

Inside Vanbrugh's Opera House

Dr Annette Rubery

Email: annetterubery@gmail.com

Website: www.annetterubery.co.uk



*Could new dumb Faustus, to reform the Age,
Conjure up Shakespear's or Ben Johnson's Ghost,
They'd blush for shame, to see the English Stage
Debauch'd by fool'ries, at so great a cost.*

Price 1 Shilling. 1724

*What would their Names say? should they behold
Monsters and Masquerades, where usefull Plays
Adorn'd the fruitfull Theatre of old,
And Rival Wits contended for the Bays.*

Vanbrugh's People



Left to right: Colley Cibber, William Congreve and Catherine Tofts.



Sir John Vanbrugh by Sir Godfrey Kneller (National Portrait Gallery).

Email: annetterubery@gmail.com | Website: www.annetterubery.co.uk | Substack: The Lichfield Rambler.



The Italian Opera House in the Haymarket by William Capon (c. 1788).

The Burney Sketch



Left: British Museum, Burney Collection of Theatrical Portraits, vol. IX, No. 101, p. 65.

Above: Joint Coat of Arms of HM King William III and HM Queen Mary II.

Eye-witness accounts

Vol. II.

[101]

Numb. 26.

A REVIEW OF THE Affairs of FRANCE:

With Observations on TRANSACTIONS at Home.

Thursday, May 3. 1705.

Digression upon Digression ; (said the Printer, when he read the Copy of this Paper.) Well, Gentlemen, the Cause is new, and the Author must give you the History of it.

Nothing could have taken me off from the Weighty and Serious Subject of Peace, which I have so Earnestly pursued, and which I am pleas'd to say, has met with so general an Encouragement, but an Accident like this ; and since it is but the Trespas of one Paper, I hope it may be Excused.

We have lately Erected at the Cost and Charges of several Pious Charitably Disposed Christians, a Noble and Magnificent Fabrick, near the Hay-market, in the Liberties of Westminster.

The Name of this Thing (for by its Outside, it is not to be Distinguish'd from a French Church or a Hall, or a Meeting-House, or any such usual Publick Building) is a Theater, or in English, a Play-House.

The Use and Design of this, is for the Encouragement of Wit, the Entertainment of the Ladies, &c. for the Representations, or Mispresentations of Vice, for the Encouragement of Virtue ; and, in short, to Contribute to the Exceeding Reformation of our Manners.

The Dimensions of this Noble Pile, its Beauty, its Stupendous Height, the Ornament and

Magnificence of its Building, are Demonstrations of the Great Zeal of our Nobility and Gentry, to the Encouragement of Learning, and the Suppressing Vice and Immorality.

What tho' the Founders of this Structure may Complain of Deficient Funds for the Compleating the Building, and that some Gentlemen's Names stand to the Roll, whose Money has not yet Encreased the Bank, and that there may be some Ground for the following Notes ?

The Fabrick's Finish'd, and the Builder's part Has shown the Reformation of his Art. Blest'd with Success, thus have their first Effays Reform'd their Buildings, not Reform'd their Plays. The Donor's Bounty may be well Design'd, But who can Guess the Model of the Mind ? Never was Charity so Ill Employ'd, Vice so Discourag'd, Vertue so Destroy'd ; Never Foundation so abruptly laid, So Much Subscrib'd, and yet so little Paid. On Puklick Faith the Fabrick they begin, And Vice it self is run in Debt to Sin

After all, the Author has nothing to say to the Crime of a Play ; nor am I so Narrow in my Opinion, as to think it is an Unlawful Action, either in the Player's Acting, or the Person's Seeing a Play, if it could be Abstracted from all the Unhappy Circumstances that attend our Theaters.

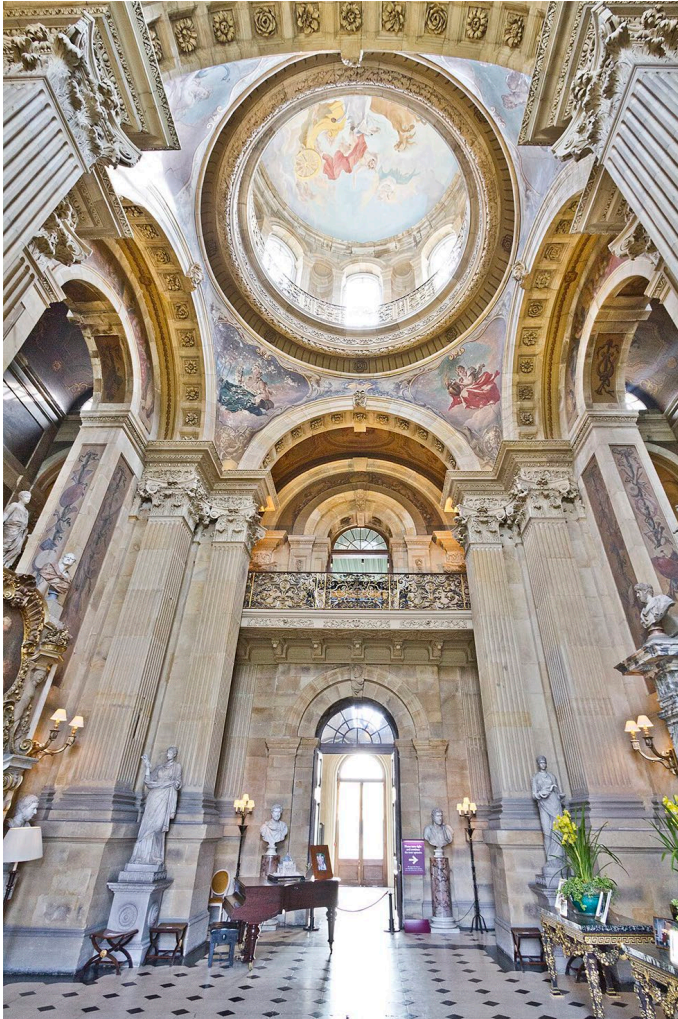
C 6

Nor

“What pompous scenes and lofty columns rise,
That strike with artful stroke our wondering eyes,
And seize the raptur'd soul with sweet surprise;
O! What a stately dome w'admiring view,
Whole chief foundations owing still to you.”

‘Lines on Lady Sunderland’s laying of the first stone
of Her Majesty’s Theatre in the Haymarket’

Circles and Domes



Left and Above: John Vanbrugh's design for Castle Howard. The original dome (destroyed by fire in 1940) contained a fresco by Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini.



Above left: Sir James Thornhill attributed to Dietrich Ernst Andreae.
Right: Thornhill's ceiling fresco for the Great Hall, Blenheim Palace.



James Thornhill, *Queen Anne's Patronage of the Arts*.

Email: annetterubery@gmail.com | Website: www.annetterubery.co.uk | Substack: The Lichfield Rambler.

“All the world’s a stage”



Above left: Pastoral scene by James Thornhill, possibly for *The Loves of Ergasto*.



Right: James Thornhill, *The First Great Flat Scene*.

Arsinoe, Queen of Cyprus



Left: unidentified garden scene by Thornhill (*Arsinoe*?)
Right: Thornhill's design for Act I, scene 8, of *Arsinoe, Queen of Cyprus*.



Left: A caricature of a performance of Handel's *Flavio* (1723).
Right: A detail from William Hogarth's *Masquerades and Operas* (1723).

Rosamond by Thomas Clayton and Joseph Addison



“Behold the glorious Pile ascending!
***Scene changes to the Plan of
Blenheim Castle.***

Columns swelling, Arches bending,
Domes in awful Pomp arising,
Art in curious Strokes surprizing,
Foes in figur’d Fights contending,
Behold the glorious Pile ascending!”

Above: Aerial view of the ‘glorious pile’ (south façade of Blenheim Palace).

Special Effects



An 'aqua drama' at Sadler's Wells with on-stage water tank, c. 1808.



Left to right: “Kitt-Catt” and “Little Whig”, two stones on Bedford Row.

Thank you
Any Questions?

