

Building History

Coventry House, 106 Piccadilly, W1

Mayfair & alteration timeline summary			Coventry House ownership
Mayfair started out as a livestock cattle market	1600s	1600s	Green park was just meadowland and pasture
Mayfair was closed down for good	1764	1761	106 Piccadilly was built as a townhouse for Sir Hugh Hunlock
Robert Adams commissioned to remodel interiors for Lady Coventry & children	1765	1764	The House passed onto the Fifth Earl of Coventry and became known as Coventry House
Robert Adams died and buried in Westminster Abbey	1792		Clients of Robert Adams carry his coffin at his funeral
		1804	Lady Coventry dies
Alterations to balcony, façade and upper floors	1810-11	1809	Earl of Coventry dies, and house passes to his son the Seventh Earl of Coventry
Green Park opens to the public	1826		
		1848	Napoleon's Ambassador moves to Coventry House
106 Piccadilly becomes St James' Gentlemen's Club		1869	Purchased by George Warren, Baron de Tabley Trustee of the St James' Club
Society of Dilettanti informs Classical inspired design of extension to club	1883	1883	The Society of Dilettanti study ancient Greek and Roman art, publish new work in the style.
World war I memorial added to reception		1931	Ian Fleming Joins the St James Club
Major refurbishment for the purpose of education	2007	1978	Education Excellence
Dukes Education opens	2017		
Building study to support wellbeing commissioned	2024	2024	London Parks Schools opens by Dukes Education.

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History of Grade 1 Listed Coventry House, Architecture and interiors

1764-70

George William, 6th Earl of Coventry (1722-1809), was the second son of the 5th Earl, and he succeeded his father in 1751. Coventry was considered a great leader of fashion, most notably from his patronage of French decorative arts, including the Gobelins tapestries that he purchased for his country house at Croome Court. In 1752 Coventry married his first wife, the famous Irish beauty, Maria Gunning (d1760), by whom he had two children, and in 1764 he married his second wife, Barbara St John (d1804), the daughter of the 10th Lord St John of Bletsoe. This second marriage brought a considerable amount of money to Coventry, and in that same year he purchased a new townhouse at 29 Piccadilly. Coventry was already in possession of townhouses on St James's Square and Grosvenor Square, and it has been suggested by Gordon that the motivation to purchase a third townhouse was to provide Barbara with a London home unconnected with Coventry's first wife, Maria.

29 Piccadilly was built on the site of an old inn called The Greyhound for Sir Henry Hunloke, 4th Baronet, of Wingerworth Hall, Derbyshire, in 1759-62. The house was built to the designs of an unknown architect, possibly Matthew Brettingham (1725-1803). Sir Henry had purchased a 99-year lease of the plot from the Earl of Bath, and in 1764 the remaining 94 years on the lease were transferred to Coventry for 10,000 guineas. Coventry immediately commissioned Robert Adam to remodel the principal (first) storey. We can see from the extant drawings that alterations to the fabric were also considered, although these were unexecuted, and further to this Adam also made improvements to the service rooms in the basement. Coventry's selection of Adam as his architect is unsurprising, as he was already working for Coventry at Croome Court. Moreover, Coventry employed various craftsmen at 29 Piccadilly who had already worked for him under Adam at Croome Court. These craftsmen included the sculptor Sefferin Alken (1717-82), the plaster Joseph Rose (1745-99), and the carpenter John Hobcraft (1720-1802).

1810-11

The 7th Earl of Coventry commissioned repairs to his father's house, as well as a cast-iron balcony for the principal front, and the heightening of the top storey. This work was executed to designs by Thomas Cundy (1765-1825). Apart from Cundy's early nineteenth-century balcony, and heightening work, the original façade survives. The house remained the principal London residence of the Earls of Coventry until 1848 when it became the home of comte de Flahault de la Bellarderie, Napoleon III's ambassador to Britain. Then in 1868 it was purchased by George Warren, Baron de Tabley, a trustee of the St James' Club, who gave the house over to the club almost immediately. 29 Piccadilly remained the location of the St James' Club for over a century, until it merged with Brooks's Club

1978

During the tenure of St James' various alterations were made, including the demolition of the stables to accommodate a rear extension. In this area a card room was added by Edward Robert Robson (1836-1917) in 1880, and a further extension was made to the east of the building in 1912 by Albert Palser (ND), of Messrs Maple and Co., including two domed billiard rooms.

In 2007 Number 29 Piccadilly (now number 106) was refurbished for the purpose of education.

2017 Duke Education took over and in **2024** created London Park Schools

Literature:

A.T. Bolton, *The architecture of Robert and James Adam*, 1922, Volume II, index pp. 44, 67; E. Harris, *The furniture of Robert Adam*, 1963, pp. 57, 67, 68, 86, 93-94; D. Stillman, *The decorative work of Robert Adam*, 1966, pp. 44-45, 91, 107-8; H. Hayward, and P. Kirkham, *William and John Linnell: eighteenth-century London furniture makers*, 1980, Volume I, pp. 103-106; T. Murdoch, 'A mirror designed by Robert Adam: an Adam mirror for Coventry House returns to London', *National Art Collections Fund Annual Report*, 1992, pp. 44-47; C. Gordon, *The Coventrys of Croome*, 2000, pp. 2, 102, 133-35, 148; E. Harris, *The genius of Robert Adam: his interiors*, 2001, chapter 3; D. King, *The complete works of Robert & James Adam and unbuilt Adam*, 2001, Volume I, pp. 307, 309; S. Bradley, and N. Pevsner, *The buildings of England: London 6: Westminster*, 2003, p. 564



Interiors by Robert Adams in 1765 include works by;

Sefferin Alken (1717-82).

Photos Coventry House, 106 Piccadilly (today)

A carver and gilder of Danish descent, was frequently employed by the Adam office. Alken is known to have been in London by 1744, after which he began working for the Hoare family at Stourhead in Wiltshire. For Adam's rival William Chambers, Alken received commissions at Somerset House and Marlborough House. Rate books from the 1750s to the 1780s place him at No. 3 Dufours Place, near Golden Square. In 1760, he took on an apprentice named Thomas Engleheart, for which he received a premium of £40. Alken was buried in Chiswick on 27 April 1782.

Adam commissions: In 1759, Alken supplied gilt frames for the Breakfast Room and Painted Room at Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire, for Nathaniel Curzon, 1st Baron Scarsdale. Shortly after, Alken worked at Croome Court in Worcestershire for Adam's patron the 6th Earl of Coventry. He collaborated on an assortment of objects – table and glass frames, pediments, and chairs supplied by John Cobb. In 1763-64, Alken executed decorative details on the monumental library bookcases for Croome Court, now in the V&A's furniture collection. Alken also carved a gilt-wood pier glass frame for No. 106 Piccadilly, the Earl of Coventry's London townhouse. This object is also in the V&A's collection. Further commissions for Adam included Audley End in Essex and Shardeloes in Amersham.

Source <https://layersoflondon.humap.site/map/records/sefferin-alken>

Joseph Rose (1744 -1798)

Photos Coventry House, 106 Piccadilly (today)

The Rose family of plasterers, known as Joseph Rose & Co., monopolised decorative plasterwork in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Joseph Rose & Co. collaborated with many prominent architects of the period: Robert Adam, James Wyatt, William Chambers, James 'Athenian' Stuart and Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, to name a few. Joseph Rose senior (c.1723-80) and his nephew, Joseph Rose junior (1745-99), worked extensively for the Adam brothers.

They were based at No. 44 Queen Ann Street East. Rose junior was made free of Worshipful Company of Plasterers in 1765, and at the close of the decade travelled to Italy. While in Rome, he made excursions to ancient ruins in the company of Gavin Hamilton and Joseph Nollekens. Rose junior was admitted to the Royal Academy schools in 1770 and took over the management of Joseph Rose & Co. after his uncle's death in 1780. He also pursued speculative opportunities, subleasing a property on Mansfield Street in 1772.

In 1789, Rose took out insurance cover for No. 36 Charlotte Street, a property sublet by the Adam brothers on their Portland Place development. Late in his career, Rose accepted an important commission as an interior designer. He designed and supervised the execution of the interiors of Sledmere House in East Yorkshire, for Sir Christopher Sykes. After Rose's death in 1799, a major sale of his equipment, books, and architectural models took place at Christie's auction house

Author Hannah Kaspar - Source <https://www.layersoflondon.org/map/records/joseph-rose>

"Celebrated plasterer (stuccoist) who worked closely with [Robert Adam](#) to create some of the finest decorative plasterwork in [Great Britain](#).

Rose was born in [Norton, Derbyshire](#), a nephew to Joseph Rose Sr. (c. 1723 – 11 September 1780), who was himself a noted plasterer in the [Rococo](#) style with works including [Doncaster Mansion House](#), [Nostell Priory](#), [Felbrigg Hall](#), and the drawing room at [Heath Hall](#) in [Yorkshire](#). The elder Rose worked primarily for [Robert Adam](#) from 1760 onward; the younger learned from his uncle and from a visit to Rome in 1768.

Rose worked for the family firm of Joseph Rose & Co., was appointed Master of the Worshipful Company of Plasterers in 1775, and succeeded his uncle as head of the firm upon his uncle's death in 1780. While some of the plaster work was performed on location, many of the more complex designs were created at his workshop in Queen Anne Street East, London, which included a wax room and casting room, as well as a mould room in which he kept wax moulds and plaster casts. Rose's work was primarily in the [Neoclassical](#) style for [Robert Adam](#), and include ceiling work at [Sledmere House](#) and major commissions at [Audley End](#), [Bowood](#), [Castle Coole](#), [Chatsworth House](#), [Croome Court](#), [Harewood House](#), [Kedleston Hall](#), and [Kenwood House](#)."

Source: Wikipedia

LONDON PARK SCHOOLS

● CLAPHAM ● MAYFAIR ● SIXTH ● HYBRID

Recent photos , demonstrate the impact of 20th wallpaper and dark carpet has on light reflectance . Note this was under 2007 conservation requirements for interiors.

R | C
Z | M
Architecture + Research
Sustainable + Biophilic
Design + Installation



Adams Classroom 1765



Doors



Reception 1765 & 2025



Coventry Library 2025



Silent study. 2025



Later St James Club extension



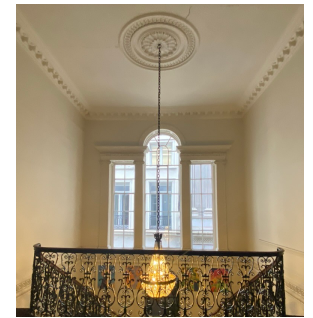
Original Robert Adams Lighting



The Great Room 1765



Grand Stone Staircase



Venetian window



Later St James Club extension



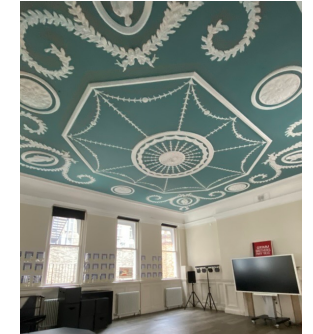
Lady Coventry's dressing room



Robert Adam Fireplaces 1765



Lady Coventry's bedroom 1765

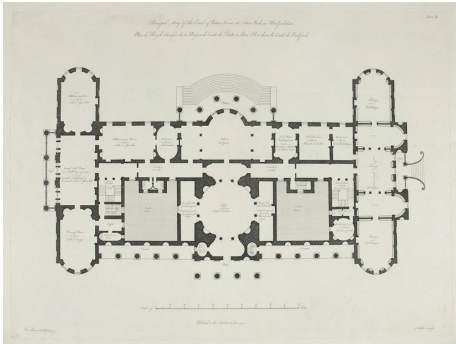
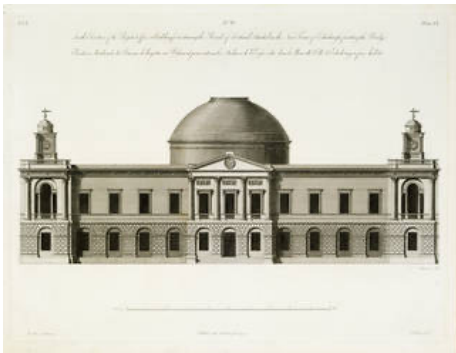
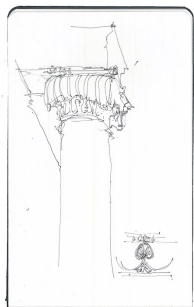
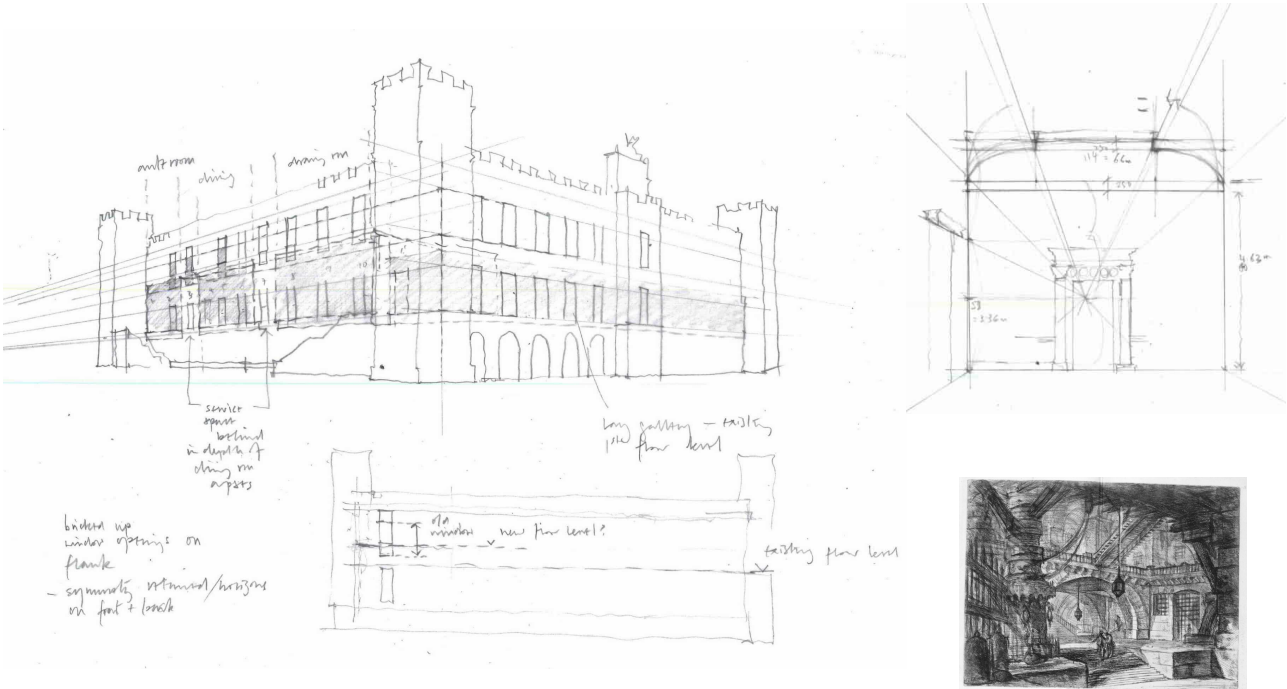
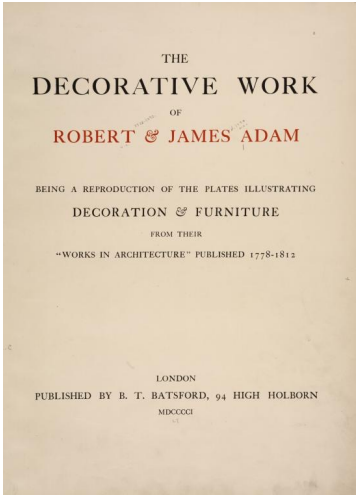
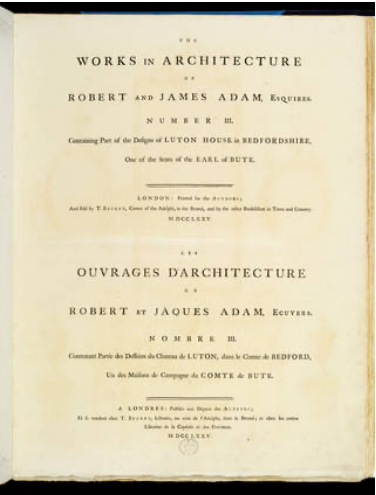


Later St James Club extension

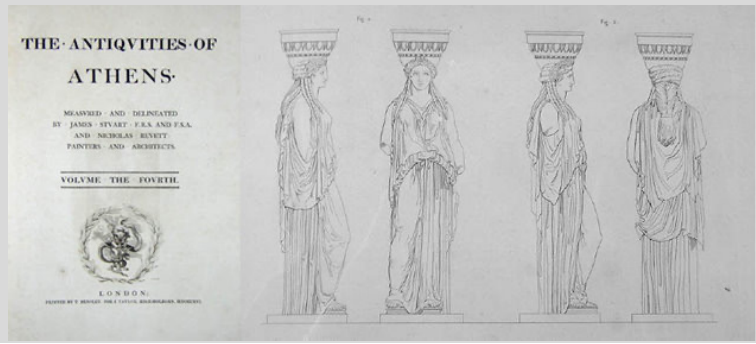
Research– Architectural significance

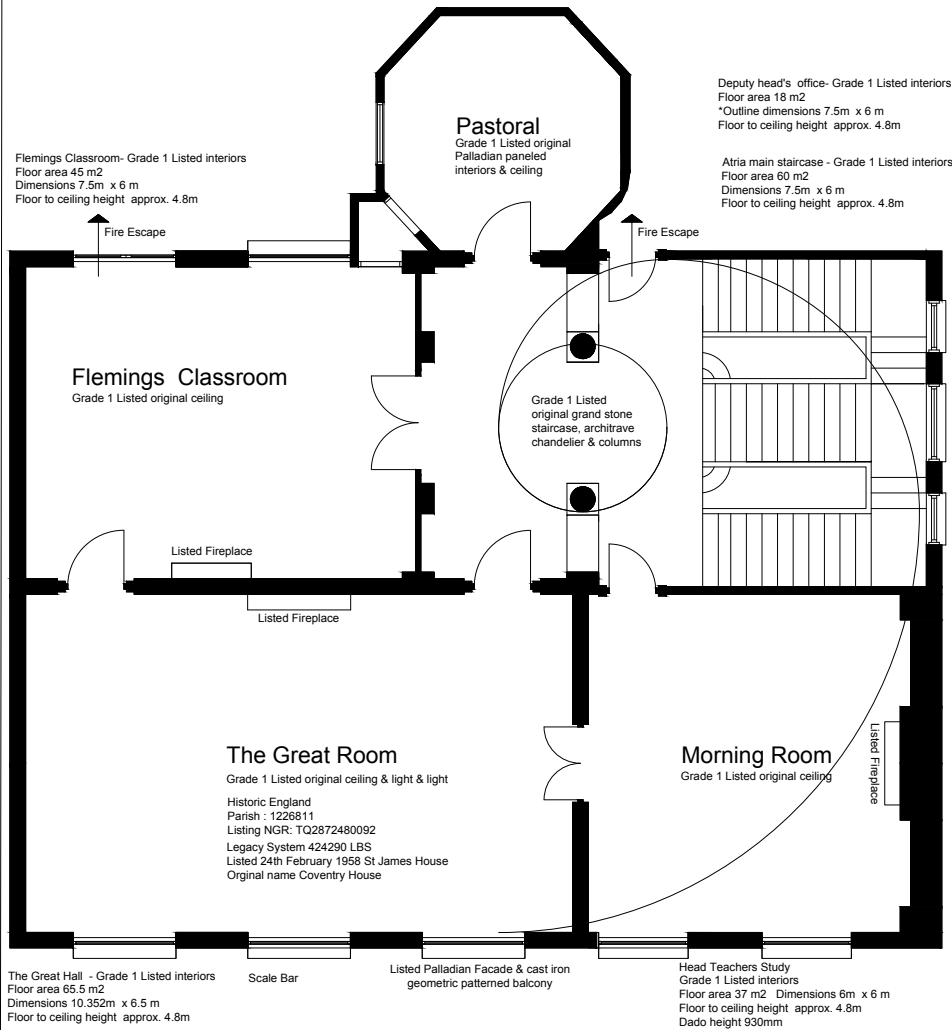
'Adam Style'

Adam's own theory of design was based on the principle of 'movement' – the rise and fall, and advancement and recession of forms. The essence of the 'Adam Style' lay in his use of ornament. Looking back in 1812, English Architect, Sir John Soane refers to the Adam Style as "...light and fanciful...This taste soon became general; everything was Adamitic



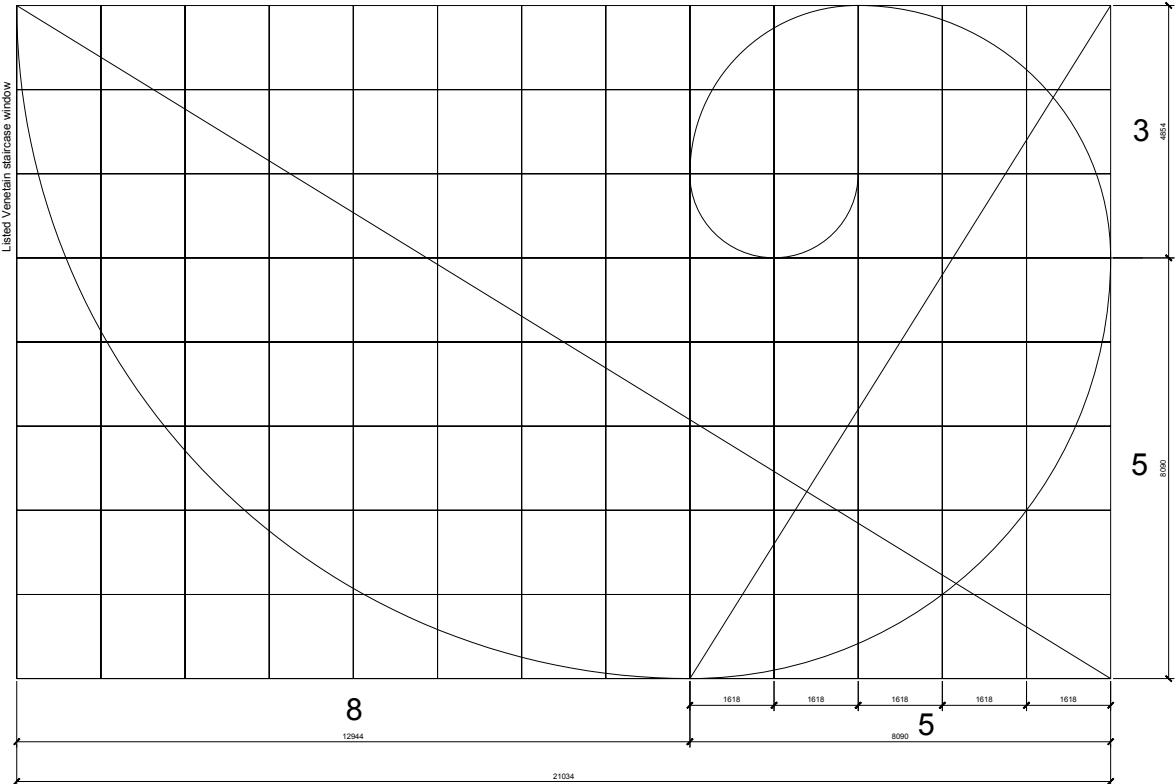
The Society of Dilettanti
A British society of noblemen and scholars that sponsored the study of ancient Greek and Roman art, and the creation of new work in the style. Founded in 1783 met at the St Jame's Club, 106 Piccadilly

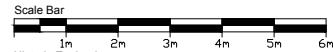




Example of use in Architecture

The original town house which is now Mayfair school was set out using geometry using the Fibonacci sequence possibly by Architect Matthew Brettingham (1725-1803) and in 1765 Architect Robert Adam also used the proportions and scale to redesign interiors which remain today. These proportions and height used enabled spaces to benefit from natural daylight and ventilation.





Historic England
Parish : 1226811
Listing NGR: TQ2872480092
Legacy System 424290 LBS
Listed 24th February 1958 St James House
Original name Coventry House

Adams Classroom- Grade 1 Listed interiors
Floor area 45 m2
Dimensions 7.5m x 6 m
Floor to ceiling height approx. 4.8m

Pastoral

Pastoral care office- Grade 1 Listed interiors
Floor area 18 m2
*Outline dimensions 7.5m x 6 m
Floor to ceiling height approx. 4.8m

Atria main staircase - Grade 1 Listed interiors
Floor area 60 m2
Dimensions 7.5m x 6 m
Floor to ceiling height approx. 4.8m

Fire Escape

Fire Escape

Listed Fireplace

Adams Classroom
Grade 1 Listed original ceiling

Grade 1 Listed
original staircase
& columns

Grade 1 Listed
original grand stone staircase
& marble columns

Listed Fireplace

Listed Fireplace

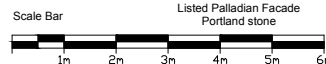
Lady Coventry Library

Historic England
Parish : 1226811
Listing NGR: TQ2872480092
Legacy System 424290 LBS
Listed 24th February 1958 St James House
Original name Coventry House

Reception

World War 1
Memorial

Coventry Library - Grade 1 Listed interiors
Floor area 65.5 m2
Dimensions 10.352m x 6.5 m
Floor to ceiling height approx. 4.8m

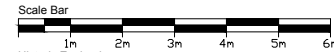


Listed Palladian Facade
Portland stone

Reception - Grade 1 Listed interiors
Floor area 37 m2 Dimensions 6m x 6 m
Floor to ceiling height approx. 4.8m
Dado height 930mm

Historic England
Parish : 1226811
Listing NGR: TQ2872480092

Legacy System 424290 LBS
Listed 24th February 1958 St James House
Original name Coventry House



Historic England
Parish : 1226811
Listing NGR: TQ2872480092
Legacy System 424290 LBS
Listed 24th February 1958 St James House
Original name Coventry House

Flemings Classroom- Grade 1 Listed interiors
Floor area 45 m2
Dimensions 7.5m x 6 m
Floor to ceiling height approx. 4.8m

Pastoral
Grade 1 Listed original
Palladian paneled
interiors & ceiling

Deputy head's office- Grade 1 Listed interiors
Floor area 18 m2
*Outline dimensions 7.5m x 6 m
Floor to ceiling height approx. 4.8m

Atria main staircase - Grade 1 Listed interiors
Floor area 60 m2
Dimensions 7.5m x 6 m
Floor to ceiling height approx. 4.8m

Fire Escape

Fire Escape

Flemings Classroom
Grade 1 Listed original ceiling

Grade 1 Listed
original grand stone
staircase, architrave
chandelier & columns

Listed Fireplace

Listed Fireplace

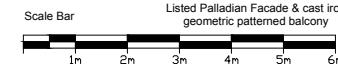
The Great Room

Grade 1 Listed original ceiling & light & light
Historic England
Parish : 1226811
Listing NGR: TQ2872480092
Legacy System 424290 LBS
Listed 24th February 1958 St James House
Original name Coventry House

Morning Room

Grade 1 Listed original ceiling

The Great Hall - Grade 1 Listed interiors
Floor area 65.5 m2
Dimensions 10.352m x 6.5 m
Floor to ceiling height approx. 4.8m

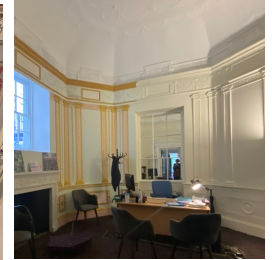
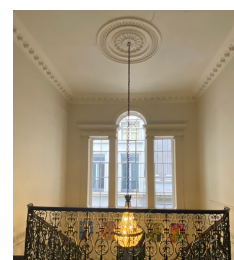
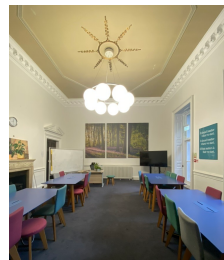


Listed Palladian Facade & cast iron
geometric patterned balcony

Head Teachers Study
Grade 1 Listed interiors
Floor area 37 m2 Dimensions 6m x 6 m
Floor to ceiling height approx. 4.8m
Dado height 930mm

Historic England
Parish : 1226811
Listing NGR: TQ2872480092

Legacy System 424290 LBS
Listed 24th February 1958 St James House
Original name Coventry House



Research study 2

Good local examples of the interiors and buildings by Architect Robert Adam at a similar time are;

- [Osterley Park](#), west London (1761–1780)
- [Kenwood House](#), Hampstead, London (1768)
- [Syon House](#) interior, [Brentford](#) (1762–1769)

V&A Research

Robert Adam's ceilings were the masterpieces of his interiors. Decorated with mythological paintings and classical motifs in plasterwork, his ceiling designs echo those of the floor carpets. Fashionable as his interiors were, they did not meet with universal approval. To Horace Walpole they were 'Gingerbread and snippets of embroidery'.

Place

This ceiling is the only piece left from the drawing room of 5 Royal Terrace in the Adelphi, London. The Adelphi (Greek for 'brothers') was a speculative development on the banks of the Thames, off the Strand, by Robert Adam and his younger brother James. However, the exorbitant cost of the foundations, as well as the high tides and pollution of the river brought the venture at

People

David Garrick, for whose house the ceiling was designed, was the greatest actor of his day. He was a friend of Robert and James Adam, whom he addressed as 'My dear adelphi' (Greek for brothers). Antonio Zucchi, who probably executed the mythological figures on the ceiling, was an Italian decorative painter. He is known to have worked in other houses in the Adelphi.

Subjects Depicted

The ceiling is decorated with griffins, scrolls and festoons, with the Four Seasons in rectangular plaques. In the central roundel is painting of Apollo, his horses being fed by the Four Seasons. This motif was repeated on the ceiling of the saloon at Nostell Priory, West Yorkshire (National Trust).



This ceiling is the only piece left from the drawing room of 5 Royal Terrace in the Adelphi, London.



Research Study 1 Publication

Extract and pictures

The Genius of Robert Adam

by Eileen Harris



77 Coventry House (later the St James's Club, now International House), 106 (formerly 29) Piccadilly, probably by Matthew Brettingham, c.1761

COVENTRY HOUSE

The London residence of the Earls of Coventry from 1735 to 1764 was an ample (too ample, according to the sixth earl) five-bay, three-storey house built around 1731 on the east side of Grosvenor Square. Though the sixth earl began refurbishing it as soon as he inherited in 1751 – and continued to do so until 1761, in which year he employed Adam to design a new bed-alcove and bed – his cosmetic improvements did not cure the inherent faults which the house evidently shared with its neighbours, erected by the same speculative builder, John Simmons, a carpenter by trade.¹

Considering the well-being of his two young children by his deceased first wife, the comfort of his second wife, Barbara, daughter of the tenth Baron St John of Bletso, whom he married on 27 September 1764, and his own desire to display his fashionable neo-classical taste to London society, he decided to build himself a new house on Piccadilly, which was fast becoming 'a street of palaces'. His appetite must also have been whetted by the designs that Adam was then making for a new house at Hyde Park Corner for the Earl of Shelburne.²

In October 1764 Adam charged Coventry £26.5.0 for 'Time spent in examining a situation for a house in Piccadilly, making various sketches of Designs for ditto, treating with Mess^{rs} Garden & Carter for the Ground & Clerk's time and Expences in measuring & planning ditto'.³ None of his 'various sketches' has been identified and nothing came of the project.

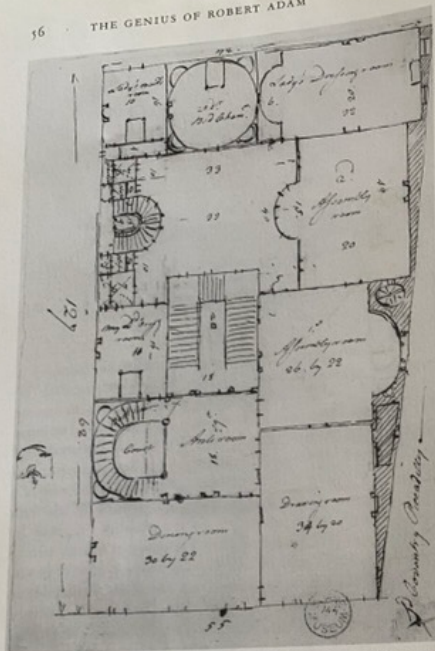
Two months later, Coventry bought Sir Henry Hunloke's house on the corner of Piccadilly and Brick Street (pl. 77): a house with an impressive stone façade overlooking Green Park, which had been completed in 1761, probably to designs by Matthew Brettingham, and only occupied for two years.⁴ 'Various Designs of Alterations on the house in Piccadilly with Estimates 10.10.0', a 'Design of a Table frame . . . 3.3.0', a 'Design of a Cieling (sic) for the Bedroom . . . 7.7.0' with 'Drawings of the Ornaments at large for the Execution 1.11.6' and a 'Drawing of an ornamented frieze . . . 0.10.6' were supplied by Adam in February 1765, a month before Coventry took possession. It is tempting to associate the design for a table frame with William France and John Bradburn's bill dated 25 May 1765 'For a large Sideboard Table Frame richly carved, and gilt in burnishd Gold and Mens Time putting up Do in your Eating Room £41.10'.⁵ Apart from that, only the bedroom ceiling was executed; it is still intact and will be discussed in the context of that room.

All that survives of the 'Various Designs of Alterations' is a rough sketch at the Soane of a first-floor plan inscribed 'L^d Coventry Piccadilly' (pl. 78).⁶ It is an overly ambitious scheme for remodelling the interior to provide a grand imperial staircase in the centre of the house, leading to a pivotal ante-room and large dining-room on the Piccadilly front, and an *appartement de parade* or suite of public rooms on the east side, consisting of a drawing-room and two apsidal 'Assembly' rooms – an odd term in the context of a private house, presumably suggested by Coventry but never used by Adam. The offices at the rear were to be converted to an *appartement de commodité*, a suite of private or semi-private rooms, as the occasion demanded, containing an apsidal 'Ladys' Dressing room' or boudoir, followed by a circular bedchamber and a ladies' maid's room. Although the ground-floor rooms (about which nothing is known) would have been somewhat simpler, they still had to be rearranged in relation to the central staircase.

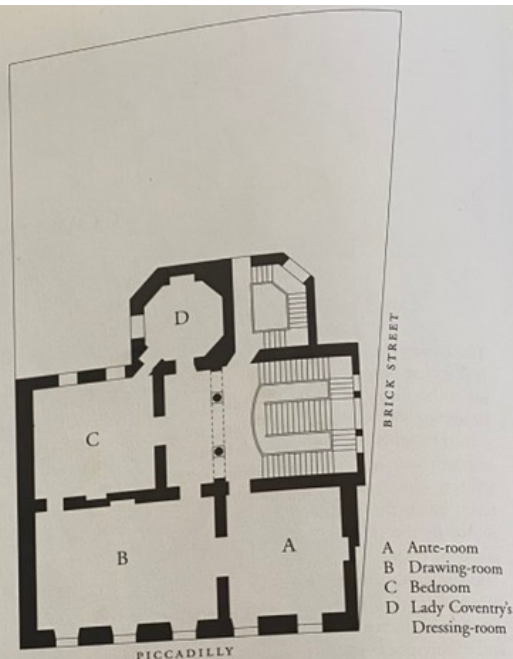
This plan demanded far more time and money than Coventry was prepared to spend (pl. 79), especially since his improvements at Croome were still unfinished after nearly thirteen years. Adam was therefore required to effect a compromise with the existing late-Palladian interiors, keeping the ground floor more or less as it was and focussing his attention on the first-floor reception rooms, the rooms of show: the ante-room and drawing-room at the front of the house, facing Green Park, and behind them the bedchamber and Lady Coventry's dressing-room.

By cleverly orchestrated decoration, he succeeded in investing this suite of conventional, rectangular spaces with variety, novelty and many contrasts, in the spirit of the ancients. The inter-connecting ante-room, drawing-room and bedroom, referred to in the building accounts as 'the 3 rooms', were uniformly hung with crimson silk damask (the same colour as the hangings at Croome) and matching festoon curtains. Their dados were all painted green and their skirtings rose-colour; the carved friezes round the walls, doors and windows in the two front rooms were green, picked out in gold. Uniform colouring of the wall surfaces served to emphasize the originality and diversity of Adam's ceilings, chimney-pieces, carpets and wall-furniture.

Special attention was naturally given to the drawing-room, the so-called 'great room', for which he supplied a 'Design of a painted ceiling in the Antique Stile . . .' costing £20 in June 1765. This expensive drawing, now lost, can be identified with a



78 Preliminary sketch plan (unexecuted) of the first floor of Coventry House, by Robert Adam, 1765 (Sir John Soane's Museum: Adam drawings, vol. 7:144)



79 A reconstruction of the first-floor plan of the main body of Coventry House. The original configuration of the rooms and offices at the rear of the house is not known. The thin black line represents the perimeter of the site as shown in Adam's sketch plan, pl. 78

coloured office copy at the Soane (pl. 80) which, though correctly dated June 1765, is mistakenly inscribed for the dining-room.⁷ His 'Alteration on the Design for the painted Ceiling of the great Room' made later that year for the small sum of £1.10.0 was evidently not very extensive and has not been identified. It is tempting to think that it increased the number of oval paintings in the rectangular panels on either side of the central square from two to six in anticipation of Antonio Zucchi's arrival in England in 1766. These ovals of classical subjects, the figured roundels in the four corners and the Aurora in the middle of the ceiling, were all painted by Zucchi before 17 June 1767 and are amongst his earliest works in this country (pl. 81).⁸ He was also responsible for the central ring of twenty-four medallions of Coventry heraldic eagles alternating with musical trophies, and the outer border of smaller cameos of classical heads and vases in lozenge-shape frames enclosed in circular wreaths. The ceiling survives intact, but its present colour is questionable.

Adam's design for the drawing-room carpet (invoiced on 8 July 1767) was the rejected ogee-pattern on a rose-coloured ground which he had devised six months earlier for the gallery at Syon, and which had no relation whatsoever to the ceiling.⁹ A full-size drawing of one section of it was made in December (pl.

82) and given to Zucchi who used it to make a 'Model peint en detrempe, d'un quart de Tapy pour la Grand Chambre, pour donner au Manufacture des Tapy'.¹⁰ When Lady Mary Coke visited Thomas Moore's carpet manufactory at Moorfields in April 1768, she 'saw one that was making for Lord Coventry that he had agreed to give a hundred and forty guineas for; it is indeed extremely fine'.¹¹ Moore also made 44 yards (41 metres) of 'fine Bruss Carpet Circle patt' for the ante-room in 1768, which may be related to the large-scale drawing at the Soane of a carpet, inscribed 'Carpet for the Earl of Coventry', with a pattern of interlaced circles enclosing lozenges and central rosettes.¹²

Had Adam wanted the drawing-room to be a fully integrated room of the sort with which his name has come to be associated, he would have given it this circle-pattern carpet, which related to the lozenge border of its ceiling and was virtually identical to the scagliola slabs he designed for his two side-tables. But an integrated interior was evidently not what was sought. The 'great room' is a deliberate and carefully considered combination of discordant elements, a 'harmony of contrasts', as Sir John Summerson elegantly put it.¹³ This stimulating dissonance is also to be found in the contemporary drawing-room and gallery at Syon.

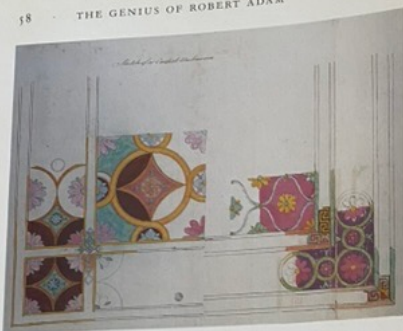


80 Design for the drawing-room ceiling 'In the Style of the painted ornaments of the Ancients', by Robert Adam, 1765 (Sir John Soane's Museum: Adam drawings, vol. 11:40)

81 Detail of the drawing-room ceiling as executed

Two richly ornamented gilt-wood table frames (pl. 83) – each with eight legs of complex form, combining rectangular blocks and round tapering balusters, joined by concave platform stretchers in the French style, and pendant half-patera and swags of husks below the frieze – were carved to Adam's design by Sefferin Alken in 1768.¹⁴ They were specially contrived to support scagliola 'Mosaic Tables' with red and blue interlaced circles on a cream-coloured ground that were supplied in the same year by Bartoli and Richter, the leading firm of scagliola makers (pl. 84).¹⁵ These tables were sold at Christie's in 1986 and are now in a private collection.¹⁶ Originally, they must have stood on either side of the main entrance from the ante-room (being too wide, at 5½ feet (1.6 metres), for the window piers) with mirrors above to reflect the colourful scagliola slabs. The '2 Glass frames' carved by Sefferin Alken in July 1768 were 9 × 4½ feet (2.7 × 1.3 metres) and had crests of female figures reclining on foliage and baskets of fruit amidst foliage at the base.¹⁷ Adam's design was adapted from one initially intended for the drawing-room at Lansdowne House, which the Earl of Shelburne rejected.¹⁸



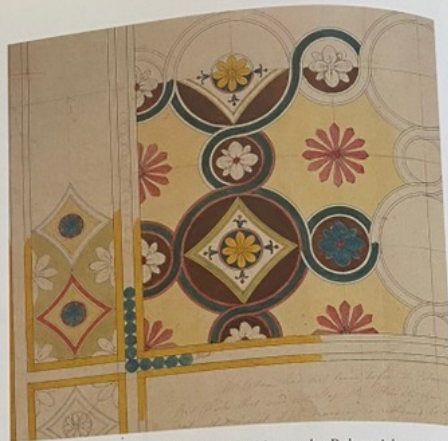


82 Record drawing of Adam's carpet designs for the drawing-room (right) and ante-room (left), Adam office, 1767 (Sir John Soane's Museum: Adam drawings, vol. 49:53)

83 Side table of carved and gilt wood, one of a pair designed by Robert Adam, 1768, and made by Sefferin Alken. The scagliola tops, also designed by Adam, were made by Bartoli and Richter (Private collection)

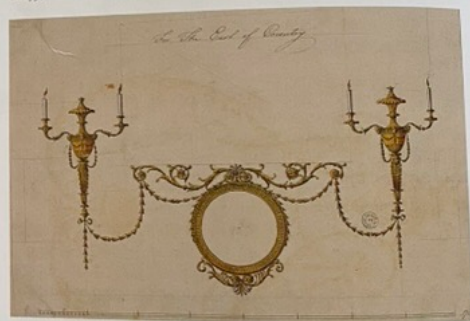


To complete the window-wall – here and in the ante-room – Adam designed 'Rich' curtain cornices which were executed by John Touzey in February 1768 and hung with festoon curtains of the same red silk damask as the wall hangings.¹⁹ In the nineteenth century the windows were lowered to the floor so as to give access to the balcony which had been added to the front of the house. Before that, they would have held part of the suite of eight large arm-chairs 'Richly Carv'd in the Antique manner, and gilt in Burnish'd gold the Ground pick'd in green covered with his Lordships Crimson Silk Damask' supplied by the firm of Gordon and Tait in July 1768 along with three large sofas to match.²⁰ Two of the sofas would have been placed on either side of the chimney-piece and the third in the centre of the west wall opposite the main entrance to the room, flanked by armchairs. Adam must have been consulted on the 'Antique manner' of the suite, though he was not responsible for its design.



84 Design for the 'Mosaic' scagliola table top, by Robert Adam, 1767 (Sir John Soane's Museum: Adam drawings, vol. 5:78)

85 Design for a concave mirror and girandoles for the ante-room, by Robert Adam, 1769 (Sir John Soane's Museum: Adam drawings, vol. 20:59)



A marble chimney-piece with swags of husks in the frieze and a tablet depicting Cupid and Psyche was carved by John Devall in July 1767 from drawings provided by Adam two years earlier.²¹ Designs for a grate followed in November 1767 and were executed in 1768 by Hartley & Cooper, the firm of smiths who executed Adam's grate for the gallery at Croome.²² It and the marble chimney-piece have long since left the house.

The ante-room, being a prelude to the great room, was perforce more restrained and harmonious, but it was by no means dull or lacking in novelty. Circles were the decorative theme here: they are found on the ceiling, on the frieze round the walls, over the doors and on the chimney-piece, on the green circular-pattern carpet with pink, yellow and brown ornaments made by Thomas Moore in 1768 and on the round concave mirror linked by garlands of husks to two girandoles (pl. 85) in the form of classical urns (the room's ancillary motif) for which Adam pro-



86 Mahogany clothes-press designed by Robert Adam c.1764-65 and made by John Cobb with specialist carving by Sefferin Alken, 1766 (Victoria and Albert Museum)

87 Detail of pl. 86 carved by Sefferin Alken



vided designs and working drawings in 1769 and 1770 respectively.²³

Distorting mirrors were a current French fashion which was also taken up by the Duchess of Northumberland, for whom Adam incorporated both convex and concave forms in the decoration of the central bay of the gallery at Syon. Lord Coventry's combined mirror and girandoles must have been placed on the long wall opposite the windows where the return reflection from the pier-glass would have added to the amusement. Alken supplied the pier-glass frame, complete with an urn finial, in 1769, but who executed the 'rich moulding' of the convex glass and the urn girandoles is unrecorded. Nor do we know what other furniture the room contained. Adam's bill for 'taking dimensions of pictures' suggests that he was responsible for their frames as well as their hanging.

Behind the drawing-room was the bedchamber, the main entrance to which was from the vestibule or lobby at the top of the stairs. It was part of the new Countess of Coventry's apartment and was the first room in the house to be finished in September 1766.²⁴ Time was evidently saved on its ceiling by leaving the pre-existing Brettingham compartments and simply replacing their ornaments with new ones designed by Adam.²⁵ The result is patently hybrid and not entirely successful, even less so as recently painted and gilded.

Apart from the various architectural finishings, there was a large mahogany clothes press made in February 1766 by John Cobb and 'very painfully' carved by Sefferin Alken (pl. 86, 87), with scrolled foliage issuing from vases in the door panels, an anthemion and palmette frieze, four female terms, a Greek key cornice and four classical vases on top. Evidently this monumental structure (approximately 2.4 × 3.6 metres, or 8 × 12 feet), which may originally have been intended for Croome, proved too large for Lady Coventry's bedroom in town; in June 1767 it was taken by Cobb to his house, dismantled and divided into two, according to a new design by Adam. Finally, in February 1769, the two sections were put up in the lobby at the head of the stairs on either side of the entrance to the bedroom. The wardrobes passed by descent to Cornelia, Countess of Craven of Coombe Abbey, Warwickshire and were sold at auction by her son, the sixth Earl of Craven, in October 1965.²⁶ One is now at the V&A.

The pier-glass designed by Adam in June 1768 and made by Alken two years later has disappeared altogether. Instead of a normal carved frame, it had a pierced anthemion fret laid over the glass (which in this instance was supplied by Chippendale) and a crest 4½ feet (1.37 metres) tall of scrolled foliage surmounted by a figure of Cupid.²⁷ There are mirrors of the same date and similar description in the galleries at Osterley and Corsham Court.

Lady Coventry's bedchamber and dressing-room were primarily for show rather than use; as soon as their decoration was finished, a private apartment containing an additional bedroom, powdering room and water-closet was proposed in a rear extension. An elevation and a full set of plans with outline copies on 'stampt parchm^t.' were supplied by Adam in January 1767.²⁸ These have not survived and subsequent remodelling of the interiors at the back of the house make it difficult to determine how much of his scheme was executed.



88 Elevations of six of the eight walls of Lady Coventry's octagonal dressing-room, by Robert Adam, 1765 (Sir John Soane's Museum: Adam drawings, vol. 14:141-2, 145-8)

It was in the small compass of Lady Coventry's octagonal dressing-room that Adam made his most complete and distinctive contribution to the decoration of Coventry House (pl. 88). Every surface – walls, ceiling and even the floor – was embellished with a variety of small-scale ornaments in the 'antique stile'. There were guilloche pilasters joined by Greek key friezes and flanked by drops of husks; panels of carved strigillation in the dado and stucco ones bordering the fluted cove, where they served as pedestals for vases issuing from scrolled foliage and accompanied by winged griffons. Large-scale working drawings were provided by Adam in November 1765 and executed in the following year by Rose and Alken.²⁹

All the ornaments were painted 'best dead white', picked in rose and green and gilded by John Touzey in April 1767.³⁰ In addition, there were separate paintings by Zucchi (seventeen in all, costing £183.15.6) applied to the walls: four panels of multi-coloured arabesques of 'Rinceau' ornament each with a figured medallion, a large panel and medallion opposite the chimney-piece where Adam initially intended to place an oval mirror and eight oblong tablets of classical figures in the frieze. The long tablet intended to go above the chimney-piece was replaced by a stucco ornament like the one above the door, for which Adam made a separate design in May 1767. The latter presumably superseded the classical sarcophagus flanked by winged griffons shown in his 1765 wall elevations.³¹

Alken's modest charge of £4.7.7 for making a 'Moulded frame' of four richly carved members for the mirror over the chimney-piece suggests that the untraced mirror design supplied by Adam in August 1767 for £2.8.0 was considerably simpler than what he proposed in his wall elevation.³² It is not clear whether John Hobcraft's bill for making and fitting up a frame and moulding for a glass in the octagon room on 9 November 1767 and John Cobb's bill for supplying a plate of silvered glass and fitting it into 'the blind frame in the Octagon Room' in February 1768 refer to Lady Coventry's dressing-room or the octagonal room on the ground-floor about which very little is known.

The statuary marble chimney-piece (pl. 89), with a tablet depicting a lion tamed by Cupid in an oval medallion and a frieze of antique torchères flanked by half-boys emerging from foliage, was carved by John Devall, junior in 1767 and is his first documented work.³³ When the rear of Coventry House was altered for the St James's Club in 1888, the chimney-flues were removed from the octagon rooms and replaced by the present windows; Devall's chimney-piece was re-erected in the back parlour on the ground floor, where it still stands.³⁴

Some of the stucco wall decorations also survive, albeit over-painted and largely obscured, but Zucchi's inset paintings have vanished without a trace. The De Young Museum in San Francisco has the octagonal needlework carpet with a flowerhead medallion surrounded by floral swags on a pink ground and bands of blue-and-white Greek key pattern enclosing a border of scrolled foliage on a yellow ground, which was designed in 1767 to answer the ceiling (pl. 90). It is thought to have been worked by Lady Coventry herself, probably using Zucchi's '*Model d'un quart de Tapy pour chambre Octagone peint à l'huile, de la grandeur just, avec beaucoup d'ornements de Girlandes et de Fleurs*'.³⁵

An 'Oval Dressing Glass frame 2.4 by 1.8 (71.2 cm. × 40.7 cm.)



89 Marble chimney-piece from Lady Coventry's dressing-room, designed by Robert Adam, 1766 and carved by John Devall, junior, 1767. Removed to its present position on the ground floor in 1888

with Coat of Arms at top & bottom & supporters at Bottom standing on rock work 2 women & foliage at sides & festoons of husks over glass &c' was made for Lady Coventry by Sefferin Alken in February 1770 from a drawing 'at large' of one of '2 Designs of two Dressing Glasses' provided by Adam in March 1769 (pl. 91).³⁶ The preferred design, now lost, seems to have evolved from two earlier designs at the Soane dated 1768 – one inscribed for Lady Coventry and the other for the earl.³⁷ A similar dressing-glass with a crest of entwined dolphins supporting Venus, female figures at the sides, festoons of husks over the glass and birds and foliage at the base, was designed in 1771 for Lady Colebrooke's dressing-room at 23 Arlington Street.³⁸ Lady Coventry's dressing-glass probably stood on the 'very neat Dressing Table with apparatus' made by Ince and Mayhew in 1769.³⁹

The drawings 'at large' for the front and one end of an 'antique stool for the Octagon room' included in Adam's account for 20 March 1767 have not been identified, nor are there any surviving bills for their execution. However, there is a rough, uninscribed sketch at the Soane of one end of a stool formed of two scrolls and pendant palmettes loosely based on an antique sarcophagus, which is comparable to the back of a hall-chair designed for the Earl of Coventry in 1767 and presumably intended for his London house (pl. 92).⁴⁰ Whether there is any



90 Needlework carpet made for Lady Coventry's dressing-room from a design by Robert Adam, 1767 (De Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco, California)

relationship between this chair design and the design 'For a pattern Chair for the Hall left with Mr Adam for Determination' by John Bradburn in May 1765 remains uncertain.⁴¹

Lady Coventry's octagonal dressing-room was in essence an ornament to the unified suite of three reception rooms, but not an integral part of it. Though there may have been a jib door from the bedroom, the principal entrance was from the staircase-lobby, making the dressing-room, to all intents and purposes, a separate entity.⁴² The octagon room on the ground-floor was similarly arranged, with a door from the staircase-hall, a window on the opposite wall and a fireplace to the left. Nothing more is known about its use or appearance.

When the principal reception rooms on the first floor were finished, attention was turned to the dining-room on the ground floor, beneath the drawing-room. This is not to say that the dining-room remained empty and unused for three years. On the contrary, the first recorded pieces of furniture to be made for the house were three window cornices 'carved... to a Drawing' by France and Bradburn in November 1765 and 'a large sideboard Table Frame neatly carved and gilt in burnish'd gold'.⁴³ It is tempting to relate the sideboard to Adam's bill for a 'Design of a Table frame for house in Town' in February 1765; the design has not been traced. Apart from that, the room was filled with a great deal of hired furniture while the redecoration was in progress.

If there were ever any thoughts of redecorating the dining-room ceiling in the 'Antique Stile', they came to nothing.⁴⁴ Lord Coventry evidently decided to leave the room more or less as it

was – with Brettingham's late-Palladian doorcases (which are still *in situ*) and a plain ceiling – and to rely instead on distinctive mirrors to dispel the old-fashioned blandness and introduce the spirit of antiquity in a novel form.

A 'Design of an Oval Glass for the Eating Room 2.2.0' is entered in Adam's accounts for August 1769. There is a finished watercolour drawing at the Soane of an oval pier-glass with a tall hanging device and an anthemion ornament at the bottom, which is inscribed 'Design for a Glass Frame for the Eating Room for the Earl of Coventry', but dated 1768.⁴⁵ Added to the drawing are faint pencil sketches suggesting female terms on the sides of the frame and a different hanging device. These ideas were worked up in a half elevation of an oval mirror inscribed 'for Lord Coventry' and dated 1770, which corresponds to Adam's bill of 30 June 1770 for 'another Design for the Glass frame in the Eating parlour 2.2.0'. A drawing of the 'moulding for Oval Glass at large for Dining Room -5.-' was supplied on 27 June 1771.

The second design was an alternative to the first one, not a design for an additional mirror. It has a fluted oval frame of exactly the same description and dimensions as its predecessor and was also intended for the two piers (approximately 5 feet 2 inches, or 1.57 metres, wide) between the dining-room windows (pl. 93). The draped female terms reaching out to grasp tasselled ropes from which the frame appears to be suspended are the added ingredient that gave the mirrors their novel neo-classical character. In order to accommodate them in the restricted space,



91 Design for a 'Glass frame for Lady Coventry's Dressing room', by Robert Adam, 1769. The frame was carved by Sefferin Alken in 1770 (Sir John Soane's Museum: Adam drawings, vol. 20:62)



92 'Sketch of a Hall Chair for The Rt. Honble The Earl of Coventry', by Robert Adam, 1767 (Sir John Soane's Museum: Adam drawings, vol. 17:92)



93 Detail of the pier-glass of carved and gilt-wood from the dining-room at Coventry House, designed by Robert Adam, 1770 and carved by Sefferin Alken, 1772 (Victoria and Albert Museum)

Adam was forced to place the figures as near as possible to the narrow top of the oval and its foliate cresting; this, in turn, required a proportional reduction of approximately 2 feet (60.9 cm.) in the height of the hanging device. None of these adjustments was left to chance; Adam's painstaking arrangement of the various elements is demonstrated by the squaring of his design; and, lest there be any doubt that the mirror would fit the space, the line of the window is drawn in on the right.

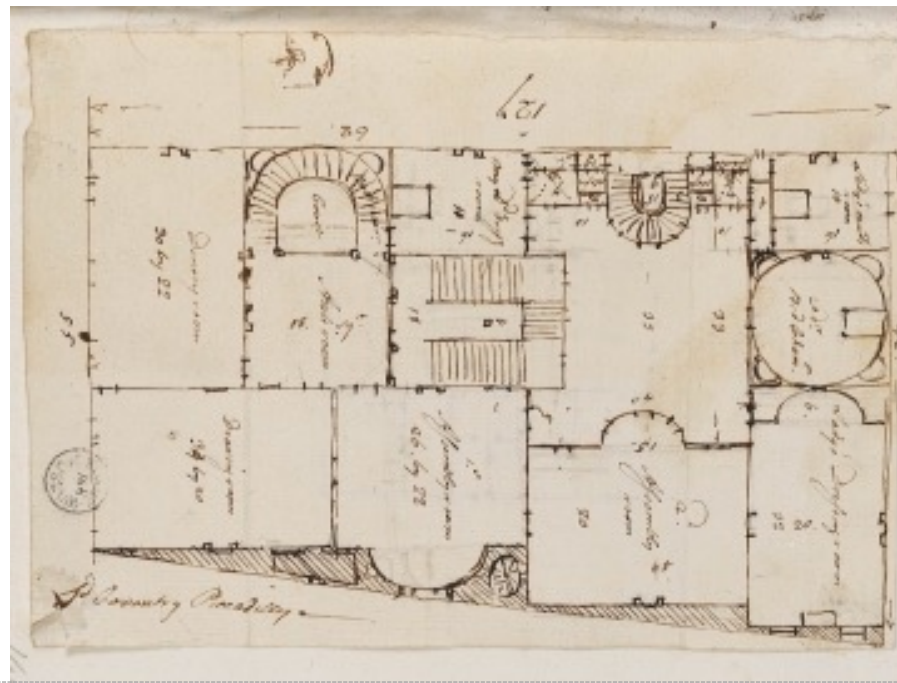
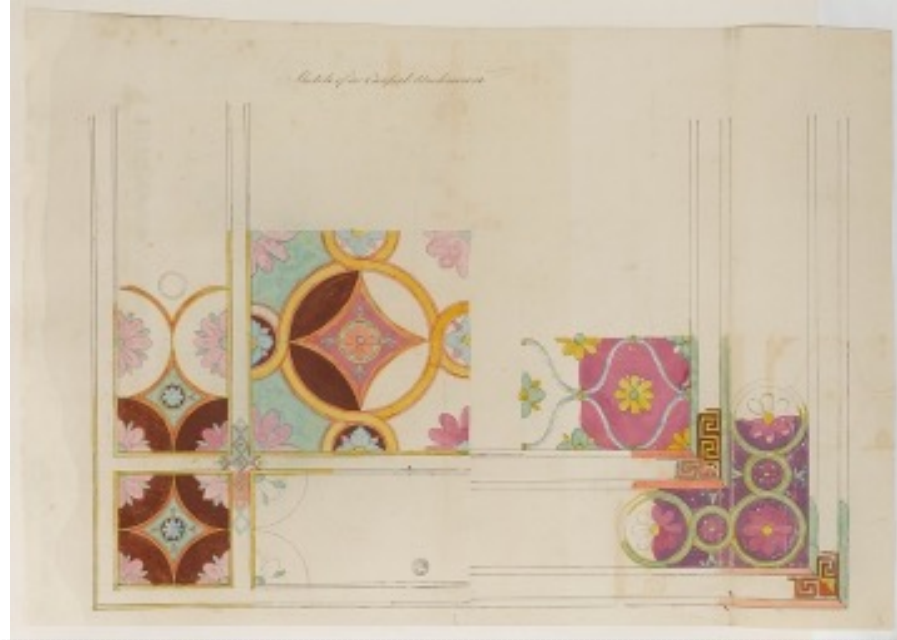
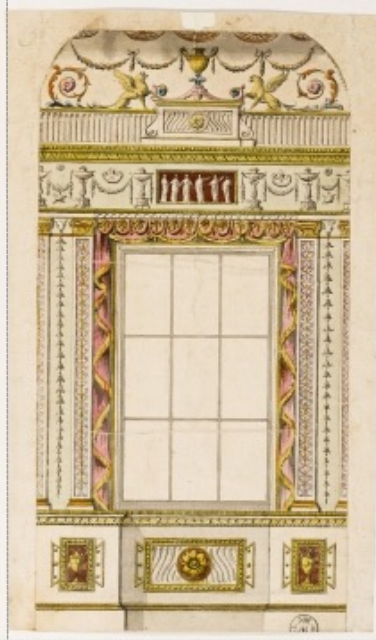
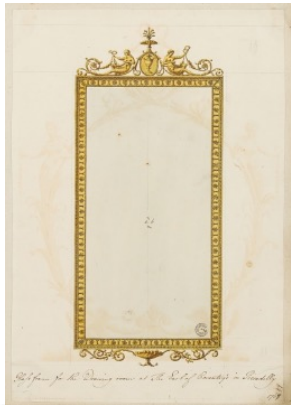
In 1934, one of the mirrors, described as 'coming from an old Adam House in Devonshire Street, Portland Place...', was exhibited by the firm of Dawson Inc. at The First Annual Fine Arts Exposition in New York.⁴⁶ Having been released from the constraints of the window pier at Coventry House, a wider oval frame was substituted for the narrow original and the attached figures were lowered, thereby increasing the overall width from a maximum of 5 feet (1.52 metres) to a little over 6 feet (1.95 metres). At the same time, the two separate ornaments of the

hanging device (a rams'-head vase and a lion's-mask patera) were compressed into a single vertical unit, taking about 19 inches (48 cm.) off the height. These new proportions were much more suitable to modern American rooms, but they are not those of an eighteenth-century English pier-glass. The mirror (assuming it was the same one and not its pair) was subsequently acquired by the New York collector Benjamin Sonnenberg and sold with the rest of his collection in 1979 at Sotheby's Parke Bernet.⁴⁷ Ten years later, it appeared in Doyle's auction rooms in New York and was bought by Alan Rubin of Pelham Galleries, London, who was the first to link it not only to Adam's design at the Soane, but also to a receipt from Sefferin Alken dated 4 February 1772 for 'Eighty pounds in full for two carved oval Gilt Glass Frames & of all Demands'.⁴⁸ The superb quality of the carved figures makes this one of Alken's finest works. This, together with its full documentation, led to its purchase by the V&A in 1992.

Research study 3

The Sir John Sloane Museum, London have available online original 1764 drawings and designs by Robert Adam for pupils to discover and the refresh design

<https://collections.soane.org/ARC3434>



Sir John Sloane's Museum Collection

Image 2

Reference number

SM Adam volume 54/7/91

Purpose

[1] Alternative preliminary design for the house, 1764, unexecuted

Aspect

Rough plan of a five-bay house, with a diagonal side wall, and with a central half-turn staircase overlooking a internal court, and a rear range beyond

Scale

not to scale

Inscribed

Hall / Dressg room / Book Room (in pencil) / parlour / Anti Room / Butlers pantry / Dressing Room / Back parlour / powdering room / water closet and some measurements given in pen and pencil

Signed and dated

•c1764

datable to c1764

Medium and dimensions

Pen and pencil on laid paper (150 x 251)

Hand

Robert Adam

Literature

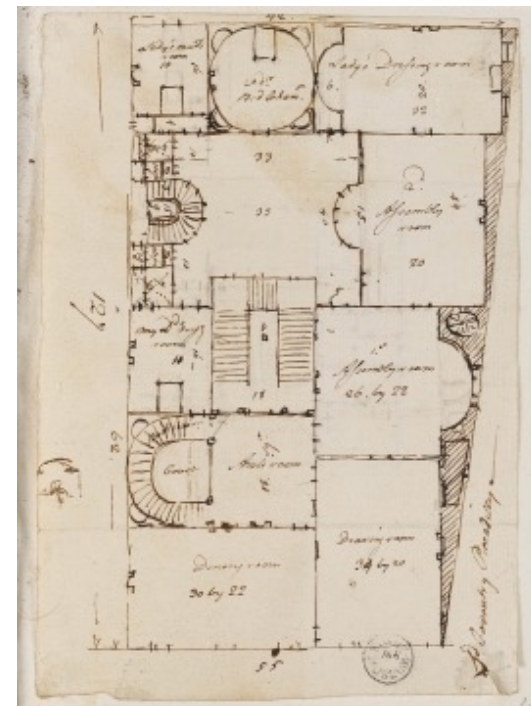
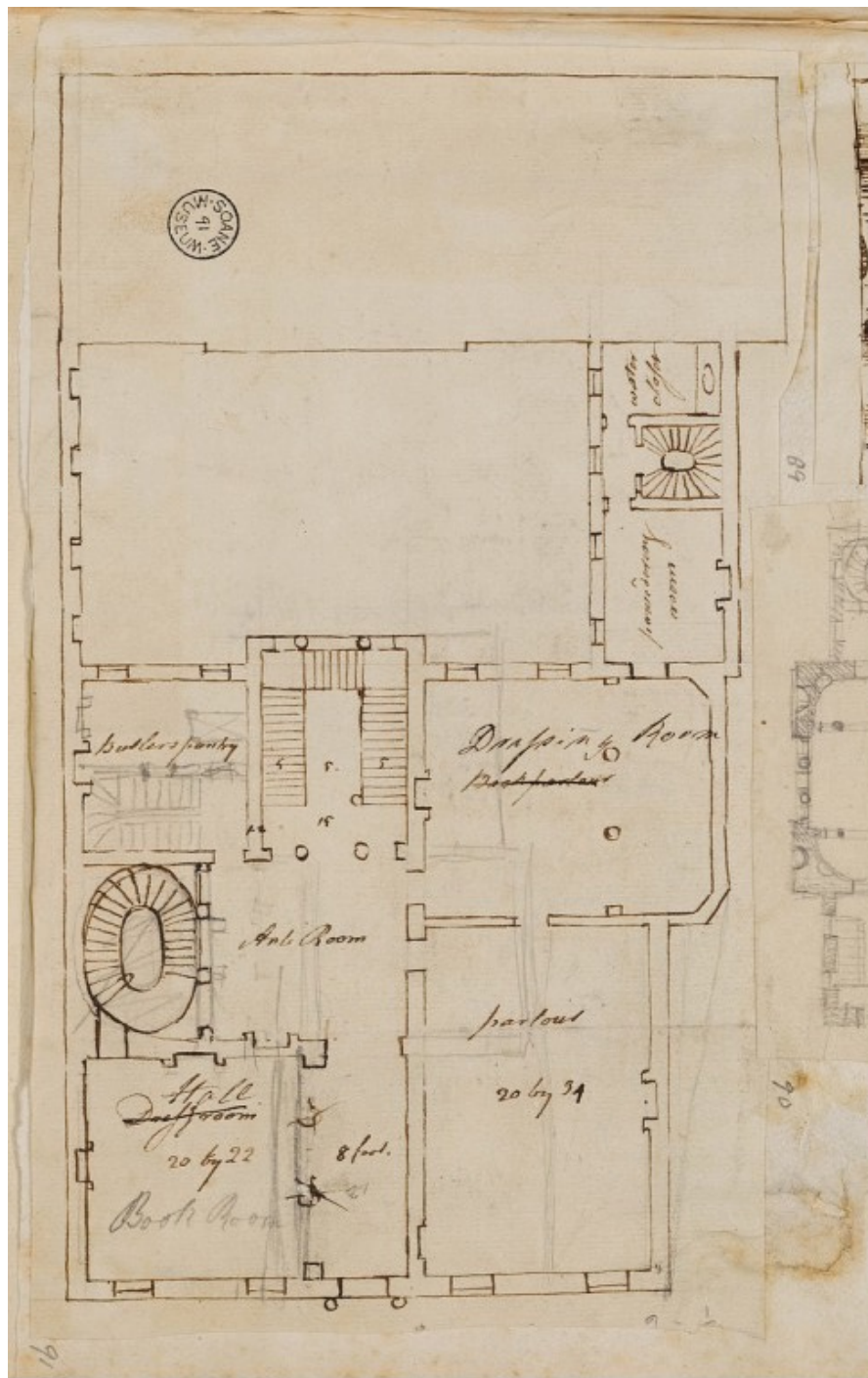
For a full list of literature references see scheme notes.

Level

Drawing

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Sir John Sloane's Museum Collection

The Great Hall Ceiling

The Great hall Ceiling design proposal

Reference number

SM Adam volume 11/40

Purpose

[10] Finished drawing for the ceiling for the great room, 1765, executed with minor alterations

Aspect

Plan of a rectangular ceiling surrounded by heavily moulded coving. There is a central circular canvas depicting a charioteer encircled by circular panels containing eagles and anthemia alternately. In each corner are small portraits busts

Scale

bar scale of 1/2 inch to 1 foot

Inscribed

Design of a Ceiling for the Dining Room at The Right Honble The Earl of Coventry's House in Piccadilly In the Style of the painted ornaments of the Ancients and some dimensions given

Signed and dated

•June 1765

Robert Adam Architect / June 1765

Medium and dimensions

Pen, wash and coloured washes including Prussian blue, red, and Indian yellow on laid paper (296 x 416)

Hand

Adam office hand, possibly Robert Nasmith or William Hamilton

Literature

Bolton, 1922, Volume II, Index p. 44

Harris, 2001, p. 57

King, 2001, Volume I, p. 309

For a full list of literature references see scheme notes.

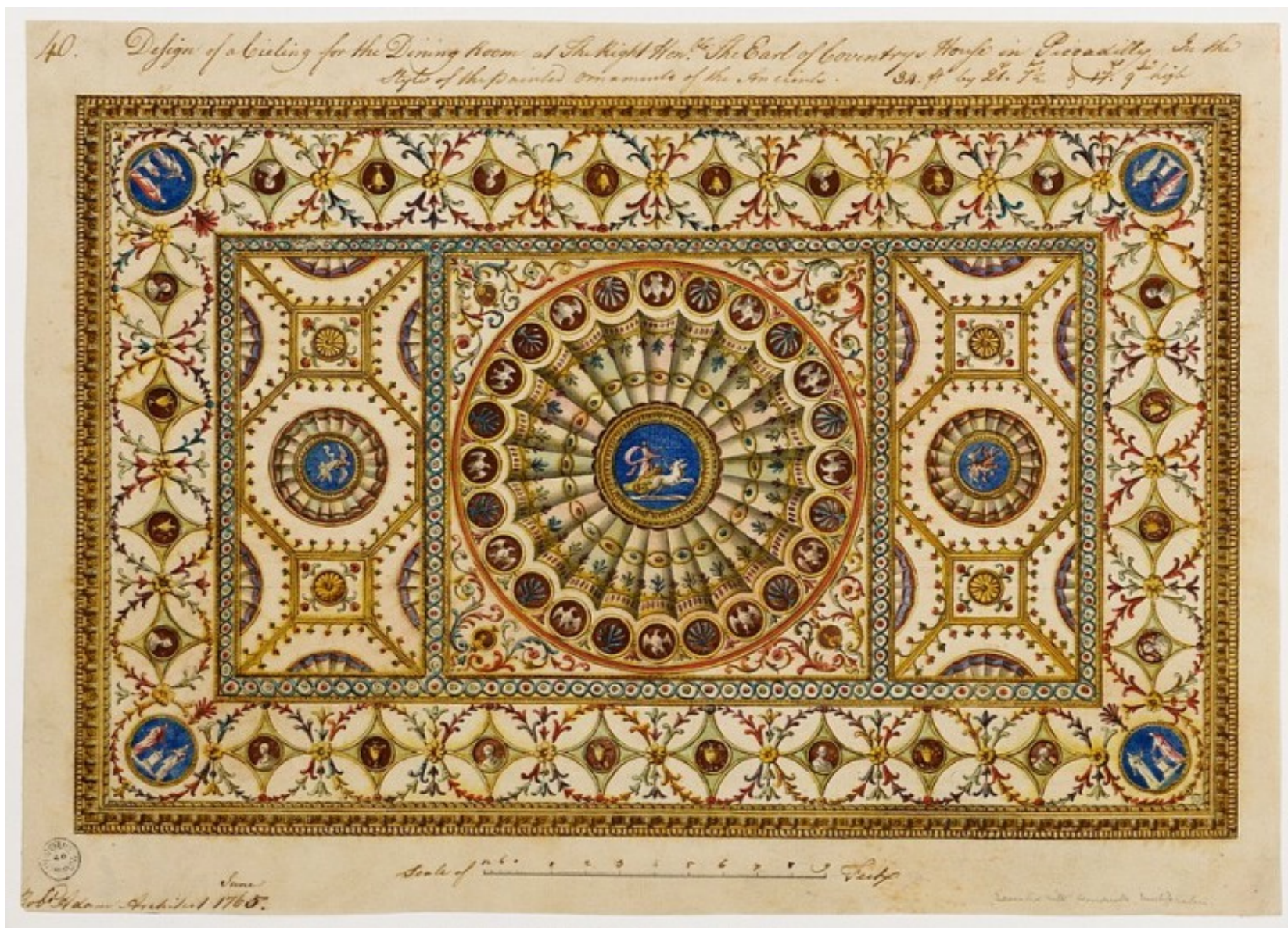
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Drawing

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Sir John Sloane's Museum Collection

The Great Hall

Fireplace design

Reference number

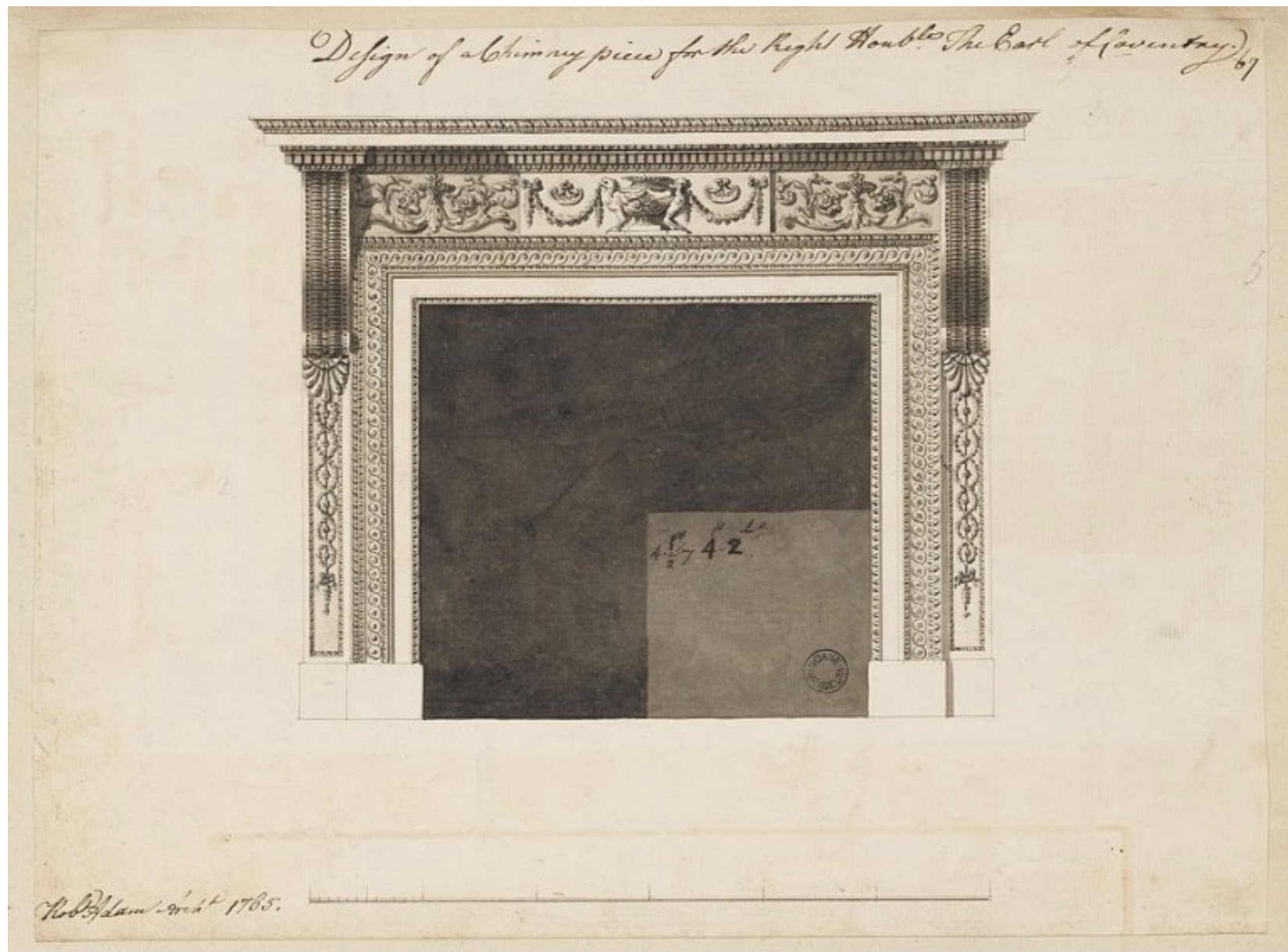
SM Adam volume 22/67

Purpose

[11] Alternative finished drawing for a chimneypiece for the great room, 1765

Aspect

Elevation with scroll piers ornamented with diminishing figure-eight of husks. The frieze is ornamented with arabesques and a central panel containing a vase, two eagles, swags and a peltoid shield



Sir John Sloane's Museum Collection

The Great Hall carpet design

Reference number

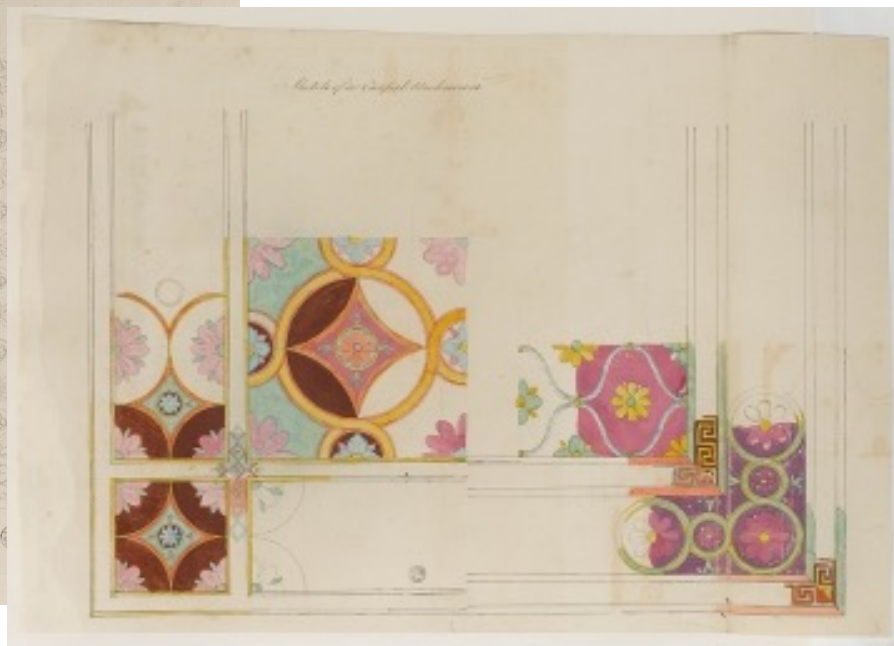
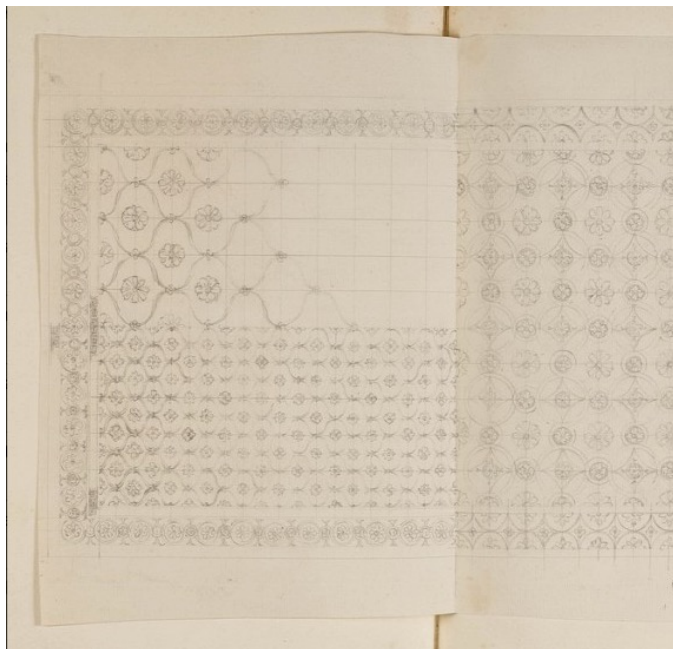
SM Adam volume 49/53

Purpose

[14] Design for a carpet for the great room,
c1767

Aspect

Plan showing two alternative patterns for a
carpet. Half is composed of guilloche, with a
lozenge motif border, and the other half is roll
work scrolls with the same lozenge border



Scale

to a scale

Inscribed

Sketch of a Carpet Unknown (in the hand of
William Adam)

Signed and dated

•1767

datable to 1767

Medium and dimensions

Pen and coloured washes including verdigris,
pink and red on laid paper (704 x 481)

Hand

Adam office hand, with title inscription in the
hand of William Adam

Literature

Stillman, 1966, pp. 107-8

Harris, 2001, p. 58

For a full list of literature references see
scheme notes.

Level

Drawing

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the Leon Levy Foundation*

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Reference number

SM Adam volume 18/57

Purpose

[16] Working drawing for a carpet
for the great room, c1767

Aspect

Plan of a detail of a carpet, with a
central compartment of paterae,
within a frame of Greek key fret,
and with a border of guilloche
enclosing rosettes, and a further
frame of Greek key fret