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ARTICLE

ROBERT ADAM'S FIRST MARYLEBONE HOUSE: THE STORY OF GENERAL ROBERT CLERK, THE COUNTESS OF WARWICK AND THEIR MANSION IN MANSFIELD STREET

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Abstract
General Robert Clerk, patron in the 1760s of one of Robert Adam's earliest London town houses, has remained a shadowy figure for Adam scholars, with seemingly little documentary material about his life to draw upon, but this is no longer the case. He was well known in political, literary and military circles and there are now plentiful clues to be found as to his career, his character and his often unusual opinions on all manner of subjects – including architecture. Much of this is brought together here for the first time. As to Clerk's house, designed expressly for him and his wife-to-be Elizabeth, Countess of Warwick, it has long been recognized that it was not built exactly to Adam's known plans. Previous studies have provided important new information and fresh insights but none has been able to recreate with certainty the original layout of Clerk House nor explain fully the prolonged, complicated story of its construction and occupation. This essay aims to address these and other aspects of the building's history and illustrates for the first time a newly discovered first-floor plan of 1775, apparently in the hand of Lady Warwick herself.

Main Text
Clerk House, on the corner of Mansfield and Duchess Streets in St Marylebone, was designed and built for Robert Clerk and the Countess of Warwick by Robert & James Adam from around 1767 as the first component of their speculative development in Mansfield Street and Portland Place. Thus it was also sometimes referred to as No. 1 Mansfield Street, but its renown rests largely on its subsequent history after 1799 as the home of Thomas Hope and showcase for his extraordinary art collections. As such it is better known as Hope's 'Duchess Street mansion', its main entrance being in that street. It was demolished in 1850.

Robert Adam's early success in England came more through country house commissions than London ones. Having established an office in the capital on his return from the Continent in January 1758, he had by the early to mid 1760s already made his name as one of the nation's leading architects through his work at Harewood House, Hatchlands, Shardeloes, Croome Court, Kedleston Hall, Bowood House, Syon House and Osterley Park. These were mostly remodellings of, or adaptations to, existing houses, the opportunity to build anew being rare. Adam was equally intent on striking out in the capital through important public and private commissions but by this date his only major residence to have been erected there was Bute (later Lansdowne) House in Berkeley Square, begun around 1762. Though other London work soon came his way, Clerk House was to be his next major

commission in the capital to come to fruition. It was also his first sortie into St Marylebone, where fashionable development was beginning to take off in the 1760s north of Cavendish Square, and where the long-running saga of Portland Place would occupy him for the rest of his life.

General Clerk and Elizabeth, Countess of Warwick

Robert Clerk was unusual among Adam's early London patrons in being neither an aristocrat nor a high-ranking politician. But, like Adam himself, he had a rare ability to move freely in polite society on easy if not quite equal terms. Indeed the two men seem to have shared a similar mix of confidence, charm and occasional abrasiveness as well as a gift for self-promotion.

Clerk's curious, lively character was remarked on by contemporaries. Although Horace Walpole dismissed him as 'ill favoured in his person' and 'of intellects not very sound', others disagreed. Alexander Carlyle, a fellow student at Edinburgh University, thought him 'very singular', recognizing an 'ingenious and active' intellect. Clerk was comfortable among the circle of Edinburgh thinkers, philosophers, artists and writers to which Adam belonged, and his views seem to have carried some weight. Montesquieu, the great French philosopher, was visited by Clerk in Paris, where they discussed education. Adam Smith was keen to have Clerk's opinion of his new edition of *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, published in 1761. And he is a key figure, alongside Smith and David Hume, in a philosophical 'discourse' written by Adam Ferguson, in which Clerk challenges the moral doctrines of the two Edinburgh intellectuals.[1] Though the factual accuracy of this discourse is uncertain, Clerk's pugnacious tone – at one point telling Smith 'Your Book is to me a Heap of absolute Nonsense' – rings true. Carlyle recounted that Clerk 'applied his warlike ideas to colloquial intercourse, and attacked your opinions as he would do a redoubt or a castle, not by sap and mine, but by open storm', and clearly thought him a bore. This view was apparently shared by Ferguson. When Carlyle once offered to send Clerk on a bedside visit to Ferguson, then suffering from a fever, he replied: 'God forbid … as you regard my life'.[2]

More of this tiresome behaviour is related in the memoirs of the journalist Friedrich Melchior, Baron von Grimm, who said of Clerk: 'He is a man of sense, but a great talker, and even fatiguing from the trick he has of adding to every phrase that he pronounces an *Hem?* so that he has the air of interrogating a person continually, though he never waits for an answer'. Grimm recites an anecdote about Clerk which is worth quoting at length for the detail it provides of this aspect of his personality. It concerns a visit made during Clerk's residence in Paris in the mid 1760s to the leading society hostess Madame Geoffrin, famed for her intellectual *salons* on the rue Saint-Honoré, whom Grimm said 'cannot think of General Clerk even now, without trembling all over'. Clerk had been taken there by the Parisian philosopher and author Baron d'Holbach. Grimm continues:

'Baron d'Holbach brought this stranger to her, and after the first compliments, and a visit of half an hour, he rose to go away. M. Clerk, instead of following …, remained. Madame Geoffrin asked him if he went much to the theatres?–Rarely.–To the publick walks?–Very seldom.–To the court, to the princes?–No one less.–How then do you pass your time? Why, when I find myself in a house that pleases me, I converse and I stay there. At these words Madame Geoffrin turned pale. It was six o'clock in the evening; she thought that General Clerk might remain till ten; this idea gave her the shuddering of a fever. By chance M. d'Alembert came in. Madame Geoffrin persuaded him after a little time, that he was not well, and that he must get General Clerk to take him home. The latter, delighted to render a service, told M. d'Alembert, that he might dispose of his

carriage as he pleased, that he should not want till the evening to take him home. These words were a thunderbolt for Madame Geoffrin, who could not get rid of our Scotchman, whatever change happened in her apartment, by the arrival and departure of visiters. At this moment she cannot think with calmness of that day; and she did not go to bed without taking precautions against the danger of a second visit.'[3]

Clerk was born in 1723, the second of five sons of Dr John Clerk of Listonshiels and Spittal (d.1757), President of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, and a nephew of John Clerk of Penicuik, first Baronet. Thus the General was connected to the Adams on two fronts. The Clerks of Penicuik were their close family friends, a relationship that was cemented in 1753 when John Clerk of Eldin – younger brother to Sir James Clerk, third Baronet – married Susanna, Robert Adam's sister. The General was proud of his connection with Scotland's leading family in terms of its artistic patronage and on his death in 1797 left them several items, including a great clock and a table clock by Mudge, which he asked should 'be all placed in and never removed from the Castle of the Clerks' Penicuick'. His 'great clock' still resides at Penicuik House, as indeed does his portrait, attributed to David Martin (Fig. 1). Furthermore, his elder brother Thomas (d.1770), a merchant, was a partner in the London firm of Innes & Clerk, financial agents to all four Adam brothers in the 1750s and 60s.[4]

Robert Clerk left Edinburgh University around 1740 before taking his degree in order to join the army, firstly as a marine, later as an engineer. He was one of four engineers appointed to the force assembled under Lieutenant-General James St Clair in 1746 for a hare-brained scheme to sail to Canada under naval escort and take Quebec. St Clair's force was later redirected to attack the French East India Company's base at Lorient, on the Brittany coast, but this manoeuvre – the first in a series of mid eighteenth-century naval 'descents' by the British against the French – fizzled out into a rather ignoble retreat. The following year he was part of an Anglo-Dutch force occupying the strategic Dutch fortress town of Bergen-op-Zoom when it was taken by the French. He was captured and imprisoned but was released when the War of Austrian Succession came to an end in 1748. Clerk's bold, adventurous nature comes across in a story recounted by Horace Walpole that he avoided execution by telling the enemy soldiers he was a friend or relative of their commander, Marshal Löwendahl, whom he said would reward them liberally for his rescue. Apparently Löwendahl was so taken by the hoax that he gave Clerk money to distribute among his captors.[5]

Clerk's only, modest, claim to military prominence was his role as instigator of another half-cocked British naval descent – the aborted 'attack' on Rochefort of September 1757 during the Seven Years War. This, too, ended in fiasco and the court-martial of its commander, Lieutenant-General Sir John Mordaunt. In his evidence to that court-martial Clerk explained that he had made a point of returning home from Gibraltar in April 1754 via the west coast of France in order to inspect naval defences there, and found the port of Rochefort surprisingly neglected and a suitable target for a raid. Never shy to address those of higher rank and status (David Hume attributed Clerk's popularity in Paris with 'People of Merit' in the mid 1760s to his 'surprising Courage in introducing himself'), he later mentioned his views on Rochefort to General Ligonier, soon to be made commander-in-chief of the British forces.[6]

And so from the musings of a junior officer was born an endeavour which saw 10,000 men carried in a fleet of eighty ships to the French coast, only to return home again without gain.[7] Clerk's role in instigating the campaign brought him unprecedented

promotion to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel (the only such rapid promotion ever awarded to an engineer) and the appointment as Chief Engineer to the expedition, thrusting him suddenly into the company of senior officers and politicians, including secretary of state William Pitt, whom Walpole described as 'captivated' with Clerk's idea. Also the subsequent inquiry and court-martial offered him a public platform which he took to happily.[8]

Despite his seminal role in the botched Rochefort affair, Clerk managed to avoid much blame in its aftermath. In fact he and a fellow officer who was soon to find death and glory, James Wolfe, were able to present themselves as bold, adventurous young soldiers held back by the timidity and indecisiveness of their ageing commanders. Both men relished the celebrity and mingled with society.[9]

The Rochefort expedition was to be of importance to Clerk for another reason. Serving on board Lord Howe's ship *Magnanime*, which took the lead in attacking the fortified Island of Aix that commanded the intended landing place, was the young William Petty Fitzmaurice (1737–1805), later second Earl of Shelburne and first Marquess of Lansdowne, a future Prime Minister and another important Adam patron. Shelburne, as he himself put it, later 'fell into a most intimate connection' with Clerk, whose opinions the young lord enjoyed thereafter as a mentor and unofficial adviser. Shelburne later said of Clerk to Lady Warwick: 'There is no man I feel myself more sensibly Obliged to ... for Improving my Heart, adding to my Affections, & teaching me to be interrested in the Happiness of others'. Clerk, for his part, once wrote to Shelburne: 'I feel you something like my son'.[10]

By this time Clerk was also on favourable terms with John Stuart, third Earl Bute (1713–92), another rising political star and, like Shelburne, a future prime minister and Adam patron. A confidant of George II's son and heir Frederick, Prince of Wales, Bute became a key figure in the rival court established by Frederick at his London home, Leicester House, in opposition to the old king. When Frederick died unexpectedly in 1751, Bute maintained close links with his widow Augusta, Dowager Princess of Wales, and their young son George, the future George III, to whom he became principal tutor and advisor as Groom of the Stole (from 1755). Bute initially thought highly of Clerk and trusted him, writing to Pitt in 1758: 'Never was man so cut out for bold and hardy enterprise'. And, through Bute, Clerk seems to have enjoyed the support of the Leicester House party and an easy-going relationship with Princess Augusta.[11]

But Clerk's meteoric rise was soon brought to a sudden halt by further controversy. He was involved in another series of coastal raids in August–September 1758, on Cherbourg and St Malo, led by General Bligh with a fleet commanded by Howe. These 'descents', the last of their kind, were advocated by Bute, who favoured coastal attacks over expensive land campaigns, and were an attempt to increase Leicester House's influence on war policy. Clerk was given the important role of quartermaster-general to the expedition on Bute's recommendation and was to be his eyes and ears on the ground – 'the right hand of his General', as Bute himself put it. But Bute had misjudged badly. A first assault on St Malo was abandoned, a second on Cherbourg was also given up after some success. And then, apparently without the involvement of Pitt or his ministers, another abortive attempt was made early in September on St Malo at Clerk's urging (presumably on Bute's behalf), even though the French forces were now on their guard.[12] In the end some 700 British rearguard troops, comprising mostly George II's beloved Grenadier Guards, were killed before they could re-embark, largely through the negligence of Clerk, who was accused of having been 'presumptuous', 'reckless' and 'dilatory' in not securing the retreat; at one point Clerk was said to have been spotted idly reading a copy of the *Gazette* on

the beach. Although on this occasion there was no inquiry or court-martial, there is a suggestion that for a time Clerk was placed under arrest, and both he and Bligh quickly fell from favour. Though he continued to rise through the ranks, presumably with Bute's and later Shelburne's help, becoming Colonel (1762), Major-General (1772), Lieutenant-General (1777), and finally General (1793), Clerk seems never again to have held a commission in the British army and his military career at home was effectively over. Pitt opined that, following St Malo, every officer in the army was 'violently opposed' to him.[13]

Clerk may have been encouraged to leave the country. Lord Shelburne certainly appears to have used his influence to help secure him a commission in the Portuguese army as a brigadier general at the time of the Spanish invasion there in the early 1760s – one of several controversial promotions of former British officers into high-ranking Portuguese posts. (Hence the common use thereafter of the title 'General' Clerk.) He had arrived in the strategic fortified border town of Elvas by December 1762 and soon afterwards was made governor there, with responsibility for securing munitions, food and other supplies.[14] Clerk then moved on to Lisbon by May 1763 but, with the war ending, made a brief return to England in July before making his way to Paris, where he lived for much of 1763–5. By the summer of 1765 he seems to have settled once again in London.[15]

The charm and easiness with people in society that had brought him the patronage of Leicester House may help explain Clerk's perhaps otherwise unlikely wooing of Elizabeth Hamilton, Countess of Warwick (Fig. 2), sister of Sir William Hamilton and wife of Francis Greville, 1st Earl of Warwick. Having raised six surviving children in the 1740s and 50s, the Earl and Countess seem to have grown apart. (A seventh child, Lady Anne, was born in 1760.) What appears to have begun as a genuinely Platonic friendship between Clerk and Lady Warwick in the late 1750s gradually developed into something deeper. Clerk spent six weeks at Warwick Castle in the summer of 1759. In their separate correspondences with Lord Shelburne they speak increasingly warmly of one another: she regularly solicits Shelburne to find Clerk a suitable position or commission; he speaks of the great regard in which he will hold her 'as long as I live, & perhaps longer too, If in the shades below &c'.[16] She left her husband in England in 1763 and 1764 to travel to Paris, where General Clerk was then living. Matters came to a head in the summer of 1765 when Lady Warwick, on returning home to the family town-house in Hill Street, Mayfair, from another trip abroad was turned away by her husband. Few details of the affair have so far come to light. The Earl of Warwick pleaded (unsuccessfully) with Lord Shelburne to have Clerk sent away again on a foreign commission but he agreed to sign a deed honouring the Countess's demands for maintenance, with Shelburne acting as trustee. At first she rented lodgings in Kensington, but it was no doubt this separation and her new intimacy with Clerk (as well as her financial settlement) that prompted the agreement with Robert Adam to design the couple a suitable town residence in Marylebone. Clerk and the Countess were eventually married quietly in the English Ambassador's chapel in Paris, in February 1774, following the Earl of Warwick's death in July 1773.[17]

Robert Adam's Designs for Clerk House

It is the name of Robert's younger brother and partner James that appears most regularly (and often alone) in the earliest agreements and conveyances for the Adams' Marylebone developments, though he would have been acting on behalf of their architectural practice. James often dealt with managerial and 'public relations' matters for the pair and also for William Adam & Company, the building contracting and supplies firm in which all four Adam brothers held equal shares – coaxing builders and lessees to take up plots on the speculative developments, encouraging

wealthy clients to invest in Robert's designs, dealing with the day-to-day matters of conveyancing and signing documents.[18] But Robert would have been largely responsible for the design of the house for Clerk and Lady Warwick, given its rare status as a large London residence that he was able to plan and build from scratch. Its layout has much in common with his other London town-house designs of the period.

Adam's first such house, Bute House in Berkeley Square, had been begun around 1762 for Lord Bute, the then Prime Minister, while James Adam was still in Italy. Bute's sudden fall from grace and increasing unpopularity forced him to leave London and it was Robert Clerk who negotiated the sale of the unfinished building in September 1765 to Bute's political rival Shelburne. As part of this agreement Adam, who had been working on plans of a house for Shelburne at Hyde Park Corner, was retained to complete the Berkeley Square mansion for him, at Bute's expense, which took till 1768. At first it was renamed Shelburne House but became better known as Lansdowne House from Shelburne's later title, first Marquess of Lansdowne.

In its size, planning and internal decoration, Lansdowne House was more like a palace or country mansion than a London town house. It was a capacious Palladian three-storey block flanked by two-storey pavilions and originally was to have had a Great Library in an extension wing at the rear, with domed octagons at either end, but this was left an empty shell by Adam and not completed until much later by Robert Smirke as a gallery for the 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne. Adam's early plans for the house sparkled with invention, the rooms having niches, apses, bays, rounded ends and column screens to create variety and movement, though much of this was toned down and simplified in his subsequent, revised schemes.[19]

During Lansdowne House's genesis, both Robert Adam and Lord Shelburne sought out Clerk for advice. In October 1765 Adam called on him at Clarges Street, Piccadilly (where he had taken a furnished house), to discuss, among other things, some changes suggested by Lord and Lady Shelburne as to the position of a set of back stairs that had been specifically requested by Lord Bute. Clerk told Shelburne that, with Adam's recent revisions, the house now 'could not be better and … is without doubt the best in London'. A few months previously Shelburne had also asked Clerk's opinion of the Hyde Park Corner designs, sending Adam's plan to him in Paris. Though Clerk had thought it admirable, 'according to the situation circumstances & extent of the building', he said he could not understand how the Shelburnes could possibly make do with 'only one floor', and held up Lansdowne House in contrast: 'Lord Bute's house is worth ten of it upon that account'. Clerk was at the time also advising Shelburne on rebuilding his country pile at Bowood, Wilts., and on financial management. As for Adam, he took Clerk with him when he went to see Lord Bute shortly after the sale to Shelburne, and later, in confidence, expressed his 'distress and anxiety' to Clerk, and his concerns about making changes to the plan when it had been agreed with Bute that he would foot the bill for the house to be finished 'as intended'.[20] There is at least one other documented instance of Adam and Clerk discussing architectural matters. When his cousin Sir James Clerk of Penicuik was rebuilding the family seat of Newbiggin House at Penicuik in the Palladian style, Clerk wrote to him criticising the old-fashioned and rigidly symmetrical interior planning that Sir James had set his mind on, with two main staircases either side of a central entrance hall. Clerk sent a copy of this letter with its critique and suggested alterations to Adam, and had, he said, received his approval.[21]

By the time of the Lansdowne House deal in the mid 1760s, Clerk, having spent several years on the Continent, had decided upon a new style of living: to summer in

Europe – 'every year a new country' – but during the winter to live for four or five months in London, 'where I intend to build an Hotel'.[22] His choice of words is significant. Clerk's experiences in Paris seem to have bred in him an admiration for the Parisian mode of living in *hôtels particuliers* – an admiration he shared with Robert Adam. Praise for French planning resonates throughout the polemical preface to the first volume of *The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam* (1773), and Adam also candidly described his plan of Derby House in Grosvenor Square, one of his London town-house masterpieces, as an attempt to arrange the apartments in the French manner, adapted to the requirements of a more confined London plot. The 1760s saw the Adam Brothers perhaps at their most productive and creative, ingeniously combining ideas from Parisian planning with others gleaned from Roman *thermae* and Palladian villas to create an architecture centred on interesting sequences or parades of variously shaped rooms. Adam's designs for alterations at Syon House (from 1761) mark its first outing, but the early plans for Lansdowne House and to a lesser extent Clerk House show aspects of the same approach.

The site for Clerk House was unusually large, with a frontage of around 100ft., bounded by Queen Anne, Mansfield and Duchess Streets and abutting east on the much narrower plot reserved by the Adams for Chandos House (begun *c*.1769). Various Adam office designs for Clerk House survive in Sir John Soane's Museum; another set, which largely duplicates some of the Soane drawings, was known to have been in Thomas Hope's possession and is now in private ownership.[23] They record alternative schemes for a French-inspired courtyard-plan house comprising a double-pile main block, with a central hall and an imperial staircase in a side compartment, flanked by projecting service wings (Figs. 3–7). The drawings probably date from 1767, when James Adam first agreed with the Duke of Portland to lease land on his estate for development, and certainly before the summer of 1768, by which time building work was apparently under way.[24] The first group of designs have the main entrance and courtyard clearly indicated on the south side, as at Chandos House, facing Queen Anne Street, with two-storey flanking wings. This set also shows the lower part of the house curved and fronted by a semicircle of columns forming a carriage-way. The Adams had been experimenting with colonnaded courtyards in house designs since the 1750s. The house of *c*.1764 intended for Lord Shelburne near Hyde Park Corner had a similar large front court, as did another scheme of the same date for Lord Holland at Albany, Piccadilly.[25] Robert Adam was to return to the theme in his unexecuted designs of *c*.1770–2 for a colossal Palladian mansion for the Duke of Portland on New Cavendish Street – facing directly down Mansfield Street – which was to have been fronted by a courtyard with a circular colonnade on an extraordinary scale.[26]

Clerk House was designed with no basement, so a relatively low ground floor was given over mostly to servants' rooms, stables and other services. Its principal feature was an impressive circular hall with niches, derived from the Vestibule of the Emperor Diocletian's Palace in Split (Fig. 5). In this first scheme the dominant room on the much taller *piano nobile* was a great drawing room (or 'Room for Company before Dinner') entered off the stairs, planned with semi-circular ends, niches for statues and windows overlooking the courtyard (Fig. 6). From here guests would progress to an uncomplicated (for Adam) rectangular dining room; the positioning of the stairs to the side allowed these main reception rooms to be arranged *en suite*. Behind them was a private suite, probably for the General, overlooking the garden, including a powdering room, water closet, and an enfilade of bed and other rooms communicating directly with the stairs and great drawing room. Above was a second private suite with plenty of adjoining 'rooms for company'.

The second Clerk House scheme increases the height of the flanking wings and dispenses with the central colonnade, adding instead a simple Doric entrance porch (Fig. 4). No floor plans survive for this design, but presumably they corresponded by and large to the first set of drawings, with a central hall. However, two notable changes are discernible in the sectional drawing (Fig. 7). The hall and the 'Room for Company' above it are now both straightforward rectangles: gone are the lively bows and niches originally suggested by Adam. It was this scheme for the house that was eventually built, though with certain modifications, the principal one being the complete rotation and reversal of the plan so that the entrance, wings and courtyard faced north to Duchess Street rather than south, and the 'Room for Company' had the main stairs to its left and dining room to its right, not the other way round.

Lady Warwick's first-floor plan of 1775, given to her niece, the courtier and diarist Mary Hamilton, confirms this reorientation and the simplification of the main drawing room (Fig. 8).[27] Though inscribed as 'Drawn & written by herself', it corresponds so closely with the Adam plans and repeats so many of their conventions – such as the dashed lines for beds – as to suggest that it may be a tracing or redrawing of a now lost plan by the Adam office. In spite of its reversal and the introduction of some splayed window openings, the rear private enfilade tallies exactly with that on the Adam plans, though the room uses have been modified slightly, with an ante-room for servants 'out of livery' leading directly off the Great Stairs to a pair of drawing rooms and then the bedchamber. Lady Warwick has noted that the powdering room was used also 'for a Warm Bath'.

The plan is also instructive as to the final form of the two side wings. The west wing, lit from the road side, has three bedrooms and a fourth room (presumably for grooms and stable-hands) over the stables on the floor below, which had windows and doors facing Mansfield Street. Under the fourth, southernmost, room was an entrance arch for coaches leading off the street. The east wing represents the other major change from the earlier plans, as instead of more service rooms here, above the ground-floor coach-house, the first floor was constructed as another small private apartment, with a further 'Room for Company', bedchamber and dressing room, all with fireplaces. Perhaps this was intended for the Countess's occasional use, to save her making the journey to the floor above; perhaps it was a guest suite for visitors, such as the Countess's children. In both wings Adam avoided the need for internal staircases by removing them to semi-circular projections at the ends.

Lady Warwick's plan also confirms that the main north elevation between the side wings had five windows to its first floor, as shown in Adam's second set of plans, and not the three widely spaced windows of the first, colonnaded scheme. The three left-hand (eastern) windows served the 'Room for Company', as suggested by a later sketch plan made by the antiquarian Francis Douce on a visit to see Thomas Hope's collection in 1812; the other two were simply blind, the Dining Room being lit solely by a pair of window openings in its west wall.[28] Also, the entrance porch in the courtyard had been simplified in execution, comprising only one large opening framed by circular columns on square bases and not the tripartite affair shown in the Adam drawing.

The plainness of the house's elevations was something remarked upon by later commentators – though their judgement may have been coloured by post-Adam additions and alterations made for Thomas Hope by the architect Charles Tatham, who adopted an austere neoclassical style reminiscent of Ledoux. Nevertheless, such an approach was not out of keeping with Chandos House, next door, or the terraces that the Adams built shortly afterwards in Mansfield Street – nor was it unusual for Adam office drawings to adopt a businesslike functionalism when

presenting alternative schemes to clients. Unexecuted designs for Lord Lisburne for alterations to Mamhead House in Devon, of *c*.1766–9 and therefore contemporary with the early Clerk House drawings, exhibit a similar severity.[29] One other Adam drawing for the exterior of Clerk House, dated 1779, shows a revised elevation for the garden front, with Ionic columns and decorative panels, but it is uncertain if this was carried out.[30]

A distinctive feature of all the plans was the unprecedented use of fireproof segmental or barrel-vaulted ceilings throughout the house on all floors. These were used specifically at General Clerk's request and were yet another consequence of his time in Paris. In May 1765, before he began to broker the Bute House sale, Clerk wrote to Lord Shelburne from Paris recommending the use of French-style fireproof brick vaults (or 'flat arches', as they were known) in house construction. 'There is but one man here who can attempt it', Clerk wrote, 'He comes on purpose with French workmen & that only for me', adding: 'I shall have them in my house'.[31] The 'flat arch' roofing technique had been developed and popularized in France by Count Felix François d'Espie (1708–92), a retired army officer, and it is likely that Clerk's 'one man' and 'French workmen' referred to d'Espie and his builders. They had once before been asked to come to England to advise on and construct the flat-arch system, for Alderman William Beckford at Fonthill Splendens, Wiltshire (built *c*.1757–70, demolished 1807). Beckford had been given a copy of the count's book on fireproof construction in 1755 when his previous mansion, Fonthill Redivivus, burnt to the ground, and he was instrumental in having the work translated into English (by L. Dutens) and published in 1756. D'Espie offered to make a model of his system and send it to Beckford with his workmen, but it is not known if this happened.[32] Clerk and the Countess were evidently proud of this pioneering aspect of their mansion's construction: her first-floor plan of 1775 carries the inscription: 'The Whole Building is with Arches, & is the first and only one so built in London to this present year 1775'.[33]

The same letter from Clerk to Shelburne also suggests that the idea of Marylebone as the favoured location for the new mansion may have been Clerk's own. Having chided Shelburne that his Adam-designed house at Hyde Park Corner would not only be too small but also in an unfashionable district, he recommends Marylebone to him:

'Go beyond Portman's square Middlesex Hospital, or where you like, it is not 6 minutes difference; take a piece of ground 150 yards by 156 yards with a wall round it 30 feet high & road round it, You have all within yourself tranquillity, quietness, your mind to yourself to your friends & to mankind.'[34]

However, James Adam's initial agreement with the Duke of Portland of October 1767 included not only the sites of Clerk House, Chandos House and Mansfield Street but also at least part of the future Portland Place; so it is equally possible that the Adams had planned Clerk House as a lure to attract buyers to their wider speculative development there, which they must have already begun to plan for before taking on the Adelphi rather than afterwards, as is generally thought.[35]

Construction and Early Residence, 1768-97

In spite of the late change of mind as to the orientation of the house, it seems that the Adam office plans were otherwise followed closely during construction. Estimated costs given to Lady Warwick specified that the house would be built 'agreeable to the plans, elevation & sections of the design'. At this stage the estimates (of around £8,000–£9,000) were for basic construction costs only, with no mention of Adam interiors.[36]

Such an approach was not uncommon for the Adams when it came to assessing the costs for new houses, as they claimed a complete figure was hard to judge 'without entering into a detail of the mouldings and every thing to be done with the same minuteness that would be necessary for the execution of the whole', and it was, they said rather grandly (and disingenuously), their 'fixed rule to lead no patron into any unforeseen expense'. These remarks relate to an unexecuted scheme of 1774 for a detached mansion for Lord Kerry in Portland Place, which, in similar fashion to Clerk House, was estimated at just under £13,500 for 'carcassing & plain furnishing' only. The Adams' first 'guest estimate' (as they called it) for an overall figure for decorative work for Lord Kerry's was £2,500, of which around £1,500 was later ascribed to stucco work, carving and gilding. These could be delayed, said the Adams, to keep initial costs down, leaving Kerry 'at liberty to add & furnish as you shall afterwards find convenient'. Perhaps a similar offer was made to General Clerk and Lady Warwick.[37]

Lady Warwick made her first cash payment (of £500) in July 1768, by which time work would have been under way. Thereafter she agreed to pay the Adams £250 a quarter until 1776. As her son Robert Fulke Greville made clear at the end of the building accounts, Clerk House was paid for entirely 'out of the Monies belonging to Ly W. herself'.[38]

In June 1769 James Adam granted Clerk a 99-year lease of the house, backdated to Michaelmas 1767, which Clerk placed in trust for the Countess.[39] Normally such a conveyance would suggest that the building was close to completion and the Adams were in possession of the ground. But they were often precipitate, and in this case seem to have concluded business with Clerk *before* the Portland Estate had issued them their promised lease. In reply to complaints about a wall the Adams were building in the summer of 1771 in Queen Anne Street (probably connected with Chandos House or Clerk House), the Duke of Portland replied sharply that no lease of the ground had been executed and nor would one be till the wall had been taken down and iron rails substituted as agreed. ('Smiths work to Iron rail round the area' is listed in the estimate of costs given by the Adams to the Countess.)[40] Clerk eventually received a second, fully legal lease from James Adam with the Portland Estate as co-party in 1775, shortly before the Duchess made her last payment and by which time the house must have been nearly finished.[41]

This was a long delay – the house had been roofed in as early as 1771 – but is explained in the building estimates and accounts where there is mention of a fire and a new agreement with the Adams of September or December 1771 (the date varies), which included rebuilding after the fire. Also mentioned was a proposal to leave the second-floor rooms unfinished, probably to expedite completion, as the Adams did not always wait for all their work to be done before handing a house over. Lady Shelburne complained in her journal that when she and her husband moved in to Lansdowne House in August 1768 'few people wou'd have come to live in it, in so unfinished a state'. Masons were still at work 'cleaning the staircase', she wrote, 'and the bell hangers make it as yet impossible for us to see any but people of business & very intimates'. With no mirrors, curtains or chairs in her hall, anteroom or dining room, she thought it 'very doubtful' that they could ask the King of Denmark to dinner.[42]

Lady Warwick had been paying rates on her new property since 1771 and continued to do so until 1774 but it seems inconceivable that she would have been living there alone in an unfinished house during that period. Clerk was still using the house in Clarges Street he had taken on his return to England in 1765. Perhaps they were reluctant to set up home together flagrantly while her husband the Earl of Warwick

was still alive; perhaps it had always been their intention to let the house initially and bide their time. The Countess travelled abroad; during a return visit to London in August 1773 she was accommodated by Lord Shelburne at Lansdowne House – a 'magnificent Hotel', she called it – which must have put her own, unfinished 'hotel' to shame.[43]

In January 1774 Clerk House was finally advertised to let. In the estate agents' language of the time, much was made of the fine suite of Adam reception rooms – described as 'for Number and Dimensions ... almost unequaled in this Capital' – and also of the house's 'incombustible plan' and arched ceilings. Rent was set at a 'very easy' £450pa.[44] It was thought particularly suitable for a Foreign Minister but its first tenant was Sir Thomas Wynn of Glynllifon, Caernarfonshire (later Lord Newborough), who resided there from 1774 until 1780 having agreed a 5½-year lease with the Clerks and James Adam, though at a reduced rent of £350pa. Wynn sat in Westminster during this period as MP for Caernarfon (until 1774) and St Ives (until 1780), and was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. Clerk House was evidently still unfinished when Wynn moved in, as James Adam and the owners offered to further deduct from his rent any expenses for 'hangings for the rooms staircase and offices or in papering the same or in hanging the Bells'. Lady Warwick's accounts show that in the end this reduction amounted to £60.[45]

Wynn had gone by the summer of 1780, when Clerk and the Countess finally took possession of their Marylebone 'Hôtel' as a married couple. A year earlier, in preparation for this, the Adam office produced a second series of designs, this time almost entirely for interior decorations and relating mostly to the grandest reception room, the 'Room for Company', including alternative ceilings. One is a simple, spare symmetrical design featuring a central painted panel of the Greek and Roman mother-goddess Cybele in her chariot drawn by lions, set within an outer border of bellflower bands and painted and sculpted panels; the other is a more characteristic geometric Adam design of the period with what appears to be Venus with a Cupid in her chariot drawn by swans, as well as a profusion of grotesque acanthus scrolls, borders, palmettes, plaques and griffins, and many more, smaller painted panels (Fig. 9). This latter drawing has been partially painted in various hues to illustrate possible colour schemes on one sheet – a common technique in the Adam office. There is also a pencil sketch by Robert Adam himself for a chimneypiece for this room, as well as a later worked-up office pen drawing of the same design (Fig. 10). Especially charming are several coloured arabesque designs for shutter panels (Figs 11, 12). Composed mostly of medallions, urns, delicate garlands and swags, they resemble some of Adam's Etruscan decorative work of the mid-to-late 1770s, as at Derby House, Osterley Park, and Sir Abraham Hume's house in Hill Street.[46]

In his most recent studies of the Hope mansion, David Watkin argues convincingly that Adam's 'Room for Company' and the adjoining Dining Room may have survived Thomas Hope's arrival more or less intact, since neither appears in the monograph he devoted to his lavish rearrangement and redecoration of the interiors there (*Household Furniture and Interior Decoration*, 1807). Francis Douce, writing of his visit in 1812, described the Dining Room as an important Neo-classical statement and noted a 'very beautiful' carpet which Hope had apparently found there – perhaps a remnant of the Adams' 1770s decorative scheme. Watkin also argues that some of the illustrations by Henry Moses in another Hope publication, *Designs of Modern Costume* (1812), were set in Duchess Street and may evoke the Drawing Room interior. Certainly the broad pilaster strips ornamented with scrolled and anthemion patterns are in the Adam manner (Fig. 13).[47]

General Clerk died of a sudden seizure in May 1797. Though the London press described his death as occurring at home, this was in fact a cover-up. The 'apoplexy', as it was referred to, had actually taken place at the house of a mistress in Cleveland Street, Marylebone, and apparently whilst *in flagrante*. A Doctor Hayes, who lived a few doors away, was called for but Clerk was already dead when he arrived; Hayes euphemistically described Clerk as being 'in a *very particular situation* when he died'. Hayes said Clerk was accustomed to visit a 'young person' there '2 or 3 times a week before He went home to dress for dinner'. Nevertheless no-one at the house seemed to know who Clerk was until Dr Hayes discovered some letters in his pocket. Hayes sent word to Clerk House, and Clerk's stepson Lord Warwick came and took the body back to Mansfield Street in a Hackney coach.[48] By August Lady Warwick had moved out, assigning the mansion to her son the 2nd Earl of Warwick. She wrote to her youngest son Robert Greville that she was 'without gloom', busying herself in fitting up a house to rent on Richmond Green, 'where I mean to seclude myself in some degree'. She died at the end of February 1800 in Dover Street and was buried on 6 March in the Duke of Ormond's vault in the Henry VII Chapel at Westminster Abbey, alongside members of the Hamilton family, Earls of Abercorn.[49]

Later History of the House

Towards the end of 1794, with the French armies closing in on Amsterdam, the wealthy banker and collector Thomas Hope left his native Holland. After briefly passing through London he set off on a Grand Tour, finally returning to the English capital to settle for good in 1798. At first he seems to have taken a house in Hanover Square, but later moved to Berkeley Square. However, the plans he was forming to revolutionize British art and design required larger premises and so in April 1799 he acquired the lease of Clerk House from Lord Warwick at a cost of £9,450.[50] It was well suited to his needs, with suites of large reception rooms to display his collections as well as ample grounds for enlargement, and may already have been known to Hope from its proximity to the house of Henry Hope, his father's cousin and head of the family bank, in nearby Cavendish Square. Also, its Parisian layout must have appealed to his Francophile tastes.

Hope's remodelling and extending of the house as a semi-public gallery has been covered in detail, particularly by David Watkin, so only a summary follows here.[51] C. H. Tatham was Hope's architect of choice and was soon at work on a new picture gallery, 100ft. long, begun in the summer of 1799 along the Duchess Street frontage beyond the Adam side wings, one of which was extended to meet it. The other Adam wing was demolished to make room for a new west range, intended as a library but in the event used as a sculpture gallery. Though Tatham drew all the plans it is clear that he was following strict instructions and occasional drawings from Hope.

For Hope the house was the key to the success of his crusade to improve British taste and design. The first-floor galleries were opened to the public and their architecture and contents publicized in *Household Furniture*. Several of the Adam first-floor rooms were remodelled and added to the circuit of new galleries as exotic, themed surroundings for the display of Hope's pieces – an Egyptian Room (Fig. 14), an Indian Room, a Star or 'Aurora' Room (named after a Flaxman statue there), and a 'Lararium' with a colossal Egyptian-style chimneypiece. These rooms retained their distinctive vaulted Adam ceilings, whereas all the new galleries by Hope and Tatham sported flat, coffered ceilings and skylights. Only the principal Adam reception rooms, which were not illustrated in the monograph, seem to have escaped Hope's transforming hand, though they too were stuffed with treasures. The building works may have been finished by 1802, when Hope threw a party, but were certainly so by 1804 when he sent admission tickets to 60 Royal Academicians.

Hope later made only one major addition: a Flemish Picture Gallery, about 42ft. long, built in 1819 in the rear garden at the house's south-west corner. Intended to take the collection of around a hundred Dutch and Flemish old masters that his younger brother had inherited, it was similar in style to the earlier Hope galleries, with the assistance on this occasion of William Atkinson as executant architect. Atkinson was then working on alterations at Hope's country retreat, the Deepdene, near Dorking.[52]

After Hope's death in 1831, his eldest son Henry Thomas Hope inherited his father's residences in London and Surrey and retained them for a time. But in 1850 he sold the Duchess Street mansion to the architect and speculative builder Sir Matthew Wyatt, who demolished it in return for a new Portland Estate lease for 13 second-rate houses on its site. Later known as Nos.4–8 Queen Anne Street, Nos.2–14 Mansfield Street and Nos.10–12 Duchess Street, these houses were designed and begun for Wyatt by the architect F. E. H. Fowler, but following Fowler's bankruptcy in 1851 were taken on and finished by John Philip Shaw, a land agent. They were in turn demolished for the present building on the site: a large block of stone-fronted mansion flats designed in 1923 by the architects H. W. Wills & W. Kaula, now known as No.2 Mansfield Street and No.8 Queen Anne Street.[53]

Conclusion

Perhaps because it was demolished so early, Clerk House is sometimes overlooked in accounts of the Adam Brothers' plans for the Portland estate in Marylebone. But it was the first building they set to work on there, and its presence, alongside Chandos House and the terraces of Mansfield Street and Portland Place, demonstrated their ambition to create a mixed environment of housing of several different types and sizes.

Intellectual, plucky, audacious, opinionated, garrulous, hubristic, controversial, and not universally popular – General Robert Clerk was a firecracker of a client for Robert Adam to have for such a significant early London commission. The various surviving plans show Adam revising his ideas, perhaps aware of the importance of this large house as a rare chance to carry a scheme through from design stage to completion, perhaps responding to the demands of a knowledgeable and sometimes difficult client who was apparently also a close friend. Those plans also indicate the considerable influence of Parisian *hôtel* architecture in Adam's work at this stage in his career, alongside the varied room shapes derived from antique Roman *thermae* and other sources. Furthermore, the survival of early estimates for the house, which entirely eschew the subject of internal decorations, casts a little extra light on to the working methods of the Adam Brothers' architectural practice – a subject where more research remains to be done.

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