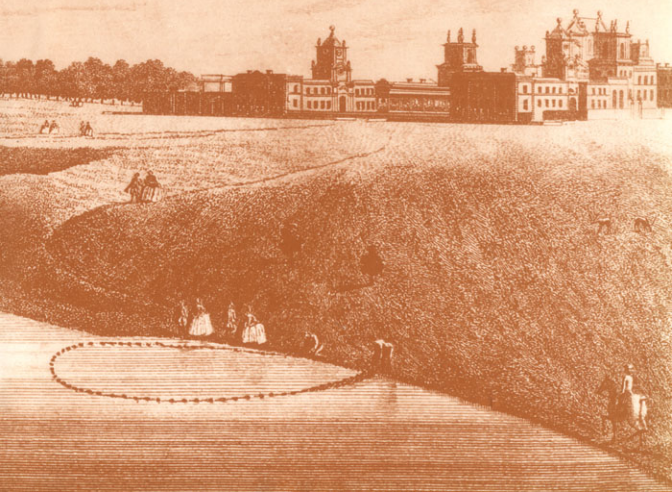


English Architecture Public and Private

ESSAYS FOR KERRY DOWNES

Edited by
John Bold and Edward Chaney



ENGLISH ARCHITECTURE
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE



St Paul's Cathedral, Wren's Great Model, interior view looking west.

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Preface

Many debts have been incurred in the preparation of this volume. We are especially grateful to all those who have given generously of their time in order to contribute. It is with sorrow that we record our particular thanks to two contributors who died in 1992. Professor Peter Murray and Sir John Summer-son both made outstanding contributions to the analysis and understanding of European architecture, placing all the other contributors to this volume in their debt. They brought to architectural history a breadth of vision and range of reference which have set standards for others to follow. We were very grateful to them for answering so promptly and positively this further call on their time in difficult circumstances; we only regret that they were not able to see their essays in print.

The contributions of individuals and institutions are cited in the notes to the essays and in the list of acknowledgements: we thank them all, with particular thanks to the photographic staff of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England. We also wish to thank Margaret Downes for her discreet encouragement and Professor Eric Fernie for recommending an approach to our publisher. Martin Sheppard, of the Hambledon Press, has shouldered the responsibility of producing yet another volume of essays with very little persuasion and has been unfailingly supportive throughout its preparation. Lastly, we are grateful to the Marc Fitch Fund for providing a grant to set against the costs of the illustrations.

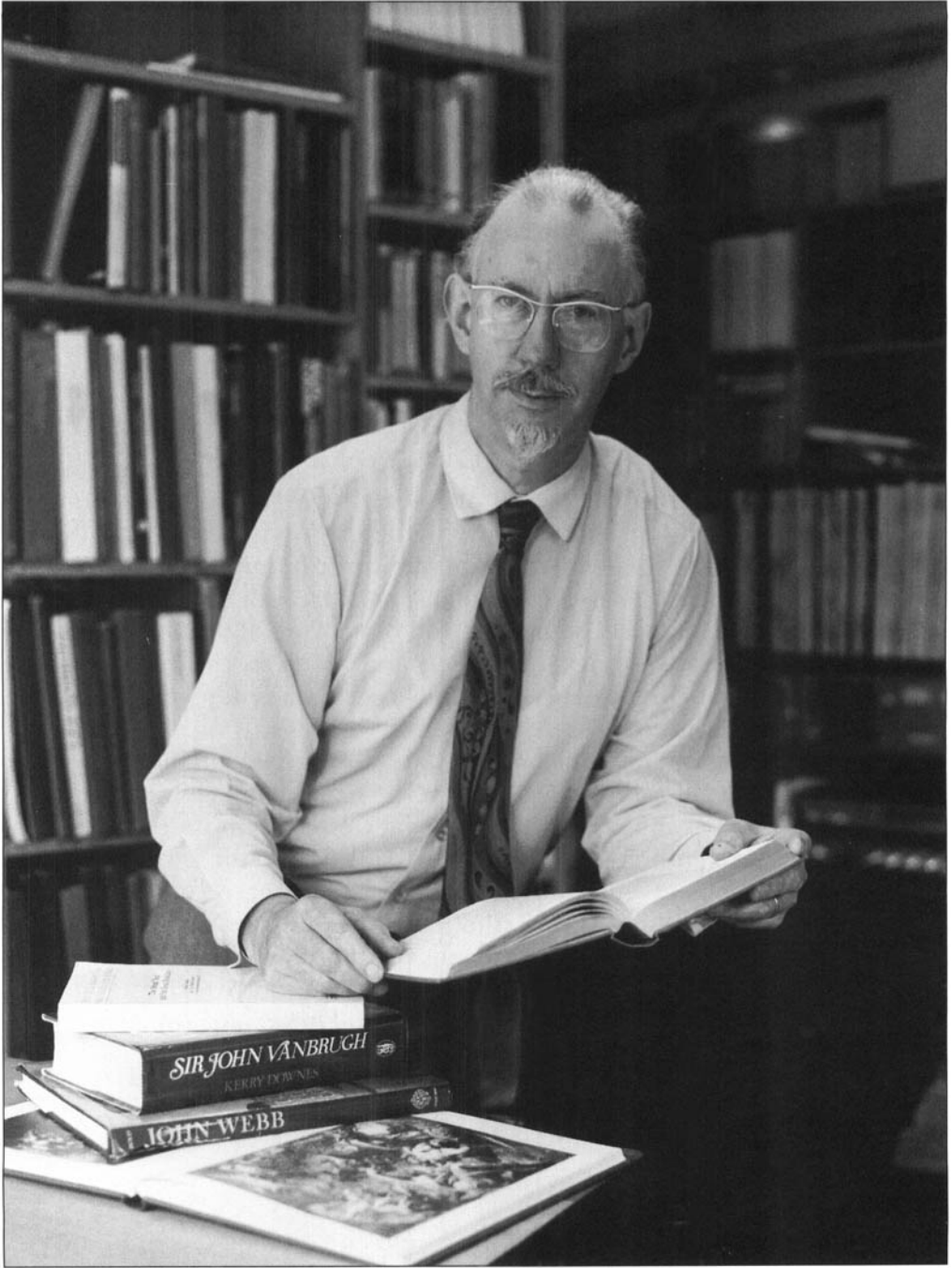


Photo: Grahame Melanby

Kerry Downes

Introduction

It is a great pleasure to celebrate and pay tribute to the achievement of a scholar and teacher who, after more than thirty years of lucid exposition, remains the preeminent authority on the architecture of the English Baroque. Kerry Downes has not only described and analysed the achievements of Hawksmoor, Vanbrugh and Wren in an apparently inexhaustible flow of publications (which belies the recreational 'procrastination' he claims in *Who's Who*), he has re-defined the way in which others see them. This is a contribution to architectural history of a very high order.

Trained at the Courtauld Institute of Art, Kerry was for eight years Librarian at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, before moving to the University of Reading in 1966. For twenty-five years as Lecturer, Reader and finally Professor of History of Art, he has given generously of his time and knowledge to a succession of students who came to value the judiciousness of his silences as well as the acuity of his comments; the significance of both often dawned only hours after the seminar's end. That same ability to illuminate, quietly and undemonstratively, has distinguished Kerry's twelve years as a Commissioner with the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, latterly as its senior architectural spokesman.

In the twenty years which elapsed between the first and second editions of Kerry's first major monograph, on the life and work of Nicholas Hawksmoor, public perceptions changed to a degree which the author can scarcely have predicted. This overdue change was due in large measure to his success in setting the record straight so that, to paraphrase his own words, the new taste could be an informed one. All modern scholars must take his pioneering work and his subsequent reconsiderations, listed in our appended bibliography, as their starting point, not only on Hawksmoor but also on Sir Christopher Wren and Sir John Vanbrugh. His presentations, distinguished by sedulous scholarship, clarity of expression and a passion for the built works, have changed fundamentally the way in which these men, the preeminent English architects of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, are viewed. If we believe that we now understand the building histories of such major monuments as St Paul's Cathedral, Castle Howard and Blenheim Palace, it is because Kerry

Downes has described them for us. He has charted a path, notoriously difficult to establish, which marries the evidence of documents and drawings with the evidence on the ground. Those who have been privileged to accompany Kerry on such surreal expeditions as crawling around the outside of Hawksmoor's Easton Neston in the snow in order to ascertain whether or not it has been refaced, will testify to the undeviating search for observable evidence which has characterised his approach to architectural history. Those who visited his masterly exhibitions on Hawksmoor and Wren at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1977 and 1982, or that on St Paul's at the Royal Academy in 1991, will acknowledge that serious scholarship, the expansion of visual awareness and the thrill of discovery are capable of going hand in hand.

Kerry Downes has dealt consistently with the great masters. It is characteristic that he, like Sir John Summerson, should have campaigned for Architecture, represented by Mies van der Rohe, at the notorious Mansion House enquiry. It is characteristic also that in turning from architecture to painting he should have chosen to write authoritatively not on lesser men but on one of the greatest of northern painters, Rubens, whose harmonisation of history, intellect, sensuality and human understanding offers an encapsulation of the baroque style which the author has sought always, both in books and lecture theatres, to define and illuminate.

This collection of essays, by contemporaries, colleagues and former students is presented, with thanks, as a tribute, but also in the hope and expectation that it will encourage its dedicatee to continue his long and fruitful association with the art and architecture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and perhaps beyond.

Some of these essays fall outside the range of Kerry's published work, but not outside his sphere of interests. They range from the late middle ages to the twentieth century; from the towers and spires of Northamptonshire and the European double staircases and classical porticoes which inspired Inigo Jones; through the work of the little-known eighteenth-century architect William Baker and the nineteenth-century church of Avon Dassett in Warwickshire, by Thomas Meyer, to the uncompromisingly modernist work of Wells Coates, Maxwell Fry and Berthold Lubetkin in the 1930s, discussed here in a personal reminiscence.

Taken together, they demonstrate a wide range of approaches to the English architecture of both the public and private realms, from the detailed description of the City of London house of the Member of Parliament John Pollexfen, and the related discussion of the ways in which architects of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries fulfilled the need of owners for a separation of public and private spaces, to the analysis of administrative chaos in the Victorian metropolis, where the once creative web of authorities eventually proved incapable of working together for the public good.

Many of the essays break new ground. Here for the first time is a full discussion of the extensive architectural patronage of the 10th Earl of Northumberland, with a detailed description of the work carried out at Northumberland House, Petworth and Syon. The patronage of the Earl of Clarendon is also presented, with the publication of letters from his London steward to the steward of his Oxfordshire estates, concerning the rebuilding of Cornbury by Hugh May. Other essays offer new perspectives on buildings and landscapes with which we might have considered ourselves familiar. These include the first detailed survey of Vanbrugh's partially flooded Grand Bridge at Blenheim, as well as new documents which chronicle the role of Charles Bridgeman in reshaping the gardens of, among others, Lumley Castle, Wroxall Manor and Wimpole.

Only one contribution, on a portrait of Stephen Duck, the 'thresher poet' who in a fit of dejection drowned himself in a Reading trout stream, is not directly concerned with architecture. Sir James Thornhill, however, who painted this portrait, was not only the King's Sergeant Painter and the leading English decorative artist of the day, but also a candidate for the Surveyorship of the King's Works, fully capable of designing buildings and thus able, like Jones, Wren and Vanbrugh before him, to demonstrate mastery in more than one profession.

The essays concentrate on the study of the period to which Kerry Downes has contributed so much, discussing not only the buildings, but also the history of the sources and ideas which informed them. For example, the significance for architecture of writers on mathematics, prior to the great age of pattern books, is here reviewed, a matter of particular concern to all who seek to understand the mind and art of Wren, the mathematician who turned to architecture. Three of the essays consider aspects of Wren's work and his legacy: his use of the architectural model, the eighteenth-century derivatives of St Paul's Cathedral and the wartime representations by the great perspectivist Cyril Farey of Wren's masterpiece, when it stood as a symbol of continuity and resistance during the Blitz. Others offer new evidence for attributions to Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh: the barracks at Berwick, the first Ordnance building for which documentary evidence can be advanced to support such an attribution, complemented by a more general study of the building practice of the Board of Ordnance; Sir William Strickland's hunting lodge at Malton, which has features in common with the neighbouring Castle Howard, and a church in Berkshire, once attributed to a ubiquitous and improbably long-lived Inigo Jones.

Jones himself, in company with the Earl and Countess of Arundel, is documented on his formative journey to Naples in 1614, which provided him with exempla, hitherto unregarded, for his subsequent architectural practice. The concentration on the Palladian influence in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England has obscured the debt which architectural travellers owed to

others. The sustained interest in the architecture of Sanmicheli, discussed here, was manifested particularly during the era of mid eighteenth-century British neo-classicism when the sculptural and planar qualities of the Pellegrini Chapel were found to provide a more appropriate model than the work of Palladio. The British enthusiasm for Sanmicheli was shared by Sir John Soane who illustrated a number of his buildings in his Royal Academy lectures. The one example of Soane's built work which is discussed in this volume, however, owes rather more to Palladio. This, appropriately for the recipient of these essays, is the elegant yet little known Simeon Monument in the Market Place in Reading, one of the architect's two works in the town closest to his birthplace.

Monuments, as statements, embody both the public and private. By looking at the architecture of the past and seeking to learn from it, as the contributors to this volume have done, we may find profit in considering how the needs of the public and private domains within society may inform an architecture for our times. Such an architecture, balanced, intelligent and humane, building on the best examples from the past, would respect the inherent tension between polarities and seek to achieve harmony rather than to perpetuate opposition.

If Kerry Downes were to retire from research and writing as well as from teaching and administration, he would have done enough already to show how we might benefit from investigating, analysing and understanding historic architecture, and how much that understanding might contribute to our perception of contemporary needs and solutions. It is our hope, however, in presenting this volume, that he will continue to apply the 'strong reason and good fancy', learned from Nicholas Hawksmoor, to many more books and essays of his own.

John Bold
London

Edward Chaney
Oxford

December 1992

Kerry Downes: A Bibliography

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Abbreviations

BAL	British Architectural Library
BL	British Library
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
OS	Ordnance Survey
PRO	Public Record Office
RCHME	Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
VCH	The Victoria County History

The Role and Function of the Interior Double Staircase

MARY WHITELEY

Double staircases hold a special fascination; the majority of authors writing on the interior double staircase of the sixteenth century onwards make the different types of stair their main line of study. However no staircase can be judged without considering its relationship to the rest of its building and the role and function for which it was designed.

Interior double staircases are first found as an established feature in Europe as early as the fourteenth century. An example survives in Staffordshire at St Editha church in Tamworth (Fig. 1).¹ In the south-west turret of the west tower, which was added to the church in the fifteenth century, two interlocking spiral staircases climb round a communal newel. The two flights are quite independent having separate entrances and no intercommunication before arriving at the top of the tower. The staircase which is entered from the interior of the church served the rooms with an ecclesiastical role, the ringing chamber, the belfry and the two eastern turrets. The other staircase, approached from the outside, gives access to the tower terrace and at the first level to the room in the north-west turret, via a corridor that bypasses the ringing chamber. The role of the second staircase is not clear, but its function was obviously intended to provide a circulation that was separate from the church.

Many staircases, similar both in type and function to the double newel spiral at Tamworth, were built in western Europe during the late medieval period. The majority that survive or are recorded were in religious establishments: in the Collégiale Saint-Pierre at La Romieu, Gascony (1313-18),² in the Collège des Bernardins, Paris (begun 1338);³ in St Vitus Cathedral, Prague (from

* This study lies on the edge of the guidelines for this commemorative book as the majority of examples are on the other side of the Channel; it does, however, cover the subject for which Kerry Downes knows me best – *l'escalier*.

1 C.F. Palmer, *History and Antiquities of the Collegiate Church of Tamworth* (Tamworth and London, 1871), pp. 64-65; H.C. Mitchell, *Tamworth Parish Church* (Welwyn, 1935), pp. 32-33; R. Sherlock, 'St Editha's Church, Tam-

worth', *Archaeological Journal*, cxx (1963), pp. 295-96.

2 Marcel Durliat, 'La Romieu', *Congrès archéologique de France*, cxxviii (1970), pp. 181-93.

3 A. Lenoir, *Statistique monumentale de Paris*, ii (1867), pp. 224-27; H. Sauval, *Histoire et recherches de antiquités de la ville de Paris* (1724; facsimile, Farnborough 1969), i, pp. 435-36; P. Hurtaut and Magny, *Dictionnaire historique de la ville de Paris et ses environs* (Paris, 1779), i, p. 588.

c. 1350);⁴ in Bavarian churches at Weissenburg, Wertheim am Main and Regensburg;⁵ at All Saints Church, Pontefract (fifteenth century);⁶ and at the Prior's Lodge at Wenlock Priory (c. 1500).⁷ This type of staircase was also used for military and residential architecture: at the château of Saumur (fourteenth century);⁸ in the tour Saint-Nicolas at La Rochelle (after 1372);⁹ and at the Grand Châtelet, Paris (second half of the fourteenth century).

In five of the staircases it is possible to identify the individual role and function of the separated flights. At Saumur, one flight which originally started on the ground floor provided the access for the guards climbing up to the lookout tower on the roof, the other a much shorter flight beginning only at the first floor linked the two levels of an important lodging. A similar division between the military and residential requirements occurs in the double spiral at the tour Saint-Nicolas, La Rochelle. At the Collège des Bernardins the two flights kept the circulations of the church and the college distinct, one starting in the sacristy served the upper levels of the church, the other provided the night stairs linking the dormitory to the choir. Communication between the two flights could be provided, as occurred in the church at La Romieu where a small corridor curves round the outside of the staircase which enabled the cardinal approaching from his palace to pass from one flight to the other.

The use of double spiral staircases was widespread, especially it seems in religious establishments, for this type is also found in churches in eastern Europe,¹⁰ and in minarets in the Middle East.¹¹ All the examples of this stairtype share common features, they are small in size and minor in role, but their great advantage was their practicality in providing two separate circulations within a minimum of space.

Double staircases providing the same function were still being built at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Leonardo da Vinci advocates their use in military architecture as a means of preventing the intermingling of different categories of people: 'double stairs, one for the castellan, another one for the mercenaries' (Fig. 2).¹² Leonardo illustrates two types with this function; the doubled newel spiral and the X-type double staircase that consisted of crossed

4 M. Radová-Štiková, 'Steinerne Treppen des 13. bis 16. Jahrhunderts in der Tsechoslowakei', *Scalalogia*, ii (1986), p. 66.

5 Articles in *Scalalogia*, i (1985).

6 N. Pevsner and E. Radcliffe, *The Buildings of England: Yorkshire, The West Riding* (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 393.

7 N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Shropshire* (Harmondsworth, 1958), pp. 207-11.

8 H. Landais, 'Le château de Saumur', *Congrès archéologique de France*, cxxii (1964), pp. 523-58.

9 J. Mesqui, 'Une double révolution à La Rochelle: la tour Saint-Nicolas', *Bulletin monumental*, cxlviii (1990), pp. 155-90.

10 M. Radová-Štiková, ('Steinerne Treppen ...', p. 66) names double spirals in churches at Sázava, at Miličín, and at Kutná Hora.

11 The earliest minaret in Afghanistan dates from the second half of the twelfth century, J. Moline, 'The Minaret of Ġām', *Kunst des Orients*, ix (1973/1974), pp. 131-48; Emir Taylan's Mosque in Tripoli, Lebanon (13th-14th century); Manar Khwadjeh 'Alam (14th-15th century), M. Smith, 'The Manars of Isfahan', *Athar-e Iran* (1936), p. 353.

12 C. Pedretti, *A Chronology of Leonardo da Vinci's Architectural Studies after 1500* (Geneva, 1962), p. 36ff; C. Pedretti, *Leonardo Architect* (London, 1986).

straight flights. The survival of literally dozens of this second type in Venice allows their different functions to be identified.¹³ In the palaces one flight was used as the main staircase, the other as the service stairs. In the housing blocks built by the confraternities they served two adjoining apartments; the way they were arranged provided each apartment with its own separate entrance from the street, allowing each to have its principal room(s) on an upper floor, one on the first, the other on the second. Their popularity in Venice was no doubt due to their practicality in a city where space was so restricted and privacy a much valued commodity. They differed from their medieval counterparts in being the principal staircase of the house.

Different types of double staircase are found in the architectural sketches made by Leonardo, and by Francesco di Giorgio and the pseudo-Bramantino.¹⁴ One particular design which can be interpreted as consisting of two straight flights divided by a passage, with a returning central flight continuing up (Fig. 3), would have provided alternative options for arriving at the same destination on the first floor. This type of double staircase satisfied the Renaissance desire for symmetry. Important single-flight staircases with a ceremonial role had been built from the fourteenth century,¹⁵ but the idea of introducing symmetrical stairs was significant for the development of the staircase as a monumental feature during the later sixteenth century.

Early examples of large double staircases were built in a group of royal houses in France during the first half of the sixteenth century. They include the famous double spiral at Chambord (late 1520s), and the doubled straight flights at Challuau (1541) and at La Muette (begun 1542) (Fig. 4).¹⁶ All three have a central space or passage between their flights which substantially increased the size of their staircase. At La Muette a conscious intention to make the staircase a more important feature is confirmed in the *devis* for masonry; the staircase was to be made equal in size to the chapel and both flights were to be used for access to the three floors.¹⁷ These three impressive staircases were not, as might be expected, in important residential palaces but in isolated buildings in parks. A tradition, said to have dated from the time of François I

13 G. Gianighian and P. Pavanini, *Dietro i palazzi: tre secoli di architettura minore a Venezia, 1492-1803* (Venice, 1984), pp. 63f, exhibition held at Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista; M. Whiteley, review of 1984 exhibition, *Bulletin of the Society for Renaissance Studies* (1985), pp. 59-62.

14 J. Guillaume, 'Léonard et l'architecture', *Léonard de Vinci, ingénieur et architecte* (Montreal, 1987), pp. 261-66, exhibition held at Musée des Beaux Arts.

15 M. Whiteley, 'La grande Vis: Its Development in France from the Mid Fourteenth to the Mid Fifteenth centuries', *L'escalier dans l'archi-*

ture de la renaissance, proceedings of a conference held at Tours in 1979 (Paris, 1985), pp. 15-20; M. Whiteley, 'Deux escaliers royaux du XVe siècle; les "grands degrez" du palais de la Cité et la "grande viz" du Louvre', *Bulletin monumental*, cxlvii (1989), pp. 142-54.

16 J. Guillaume, 'Escalier dans l'architecture française de la première moitié du XVIe siècle', *L'escalier dans l'architecture de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1985), p. 38.

17 L. de Laborde, *Comptes des bâtiments du roy (1528-1571)* (Paris, 1877), i, p. 219.

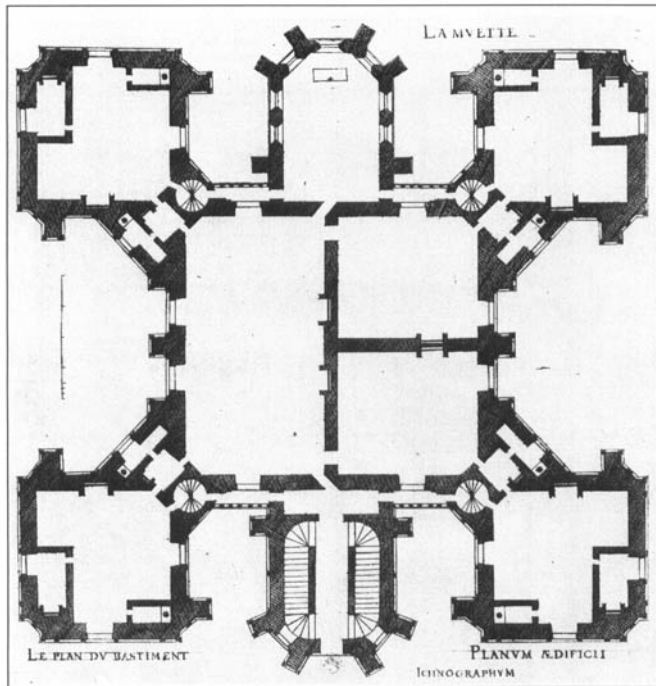


Fig. 4 La Muette, plan after Du Cerceau engraving.

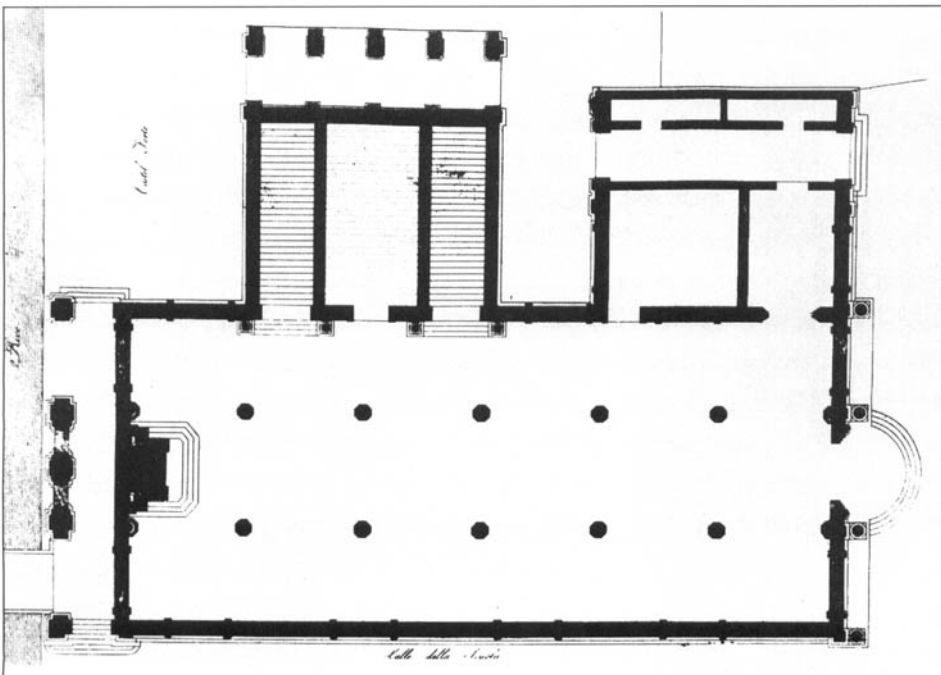


Fig. 5 Scuola di S. Rocco, Venice, plan of ground floor.



Fig. 6 Alcázar, Toledo, the imperial staircase before destruction in 1936.

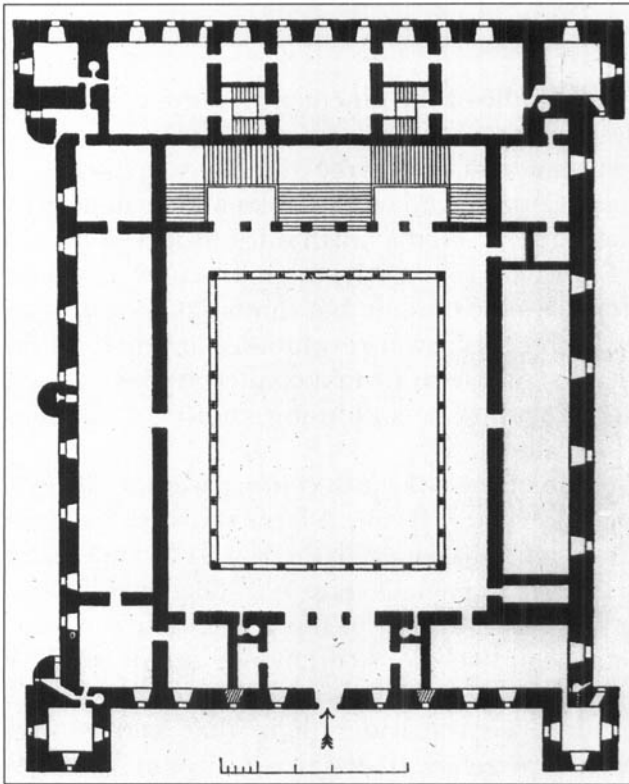


Fig. 7 Alcázar, Toledo, plan of the ground floor.

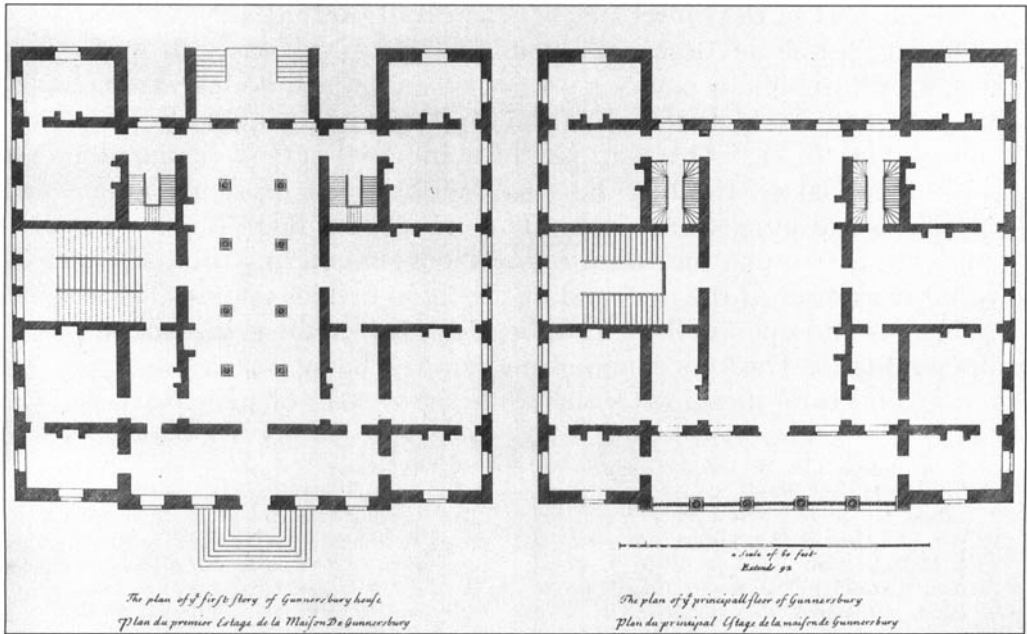


Fig. 8 Gunnersbury House, plans of the ground and first floors, from Colen Campbell, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, i (1715).

and first recorded in print in the middle of the nineteenth century, associated the playing of games of hide and seek by children in the double spiral at Chambord,¹⁸ and it is conceivable that the three double staircases were designed with an element of fun. Certainly no other explanation can be given for the extraordinary double newel spiral on the north side of the west front of Rodez Cathedral in southern France (c. 1540).¹⁹ Its main function was to link the nave of the church to the terrace at its summit, but climbing this staircase is similar to entering a maze. At each of its seven revolutions, another curving flight projects out from the main staircase to form a connection between the two independent flights, thus providing a continuing choice of changing direction from one flight to the other.

The main trend from the middle of the sixteenth century was the development of the double staircase for its ceremonial role. A large staircase, similar in type to Leonardo's triple flight design, was added to the Scuola Grande di San Rocco (1545) in Venice to link the two large halls (Fig. 5).²⁰ The lower hall was used amongst other functions to distribute alms to the poor, while the upper hall was reserved for the meetings and religious ceremonies attended by the members of the confraternity. The two vaulted flights that rise out of the lower hall converge to return as a single central wider flight that leads straight without landing or door into the *sala maggiore*. In design as well as in decoration the staircase is conceived as an integral part of the architectural composition and was undoubtedly used for the ceremonial processions that played such an important part in the life of the Venetian confraternities.²¹

The staircase at the Alcázar in Toledo (c. 1550), which was destroyed in 1936 but has been rebuilt, is one of a series of monumental double staircases that were designed and built in the Spanish royal palaces during the later sixteenth century (Figs. 6, 7).²² The staircase, a full imperial in type, became the main focus of the palace, rivalling the great hall in its huge size, its architectural decoration and in its spatial unity. The central first flight directly faced the main entrance so that the visitor immediately on entering the courtyard was invited to ascend. At the first landing the flight divides into two flights which then rise round open wells to lead, not directly into the great hall, but to the upper galleries. This conception of the staircase being treated as an independent architectural theme conforms to the new ideals of staircase design that

18 I am indebted to Dr David Thomson for bringing the mythology of Chambord to my notice.

19 A.F. Blunt, *Art and Architecture in France 1500 to 1700* (London, 1953), pp. 61-62; L. Bousquet, 'La cathédrale de Rodez', *Congrès archéologique de France* (1937), pp. 367, 372.

20 D. Howard, *The Architectural History of Venice* (London, 1980), pp. 133-35; P.L. Sohm, 'The Staircases of the Venetian Scuole Grandi and Mauro Coducci', *Architectura*, vii (1978), pp.

125-49.

21 J. Glixon, 'Music and Ceremony at the Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista: A New Document from the Venetian State Archives', *Crossing the Boundaries, Christian Piety and the Arts in Italian Medieval and Renaissance Confraternities* (Michigan, 1991), pp. 56-87.

22 C. Wilkinson, 'The Escorial and the Invention of the Imperial Staircase', *Art Bulletin*, lvii (1975), pp. 65-90.

were added by Vasari into the 1568 edition of his book.²³ He advised that public staircases should not only be wide, spacious, well-lit and gentle to climb but that every part should have an air of magnificence, since a large number of visitors saw no more of the house beyond the staircase.

The first grand processional staircase to be built in England was added to Bridewell Palace in 1522, nearly 150 years after their introduction in France.²⁴ Symmetrical staircases were also built in England but never on the same scale or with the same enthusiasm as elsewhere in western Europe. During their travels both Inigo Jones and John Evelyn made observations on the double spiral at Chambord. Jones studied the mechanics, while Evelyn was impressed by 'the extravagancy of the designe'.²⁵ Large-scale double staircases were designed in the projects for Whitehall Palace,²⁶ but one of the earliest to be actually executed in England was at Gunnersbury House (late 1650s) (Fig. 8)²⁷. It is an imperial staircase with a central flight returning in two, but the spatial design and the decoration are more constrained than in its continental counterparts. English architects generally seem to have favoured large twin staircases in their designs for palaces and country houses that could be placed discreetly on either side or behind the entrance hall without intruding on its space. In *English Baroque Architecture*, Kerry Downes praises two English staircases in particular, the King's and Queen's Stairs built by Hugh May at Windsor Castle (1674-84), but comments that their dramatic lighting, illusionism and real spatial complexity was never surpassed in later English architecture.²⁸

A new concern during the late medieval period for making a division between the different functions of a building promoted an improvement in the circulation. The use of the small double newel spiral was a practical solution in that it provided in the minimum of space two distinct circulations that could be flexibly adapted to their separate needs. During the sixteenth century the introduction of new types of double stairs for the principal staircase and the increased importance given to the ceremonial role in public and residential buildings led to the development of the double staircase as a monumental feature. Variations, many of which have great spatial complexity, were built during the Baroque period, yet the double staircase retained the role and function that had been developed during the sixteenth century, that of providing an imposing entrance to the main rooms on the *piano nobile*.

23 *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori et architettori* (Milan, 1962), i, p. 92. In the earlier edition of 1550 Vasari merely recommends staircases to be serviceable and unpretentious.

24 S. Thurley, *English Royal Palaces 1450-1550*, (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1989/90) pp. 101-3.

25 I am grateful to Dr E. Chaney for telling me

about Jones's annotation in his copy of Palladio, Book i, p. 64; *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. E.S. de Beer (Oxford, 1955), i, p. 91; ii, pp. 139-40.

26 J. Bold, *John Webb: Architectural Theory and Practice in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 107-25.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 91-94.

28 K. Downes, *English Baroque Architecture* (London, 1966), pp. 17-20.

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