionalist, hierarchical, dynastic and monarchical. Indeed, the palace emerges from my analysis as first and foremost a product of traditional court culture. As an aesthetic entity, physical artefact, and symbolic form, it is eminently the product of a courtly milieu, and the meanings that it was originally intended to embody can only be fully appreciated when it is seen in that context. In the world in which it was built, Blenheim was not just a great house: it was a symbol of Marlborough’s exalted status; the embodiment of the duke’s ‘magnificence’; a marker of dynastic identity; a monument that propagated a mythic account of Marlborough’s place in British and European history; and the means by which the architects and craftsmen sought, through the aesthetic and material excellence of their work, to establish their own claims upon posterity. And, I would argue, it is only with awareness of this coincidence of social, dynastic, and aesthetic purposes that we can begin to account adequately for the extraordinary architectural achievement co-created by Marlborough, Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor, and the artisans and labourers who worked under them.

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<sup>580</sup> These views have been influentially propounded in wide variety of works, including the only modern study of the royal household in Anne’s reign, Robert Bucholz’s *The Augustan Court: Queen Anne and the Decline of Court Culture*; but also in broader cultural terms by John Brewer in his otherwise superb study of eighteenth century urban culture, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*; and in the political realm by Steven Pincus’s *1688: The First Modern Revolution*.

<sup>581</sup> J.C.D. Clark has argued strongly that eighteenth-century Britain should be seen as a fundamentally *ancien régime* polity, but his interpretation continues to meet considerable resistance.

## DEFINITIONS

Blenheim is a complex building, and I have wherever possible used consistent terminology to refer to its basic constituent units:

***Main house*** – the whole central block of the house containing the state rooms and the private apartments, the four great corner pavilions, and the quadrants on either side of the entrance courtyard;

***Pavilions*** – the four square towers at the corners of the main house

***Central pile*** – the taller nine-bay unit in the middle of the main house, which contains the hall, principal staircases and saloon, and the rooms immediately to either side of them;

***Service wings*** – the two wings to the north east and north west, the first containing the kitchen and offices, and the second containing the stable block and coach houses;

***Kitchen wing*** – the original north east wing, containing the kitchen and principal domestic offices;

***Kitchen court*** – the three ranges of building that form a courtyard to the east of the kitchen wing, which were added to the design c. 1707;

***Stable wing*** – the original north west wing, containing the stables and coach houses;

***Stable court*** – the three ranges of building which form a courtyard to the west of the stable block, which were added to the design c. 1707 but never built.

## APPENDIX 1: Summary Chronology 1704-1712

Date	Wider Events	Duke & Duchess of Marlborough	Blenheim Palace
<b>1704</b>			
August 2/13	Battle of Blenheim		
August 17/28		Emperor's letter to M informally confers Princely title	
September onwards			Idea of monument begins to circulate
November		M in Berlin	
December 3/14		M arrives in England	
'about Xmas'		M approaches Vanbrugh to design his house	
<b>1705</b>			
January		Queen Anne requests aid to enable grant of Woodstock estate; request accepted by both Houses of Parliament	
February		M visits Vanbrugh and views Castle Howard model	
February 28		M departs for Woodstock with Vanbrugh	
March 16		Act of Parliament to enable Woodstock grant receives royal assent	
April 16			Wise's men begin clearing site
May 23			Joynes appointed comptroller
June 9			Vanbrugh receives warrant appointing him surveyor
June 16			Foundations started
July 28			Hawksmoor reports change to placement of kitchen & chapel
August 14			Foundations complete
Late August			Basement started
Late September/early October		Duchess & Godolphin visit Woodstock;	model constructed
December		M in Berlin, Vienna, Hanover, The Hague; Imperial letters patent issued for principality	
<b>1706</b>			
April			'Competition' for the bridge and approach
May	Battle of Ramillies	M's representatives enter Mindelheim	The basement walls of the main house 'for the most part' complete
June	Fall of Flanders to the		Strong begins work on

	allies		private apartments
September-October		Duchess visits, and finds 'nothing to please her'	
November		M returns early from the campaign	Roof put on private apartments
Late November/early December		M visits Woodstock to review the works	
December		M's titles and property perpetuated to his heirs, male and female, for ever	
<b>1707</b>			
January		Parliament perpetuates M's £5000 pension on the same basis as his titles and property	Debt reaches £27,702 Proposals drawn up for 1707 works, estimating cost at £32,490
February-May			Extensive demolition and rebuilding of south front; rebuilding of Bow Window
May			Hawksmoor, Joynes and Boulter ask for salaries
June			V asks duchess to give orders for bridge to begin
July		Vanbrugh writes to M outlining works that can be completed by the end of the season; M unhappy that saloon and hall cannot be covered; duchess suspends work on the bridge and asks that 'all mony and hands' are directed to the hall and saloon.	
August	Failure of allied attack on Toulon		Strong agrees to begin work on NE lantern; large-scale models made of pavilion and lantern
September 20			Sylvestre writes to duke with assessment of design for saloon
December		M shown plans for building that include new courtyards and greenhouses	NE lantern complete except for ornaments
<b>1708</b>			
January			SE tower completed
February	Harley attempts coup, but fails	Godolphin and Marlborough resign, but reinstated	
May			Boulter dies
June			Vanbrugh petitions duchess for Boulter's

			salary, but without success
July	Battle of Oudenarde; general election over – Whig landslide	Blenheim grants increase in size and frequency	S portico altered to take account of change of order; work starts on Grand Bridge
August			Townsend finishing clock tower on kitchen wing
September			Tilleman Bobart appointed in Boulter's place
<b>1709</b>			
January	Great Frost		Service wings roofed
March			Peisley making final additions to clock tower
June			Vanbrugh writes to duchess pleading for preservation of Woodstock Manor
September	Battle of Malplaquet	Anne shocked at bloodshed at Malplaquet – M's position weakened	Hall and saloon covered
<b>1710</b>			
April	Shrewsbury appointed Lord Chamberlain	M and Godolphin losing favour fast	
June	Lord Sunderland (M's Whig son-in-law) dismissed by Anne		
August	Harley implements coup against Godolphin	Godolphin dismissed	Blenheim creditors become anxious about payment, and refuse to advance further credit
September		Vanbrugh sends drawings to M; mentions that engravings are being produced. Duchess puts a stop to all work at Blenheim	Unpaid workers show signs of restiveness; Vanbrugh petitions Treasury for additional funds
October/ November			Treasury Commissioners grant further £7000
<b>1711</b>			
January		Duchess dismissed from her offices	
March	Harley appointed Lord Treasurer and raised to peerage as Earl of Oxford		
Summer			Strong and Gibbons working on Saloon

September		Anne signs a final Blenheim warrant for £20,000	
<b>1712</b>			
January		Marlborough dismissed from his offices	Blenheim creditors again fearful of being paid; work slows to a crawl
June			Last remittances of money to Woodstock expended

## APPENDIX 2: Blenheim Treasury Payments 1705-1711

*NB: Dates in italics are approximate or uncertain; some single payments have been broken down into two to indicate more clearly which Sign Manual authorised them—this has been indicated by shading the relevant cells grey.*

Royal Sign Manual		Treasury Payments		
Date	Amount	Date	Amount	Annual Totals
21/06/1705	£20,000	25/06/1705	£2,500	£20,000
		21/07/1705	£2,500	
		17/08/1705	£2,000	
		25/08/1705	£3,000	
		27/09/1705	£3,000	
		20/10/1705	£3,000	
		01/12/1705	£3,000	
		19/12/1705	£1,000	
26/12/1705	£20,000	04/02/1706	£3,000	£30,000
		02/04/1706	£2,000	
		27/04/1706	£2,000	
		16/05/1706	£3,000	
		06/06/1706	£3,000	
		01/07/1706	£3,000	
		24/07/1706	£2,000	
		17/08/1706	£2,000	
21/08/1706	£20,000	18/09/1706	£3,000	£30,000
		31/10/1706	£2,000	
		20/12/1706	£5,000	
		10/03/1707	£4,000	
		27/03/1707	£500	
<i>19/05/1707</i>	£20,000	14/05/1707	£5,500	£30,000
		28/06/1707	£4,500	
		07/08/1707	£5,000	
		28/08/1707	£500	
		18/09/1707	£3,000	
		20/11/1707	£3,000	
17/01/1708	£20,000	18/12/1707	£4,000	£36,600
		06/03/1708	£6,000	
		27/04/1708	£6,600	
		02/06/1708	£6,000	
19/07/1708	£20,000	11/08/1708	£1,400	£42,000
		11/08/1708	£4,600	
		20/09/1708	£6,000	
		18/11/1708	£6,000	
21/12/1708	£20,000	11/01/1709	£3,400	£42,000
		11/01/1709	£2,600	
		<i>??/03/1709</i>	£6,000	
		<i>??/05/1709</i>	£6,000	
23/06/1709	£20,000	07/06/1709	£5,400	£42,000
		30/07/1709	£6,600	
		15/09/1709	£6,000	
		24/11/1709	£6,000	

		03/02/1710	£1,400	
21/12/1709	£20,000	03/02/1710	£4,600	
		22/03/1710	£6,000	
		27/04/1710	£6,000	
		??/06/1710	£3,400	
02/06/1710	£20,000	??/06/1710	£6,000	
		??/08/1710	£7,000	
		18/10/1710	£2,000	
		23/10/1710	£2,000	
		30/10/1710	£2,000	
		06/11/1710	£1,000	£41,400
17/07/1711	£20,000	08/08/1711	£2,000	
		16/08/1711	£1,000	
		22/08/1711	£1,000	
		30/08/1711	£1,000	
		06/09/1711	£1,000	
		20/09/1711	£2,000	
		02/10/1711	£2,000	
		11/10/1711	£1,000	
		17/10/1711	£1,000	
		24/10/1711	£1,000	
		31/10/1711	£1,000	
		07/11/1711	£1,000	
		14/11/1711	£1,000	
		21/11/1711	£1,000	
		28/11/1711	£1,000	
10/12/1711	£1,000			
20/12/1711	£1,000	£20,000		
<b>Total funds granted</b>			<b>£220,000</b>	

**Sources:** *Calendar of Treasury Books*, vols 22-25, *passim.*; Soane Museum Library 106; Bodleian MS Top. Oxon. c 265 f. 89ff; British Library Add MS 19609 f. 73ff; British Library Add MS 19605 f. 116.

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