

THE OLD BLUE COAT HOSPITAL, LIVERPOOL: WAS IT DESIGNED BY THOMAS RIPLEY?

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WITHIN the ancient boundaries of Liverpool there remains only one building earlier than 1750—the Old Blue Coat Hospital in School Lane, now known as Bluecoat Chambers, which was built 1716-1718. It is a building of great charm and interest, and its undeniable architectural merit, its atmosphere of ancient peace, the philanthropic purpose which it fulfilled for two centuries, and its present-day purpose as a centre of the arts—painting, sculpture, architecture, literature and music—combine to endow it with the high regard of Liverpool citizens.

The building is of narrow red bricks with stone dressings. The two-storied main front has a pedimented centre set slightly forward; a cupola rises behind the pediment. Two eleven-windowed, three-storied wings with pedimented doorways project at right-angles from the main front; the upper windows are of the oval ox-eye type. Similar windows with moulded stone surrounds light the basement. The forecourt is enclosed by a low brick wall with a stone coping and iron railings, and a gateway in a wide segmental recess in the wall has its original massive panelled stone pillars and a fine wrought-iron over-throw. All the windows retain their glazing-bars. The round-headed windows in the main front and the return fronts of the wings are attractive features; they have heavily moulded architraves with prominent keystones, and the architraves are enclosed by brickwork of "header" width separating them from Doric pilasters supporting moulded archivolt also with keystones, on each of which is carved the cherubic head of a child. The moulded cills are supported by panelled pedestal aprons resting on stringcourses. The arched entrance doorway in the main front is flanked by engaged half columns with plain shafts and Roman Ionic capitals. These support an entablature and a broken segmental pediment, both denticulated and enriched. The frieze is pulvinated. The keystone of the entrance arch is continued to the cornice. The rounded terminals of the two pediment segments are carved with the eight-pointed Star of the Order of the Garter.

Three stone figures emblematic of the charity originally stood at the angles and apex of the main pediment, but together with the stone urns at each corner of the parapet they had disappeared before 1770. Early in the nineteenth century the original parapet of short sections of balustrade separated by brickwork was replaced by a solid brick parapet. The original south elevation repeated both in form and ornament the north (main) elevation, the only variations being the absence of the three stone figures on the pediment and an additional two-windows length which in the north front was taken up by the wings. During major alterations to the building in the twenties of the nineteenth century the present segmental south front replaced the original front.

I. ACCOUNT BOOK EVIDENCE

It is not unusual for local tradition to attach the name of an architect of note to any building of architectural merit, but no serious attribution of this building has ever been made.⁽¹⁾ In 1955 in his *Lancashire Architectural Guide*, P. Fleetwood-Hesketh, a member of this Society, expressed the opinion that the Old Blue Coat Hospital and the former Custom House at the east end of the Old Dock were "no doubt by the same designer". Knowing that the old Custom House was designed by Thomas Ripley in 1719⁽²⁾ I decided to pursue this clue. The obvious course was to ascertain if this stylistic evidence was supported by any documentary or historical evidence.

The early minute books of the Blue Coat Hospital are missing, and no direct documentary evidence of the designer has been found; it is impossible therefore to make a firm attribution. The small collection of early papers in the custody of the headmaster of the Bluecoat School at Wavertree includes a foolscap-sized cash-book of 184 pages which contains every item of income and expenditure from 1709 to 1755, including the Hospital building accounts of 1716-1718. The book is termed *Bryan Blundell's Ledger*, and in the absence of the minute books

⁽¹⁾ In letters to the *Liverpool Daily Post*, 28 July 1926, and *Country Life*, 14 August 1926, the late Professor Sir Charles Reilly, on stylistic grounds, suggested the possibility of the building being by Wren. He based his suggestion on the use of oval windows in the fenestration, and the similarity of the main doorway to a doorway at Brewers' Hall, London. Oval and round windows, however, were a usual architectural feature at that period (cf. Croxteth Hall), and Brewers' Hall was not designed by Wren, but by William Whiting.

⁽²⁾ E. H. Rideout, *The Custom House, Liverpool* (Liverpool, 1928), pp. 5-8, and R. C. Jarvis, *Customs Letter Books of the Port of Liverpool 1711-1812* (Chetham Society, 1957), pp. 13-14.

it is invaluable as source material.⁽³⁾ It reveals that the total cost of building was £2288 : 15 : 8 and every penny of that amount is accounted for in 224 entries. There is no mention of a payment to an architect, but in the eighteenth century it was not unusual for architects to prepare designs and working instructions for charity buildings without charging fees. John Wood (1) of Bath and James Gibbs were both benefactors in this way.

It is certain that Bryan Blundell, the co-founder and principal supporter of the charity, would desire that the Hospital should be a credit to Liverpool, the crowning achievement of the benevolent enterprise upon which, with the Rev. Robert Styth, he had embarked nearly a decade earlier. It may safely be assumed that he would convince the trustees, all of whom were leading burgesses of Liverpool, that the designs could not be entrusted to a local builder, and it is clearly improbable that a local builder could have conceived elevations of such excellence as those in School Lane. The architectural handbooks of James Gibbs, Isaac Ware, Batty Langley, William Halfpenny and others did not appear until the middle and late 'twenties. In 1715, when the Blue Coat Hospital was projected, books of this type intended to help competent local builders to produce buildings of merit, did not exist.⁽⁴⁾ It is improbable that the trustees and the local builders would have any real conception of the accommodation essential for the efficient and economical running of a fairly large residential institution with chapel, workshops, dining hall, dormitories, kitchens, staff accommodation and ablution and sanitary arrangements. Nor was there any local institution from which inspiration could be obtained. The only contemporary comparable building was the Blue Coat School at Chester which was under construction at the same time, but except for the "Wrenish" appearance of both buildings there is little in common between them in elevations, lay-out and architectural details.⁽⁵⁾ Charity schools of the type envisaged by the trustees

⁽³⁾ It has been almost completely ignored, however, by local historians. Matthew Gregson, J. R. Hughes and Sir James Picton examined it but made little use of it. Since this paper was read the *Ledger* has been micro-filmed and its contents are now available in the Liverpool Record Office.

⁽⁴⁾ Volumes I of Leoni's *Palladio* and Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus* appeared in 1715. These important works influenced the subsequent "Palladian permeation", but it is beyond the bounds of possibility that the elevations of the Blue Coat Hospital derived from them.

⁽⁵⁾ Chetham's Hospital, Manchester, had been in use as a residential charity school since 1656; it was adapted, however, from an ancient collegiate building and was not modernised until 1816. It is most unlikely that the founders of a new school would look to it for inspiration. Christ's Hospitals at London (1682) and Hertford (1691) were then modern charity schools, and it may be significant that the Blue Coat Hospital has architectural features in common with these two buildings.

were situated mostly in London and the home counties, and it seems likely that it would be there that the trustees would expect to find their architect.

There is no record extant of any local architect at that period. Joseph and Jonathan Brooks were mere boys in 1716. Henry Sephton's earliest designs were made in 1726, the year following that in which Thomas Steers received his first architectural commission, the designing of St. George's Church, Liverpool.

The Blue Coat accounts record a payment of £50 : 15 : 10 to Steers, but give no further details. It would appear unlikely that this item was a payment to Steers for services as architect, for even if Steers had furnished designs it is improbable that he would have charged a fee for them. At that time his friends and associates were displaying eagerness to assist the trustees in their task of establishing a handsome home and school for the poor children of the town, and the charging of a fee for designs would have been an affront to Liverpool's benevolent conscience. This mood found expression not only in private gifts, but also, as the *Ledger* reveals, in contributions from Liverpool exiles in the American colonies, in special sermons and collections in the churches, in the allocation by shipowners of fixed percentages of the profits of their ships' voyages, and in entertainments and lotteries. It reveals, also, that the principal contractors substantially reduced their accounts, and were content with small profits. Thomas Steers had a smithy in Steers Alley near the Old Dock Quay, and it is probable that the payment to him was for ironwork used in the building. In his exhaustive study of Steers in Volume 82 of our *TRANSACTIONS*, Henry Peet examines his architectural activities but does not identify him with the Blue Coat Hospital.

Another consideration which may be relevant to this question of a local architect is that the constructional work in 1716-1718 included much that was of poor quality. This points to the designs having been obtained from a non-local architect, for it is inconceivable that an architect in a position to supervise the execution of his designs would have passed such indifferent workmanship.

II. STYLISTIC EVIDENCE

A possibility which cannot be overlooked is that the architectural similarity of the Old Custom House and the Old Blue Coat Hospital may have been due to the erection of both buildings by the same builder. If Ripley had sent only textual

instructions for the Custom House and had left the architectural and ornamental details to the local builder, one would be left with doubt on this point. But the customs records of the period show that the Board of Customs was extremely precise. It ordered that the Liverpool Custom House should be built to Ripley's elevation and plan,⁽⁶⁾ and the subservient collector at Liverpool could be counted upon to ensure that the Board's instructions were carried out to the letter.

The illustrations of the two buildings show that they had the following details in common:—

1. Recessed main front and wings at right angles.
2. High parapet with clusters of turned balusters over windows.
3. Urns at corners of parapet.
4. Round-headed windows with prominent keystones.
5. Long and short quoins at corners and in interior angles. (Quoins at interior angles of buildings are extremely rare.)
6. Pedestal aprons under window cills and balustraded sections of parapet resting on cornices, stringcourses and bases.
7. Oval windows in basement. These are not shown in the illustration of the Custom House, but appear in numerous eighteenth-century views of the building.

The Custom House was not graced by a cupola, but in his working instructions of 4 August 1719 Ripley stated: "I have not drawn a Turrit or Cupolo, but if it be thought convenient the building will admit of it". Alderman Sylvester Moorcroft of Liverpool, at whose cost the Custom House was to be built, had not been treated over-generously by the Board in the matter of rent⁽⁷⁾ and he had every inducement to build cheaply. On the other hand the wealthy merchants of Liverpool were ready and willing to spend freely on a fine charity school. The two buildings had numerous features in common which resulted in a striking similarity, but a close examination reveals that the Custom House features were introduced in a much cheaper form.

There are some striking points of similarity between the Old Blue Coat Hospital and some of Ripley's known buildings. The London Custom House, which he designed in 1718-9, had a deeply recessed two-storied centre with three-storied projecting wings, round-headed windows, a stringcourse interrupted by window heads, and urns surmounting a high parapet. The Admiralty in Whitehall, which was built by Ripley between 1723

⁽⁶⁾ Letter from Board of Customs, London, to collector at Liverpool 19 March 1720. (Rideout, *op. cit.* and Jarvis *op. cit.*)

⁽⁷⁾ He was to be paid £106 : 10 : - per annum, the rent he was already receiving for the earlier Custom House, a small cottage-type building at the foot of Water Street.

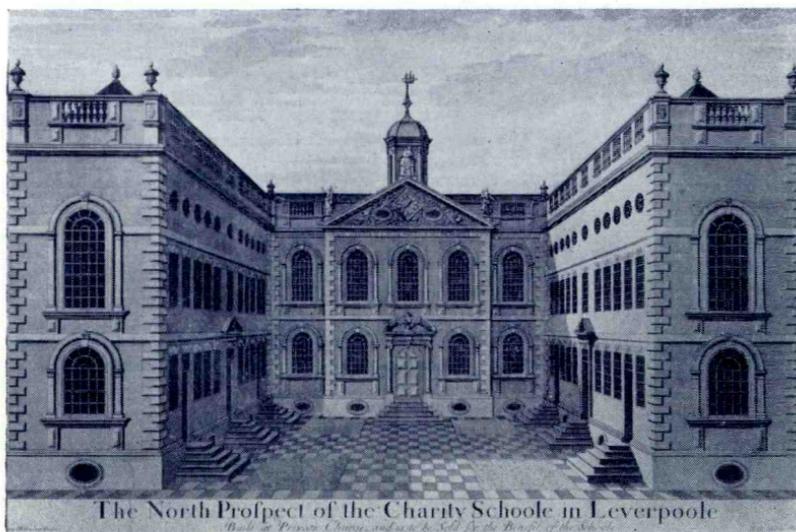


Plate 12. THE OLD BLUE COAT HOSPITAL, LIVERPOOL, IN 1718
From an engraving by H. Hulsberg of a drawing by J. Mollineux.



Plate 13. THE OLD LIVERPOOL CUSTOM HOUSE
Architect: Thomas Ripley. Artist: W. G. Herdman.

and 1726, also has a deeply recessed front with projecting wings, and, as at both the Blue Coat Hospital and the London Custom House, the centre feature of the main front is pedimented and set forward. Houghton Hall, Norfolk, built for Walpole in the 'twenties and now the principal seat of his descendant, the Marquess of Cholmondeley, the Lord Great Chamberlain, was designed by Colen Campbell, but Ripley served as executive architect. For Campbell's four corner towers carried up as pedimented pavilions, there were substituted in building eight-sided domes surmounted by cupolas. The second earl of Oxford attributed this change to James Gibbs, but Horace Walpole and others said it was the work of Ripley. If these were Ripley conceptions they indicate his apparent predilection for the cupola. Campbell designed small cupolas for the flanking wings, but much larger cupolas were substituted, probably by Ripley. At Wolterton Hall, Norfolk, which was built for Sir Horatio Walpole, Sir Robert's brother, at the same time that Houghton Hall was in construction, Ripley designed a fine, large cupola over the stables, and the interior work at Wolterton includes decorated pulvinated friezes similar to the frieze over the main entrance to the Old Blue Coat Hospital.

The attribution of the Old Blue Coat Hospital to Ripley merely on the stylistic evidence adduced above would be unwise and, indeed, a distinct disservice to architectural history; but it may reasonably be claimed that stylistically there is nothing inconsistent with the building being by him.

III. HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Bryan Blundell, as suggested earlier, would doubtless be supported by the trustees in his desire that the Blue Coat Hospital should be designed by a competent architect. The next step would be his selection. Who among the trustees would be most favourably placed for obtaining one? The name of Alderman Sir Thomas Johnson, M.P., a trustee since 1709, at once comes to mind. He had been mayor of Liverpool in 1695, and during the next quarter-century was the civic leader in such enterprises as the establishment by act of parliament of the parish of Liverpool, the building of St. Peter's and St. George's churches, the grant of the castle, and the construction of the first dock. Indeed, the dock project, the most important episode in the port's history, owed its success to Johnson's endeavours; for he was instrumental in obtaining the act of parliament, he brought the eminent engineer, George Sorocold, to Liverpool

to advise about the dock and estimate its cost, and he induced Thomas Steers of Rotherhithe to undertake the task of construction. "To him (Johnson) more than to anyone else," says Thomas Heywood in his introduction to *The Norris Papers* (Chetham Society), "is the town indebted for its vigorous and well-omened commencement".

In view of Johnson's record, particularly in the finding of Sorocold and Steers, it is inconceivable that the Blue Coat trustees would look beyond him when they required someone to enlist the services of an architect. The *Ledger* reveals that in 1720 the trustees handed Johnson £20 for the purpose of obtaining a royal charter for the Hospital; on this occasion, however, he was unsuccessful.

Johnson was an M.P. for Liverpool from 1701 to 1723. In 1701 the newly elected members in the house included also Sir Robert Walpole, a young Norfolk squire, destined to become in comparatively few years the most powerful English statesman of his age. In October 1715 he became first lord of the treasury and chancellor of the exchequer. Sir Thomas Johnson was a staunch Whig and a loyal supporter of Walpole, and it appears certain that the two men were well acquainted, perhaps even close friends. Johnson represented a seaport fast growing in importance, and Walpole, who in 1701 was elected for Castle Rising, in 1702 exchanged that constituency for King's Lynn, then one of England's great seaports, because he felt that his status would be enhanced by the change. From his earliest days as an M.P. he was involved in matters of commerce and industry, and this, no doubt, would lead him frequently to confer with Johnson who, again to quote Thomas Heywood, was the "acknowledged head" of the Liverpool merchants "seeking out new sources of wealth by distant and daring adventures".

Johnson's influence with Walpole and the treasury was soon apparent. The battle of Preston, 13 November 1715, resulted in the gaols of north-west England being filled to overflowing with Jacobite rebels, who without delay were brought to trial. A few were executed and large numbers sentenced to transportation to the plantations. On 28 February 1716 Johnson submitted a plan to the lords of the treasury for transporting the rebels, which was accepted. He was to be paid £2 for every rebel transported under his scheme, and before the end of March 1716 the treasury directed that he should receive a payment of £1,000 on account, although not a single rebel had at that time been shipped. It is extremely unlikely that the first lord would not be privy to a transaction of this magnitude,

and it may well be that it was arranged on his instructions.⁽⁸⁾ On the day that Johnson submitted his scheme, Walpole was taking an interest in his architect protégé (see below page 157) for on 28 February 1716, Ripley was appointed clerk of the works at the Royal Mews, a post in the King's Office of Works. Six weeks earlier Walpole had appointed him labourer in trust at the Savoy Palace, also a King's Works' post.⁽⁹⁾ There can be little doubt that in January and February 1716 Ripley's name was on the tip of Walpole's tongue.

The foundation stone of the Blue Coat Hospital was laid on 3 May 1716 and, allowing for the instructing of the architect and for discussions on the submitted designs, it seems not improbable that when Johnson visited the treasury in February 1716 the matter of an architect was in his mind. It seems equally probable that Johnson, in proposing a scheme to the lords of the treasury which would well line his pockets, and aware of Walpole's friendship with Ripley, which was then common knowledge, would seek the advice of the first lord in the matter of an architect. Exactly how Ripley would come into the picture at that stage must, of course, be a matter of conjecture, but it is beyond doubt that in February 1716 Walpole, Johnson and Ripley were in juxtaposition. Ripley, newly appointed to a post in the King's Works, and no doubt hopeful of greater favours to come, would not be averse from obliging a staunch henchman of his patron, even if doing so entailed the provision of free designs for the Hospital.

IV. JOSHUA MOLLINEUX

The thesis that Sir Thomas Johnson, early in 1716, enlisted the services of Ripley as architect is supported by a further piece of historical evidence. Hanging in the entrance to the Sandon Society's headquarters in the Old Blue Coat Hospital is an engraving bearing the title, *The North Prospect of the Charity Schoole in Leverpoole* (see above page 148), and under the title are the words *Built at Private Charge, and is to be sold for the Benefit of the Schoole*. The engraving is inscribed *Joshua Mollineux Delin.* and *H. Hulsberg Sculp.*. It is undated and the question of its date appears never to have been investigated. In *Bryan Blundell's Ledger*, however, are five entries relating to

⁽⁸⁾ Johnson, at this period, was indebted to the crown for several thousand pounds in respect of salt bonds, and probably also in respect of tobacco bonds. (E. Hughes, *Studies in Administration and Finance* (Manchester, 1934), p. 395, and A. C. Wardle, *TRANSACTIONS*, Vol. 90, p. 182.)

⁽⁹⁾ H. M. Colvin, *Dictionary of English Architects 1660-1840* (London, 1954), p. 502.

it. The first entry dates it. It reads: "12 April 1718 To Joshua Mullyneaux, drawing draft of School £1 : 1 : 0." An entry dated 22 December 1718 records: "To the Plate and 2,000 prints with carriage from London £50 : 5 : 6," and on the same date is a rather mysterious entry: "To Jackson, bringing the Plate from London and Oyl 4s. 6d." It is obvious that £50 for 2,000 prints left little margin for the engraver's fee; possibly no fee was charged. The next entry is dated merely 1719 and reads: "By Mr. Edward Markland⁽¹⁰⁾ 10 guineas from Maryland, but he had 50 Draughts of the Schoole for it £5 : 10 : 0." Markland subscribed five guineas yearly to the Blue Coat Hospital. In this year, 1719, he sent ten guineas, and treasurer Blundell entered the contribution as £5 : 10 : 0. only, entering in a separate account since lost the balance of £5 which represented payment for fifty engravings at 2s. each.

The next entry is dated 4 November 1735, seventeen years after the prints had arrived in Liverpool. It reads: "By drafts of Schol sold and parted with as per account £136." The net profit "for the Benefit of the Schoole" was about £84, but why it was not brought into account for seventeen years is a question which Blundell does not answer.

Efforts to pierce the veil which enshrouds this hitherto unrecorded artist, Joshua Mollineux, have met with scant success, and the few biographical details discovered relate only to the period from 1718, when he drew the picture of the Old Blue Coat Hospital, to c. 1730, the date assigned to his painting *Knowsley Hall from the West*. Research into his parentage⁽¹¹⁾ and dates of birth and death has proved fruitless. From 1722 to c. 1730 he was in the employ of the tenth earl of Derby at Knowsley, probably as an assistant to Hamlet Winstanley, the earl's private painter, engraver and art adviser. The *Stanley Account Books* at the Lancashire Record Office reveal that between March 1722 and July 1728 he was paid £120 : 15 : 0 for "drawing" and "painting", but there are no records of payments to him from December 1724 to April 1726, and it is possible that during part of that period he was in

⁽¹⁰⁾ Perhaps a son of Ralph Markland, vicar of Childwall c. 1690-1721, whose second son, Edward, was living at Liverpool in 1748. Markland pedigree in John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. IV, facing p. 657. Two other sons were admitted to Christ's Hospital, Jeremiah in 1704 and John in 1709.

⁽¹¹⁾ The assistant keeper, Department of Engraving, Illustration and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, suggested that he may be a son of Henry and Mary Mollineux of Lydiate, the notable Quaker writers who were married in 1685 and who died respectively in 1720 and 1696. The *D.N.B.* states that Mary died at Liverpool "leaving children", but efforts to relate Joshua to this family have been unsuccessful.

Italy with Winstanley. The latter's sojourn in Rome and Venice is generally stated to be from 1723 to 1725.⁽¹²⁾ A regrettable gap in the series of *Account Books* from 1729 to 1754 drops a curtain on Mollineux's later career; he may, of course, have spent several further years at Knowsley. Of the numerous reference books, British and foreign, which have been examined, none mentions him, whereas his Knowsley contemporary, Winstanley, is rarely overlooked.

Only four pictures by Mollineux have come to light, and *The North Prospect of the Charity Schoole in Leverpoole*, drawn in 1718, is the earliest of the four. *The English and Dutch Fleets at Spithead in 1729*, which measures 7 ft. 6 ins. by 3 ft. 10 ins., is at Knowsley. *A Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures at Knowsley Hall in 1887* in the Liverpool Athenaeum Library lists two pictures of this title by Mollineux. The British Museum's Department of Prints and Drawings has an engraving of one of them. It measures 4 ft. 6 ins. by 1 ft. 6 ins. and is inscribed *Joshua Molineux fecit apud Knowsley*. It seems possible that the preliminary drawing was made during a visit by Mollineux to Halnaker in Sussex, a property which came to Derby by his marriage to Mary, daughter and heiress of Sir John Morley of Halnaker. Halnaker is only fifteen miles from Portsmouth, off which the fleets were lying. The *Account Books* record numerous journeys between Knowsley and Halnaker by the earl and his officers and servants. The third picture, *Knowsley Hall from the West*, painted c. 1730, is also at Knowsley. It is reproduced in *Knowsley Hall: A Guide Book for Visitors* (1955) and it provides the evidence upon which the present earl based the alterations and demolitions at Knowsley a few years ago. The date of Mollineux's fourth picture, *Borromean Islands (Lake Maggiore, Northern Italy) after P. Tillemans*, is unknown. This was sold with other Knowsley pictures at Christies on 8 October 1954 (Lot 131) for twenty-two guineas. The purchaser was an Italian resident in Lucca. Peter Tillemans (1684-1734) was a notable painter of topographical and sporting subjects; a number of his works are at Knowsley.

Except for the marine picture mentioned above, the British Museum has no information about Mollineux. He is completely unknown at the Victoria and Albert Museum. He is not represented in the civic art galleries of Liverpool, Manchester, Preston or Southport. His name, and the fact that the great south-west front at Croxteth was completed about 1714, prompted me to enquire there about him, but Captain Williams,

⁽¹²⁾ £846 was remitted to Winstanley from Knowsley during that period. (*Stanley Account Books*.)

agent to the earl of Sefton, told me that the *Inventory of Paintings and Drawings at Croxteth* contains no reference to him.

Squire Nicholas Blundell of Crosby recorded in his diary that when in Liverpool on 25 June 1726 he "went with Mr. Molineux to look at some Lansskips which he had drawn". As Blundell spent the rest of the day settling accounts and drinking at the Talbot it would appear that he examined the pictures in Liverpool and that the artist was possibly residing there at that date.

It is apparent that this shadowy figure was of purely local standing as an artist, and at first it appeared to me rather odd that a drawing by one so obscure should be engraved by an artist of such eminence as Henrik Hulsberg, a leading architectural engraver. Hulsberg came to London from Amsterdam at the beginning of the eighteenth century and remained in England until his death in 1729. He engraved a number of portraits and some of the plates in Kip's *Britannia Illustrata*, but was mainly engaged in large architectural compositions such as Wren's designs for St. Paul's Cathedral, *A Catalogue of the Churches of the City of London, Royal Palaces, Hospitals, and Publick Edifices built by Sir Christopher Wren, Surveyor-General of the Royal Works*, and Colen Campbell's famous work, *Vitruvius Britannicus*. In Volume I (1715) of the latter work the engraver's name is absent from the plates, but many of them are undoubtedly by Hulsberg. Volume II (1717) contains seventy-three elevations, and Volume III (1725) ninety elevations, all engraved by him.

It is a steep descent from the elevations of Sir Christopher Wren and Colen Campbell to the Blue Coat drawing of Joshua Mollineux, and in the absence of the Hospital's minute books the procedure by which Hulsberg's services were obtained must be the subject of conjecture, but the advantage to the charity of such an arrangement is obvious. The prints were to be sold *for the Benefit of the Schoole*, and the words *H. Hulsberg Sculp:* in the bottom right corner would help to ensure the scheme's success. Clearly, the prints were not wholly intended for local sale. Liverpool's population of about 10,000 in 1718 lived in some 2,000 dwellings, but the great majority of these were occupied by low-paid labourers and others to whom the two shillings charged for a print represented more than a day's pay. It is probable that the prints sold locally did not exceed two hundred and may have been less. Liverpool's trade with the American colonies was considerable, and it is possible that Edward Markland in Maryland was not the only settler to whom parcels of prints were sent. Nearly half a million

British settlers were scattered along the eastern seaboard of America from the Hudson to the Carolinas, of whom not a few were cadets of titled and landed families. Some of these latter, no doubt, had a turn for architectural scholarship, and it is probable that by 1718 copies of *Vitruvius Britannicus* and the Wren plates had reached them. Ten years later many copies of *A Book of Architecture* by James Gibbs crossed the Atlantic and influenced American architecture for the rest of the century.

It may be that the Blue Coat trustees made direct contact with Hulsberg, but it is far more probable that they again enlisted the good offices of Sir Thomas Johnson, whose name still headed the list of trustees in the *Ledger*. In a quest of this type there is no one more likely to be consulted than the architect. If the architect consulted happened to be Ripley would he in turn be likely to recommend Hulsberg? It would be odd indeed if Ripley and Hulsberg were not at that period acquainted. Acquaintanceship could spring from the architectural circle in which both men moved, Hulsberg probably near the centre with Wren, Campbell and Hawksmore, the great designers whose plates he had engraved, and Ripley, a subordinate officer of the Royal Works but with the London Custom House designs then coming off his drawing-board, perhaps nearer the fringe.

The first mention of Ripley in the minutes of the Board of Works is dated 12 July 1715,⁽¹³⁾ and from then onwards he is recorded as executing tasks on the Board's behalf. "Both Wren and Vanbrugh attended regularly at the early Board Meetings up to 1718", state A. T. Bolton and H. Duncan Hendry,⁽¹⁴⁾ "after which the interest declines until everything falls more and more into the hands of Ripley and Officials". Ripley, as stated above, was appointed a clerk of the Works in February, 1716, and these officials, stated the principal officers in a 1717 memorandum to the treasury, were required to be "competently versed in all parts of architecture, which some of them are to a great degree of excellence".⁽¹⁵⁾ On 2 September 1718, when the engraving of the Mollineux drawing was probably under consideration, Colen Campbell was appointed deputy surveyor and chief clerk of the Royal Works. The aged Wren, on political grounds, had been supplanted as surveyor-general by William Benson, an active Whig politician whose knowledge of architecture was negligible. Campbell, therefore, became the Board's

⁽¹³⁾ *Wren Society*, Vol. VII, p. 255.

⁽¹⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁽¹⁵⁾ H. M. Colvin, *op. cit.*, p. 760, note 2.

principal executive officer, and as chief clerk he was Ripley's immediate superior. Campbell, a Whig, was in Sir Robert Walpole's favour, so much so, indeed, that by 1721, or perhaps earlier, Walpole had decided that Campbell should design his projected great mansion at Houghton in Norfolk and that the executive architect should be Ripley.

Vitruvius Britannicus, of course, is indisputable evidence of a professional association between Campbell and Hulsberg from not later than 1714. If, as is most unlikely, Ripley had not direct access to Hulsberg, an intermediary, Campbell, was at hand.

It was mentioned above that the cost of the plate, 2,000 prints and carriage from London was £50 : 5 : 6. Obviously Hulsberg either engraved the plate *gratis* or received a fee infinitely less than that which one of his stature could command. Benevolence may have moved him to this, but perhaps it is not ungenerous to suggest that a modicum of self-interest hovered in the background. He may have been influenced by a wish to keep on the right side of the architects on whom his livelihood largely depended. Volume II of *Vitruvius Britannicus* had been published in the previous year; in it the names of a score of dukes headed a most impressive list of subscribers at the foot of which Campbell stated: "the Author has made a great Progress in a Third Volume." In 1725 Volume III duly appeared; its ninety elevations, all engraved by Hulsberg, are dated 1723.

In view of the relationship between Ripley, Campbell and Hulsberg in 1718 it is reasonable to infer that Hulsberg's engraving of the plate supports the conclusions drawn from Johnson's visit to the lords of the treasury in February 1716, and that this evidence, combined with the stylistic evidence previously adduced, indicates a distinct possibility that the Old Blue Coat Hospital was designed by Thomas Ripley.

If Ripley designed the Blue Coat Hospital it was his earliest-known conception. It may be that the astute Walpole, with more important work in view for his protégé, seized the opportunity afforded by Johnson's quest for an architect to try out Ripley's prentice hand on a provincial building, and that, later, he looked on the Blue Coat designs and found them good. It is an interesting reflection that from the elevations of a charity school in Liverpool might have sprung the very mixed bag of the London and Liverpool Custom Houses, the Admiralty, Wolterton, and much of Houghton.

V. THOMAS RIPLEY

Ripley was born in Yorkshire about 1683;⁽¹⁶⁾ the exact place of his birth is unknown. As a young man he went to London where he took up the trade of a carpenter and kept a coffee house in Wood Street, off Cheapside. On 14 March 1705 he was admitted to the freedom of the Carpenters' Company. He married a domestic servant in the household of Sir Robert Walpole, but whether this brought him to Walpole's notice, or whether he met his future wife whilst working for Walpole is not clear. It is certain, however, that his appointments to posts in the King's Works and his architectural assignments were all due, directly or indirectly, to Walpole's influence. From the lowly post of labourer in trust, he rose in eleven years to the second highest post, comptroller. In the intervening years he secured appointments as clerk of the Works in 1716 and master carpenter (succeeding Grinling Gibbons) in 1721. His occupancy until his death in 1758 of the comptrollership was the longest in the post's history, and with only two years to spare he secured for his barrister son, Richard, the post of chief clerk of the Royal Works which Richard held until 1786, when he died. Between them, the Ripleys, father and son, were on the Works payroll for seventy-one years.

Ripley's professional life was almost entirely absorbed by his Royal Works duties.⁽¹⁷⁾ This and the wide variation in the quality of the few buildings he designed render his assessment as an architect difficult. His ill-proportioned Admiralty in Whitehall⁽¹⁸⁾ contrasts violently with the all-round excellence of Wolterton, a fine house by any standard. Perhaps Wolterton was a flash in the pan which surprised even its designer, who, had he proceeded to build a few more houses of equal merit would have secured a higher place in architectural history. However, he stopped short at Wolterton and must be content with a place rather low down in the second eleven. Official duties at the Works left ample time for private practice, but Ripley, perhaps aware that his creative ability was strictly limited, made no attempt to move outside the orbit of Walpolian influence. To him, no doubt, the Works was a secure haven in

⁽¹⁶⁾ The biographical details are from H. M. Colvin, *op. cit.*, pp. 502-504.

⁽¹⁷⁾ There is evidence, however, that he engaged in speculative building in London, and in 1722 he joined with Richard Holt in taking out a patent for an artificial stone. From 1710 to 1714 this Richard Holt was in Liverpool where he owned the Lord Street Pothouse. Sir Thomas Johnson's wife had a near relative named Richard Holt, but attempts to answer the interesting question as to whether this relative was the Lord Street potter have failed.

⁽¹⁸⁾ The Doric screen erected in 1760 to hide Ripley's building was Robert Adam's first public work in London.

which he was assured of a good income. In his youth and early middle age he may have had visions of joining the ranks of the great designers, but these must have faded long before 1742 when a second marriage brought him a wife with £40,000.

Despite his undistinguished record, however, he was far from deserving the opprobrium heaped upon him by Alexander Pope,⁽¹⁹⁾ whose denigrating pen was poised at all times against any friend of Walpole; or the more recent sneer of A. T. Bolton that he was "little better than a carpenter". Even the unfriendly Horace Walpole admitted that Houghton and Wolterton "will, as long as they remain, acquit this artist of the charge of ignorance", and considered Wolterton "one of the best houses of the size in England".⁽²⁰⁾

Perhaps some day a casual phrase found in a letter of a Clayton, Cleveland, Blundell, Johnson, or some other Liverpool worthy of the period will prove beyond doubt that the Old Blue Coat Hospital, Liverpool, was indeed designed by Ripley. If this does occur, the building will go to the credit side of his account, for of the not inconsiderable number of early eighteenth-century charity schools which came under examination in the preparation of this paper, none, in architectural merit, surpassed it.

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⁽¹⁹⁾ *Dunciad, Epistle to the Earl of Burlington, and Imitations of Horace.*

⁽²⁰⁾ *Anecdotes of Painting*, quoted by Gordon Nares, *Country Life*, 18 July 1957.