

The Kings Weston Book of Drawings

by KERRY DOWNES

Introduction

The present publication is intended to have neither the fullness of a definitive catalogue nor the luxurious veracity of a facsimile edition. In thus declaring at the outset limitations which are self-imposed and which may appear arbitrary, one is under some obligation to justify them. The album of drawings formerly at Kings Weston, and now in the possession of the Trustees of the Bristol Municipal Charities, has been widely known at second hand ever since the publication of some of the drawings in the article on Kings Weston in *English Homes* (1928). The greater part of its contents, however, has remained unknown to all but the few students who have examined the originals; this, on the positive side, is sufficient justification for a fuller account of them than has so far been given. Moreover, while many questions about the album are still unsolved, the airing which may lead to the solution of some of them can best be done by publication; this also provides the opportunity both for certain factual statements that can be made and for the correction of certain wrong assumptions. Of the latter the most disputable, and the most common outside the immediate area of Vanbrugh studies, embodies the aura which continues to emanate from the gilt title of the album: *Sir John Vanburgh's designs for Kings Weston*. True, some of the drawings are for Kings Weston and are valuable sources for the genesis and history of that house; true, some others are apparently from Vanbrugh's office, but there are, as Avray Tipping and Christopher Hussey recognized in 1928, no drawings from Vanbrugh's hand. Moreover, neither the sole nor the chief interest lies in the Kings Weston drawings. The others include designs for houses and hen-coops, designs by the famous, the unknown and the nameless, drawings by those who drew well and by those who did not. Few of them are either pretty or exciting, but none is without interest. Some will be passed over by architectural historians – including some that I have reproduced – and it is the student of some other branch of history who is most likely to and may (I both hope and fear) most justifiably take me to task for my omissions. I have known the drawings for over three years. A longer time would allow for more thought, more identifications, more badgering of students of related subjects. My excuses for not taking more time are two-fold, and to some extent antithetical. First, the material itself is sufficiently interesting, and sufficiently new to many, to warrant a progress report. Second, the drawings as a collection are not of the same importance as, for example, those at Elton Hall or Worcester College, and I am not ashamed to own that there are other, larger questions about English architecture of the late Stuart and early Georgian period which strike me as more challenging and more rewarding. The temptation to ask, and try to answer, only those questions about the Kings Weston album which interest me in this larger context is one that I have not managed, or tried, wholly to avoid.

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Weston; the Principal of Bristol College of Science and Technology for permission to photograph the urn in Fig. 14; those owners who have allowed me to reproduce comparative material; Mr Howard Colvin for several valuable observations and the loan of photographs of the Elton Hall drawings; finally the Editor for his constant encouragement and patience.

EDWARD SOUTHWELL AND KINGS WESTON

Kings Weston, now in a western suburb of Bristol and standing on the edge of a plateau overlooking Avonmouth, was designed by Sir John Vanbrugh about 1710-11 for Edward Southwell, who had in 1702 inherited the property from his father Sir Robert Southwell, who had bought it in 1679. Edward, born in London in 1671, was called to the Irish bar and succeeded his father as Secretary of State for Ireland. From 1702 to 1711 he represented Rye in Parliament, then successively Tregony and Preston until about 1714. He remained Member for Kinsale in the Irish parliament until his death in 1730. He was made clerk to the Privy Council on 10 May 1708 and his first wife, heiress of a moderate estate, died in March 1709. It is possible that these events have some bearing on his decision to spend more of his time in England and to develop Kings Weston further than the garden works he had already undertaken. In September 1708 Mr Gilmore, one of the shadowy personages of the Kings Weston album and a domestic engineer, wrote to him from Badminton about the construction of a new cold-water bath at Scarlet Well near Bristol (No. 86); the letter was rather hasty 'for fear the ship would bee gon' which suggests that Southwell was then in Ireland. By the time of his second marriage in 1717, to Anne, daughter of William Blathwayt for whom Talman had rebuilt Dyrham, the masonry of Kings Weston was completed.¹

In 1710 Southwell was one year short of forty. He was earlier described as 'doctissimus', but we do not know how far his learning extended to architecture. His interest in patronage is recorded, with a Vicentine allusion, by Colin Campbell in the note to his plates of Kings Weston (*Vitruvius Britannicus*, I, 1715, p. 5): Campbell calls him 'the Angaranno of our Age, to whom my Obligations are so deep, that to repeat the least Part of them, would offend the Modesty of my Benefactor'.² Southwell found on his site an earlier U-shaped house, and he appears to have reused the old foundations. His choice of Vanbrugh as architect is not surprising, for Blenheim was in 1710 rising in fame and Marlborough was still in power; Campbell was still in Scotland and perhaps hardly yet preparing to take London by storm and Palladio. The fact that Southwell took up Campbell within a few years suggests that he held no very strong partisan artistic views in the conflict between Baroque and Palladianism, a supposition which has some bearing on the authorship of parts of the Kings Weston album. Had he not begun building until 1714-15, Campbell might well have been his architect. In fact the masonry was finished by 1714 although the house was not complete in Southwell's lifetime. The staircase was being floored in 1719 (No. 3) but much of the interior, as well as the steps to both the entrance (south) and the garden (east) fronts, was carried out to his own designs by Robert Mylne between 1763 and 1772.³ Mylne or a later architect also altered the west front and added to the north, and the skylight roof of Vanbrugh's two-storey stair-cage cannot be before the 1760s. Mylne worked for Edward Southwell's grandson, Edward III,

who inherited through his mother's family the title of Lord Clifford. The estate passed out of the family by sale in 1836; the purchaser's grandson, Dr Philip Napier Miles, sold the house in 1937 to the Bristol Municipal Charities, who intended to use and augment it as a school for Queen Elizabeth's Hospital. This project was abandoned at the outbreak of war in 1939 and the house suffered neglect and damage as results of war service and post-war local vandalism. It was subsequently leased to Bristol Education Department for use as a primary school. In 1962 the Municipal Charities sold it to Bristol Corporation, who planned to make it the centre of the new College of Advanced Technology; it was occupied by the College's School of Architecture, under whose admirable tenancy considerable repair and restoration work was done. In the summer of 1963, however, it was decided to find another site for the college, and this means that, while a Historic Buildings Council grant for further restoration was made early in 1966, the house may still become a historic buildings problem in the foreseeable future.

THE DRAWINGS AND THEIR COLLECTOR

The album of drawings was given by the late Mrs Napier Miles to the Trustees of the Bristol Municipal Charities. It had been at Kings Weston for the extent of living memory and it is natural to assume that it had been there since the house was built. That the drawings have always been in the house is indeed possible but unsusceptible of proof, and since certain other groups of drawings with plausible pedigrees can be shown to have been bought and not inherited⁴ it would be unwise to base further arguments on an unsubstantiated claim to continuity of possession. It should not, for instance, be used as evidence that the collection was compiled by Southwell himself, even though none is dated after 1730.

There is no doubt that the drawings, or many of them, were collected during the early eighteenth century; many are titled in a firm, round, distinctive though unprofessional hand (e.g. No. 60, Fig. 72) to which we owe most of our information about the drawings. It is to be found on drawings made by several other hands and on a number in which draughtsman and annotator were clearly identical. Some of the latter are marked as copies (e.g. No. 19, Fig. 13) but others appear to be originals (e.g. No. 60). In one case it is possible to see the annotations duplicated by notes in another more fluent hand, most of which have been cut off (No. 16). From the placing and style of the writing it looks as if the annotator copied and expanded the title written in the top right-hand corner by the original recipient of the drawing. The two hands appear again in No. 18 where the process of expansion is unmistakable: the original title '29 December 1722. In the Earle of Cholmondelys Grove' is amplified by 'A Seat' and a description of the materials and the form of the roof. It is reasonable to assume that the drawings – or the majority of them – were assembled by the writer of the firm round hand, who will henceforth be called the Compiler.

The doubtfulness of the Compiler's identity with Edward Southwell has already been implied, and there is some more cogent evidence against this identity. The style of the hand does not suggest a man of Southwell's station. The activity of two separate hands on Nos. 16 and 18 can be followed further on the backs of Nos. 43 and 130 (Figs. 21, 36, 91). The form of the figure '2' is

consistent in the fluent writing in three of the four, and the form of 'Coll' links Nos. 43 and 130. The fluent writer tends to make a turn of the pen at the end of a word: 'of' and 'Grove' in No. 18, 'Kingsweston' and 'Garden' in No. 43, and most noticeably in No. 130, not only in 'Yate' and 'Bristol' but in 'E. Southwell' which appears to be a signature for the free postal delivery of the sheet, which bears a date stamp of 5 February and a note by the Compiler of receipt on the following day in 1717/8. The fluent hand, therefore, is probably Edward Southwell's. It follows both from the foregoing and from Southwell's patronage of both Vanbrugh and Campbell that he can no longer be seen, as he has been, as a self-appointed pupil of Vanbrugh.

The Compiler remains anonymous. On the basis of the stamping and receipt of No. 130 one might suppose him to be Colonel Robert Yate, a Bristol alderman who took a building site in Prince Street in 1725 and died in 1737.⁵ However, the Compiler refers on his plan of this site (No. 96) to 'the Ground taken by Coll Yate', which implies that Yate was not the Compiler. The dated annotations cover a period from 1697 to 1728, but the similarity in the writing suggests that the dates were added, or copied, in the last decade of this period, to which the majority of them belong. Nevertheless, although we do not know his name we can deduce a fair amount about his activities. His receipt of a letter addressed to Yate and his concern with Yate's houses in Bristol imply that he was acting as surveyor; similarly his concern with several parts of the Kings Weston works was more than merely a collector's interest, in view of the fact that he copied drawings and a contract (Nos. 19, 38). Some of the original drawings (as opposed to copies) must be his own designs; they include several, not executed, for rebuilding Charlton House, Wraxall, in Somerset a few miles south of Kings Weston and again west of Bristol. This property was owned by Yate from 1694 until his death. One dated 1717 has chimney arches which recall Vanbrugh's first design for Eastbury (No. 64, Figs. 65, 66); another is dated 1726 and shows rich and plainer alternatives, 'That the Owner may choose which suites his humour or Conveniency best' and gives plain door and windows which 'may be enriched . . . as the Owner pleases' (No. 60). The planning is competent; the detail owes something to Vanbrugh, but the emphasis on the owner's choice reveals a lack of conviction about Baroque detail, compared with Hawksmoor's nonchalant but prodigal offers of alternative styles and designs, or even with Vanbrugh's emphasis on 'the Figure and Proportions that make the most pleasing Fabrick, And not the delicacy of the Ornaments'.⁷

The Compiler thus appears as a builder-designer, probably (in stone country) a mason. The presence of drawings by one of the Bastards of Blandford (No. 97, he did not know the Christian name) and connected with Spettisbury (also No. 129) implies that his connections extended farther than the environs of Bristol to a point some forty or fifty miles to the south in Dorset. He might be a man like Nathaniel Ireson, who was born in Warwickshire in 1686, travelled south-west to Stourton in Wiltshire, where he worked at Stourhead 1720-22 for Campbell, and thence in about 1726 to Wincanton in Somerset, where he settled, living until 1769. There is nothing to identify him with the Compiler, however, and the only drawings known to be by him⁸ differ in style from those in the album. There is not sufficient evidence to see the Compiler as a link between Vanbrugh and the local Baroque style of the buildings erected in Blandford

after the fire of 1731, mostly by the Bastard family; one link was of course Vanbrugh's Eastbury (cf. No. 21), which is only a few miles from Blandford and was begun in or before 1724. (At the same time the influence of Archer on the Blandford school, although not precisely assessable and perhaps small, is not to be discounted.)

The question remains, how intimately the Compiler was connected with the building of Kings Weston. The original master mason there was George Townesend of Bristol, who died in 1719,⁹ and whose unexecuted design for fronting the dairy was copied by the Compiler (No. 38). He may have been succeeded by 'Mr Price', whose stable design of 1720 survives (No. 4) and whose recipe for earth floors, given to the Compiler by Mr Grant of Kings Weston (cf. No. 29), is one of several among the miscellaneous written papers at the end of the album. In the recipe he is called 'Mr Price of Wandsworth' but it is not known for certain whether the Prices of London, Richmond, York Buildings and Wandsworth, who crop up in English architectural history at this time were one or several persons.¹⁰ If Price did not succeed Townesend, then the Compiler probably did; it has already been pointed out that the majority of the dated drawings in the album are of 1718 or later, while the Compiler's copies include those from originals of 1717 by Sumsion and Townesend (Nos. 19 and 38).

THE FORMATION OF THE ALBUM

The drawings are now for the most part pasted on to blank sheets of paper bound into a book, although a few are simply guarded in. The pages and drawings are unnumbered. The album and its gilt front title appear to be early nineteenth-century, that is about a century later than the contents. The probability that the collection was only then put into its present form is increased by the lack of any controlled order in its arrangement. Related drawings are separated. Small unrelated ones are pasted on the same page. Drawings for Kings Weston are near the beginning and also near the end. Moreover, some of these seem to have been in a different order for a considerable time when they were damp, as the off-setting of colour at this time shows that Nos. 111 and 113 and probably Nos. 14 and 67 were then in pairs.

It follows that unscribed drawings may have come not from the Compiler's collection but from some other source, being bound up in the *omnium gatherum* of the album. This applies to the Kings Weston elevations and to a number of small house designs from Vanbrugh's office which are mentioned below (p. 14).

The drawings as a whole lack either the spontaneity of a Vanbrugh sketch (Fig. 65) or the more skilled pictorial power of Hawksmoor's best drawings. The sphinx (No. 8) is one of the best; its author is unknown. In many of the elevations wash colouring is used, not only for windows but to indicate shadows and thereby give greater life and depth; this was common practice in Wren's finished drawings as it was in those of Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor, so it is not surprising to see it adopted by minor artists.

In the present catalogue the drawings are numbered from the front of the album, one number being given to each separate drawn sheet, not to pages of the volume. The miscellaneous sheets at the end are not accorded numbers. The illustrations, to which the catalogue gives references, are arranged in a different order, better related to the range of the material (see also p. 16).

The history of the building of Kings Weston and of subsequent alterations has already been outlined. In fact, while Mylne's papers and the fabric itself tell us a good deal about the alterations, the drawings are our only source for parts of the original.¹¹ No. 113 shows the original form of the east front, without Mylne's garden steps and with a shallow pediment over the attic. No. 14 shows the west front as it was probably built, with a central recess with Venetian windows instead of the present half-hexagonal projecting bay on all floors, which seems to be an addition. The elevations all show an earlier form of the chimney arcade than that executed, to which drawings in the Victoria & Albert Museum (Fig. 10) are closer. The plan (No. 112), which agrees with that in *Vitruvius Britannicus* (I, Pl. 47), and the basement plan (No. 123) show an arcade round three sides of the stair-cage and the window wall on the fourth, north side contiguous to the staircase, making a three-bay recess in the north elevation as in No. 111. In the fabric the windows stand a bay farther out so that there is no recess (Fig. 12) and the arcades are omitted; thus the staircase stands free within the cage on all sides and is only supported by the piers at the corners – the only vestiges of the arcade scheme. It seems more likely that this change was made in the course of building than as a later alteration.

The plan also shows the original arrangement of the hall, which we know was altered by Mylne: Vanbrugh built a central door leading to the staircase between two fireplaces, and Mylne reversed this arrangement.

Nos. 17 and 66 show another unexecuted project of Vanbrugh: a walled forecourt which, as at Blenheim and Castle Howard, Vanbrugh considered a desirable introduction to his house but failed in each case to persuade his client to pay for. There are also designs for garden and ancillary buildings. One of the more important is No. 37, which shows that Colin Campbell had some share in the design of the Penpole Gate, more recently called the Breakfast Lodge, which was demolished in a ruinous state in 1950. Vanbrugh made one quite different design, which survives at Elton Hall (Fig. 28) in two copies. There is also at Elton a sketch¹² which is related about as closely as Campbell's design is to the building; only a further drawing would allow the final responsibility to be more precisely apportioned.

THE DRAWINGS FOR HOUSES

Besides the Kings Weston drawings there are two groups of designs for houses, one related to Vanbrugh and the other by the Compiler and others. The first group contains no originals by Vanbrugh and the hand or hands have not been identified so far. Most of them are for one-storey buildings of a type known from the groups in the Victoria & Albert Museum¹³ and at Elton. The general stylistic grounds for attribution to Vanbrugh – heavy round arches and thick impost mouldings, picturesque plans and silhouettes, gables with the lower member broken, pyramids and corbel-tables – are reinforced in one case (No. 89) by the existence of a very similar sketch at Elton which may be in Vanbrugh's hand and is certainly from his office. The album also contains drawings of or for fireplaces with which Vanbrugh's name is coupled (Nos. 73, 126); these are connected both with the Elton drawings and with Vanbrugh Castle, the architect's own house at Greenwich.

The second group contains, besides the Compiler's designs for merchant's houses and for Charlton, his plans for a house to replace the Red Lodge at Bristol (Nos. 20, 56, 61). This late Tudor building, which survives, belonged to John Henley from 1710; it was later bought by Colonel Yate, who owned it until his death.¹⁴ One plan (1728) was prepared 'in case of any accident to' and another 'in lieu of' the Red Lodge; the Compiler also titled a site plan measured in 1702 by Mr Gilmore, who has already been mentioned (p. 10).

Other drawings, not by the Compiler, include a house design, possibly by William Dickinson (No. 125), drawings connected with Southwell's London house in Spring Garden and a sheet of plans and elevations of George London the gardener's pavilion house at Long Ditton, which is related to drawings at Worcester College (No. 51).

NOTES

- 1 *D.N.B.*; Cobbett, *Parliamentary history*.
- 2 Giacomo Angarano, an early patron of Palladio, who dedicated to him the *Quattro libri*.
- 3 C. Gotch, 'Mylne at Kings Weston', *Country Life*, CXXIII, 1953, pp. 212-215.
- 4 Drawings for Christ Church, Worcester College and the Radcliffe Camera, now in those colleges and the Ashmolean Museum respectively, were sold by Joseph Skelton the Oxford antiquary early in the nineteenth century. In each case a priced blue folder inscribed in an early nineteenth-century hand is, or was, with the drawings, and the Christ Church set is known to have been bought from Skelton.
- 5 W. Ison, *The Georgian buildings of Bristol*, 1952, p. 161; *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1737, p. 701; drawings Nos. 95, 96.
- 6 R. Cooke, *West Country houses*, Bristol, 1957, p. 80.
- 7 Vanbrugh, *Letters* (ed. G. F. Webb, 1928), p. 15.
- 8 C. Hussey, *English country houses, early Georgian*, 1955, p. 229.
- 9 Colvin, *Dictionary*, pp. 614-615.
- 10 Colvin, *Dictionary*, pp. 474-475.
- 11 Drawings from Colin Campbell's collection have recently been discovered, including some which confirm the previously unique Kings Weston elevations. At the time of writing these drawings, for knowledge of which I am indebted to Mr John Harris, have not been studied.
- 12 H. M. Colvin & M. J. Craig, *Architectural drawings in the library of Elton Hall* (Roxburghe Club), Oxford, 1964, Pl. XXa.
- 13 L. Whistler, 'Vanbrugh's smaller houses', *Architectural Review*, CXV, 1954, pp. 119-122.
- 14 K. M. Armistead, 'The Red Lodge', *Country Life*, CXXVIII, 1960, pp. 238-241. The same writer's *Guide to the Red Lodge*, published by Bristol City Art Gallery, gives details of successive owners.