

Makers, Buyers, and Users: Sir Lawrence Dundas and his Town House: 19, Arlington Street, London (1763-1780)

Introduction

The eighteenth century is occupied by key figures who located the enlightened thinking of the time, within the framework of Georgian creativity. Names such as Robert Adam, Thomas Chippendale, and Josiah Wedgwood, are synonymous with the construction of a Neo-Classical language of architecture, interiors, and design, and their magnificent rise to creative glory are well-documented and lauded. As a design historian however, my research interest lies not with the creative geniuses of Georgian design, but with those who commissioned, bought, and displayed the goods that were exhibited within the country houses of the wealthy, particularly those who lived within the margins of accepted society; the recusant Catholics, the 'new money' Nabobs, and the lowly born social climbers. In the past, my focus has been on the ways in which the marginalised expressed their arrival, or survival, to elite society, through the purchasing and display of high status possessions. My previous research has revealed two distinct patterns of display and consumption here; adherence to the social norms of taste in the visual language of exhibition, and, secret visual languages that can be read by the similarly marginalised.¹ One of the greatest names in eighteenth-century connoisseurship, Sir Lawrence Dundas (c. 1710-1781), was one of these marginalised figures, who earned the reputation as being a man of dubious character, bribery, and political machinations, much of this earned from attitudes of snobbery amongst the elite. As he rose from minor gentry to one of the greatest purchasers of properties in eighteenth-century Britain, he promoted his arrival through the commissioning of high status goods in his new houses, but as this paper will reveal, a perceived pattern of arrival, purchase, display, was not necessary correct, nor that simple.

¹ See Clements, M. (1997) *The Lawsons of Brough Hall: An Eighteenth-Century Catholic Family & their Country House, 1700-1837* University of York MA Thesis, and Clements, M. 'The Lawsons of Brough Hall: An Eighteenth Century Catholic Family and their Country House' in Hatcher, J. (2005) *History and Regeneration (Catterick and Surrounding Villages)*, Richmond: J. Hatcher/Local Heritage Initiative

This paper will focus on the creation of a modern town house owned by the politician and entrepreneur Sir Lawrence Dundas, and is the result of painstaking research within the personal records and letters of Dundas, which are held in the North Yorkshire Country Records and Archive, Northallerton, North Yorkshire.² I aim to add to scholarly debates here by focusing on a number of key issues.³ This work will consider the creation of a classical language within the decoration and display in the interiors of Dundas' London town house at [19, Arlington Street](#). This will provide a backdrop to further discussions on the meaning of the house, and how we can perhaps read this as a visual representation of Dundas' intentions, his place within metropolitan society, and his own personality. My research will highlight an issue that has become perhaps a mainstay of those few studies of Dundas' town house; that Robert Adam was responsible for Dundas' sublime collection of furniture, by providing evidence that others were accountable, and perhaps, in far bigger ways.

² ZNK Zetland/Dundas Archive

³ Many sources on the history of the eighteenth-century house have been published, with the majority focussing on examples of the highest echelons. For comprehensive studies of the culture of country house building see Arnold, D. (1998) *The Georgian Country House: Architecture, Landscape and Society* London: Sutton Publishers; Barczewski, S. (2014) *Country Houses and the British Empire, 1700-1930* Manchester: Manchester University Press; Barnard, T. & Clark, J. (Editors) (1995) *Lord Burlington: Architecture, Art and Life* London: The Hambledon Press; Borenius, T. (1941) 'Castle Howard and its Lost Treasures' in *Burlington Magazine* April pp 3-9; Cast, D. (1984) 'Seeing Vanbrugh and Hawksmoor' in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* XLII pp 310-327; Chambers, J. (1985) *The English House* London: Methuen; Christie, C. (2000) *The British Country House in the Eighteenth Century* Manchester: Manchester University Press; Cunningham, C. (1994) 'An Italian House is My Lady' in G. Perry & M. Rossington *Femininity and Masculinity in Eighteenth-century Art and Culture* Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp 63-77; Girouard, M. (1978) *Life in the English Country House* London: Yale University Press, pp 163-180; Harris, J. (1994) *The Palladian Revival: Lord Burlington, his Villa and Garden at Chiswick* London: Yale University Press; Kauffman, E. & Hudnut, J. (1995) *Architecture in the Age of Reason* Toronto: General Publishing Company

For references to stylistic and technological issues relating to country house building see Baird, R. (2004) *Mistresses of the House: Great Ladies and Grand Houses* London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson; Girouard, M. (1978) *Life in the English Country House* London: Yale University Press, pp 119-180; Tinniswood, A. (1998) *The Polite Tourist: The History of Country House Visiting* London: The National Trust

For essays focussing on the role of women in the creation of elite houses, see Mourdant Crook, J. (1987) *The Dilemma of Style: Architectural Ideas from the Picturesque to the Post-Modern* London: John Murray; Craig, R. (1992) 'Claydon House, Buckinghamshire: A Mirror of Mid-Eighteenth-Century English Taste' in *SECAC Review* Vol 12. No. 2. pp 69-79; Cunningham, C. (1994) 'An Italian House is My Lady' in Perry, G. & Rossington, M. (1994) *Femininity and Masculinity in Eighteenth-century Art and Culture* Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp 63-77; Stevens Curl, J. (1993) *Georgian Architecture* London: David & Charles; Martin, J. (2004) *Wives and Daughters: Women and Children in the Georgian Country House* London: Hambledon and London; Summerson, J. (1993) *Architecture in Britain 1530-1830* London: Yale University Press; Vickery, A. (2009) *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* London: Yale University Press; Zaw, S. K. (1994) 'Appealing to the Head and Heart' in G. Perry & M. Rossington *Femininity and Masculinity in Eighteenth-century Art and Culture* Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp 123-141

Dundas attempted to record part of his house through the commissioning of a portrait by Johann Zoffany, and my work will study this painting as a document in which the importance of display to an individual is exhibited through the medium of image. The areas of focus will initially be contextualised by an overview of Sir Lawrence Dundas' life and career.

This investigation questions the perception that key names were solely responsible for the creation of eighteenth-century objects and spaces, or that houses and designs that are not mentioned in the scholarly sources are perhaps unworthy of study. This research will also highlight the importance of viewing the whole, as we negotiate the reality of the ideal and the actual, in the display of 'things' in the eighteenth-century interior.

Sir Lawrence Dundas: A Life in Context

In Johann Zoffany's portrait of 1769 (Figure 1), Sir Lawrence Dundas, entrepreneur,



Figure 1: 'Sir Lawrence Dundas and his Grandson in the Library at 19, Arlington Street, London', Johann Zoffany, 1769-70 (copyright at Aske Hall, Yorkshire)

politician, and wealthy baronet, appears to be the archetypal eighteenth-century gentleman. Sitting with his Grandson in his Library at 19, Arlington Street, London, he is surrounded by various objects of desire, which include numerous Dutch seascapes, objets d'art, luxurious textiles, and various pieces of Chippendale furniture. This painting of a successful and accomplished man denies his

comparative lowly birth, and the lengthy steps taken to achieve his status amongst the London elite.

Dundas began his life in Stirling, Scotland, the son of a merchant from an impoverished branch of the Dundas family. His rise to social and political power was meteoric, and was the result of his skill in recognising an opportunity for investment. In 1738, Dundas married Margaret Bruce, the daughter of Alexander Bruce of Kennet, Clackmannanshire; a family of considerable wealth and status. Dundas' success was bolstered by the 1745 Jacobite uprising, when he became a commissioner, supplying bread and other goods to the British army. Applying his ambition later to politics, in 1754 he stood as parliamentary candidate for Linlithgow, subsequently earning a reputation for his work in cheating and bribing and as such lifelong criticism for being perhaps unfairly, corrupt (Namier & Brooke, 2006: 358). Having spent what was, according to the third Duke of Argyll, '[T]he greatest sum to purchase an election that was even known in the country' (www.oxforddnd.com: 2014), rumours of financial irregularities abounded. An ensuing investigation by the Prime Minister George Haldane and the Duke of Argyll uncovered evidence of bribery, and subsequently Dundas was forced to relinquish his seat.⁴

It was at this point that Dundas appeared to shift his aspirations from politics to social advancement, and from Scottish to English land ownership. It is possible here that Dundas believed that social progression would lead to a political career, rather than politics being the sequel to advancement amongst the elite. In 1755, Dundas became a member of the Society of Dilettanti and through this began to engage with influential members of the elite, and involve himself more with issues relating to the acquisition of fine art and elite goods.⁵ Dundas' financial position furthered greatly when in 1756, he was able to generate contracts with the British and Austrian armies during the Seven Years' War (1756-63), and estimates of his profits from this period

⁴ See Bannerman, G.E (2019) 'The 'Nabob of the North': Sir Lawrence Dundas as Government Contractor' in *Historical Research* Vol. 83, No. 219, February 2019, pp 102-123; Edith, Lady Haden-Guest, 'Dundas, Sir Lawrence 1st Bt. (c.1710-81) of Kerse, Stirling and Aske, nr. Richmond, Yorks', in *History of Parliament, Volume I, 1754-1790*, www.historyofparliamentonline.org/ p.358 (accessed 12.06.2014)

⁵ See Kelly, J.M. (2009) *The Society of Dilettanti* London: Yale University Press, pp 211-213; Redford, B. (2008) *Dilettanti: The Antic and the Antique in Eighteenth-century England* The Getty Research Institute. Los Angeles, pp 112-129

range from £600,000-£800,000.⁶ Engaged in several large and extensive contracts with the Treasury, '[Dundas] so prudently ordered the multiplicity of affairs under his direction that he acquired the regard and esteem of the army and a large fortune for his family' (Carter, 1934: 17).

The personal papers of Sir Lawrence Dundas held at the North Yorkshire County Records Office (NYCRO ZNK) shed light upon his aspirations, and how he was able to gain his status in society so quickly.⁷ They reveal sometimes that he attached himself to influential people ruthlessly, only to distance himself from them when circumstances suited. Dundas' personal correspondence also sheds light on his astute financial and political ambitions, his acquisition of powerful and influential friends, and that he was a loving and caring husband. His letters to his wife Margaret reveal a man who was at odds with his reputation in the wider world. There are references throughout his papers, to the importance he placed on spending on the acquisition of property and luxury goods during in his rise through eighteenth-century society, and how he perhaps considered these as a stage set for his family's advancement. Mostly though, the archive allows us to understand a man whose subsequent reputation as corrupt and lowly born, has perhaps overshadowed the meteoric successes Sir Lawrence Dundas enjoyed. In his recent study of Dundas as a subcontractor, the historian G.E. Bannerman (1991) suggests that this reputation, both at the time and today, is more due to eighteenth-century society's general view of subcontracting as being a less than honest trade, and an opinion amongst the elite, of negativity to those such as Dundas, who had risen quickly to a higher status. Bannerman reveals that '[C]omments illustrate the vibrancy of the... 'country' critique that riches obtained from contracts were inappropriate, even unpatriotic, in the context of the nation at war' (Bannerman, 1991: 103). Bannerman refers here to Dundas' role as a commissioner of goods for the British army during the Seven Years' War.

⁶ In some circles it is suggested that Dundas' fortune was nearer £2 million. Which if correct, would indicate a purchasing power of over £340,500,000 today, which is questionable, even for Dundas successes

⁷ The preface NYCRO ZNK applies to the Zetland/Dundas records held in the North Yorkshire County Records and Archive, Northallerton

The negative aspects attributed to Dundas' character, which were employed by his social and political enemies and at times, friends, were perhaps not something pointed towards Dundas in particular, but as Bannerman suggests, the general acerbic judgements were trained towards all who had gained wealth from contracting, especially those like Dundas whose rise in society had been meteoric. What is evident though is that despite the apparent distaste for those whose fortunes were the result of contracting, in figures such as Sir Lawrence Dundas, there were positive aspects. For example, after supplying Lord Shelburne with a loan for £2,000, in 1762, Shelburne wrote to Henry Fox that '*Dundas, the Nabob of the North, writes me to desire I'll give him a baronetcy*' (Lady Edith Haden-Guest, 2014).

The level by which society in general viewed commissaries with distaste is highlighted by Paul Langford in *Public Life and the Propertied Gentleman* (1991), where he highlights two crucial issues in regards to the rise and successes of figures such as Dundas. Firstly, he shows how George III became increasingly reluctant to ennoble those who society viewed as disreputable, (throughout the 1760s and 70s, Dundas had his ambitious eye fixed firmly on securing a peerage), and secondly, despite becoming a formidable politician in the boroughs, and although gathering some political weight behind a campaign of support for his peerage, '*Dundas would have to die before his family could receive the honorary reward for his services. Time made it possible to remove the smell of the shop*' (Langford, 1991: 529).

Dundas' personal papers in the guise of letters, diaries, inventories, invoices and sales vouchers, reveal an interesting shift in emphasis during the early 1760s where the prominence in letters to his wife Margaret change from the daily trivialities of working for the army in Germany and Holland, and begin to mention not just the acquisition of money, but investment, home improvements, and aspiration.⁸ In letters to his wife regarding the renovations of their house in Kerse, Stirlingshire, he writes:

⁸ See Zetland Dundas archive ZNK held at North Yorkshire County Records and Archive (NYCRO), Northallerton, North Yorkshire

I hope you will give orders about everything concerning your house in Hill Street before you go to Scotland... pray when you get to Kerse let me know everything about the Kerse and what you do about the house. I would wish to have the dining room lined with timber in place of paper for I think a room for eating should be wainscoted in place of paper (NYCRO ZNK X1/2/7(a), 1760)

A number of enlightening issues are highlighted by this letter from Bremen. Sir Lawrence and his wife had been apart for some time, the result of his role as commissioner to the British Army, and Dundas appears to have left the running of his house at Kerse, to his wife Lady Margaret. It is the first mention in the personal papers held in the Zetland/Dundas archive to the purchase of Kerse House, Falkirk, which was acquired in 1749, and further correspondence goes into some detail about renovations there. The letter also indicates that the Dundas family had recently acquired a town house in Berkeley Square, London, and when Dundas asks of his wife '*Let me know everything about the Kerse and what you do about the house*', he intimates that the role of his wife was central to the renovations taking place in his Scottish house.

Given his work as contractor to the army, and through his somewhat dubious reputation for cheating and bribing, Dundas had many critics, particularly when his social status began to rise. In 1762, Dundas was seen trying to procure a title. Fellow member of the Society of Dilettanti and Whig Politician Lord Shelburne, later Prime Minister, helped Dundas acquire a baronetcy in that year. With this came criticism of Dundas' use of his finances to gain a place in eighteenth-century society, and after Samuel Foote's 1772 play *The Nabob*, where the character Sir Matthew Mite returns to England to buy his way into high society, Dundas later began to be referred to as 'The Nabob of the North' amongst England's established elite.⁹ Shelburne had been instrumental previously in trying to secure a seat in parliament for Dundas and it appears that he was a central figure in Dundas' political ambitions:

⁹ Lord Shelburne referred to Dundas as a nabob in 1762, so there is a suggestion here that the name was used in elite circles well before Foote's 1772 play.

I have had a letter from Lawrie Dundas to say that he is very desirous of coming into Parliament under your Lordship's protection he submits the terms to your Lordship, his object is to get in (Namier & Brooke, 1964: 359).

It appears that Dundas' ambitions at this stage were thwarted, as a letter from James Edgar to Lord Shelburne, dated 17th Oct 1761 reveals:

Col. Masterton wrote me lately he has taken the liberty to inform your Lordship of the disappointment I had met with about my seat in Parliament, and acquainted me how ready you were in offering your assistance with your friends to bring me in upon the first vacancy (Namier & Brooke, 1964: 359).

It is perhaps at this stage that Dundas decided to acquire English properties. He was in 1761, a commissioner to the British army in Germany, and had a Scottish property, of some size, but this was modest in comparison to those of his peers, and to those he would go on very soon to purchase. Despite his successes, Dundas was from the lower ranks of eighteenth-century landed society, subsequently he became a social climber, a man moving in social circles above his natural station. Dundas was also to some, a nabob, although the term 'nabob' was usually applied to those eighteenth-century characters whose entrepreneurial skills had led them to India. Usually a nabob's fortune was made in trade and commerce, and an eventual return to England to purchase the luxury of being a gentleman. Sir Lawrence Dundas was given this title by his detractors, although never having visited India, and never travelling any further than Germany in the 1750s, Dundas' own acquisition of land coincidentally followed the patterns of those true nabobs. As a man who purchased existing properties across the nation, Dundas was a typical man of new means, in essence, quite similar in purchasing patterns, to the nabob:

Those country estates which the returning nabobs acquired...were an absolute necessity both as sources of political patronage and as symbols of status. Many of the estates purchased already had houses upon them (Edwards, 1991: 34).

Dundas differed greatly however, when it came to decorating his properties:

The Nabob's dining-room [was] finished in carved oak, supplied...from the establishment of some great house-furnisher, who furnished at the same time the four salons...the hangings, the objects of art, the chandeliers, even the plate displayed on the sideboards, even the servants who served the breakfast. It was the perfect type of the establishment improvised...by a parvenu of colossal wealth, in great haste to enjoy himself (Finn, 2013).

Purchase vouchers and personal correspondence belonging to Dundas indicate that he had very little interest in new buildings, and instead chose to spend vast amounts of money on redecorating and improvements.¹⁰ This was also the distinctive pattern of purchase of the nabob. Alterations rather than rebuilding was '*[F]or convenience though not pompous*' (Ware, 1756: 93). Typically, Dundas bought properties complete, extending:

[H]is conquests from North to South [including] Moor Park...He has contracted in his own great way; takes everything as it stands, then commissioning the redecoration and alterations of his estates (Lady Haden-Guest, 2014).

There is a failure to recognise here, that whilst referred to as a nabob in some quarters, Sir Lawrence was one of the richest men in the country by the 1760s, and by the time his portfolio of properties was complete, he was one of the largest landowners in Britain. Rampant architectural exercises were perhaps not necessary, and those rising to high status in the eighteenth-century normally created vast powerhouses as a means to extend their influence. By the 1760s, when Dundas was entering his spectacular phase of land purchase, he was already enormously wealthy, had staked his place in elite and political society, and was known throughout the land.

Dundas' rise in society and a growing importance in politics was envied and criticised by many, and throughout the period 1764-1781, when Dundas was at the height of his influence, critics and writers focussed on his landownership:

¹⁰ See accounts ledgers and purchase documents in NYCRO ZNK X 1/7/15, X 1/7/21-26, X 1/7/28, X 1/7/31-49, X 1/7/50, X 1/7/68, X 1/7/70, X 1/7/76

He has made a great shew of his wealth, having purchased five or six capital estates in England, Scotland and Ireland, and matched his children into some of the greatest families – such sudden fortunes gained out of the public purse, are among the heaviest weight of war: they not only burden the fortunes, but gall the feelings of every individual of either honour, credit or affection for his country (Finn, 2013).

In Scotland, Dundas had risen from the son of a merchant to a man with land and social opportunity. But his position was such that he was able to arrange a marriage between his son Thomas to Lady Charlotte Fitzwilliam; the niece of Lord Rockingham. Historian Denys Sutton suggests that it was the marriage in to such a prestigious family that prompted Dundas to purchase and redecorate his Arlington Street house in the elegant Neo-classical style in 1763, and his palatial mansion at Moor Park, Hertfordshire.¹¹

The Classical Language of a Town House:

Number 19, Arlington Street, London, was built between 1732 and 1738 for Lord Carteret, 2nd Lord Granville. Purchased by Sir Lawrence Dundas in 1762, the house was almost immediately redecorated according to the designs of the up-and-coming young architect Robert Adam. Dundas' home at 19, Arlington Street has been covered very little by scholars, instead the emphasis albeit slight, has been on individual pieces of furniture because of their credence as being the result of Robert Adam's genius at an early stage of his career. As would be expected in a property decorated by Robert Adam, even at this early stage of his career, the dominant motif was the classical, with a strong reference to Pompeii rather than Rome. Having visited Naples, and the ruins of the Roman palace at Spalatro (modern day Croatia), Adam's subsequent work was highly influenced by Grand Tour experiences both in Spalatro and in Pompeii, Italy. Adam's interests in classical antiquities was part of the broader Neo-classical movement that was spreading throughout Europe. Arbiters of the style attempted to rediscover for art, architecture, and design, the purity of form

¹¹ See Sutton, D. (1967) 'The Nabob of the North' in *Apollo* September p. 169; Bannerman, G. (1991) 'The 'Nabob of the North': Sir Lawrence Dundas as Government Contractor' in *Historical Research* 83, pp 102-123; Edwards, M. (1991) *The Nabobs at Home* London: Constable & Company pp 34-41; Finn, M. 'Accommodating the East: Sir Lawrence Dundas as Northern Nabob? The Dundas Property Empire and Nabob Taste' <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah> (accessed 14.04.2018)

and expression that was seen to be lacking in the Rococo, and the novelty Gothick and Chinoiserie. Eager to further develop his burgeoning career, Adam was also part of a general change in architectural practice, one that was attempting to elevate British creativity above the notion of European emulation, and one that would in time, focus on a British cultural language through architecture. Writing later in *The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam* (1773), Adam stated that:

The progress of all [the] arts in Great Britain may be considered as the peculiar distinction of the present reign. Inferior to our ancestors in science, we surpass them in taste. The study of what is elegant and beautiful, sensibility, discernment, and correctness of eye, are become more general: and arts formerly little known begin to be naturalized amongst us. Cherished by the patronage of a people...Many of the inferior branches dependant on painting, architecture, and sculpture, have been carried...to a degree of perfection which has far exceeded the efforts of artists in any other part of modern Europe (Adam, 2006: 11).

The Adam style of Classicism was derived from Pompeii rather than Rome, a style of an Empire rather than that of just its glorious metropolis. Dundas was an emerging figure in enlightenment Britain, at the same time as Robert Adam was a developing figure in the architecture of Reason. As such Dundas was eager to be seen to be involved in the new ways both physically in his life as a politician, and visually, through the decoration of his London town house.

An early example of Adam's newly emerging classical language, the redecoration at 19, Arlington Street was created at the same time as Adam was writing his 1764 treatise *Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian at Spalatro in Dalmatia*, and whilst he was bringing to life through plasterwork, the stucco paintings he studied in Pompeii. With a small number of important country houses and town houses now completed, Adam was, by the time he started working at 19, Arlington Street, on his creative journey to complete a viable British architectural language, and one that would also influence material culture. Having made no significant alterations to the

fabric of the building, the changes within Dundas' London town house were decorative in regards to plasterwork, coupled with some internal alterations to room layout, and through the display of many examples of furniture and objects.

The most notable rooms, the [Blue Drawing Room](#), and the Great Room or [Saloon](#), were linked by a parlour to the right of the Blue Drawing Room and Long Gallery, and a staircase, connecting both floors with an associated display of classically inspired plasterwork and objects. Through a short journey around these rooms, it is possible to reveal how the classical language of Adam was made manifest within the house of Sir Lawrence Dundas. The 1768 *Inventory of the Furniture and Goods of Sr. Lawrence Dundas Bart. at his House in Arlington Street*, reveals that within the room were a number of substantial and important pieces, notably:

3 Sophas with 3 Cushions and 2 bolsters to each, covered with Damask, Leather and Cheque covers to Sophas, Cushions and Bolsters, 2 Scroll headed stools, Covered with Ditto & Cheque and Leather Cases to Ditto, 12 Back Stools in Ditto and Ditto Cases, 4 Girandoles gold frames (NYCRO ZNK X 1/7/82, 1768)

A glass cabinet designed and made by Chippendale held some of Lady Margaret Dundas' substantial Sèvres porcelain collection, some of which had been brought to Arlington Street from their house at Kerse, Scotland.¹²

In the Great Room or Saloon there was, amongst the display, '*3 large Glasses in Gilt Frames, 4 Sophas gilt covered with Damask, 8 Gilt Chairs covered with Damask, 4 Thermes*'.¹³ Within this room were a set of [classically inspired furniture](#), designed by Adam and made in the workshops of [Thomas Chippendale](#).

¹² See NYCRO ZNK X 1/7 *An Inventory of China belonging to the Rt. Hon. The Earl of Zetland 1841* where this is mentioned

¹³ See NYCRO ZNK X 1/7/82 *An Inventory of the Furniture and Goods of Sr. Lawrence Dundas Bart. at his House in Arlington Street, 12th May, 1768*

His designs for this suite of furniture for Dundas have been considered to be crucial in Adam's subsequent career because they were his first designs for furniture, and provided a guide by which cabinetmakers could apply Neo-Classical logic to their own work.¹⁴ The suite of furniture is also given credence as it is the first and only example of work designed by Adam and made by Thomas Chippendale.¹⁵ At a cost of £210.4s.0d the suite was, according to Christopher Gilbert, to be the most expensive set ever made to date.¹⁶

The [staircase](#) at Arlington Street was decorated with similar plasterwork arabesques to those found in the decoration of the Great Room, and mythical canvases by Cipriani were hung within the plasterwork frames created by Adam. Depicting Aurora, Jupiter and Semele, Bacchus and Ariadne, and individual paintings of Hercules and Minerva, the display of classical art would have more than adequately served to appear to '*equally place [Dundas] at the forefront of Italophiles*' (Rock, 1997: 6).

Carefully chosen and located pieces, coupled with the visual improvement of Classicism effected a worthy and tastefully modern metropolitan home. When Lady Shelburne visited the house in 1768, she noted that the Great Room was '*hung... with very noble glasses between the piers*' (Bolton, 1921: 354). Those pier glasses so noted by Lady Shelburne were by and large identical to those created for Syon House in 1772, and would also appear in Adam's 1778 edition of *The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam*. So impressed with the redecoration, she goes on to state that:

The apartment for company is up one pair of stairs, the Great Room is now hung with red damask, and with a few very large and capital pictures...and

¹⁴ See Bolton, A.T. (1921) 'Some Early Adam Furniture at No. 19, Arlington St' in *Country Life*, 24 September, pp 385-88; Conran, L. (1951) 'Robert Adam's Influence on Furniture Design' in *Apollo* pp 5-10; Graham, R. (2009) *Robert Adam: Arbiter of Elegance* London: Birlin

¹⁵ See NYCRO ZNK X1/7/22 and Gilbert, C. (1997) 'Chippendale and Adam Triumphant' in *Dundas Masterpieces* London: Christies p. 17

¹⁶ See Gilbert, C. (1997) 'Chippendale and Adam Triumphant' in *Dundas Masterpieces* London: Christies p. 17

Gilt chairs. The long room next to it is furnished in the same manner. (Bolton, 1921: 354)

Sir Lawrence Dundas' wealth and status had enabled him to attract the services of Robert Adam, and initially it appears that the architect was asked to create an extension to the house at Arlington Street which faced Green Park. Given the proximity of Arlington Street to areas such as Berkeley Square, and the extensive alterations there at the home of Lord Shelburne, Adam's design for a [new wing](#) at Arlington Street would have placed number nineteen as one of the most substantial town houses in the area, and would have given the burgeoning career of Adam a substantial lift. An invoice for the design of a great room survives in the Dundas archive, and had this been built it would have been the only example to date, of a conversion at one of Sir Lawrence's properties. However, in reality, whilst the redecoration of the house would result in an early example of Adam's creative prowess, in reality, the house itself would remain a substantial, yet unremarkable example of a typical metropolitan town house.

Robert Adam's scroll of accounts for 1766 refers to a design for '*A great Room towards the Greenpark with Elevations - £13. 16s. 0d.* (NYCRO ZNK X1/7/22, 1766). In reality, Adam made no significant external alterations at Arlington Street, although Dundas could undoubtedly afford rebuilding or extensions. In the end Adam's contribution was through decoration, furniture, and furnishings. Given Dundas' substantial financial position, and his ability to spend according to his family's whims, the decision not to extend 19, Arlington Street is worthy of mention.

Dundas' decision not to extend his new property, suggests an element of eagerness to complete the house, which perhaps led Dundas to reject the notion of expansion. However, as David King reveals, there were four similar designs by Adam for houses in the vicinity, and none saw fruition (King, 2001: 167-68). Whether through time constraints, as discussed later, or through cost, which is unlikely, the unbuilt Adam design for Arlington Street was therefore not unusual. It could be suggested here that Adam's own career aspirations led him to include a design for an extension when he

proposed changes to any of his commissioned houses, and the likelihood that this was so is highlighted by King's revelation. An assumption can perhaps be drawn on this issue, in that Dundas' verdict on Adam's design reveals that he viewed the role of the architect here as interior decorator, and subsequent works in his other properties followed the same route. Dundas would later employ architects to build for him at subsequent properties, but in those instances, he commissioned not Neo-classicists, but those fluent in Palladianism, most notably John Carr of York, during the renovations to Aske Hall, Richmond, (North Riding) North Yorkshire.

The problem encountered by my research into Dundas and his property portfolio is that very little is written about him in this respect.¹⁷ Whilst problematic, this issue has allowed me to focus purely on the possible reasoning behind Dundas' purchase of 19, Arlington Street, and its subsequent decoration, without conclusions being formed elsewhere.

Dundas' Private Taste: Recorded for Posterity

Given the dominance of the classic motif in the decoration and overall display at 19, Arlington Street, it would be easy to make an assumption that in rooms not covered in this discussion, the language of Neo-classicism continued. It would also be easy to suppose that the motif was so important to Dundas, that he would have taken great steps to have Classicism captured in many ways. As I have shown, there was a dominant motif of the classical in Robert Adam's redecoration, and in individual pieces made for Dundas' display, but in one room in the house, one that was private, but summarised in a very public way, a different aesthetic occurred.

Despite the dominance of Robert Adam to the overall creative structure at 19, Arlington Street, the importance of Dundas' personal and private collection can be seen in Johann Zoffany's *Sir Lawrence Dundas and his Grandson in his Library* c. 1775 (Figure 1). It is not Robert Adam nor indeed Sir Lawrence himself that is emphasised in the conversation piece painting, it is instead the collection of

¹⁷ See Bolton, A.T. (1921) 'London Houses/19 Arlington St. S.W.1.A, Residence of the Marquess of Zetland' in *Country Life*, 17 September pp 350-55; Bolton, A. T. (1921) 'Some Early Adam Furniture at No. 19, Arlington St' in *Country Life*, 24 September, pp 385-88

Chippendale furniture and Dundas' collection of Dutch landscapes and seascapes. Historian Kate Retford reveals that within the painting:

Dundas is not just making a general statement about his rise to wealth and titled position. He is insisting that the viewer examine the actual work done by Robert Adam on his town house in intricate detail: that they approve of his talents as an art collector and connoisseur and that they admire the design of the carving on his fireplace (Retford, 2007: 303).

Whilst Retford's statement is logical, given that he had spent vast amounts of money on his new home, the fame of Adam would have highlighted Dundas' arrival in elite society. However, a second more detailed look at the painting shows that it is Dundas' discrimination and creative connections that are also being exhibited, and we are to engage with a man who has social, political, and creative networks; the latter of the highest echelons. As discussed previously, the term 'nabob' had been pointed towards Dundas, as he was a figure who rose quickly through society, and whose wealth was being made manifest for all to see. In some respects, he followed patterns of acquisition quite similar to that newly emerging rank of society:

The Nabob's dining-room [was] finished in carved oak, supplied...from the establishment of some great house-furnisher, who furnished at the same time the four salons...the hangings, the objects of art, the chandeliers, even the plate displayed on the sideboards, even the servants who served the breakfast. It was the perfect type of the establishment improvised...by a parvenu of colossal wealth, in great haste to enjoy himself (Daudet in Finn, 2013).

This quote suggests that the Nabob was a figure who would quickly gather property and exhibit within, based on an extended and perhaps thoughtless shopping spree. Dundas without doubt consumed en masse during the decoration of his house in Arlington Street, but by commissioning key figures such as Robert Adam, Thomas Chippendale, and Samuel Norman, the end result was not an eclectic mix of elite goods, instead it was a carefully constructed display which incorporated the visual language of enlightened status.

Like his acquisition of properties, particular attention to the purchasing of goods for his homes was swift and thoughtful:

[A] collection is styled as such when the owner has acquired sufficient objects of a kind and enough connoisseurship to impress [those] active in the same field (Hermann, 1999: 21).

The references within the Zoffany painting are to remind the viewer of the prosperity of Sir Lawrence and his exquisite taste for art and objects. The fact that he is presented within art itself, in the guise of the painting, which in turn reflects his own artistic taste for Dutch masters, reveals Dundas' place within the civilising ideals of the Enlightenment. This, coupled with the display of the classical motif through the house, emphasises that Dundas was a man of the Age of Reason. As a member of the Society of Dilettanti, the choice of artist was crucial, and Zoffany had painted many of the other members, particularly in interiors surrounded by their own collections of art. Increasingly, during the late 1760s onwards, Zoffany captured the elite surrounded by the types of classical or classically inspired art which had been collected by individuals during their Grand Tour; the most famous of these being '*The Tribuna of the Uffizi*' 1772-78, '*Charles Townley and His Friends in his Library*', 1782, and '*The Portraits of the Academicians of the Royal Academy*', 1771-72.

Although a recognised member of the Dilettanti, Dundas had not been on the Grand Tour, but he had spent some considerable time in Holland and Germany. His interest in fine art came not from the allegorical Classicism of late Renaissance Italy, but from the earthly and emotional beauty of post-Reformation Northern Europe, and the seventeenth-century schools of Dutch painters. The emphasis in the painting is to his proudly displayed collection, and having spent some considerable time in Holland and Germany, it would be logical to assume that Dundas had acquired his love of the Dutch masters there. Zoffany's painting is not merely a reflection of Dundas' rise to

power, it references his personal artistic taste. However, the Zetland/Dundas archive allows us to question Sir Lawrence's part in the collation of his collection.¹⁸

Through a network of self-appointed or Adam commissioned agents, the display of fine furniture and decoration was a visual reference to Dundas' place in tasteful society, with creative choices which on occasion were his, others by his representatives. Whilst the decoration, and by and large the furniture on display at Arlington Street portray a collector of fine classical forms, the Zoffany painting itself reveals an interest in the compilation of 17th century Dutch art. In his book *Pleasures of the Imagination* (1997) the historian John Brewer reveals how an enlightened reference to discernment during the eighteenth century, created a development of 'high culture'. With allusion to fine art, literature, theatre, music, and social gatherings, Brewer uncovers the ways in which notions of taste emerged, and how one's place in society could be expressed through the display of, and discussion of, taste. One of Brewer's foci is the role connoisseurship played in the exhibition of discrimination, and how notions of classical logic were the form by which pure taste could be expressed. The author reveals ways in which the act of refined collecting was considered during the eighteenth century, to be the prerogative of men of status, and only those with an attained sense of belonging had the ability to recognise taste.

With allusion to his house at Arlington Street, in Dundas' collection of furniture, much of it attributed to Robert Adam, the dominant motif was the classical form, as such reveals links between Dundas' growing reputation as a politician and man of means. His acquired status amongst elite society, and his meteoric rise from minor to major rank meant that in some sense, he differs from those with the inherited and attained impression of belonging that Brewer alludes to. After all, the 'continuing importance of lineage to personal status presented a major obstacle for any newcomers' (Gauci, 2013: 139). Although referencing the rise of William Beckford in this statement, Perry Gauci reveals in *William Beckford: First Prime Minister of the London Empire* (2013),

¹⁸ See D. Sutton 'The Dundas Pictures' in *Apollo* September 1967, pp 204-213, K. Retford 'From the Interior to Interiority: The Conversation Piece in Georgian England' in *Journal of Design History* Vol. 20. No. 4. 2007, p.303

the importance of property and display to social acceptance of sorts, for the lowly born in the eighteenth century. With this in mind therefore, it is perhaps possible to discuss the merits of a personal collection that is different to the backdrop in which it is displayed. Brewer's point is in reference to classical art and the Neo-classical motif on decoration and furniture. Having revealed that the Arlington Street house was a perfect example of this, in his private space, the library, we see a different view of the world, as captured perfectly by Zoffany. The house was an exhibition that was meant to be viewed by the visiting elite, whereas the library was a personal space, a cabinet of his own interests.

In Kelly Sloan's in *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century* (2004), John Brewer suggests that the consumption of art and objects amongst male patrons, particularly during the Neo-Classical period, was based on acts of connoisseurship, and the adoptions of certain objects¹⁹. Dundas' espoused collection in the Zoffany painting was not Neo-classical, although he obviously understood the importance of the style given that his house was dominated by it. It could be argued here that the backdrop of classical motifs and art in the rest of the house was a positive expression of accepted notions of modern taste, and all that that entails. As well as an accumulator of fine furniture, Sir Lawrence Dundas was also an investor in fine art, particularly with regards to Dutch landscapes. In relation to other objects of display at the Arlington Street house, the Zetland/Dundas archive reveals some interesting material that questions Sir Lawrence's part in the collation of his fine art collection.²⁰ In the period 1762-63, at the same time as Dundas commissioned Robert Adam to redecorate his houses in Arlington Street and Moor Park, the art dealer John Greenwood wrote to Dundas many times regarding the availability of

¹⁹ See Sloan, K. (2004) *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century* London: British Museum Press; Roberts, J. (2004) *George III and Queen Charlotte: Patronage, Collecting and Court Taste* London: Royal Collections Publications for examples that focus on male connoisseurship, and gender divisions in what is consumed in the eighteenth-century interior

²⁰ See Sutton, D. (1967) 'The Dundas Pictures' in *Apollo* September pp 204-213, K. Retford (2007) 'From the Interior to Interiority: The Conversation Piece in Georgian England' in *Journal of Design History* Vol. 20. No. 4. p.303

Dutch paintings on the continental market.²¹ For example, on the 5th October 1762, Greenwood wrote to Dundas:

Sir, I wrote you sometime since giving you a description of a picture in Mr. Bramcamps cabinet of Van Herps – thinking it would have suited yr purpose... There's a Gentm. of Fashion Here that has a fine cabinet of pictures & is often in want of cash... Now Sir if I dare purchase anything considerable for you... You may rely on my fidelity, and I flatter myself on my Judgement as I have had passed thro' my hands several choice collections (Sutton, 1967: 205).

In this letter, Greenwood is alluding to his own taste, and perhaps his ability to source an object of merit based on his judgement. He is also, in mentioning the gentleman of fashion, referencing his own network of contacts and that in this instance, the owner of the painting in question, is a man of taste and distinction. By strengthening his place as a man of knowledge in regards to art, he flatters Dundas some weeks later, writing:

Sir...I have purchased & sent...you twenty pictures...The two Tenniers are ye best that are known of him (NYCRO ZNK I/17/66, 1762).

The evidence here is that Sir Lawrence's discerning taste in paintings was in reality the result of Mr. Greenwood, and that the choices made were not based on any notions of his connoisseurship, but instead were founded on availability and price.

The political and social successes of Sir Lawrence Dundas, or the tales of his exquisite taste, were perhaps the result of shrewd choices or in the example of the display in the Zoffany painting, an art dealer based on the continent or the work of talented cabinet and furniture makers:

The Dundas Collection owed its character not only to the desire of its owner to buy Dutch paintings but to the [perspicuity] and taste of the men who sold them to him (Sutton, 1967: 205).

²¹ Little is known of Greenwood, other than he was responsible for the acquisition of Dundas' collection. What is evident though, is that Greenwood was active whilst Dundas was in Bremen, and hence it is easy to assume that the agent was part of Dundas' network before the purchase of 19, Arlington Street

Dundas' fine art collection was central to Zoffany's painting, and the dominance of this in the composition alludes to the importance given to his own taste in art. However, this is not the only reference to a displayed personality in Zoffany's portrait. He highlights the importance of certain types of furniture, in particular his Chippendale set, which sits centre stage. The 1768 inventory of goods reveals exactly those type of objects that Dundas identified himself with in the room in which Zoffany captures him. Of these objects listed here, the '[L]arge mahogany Library table, A smaller Ditto, A mahogany 2 flap table' (ZNK X I/7/82, 1768), the one Dundas leans on in Zoffany's painting, were made by Chippendale, and the 'Pier glass in a gilt frame' (ZNK X I/7/82, 1768), and fireplace were to the designs of Robert Adam, revealing that Dundas' earned wealth and status enabled him to commission the greatest artisans in the creation of his interior displays. Perhaps we could even argue here, that as well as paying reference to Dundas' ability to buy high status pieces of furniture, the painting also informs us of the creative networks available to him. The painting reveals what is important to Dundas; on display are his paintings and his collection of Chippendale (and Norman) furniture. Besides the carved marble fireplace, there are no references to Adam in the painting, although there are still notions of Classicism in the eight bronze statuettes that are placed on the mantle and the table below the window.

With the '8 antique figures on the chimney' [and a marble fireplace by Adam] it looks the picture of classical taste, worthy of a member of the Society of Dilettanti which Dundas had joined in 1754, after which he sent his son on the Grand Tour. The display of these Grand Tour treasures is reminiscent of Samuel Foote's fictional nabob, Sir Matthew Mite, who 'brought from Italy antiques some curious remains which are to be deposited in this country (Finn, 2013).

There is an issue with the painting however. The cursory glance toward the Neo-Classical language in the guise of the fireplace, the library without books, instead, a gallery of his collection of paintings, ask questions of the room and of the painting. This tantalising omission; a library without books, can be viewed in various ways. The artist was quite often given licence when capturing a figure. Was perhaps

Dundas interested in having himself captured amongst his collection of art, and hence books were omitted to avoid visual clutter? My research within the huge archive of Zetland/Dundas papers suggests that there is a different account that needs to be considered. The *Inventory of the Furniture and Goods of Sr. Lawrence Dundas Bart. at his House in Arlington Street, 12th May, 1768* (NYCRO ZNK X 1/7/82) questions the room shown in Zoffany's painting, and perhaps indicates Dundas' own personal taste and intentions in regards to his London town house. The inventory, which takes into account objects within specific rooms, reveals that within the library, the collections of goods included:

A Turkey Carpet, 2 Marine window curtains, 2 Rods for windows, 2 Mahogany Blinds, A Pier glass in a gilt frame, A large mahogany Library table, A smaller Ditto, A large mahogany pediment Book Case, An alabaster vase, A smaller Book Case, 2 mahogany Presses, A mahogany 2 flap table, A large gilt 6 flap Screen, A French Elbow Chair in horsehair, 5 Back Stools in leather, A Wind Dial, 4 Pictures, A Branch screw'd to the Chimney, A Square Trunk (NYCRO ZNK X 1/7/82).

Further listings show that in Dundas' private dressing room, there was:

A Carpet to cover the Room, A hearth carpet, 2 Blue damask window curtains, 2 Cornice to Ditto, A Pier glass in a gilt frame, 2 French Elbow Chairs in horse hairs, 6 Gothic Ditto in hollow seats, A large rosewood writing Table, A figure of Baccus, 3 mahogany writing 2 flap Tables, A Ditto Tea chest, 3 Green rollup window Curtains, 29 Pictures (NYCRO ZNK X 1/7/82).

What is highlighted here is that the inventory of goods in the private dressing room is almost the same as the objects shown in Zoffany's painting. From the blue damask curtains down to the large number of paintings, and the small collection of Chippendale furniture, indicate that the title of the painting, and the actual room are different. Given the importance given to Neo-Classical motifs in the rest of the house, Dundas' dressing room highlights a more personal taste. The fireplace, that eighteenth-century figure of domesticity, is in Zoffany's painting, highlighted by the collection of classical bronzes; these are not listed in the inventory so perhaps these were licence. The rest of the room however, is dominated by Dundas' collection of seventeenth-century Dutch landscapes and seascapes. Lacking, are those images

of classical allegory found elsewhere in the house, and absent are the Adam arabesques and columns, instead we have high status but increasingly outdated Chippendale furniture, and Northern European art. The composition of the painting is informal and personal, and the backdrop similarly so. What we see here is a man who has had himself captured for posterity, in an image that is at odds not only with the decoration in the rest of the house, but with his reputation in the wider world as rigorous consumer of the most modern and lavish goods. The painting appears at first glance, to show an established man in a room who we could assume lives with all the expected trappings and luxuries of a person with a long family history on a landed estate. In many of Zoffany's other works of the same genre, this was so, but for Sir Lawrence Dundas, his home was new, and decades of hard work, intrigues, and machinations had been used in order for him to arrive at that point in his life. Dundas was not a part of a successful, long-standing aristocratic family, and he had risen from a lowly Scottish merchant to Baronet. Despite the intricacies of capturing a moment, and the surrounding goods, Zoffany's work may seem unremarkable in the first instance. As a Conversation Piece it is quite typical of its type, but its message is clear, Sir Lawrence Dundas was powerful, and he had arrived.

The surrounding display was important to Dundas, as it was a visual testament to his current status, and as far as he was concerned, he could only rise further. To fully understand the painting however, we have to consider it within the overall display of the classical motif in Arlington Street, and only then can we consider the personal statement being made. In this sense, '[t]he wealth of this 'Nabob' enabled him to become 'a true dilettante and an enlightened patron of the liberal arts and architecture', without any censure of his taste' (Finn, 2013), but as I have suggested, in private, his own taste was perhaps different, less formal, and more personal; perhaps Zoffany was trying to capture this.

Conclusion:

Whether the result of clever acquisition, acquired notions of taste, or an understanding of the visual language of the elite, 19, Arlington Street was in result, a

fine example of a modern and fashionable town house, and one suitable for a man of Dundas' growing status. The fortune spent on the purchasing of the house and its subsequent redecoration, would suggest that Dundas' London retreat was something necessary and important for a man of his status.

The purchasing of 19, Arlington Street and Moor Park, Hertfordshire, at the same time, and in quick succession, Aske Hall, Yorkshire, indicates that the Dundas family were using property as a visual reference in their climb through society, and perhaps using them as a vehicle for national and regional aspiration. All of their properties were redecorated according to the needs of the family in those areas. The smaller but nonetheless expensive city property was redecorated to 'woo the eye and mind away from the country estate', but the town house was not a shrunken version of the country pile, or a limited space to be filled to the brim with as many goods as possible, instead it had its own expectations and uses (Porter in Stewart, 2009: 50). Visitors to the house were aware of metropolitan concerns, and unlike the country estate where guests may have spent up to a season being entertained, town houses were part of a glut of recreations which may have included the theatre, assembly rooms, shops, promenades, and sometimes endless parties. Important visitors tended to focus on an event in the town house rather than stay for long periods, and were arguably in a constant flux of being impressed with the displays in one house, and disappointed or offended by the exhibition of goods in another. Houses in Grosvenor Square, Great Russell Street, Berkeley Square and Arlington Street were in close proximity, and inhabitants of those areas were amongst the finest names in the land. The Dundas house in London therefore had something to prove.

Dundas was to society, a commissioner, and to some his wealth was gained through disreputable sources. Others found his company worthy of their status, and metropolitan ritual required that the Arlington Street house became part of the annual social circle of events. The display of goods and decoration suited the needs of the Dundas family, and they were admired by even their detractors. The decoration at 19, Arlington Street expressed Dundas and his role as a politician, as a logical, thoughtful, and as an enlightened Whig. His collection of furniture and art, displayed against a backdrop of classical motifs, suggested a man of enlightened modernity. In

her study *On Collecting* (1995), Susan M. Pierce reveals how certain types of objects, when accumulated and displayed within certain contexts, become embodied with qualities that are emphasised by both the individual, and the social circles that view them. She states that:

Objects which carry the freight of...significances and combine them with the characteristics of treasure – valuable materials, superior craftsmanship and the capacity to enchant the eye – are endowed with knowledge and power (Pierce, 1995: 151).

With references to the classical motif, connoisseurship in the eighteenth century, linked Neo-classical logic in the guise of anthemion, grotesques, and the orders, to a patriarchal sense of being, which included membership of the Society of Dilettanti, and studies on the Grand Tour.

I would conclude here that notions of new money or being a social climber are not valid in this study, as the house manifests being modern and thoughtful, enlightened but not brash. Ultimately though, as my research has shown, the house would remain relatively unused until his death in 1781. It is here therefore that we have to consider Dundas' existence not as being expressed in the acquisition of property or where he spent his time. With this approach it is possible to view Dundas' town house as more than a stage for an individual's life in the metropolis, and instead as an important part of his life in general, or as a construction of personal identity and the self. In regards to stylistic choices and the commissioning of Adam, I would note that amongst the higher echelons of eighteenth-century society, the classical taste incorporated a language of expectations, where style was an indication of rank and as such an intimation of the ability to spend. This shows that to the eighteenth-century elite, style in the guise of plasterwork, furniture, textiles, and ceramics, was a language that transcended mere fashions, and was instead an indicator of discrimination, knowledge, and a growing sense of British-ness. As the architectural historian Ariyuki Kondo argues in *Robert and James Adam, Architects of the Age of Enlightenment* (2012):

While there have been several studies which contextualize the Adam style in the broader stream of [the] eighteenth century...not much attention has been devoted to the ways in which the Adam brothers reflected the condition of the age from which their style springs (Kondo, 2012: 9).

The age in which Dundas' place in society was rising was one based on an increased understanding of what it was to be British, what it was to be a politician, and what it was to be part of a nation developing its own conscience and global identity. We can therefore try to read the classical language of 19, Arlington Street perhaps as more than an expression of fashion or newly developed tastes, but as one of belonging, or at least, for a man considered increasingly to be a Nabob.

The decoration at Arlington Street was a triumph of the new taste, with discernment displayed for all to see. Lady Shelburne, on visiting the Dundas' in 1768, noted in her diary that:

I had vast pleasure in seeing a house which I had so much admired, and improved as much as possible. The apartment for company is up one pair of stairs, the Great Room is now hung with red damask, and with a few large and capital pictures, with very noble glasses between the piers, and Gilt chairs. The long room next to it is furnished in the same manner (Bolton, 1984: 304).

She had been a visitor to the house previously, and before the Dundas' had acquired the property; it long been a home of political intrigues and owned by many political figures. Its reputation could have well been the instigator for Sir Lawrence's purchase of 19, Arlington Street, nevertheless, it was now also a tasteful and much improved property. What is more important though is that the newly enhanced house was the result in some part, to his agents; he staked his reputation as a collector on the decisions made by various figures. The sources referred to throughout this work leave us with the impression that Dundas understood that his collections were to be amongst the sublime, and perhaps it is through this collection that he wanted to herald his arrival in elite society. However, I would argue that rather than being a collector of fine things, Dundas was in reality a man whose connections could be relied upon to locate and purchase the type of goods that he would later be given

credence for. Perhaps we should argue that Dundas was a collector of high quality agents rather than goods.

The role Dundas played in the choice and acquisition of fine art is documented, and the evidence suggests that whilst he was a collector, in many instances the choices of paintings bought were suggested by others, particularly agents on the Continent. What I reveal here, is that in regards to his collection of fine furniture, as Denis Sutton has shown in relation to paintings, Dundas relied on others to aid his collection. Whilst obviously there is some kudos to be offered to Dundas in regards to his apparent taste, the overemphasis on Robert Adam as the creative force behind the resulting display of furniture at 19, Arlington Street is questionable. As I have shown, as in the example of his paintings, a series of agents, suppliers, and acquirers were also responsible for the collection of Dundas' furniture, and in the example of the latter, Samuel Norman is overshadowed by Robert Adam, but in reality was a much more extensive force in the display. Whilst his ensuing reputation as a connoisseur is valid in regards to the collection of goods he acquired, a collector claims admiration due to his or her knowledge of their exhibition, yet Dundas' was based on the expertise of others. However, although the resulting spectacle was an interior of discriminating luxury, splendid in creation, and a tasteful backdrop for Dundas' growing collection of European art, we are perhaps led to believe that Sir Lawrence's taste, or Adam's creative genius were the architects of Arlington Street's interiors; the evidence supplied here suggests otherwise.

My study of agents such as Samuel Norman and James Lawson, suggests that Dundas was by reputation a connoisseur whose discerning taste was responsible for his commissioning of Robert Adam, but by and large we are left to assume that Adam himself was the distinguished talent responsible for the luxurious displays at 19, Arlington Street. What is evident in my research however, is that whilst Adam did design a number of pieces that were later crafted by Norman and Chippendale, and Dundas had a large collection of fine paintings, neither Dundas nor Adam deserve the full accolades given to them for the appearance of fine furniture at Arlington Street. The number of pieces conceived by and made in Norman's workshops far

outweigh those of Adam. Actual numbers of items made are not mentioned in Dundas' financial accounts, but these show significantly more was paid to Norman than Adam, and as Adam would have been paid more per piece due to his fame and reputation, we can deduce quite easily Norman's greater role in the creation of most of the furniture collection.²² As the Zetland/Dundas archive reveals, many other pieces were sourced by agents such as James Lawson, John Barbe, and one Monsieur Fortirquou [?]. Whilst I suggest that Dundas' choices for the goods displayed in his houses were questionable, what is perhaps hidden here is his knowledge and understanding of who was worthy of his patronage. My work focuses particularly on the furniture maker Samuel Norman, and at times questions the sole role of Robert Adam in the creation of 19, Arlington Street's redecoration. By extension, this also raises questions about Dundas' place in the commissioning of elite goods. What has to be recognised here is that Dundas may have left decisions to his wife or to various agents, first and foremost he did pay for the goods commissioned, and hence we can assume he was happy with those made. More importantly, he commissioned Robert Adam at an early part of the architect's career. Dundas allowed Adam to design the first examples of furniture of his career, and for Chippendale to make them. Dundas also purchased furniture from Samuel Norman, and this too was quite early in the cabinetmaker's career. The conclusion has to be made therefore that whilst Dundas was not necessarily always a man with a discerning eye for design and decoration, he was a man who understood and recognised talent on the rise. Adam would become a central figure in late-eighteenth-century architecture, and Samuel Norman was in the late-1760s, commissioned as frame-maker to the King.

Dundas was a man whose cultural aim in the 1760s, was to create a stage set by which his newly arrived standing could be shrouded by propriety. Focusing on the ways in which notions of respectability emerged in the late-seventeenth century and the whole of the eighteenth century, Woodrow D. Smith (2002) engages with the role that the display of material goods played in the outward expressions of gentility. From coffee houses to domestic spaces, Smith reveals that:

²² See NYCRO ZNK X 1/7/15 Accounts of Samuel Norman and NYCRO ZNK X 1/7/22 Scroll of accounts for Robert Adam

Gentility was an array of aristocratic practices, attitudes, social ideas, discourses, and systems of material and behavioural symbols that centred around what it meant to be a gentleman or gentlewoman (Smith, 2002: 224).

Sir Lawrence Dundas, was a man of influence, financially stable, and who mixed within the highest echelons of eighteenth-century society, so it would be prudent to assume that his consumption of taste echoed that of his elite peers. As larger elite society began to consume the Neo-Classical form in the 1760s, the social sphere in which Dundas now moved, was creating a visual language based initially on a new form of taste, and one that rapidly became imbued with a dialect based on enlightened logic. It is here therefore, that we can deduce that:

[As] some collected objects, by reason of the value attributed both to their intrinsic artistic and craft qualities and to their accumulated history, [these] seem to encapsulate the relationship of the European tradition [of antiquity] to the production of material meaning and so to collecting in practice (Pierce, 1995: 151).

Dundas' use of the classical form within 19, Arlington Street encapsulated meanings that spoke of his role as a politician and as part of the elite, coupled with the expected language of material enlightenment, the latter of which perhaps shrouded his birth position as part of the minor gentry. If we consider that one of the main considerations within eighteenth-century society centred on the notion that birth and family constituted respectability, then hand in hand went respectable behaviour, both physically and in regards to consumption. The ability to display reputable taste was central to Dundas' ambitions with his house, and during the 1760s, eighteenth-century society was obsessed with the notion that perhaps there were standards of taste that were rational and measurable, and in essence, classical.²³ This therefore, goes some way to explain why Dundas' London town house was decorated with a multitude of classical motifs, it was not fashion that spurred him to adopt the Neo-Classical in this property, it was firstly the need to display his new found visual language of social decency, and secondly to reveal that he was part of the enlightened elite. In this sense, Dundas' London home acquired the visual dialect of

²³ See Bayley, S. (1991) *Taste: The Secret Meaning of Things*; pp 12-15, Smith, W.D. (2002) *Consumption and the Making of Respectability 1600-1800* pp 224-233

his elite peers, many of whom were part of a long inherited place in society, and provided a suitable backdrop for his personal collection of paintings and objets d'art. Stylistically, Dundas' town house was a visual testament to the human figure, a manifestation of who he was, and a statement of his placement in the metropolitan locality. Whilst it is possible to read with meaning the choices of motif used in the decoration of his house, it is important to consider how his renovations occurred, and in doing so give a fuller picture of Dundas' aims in the creation of his modern house.

The architectural platform for the display of luxury and worldliness was an accepted method of expressing your rank, but status included more than wealth and power, as in the mid-eighteenth century this also included knowledge of the new world, both in its enlightened philosophical sense, and the real world in its physical sense. During the eighteenth century, society and its values and aspirations quickly changed, and similarly their creative output went through various transformations of shape, form and what they referred to as 'taste'. In some instances, it is possible to link the changes in society to what was being displayed within the house. For example, at a time when British culture was beginning to reconcile the notion of a definable Britishness with a more global and empire based outlook, a logical, sensible, and proportionate style was being adopted by the elite. The Neo-Classical was a rational taste which embodied in its ordered symmetry and cogent swirls, enlightened products for a civilised society. Adrian Forty (1984) argues that the classical style invigorated society with goods that forcibly manifested Britain's right to the title of 'the new Roman Empire'.²⁴ Logic, proportion and thoughtful reflection quickly replaced the continuous untamed curve of the Rococo and the flights of exotic fantasy within Chinoiserie. As such it was inevitable that the objects that filled those halls would become as expressive as the architecture itself, and the language within spoke of Dundas' enlightened philosophical sense, or perhaps his need to show this. The dialect within 19, Arlington Street was made stronger through the commissioning of an emerging force in Neo-Classical architecture and decoration, Robert Adam.

²⁴ See 'Neo-Classicism: an Antidote to Progress' in A. Forty *Objects of Desire: Design and Society Since 1750* London: Thames and Hudson, 1984 pp 13-28

The purchasing of 19, Arlington Street and his other properties at the same time indicated that the Dundas family were living within the highest financial echelons of eighteenth-century society. Both houses, and soon their North Riding estate at Aske, were redecorated according to the needs of the family in those areas. The smaller but nonetheless expensive city property in London was redecorated to 'woo the eye and mind away from the country estate', and in essence the town property differed greatly from the palatial mansion, and as A.A. Tait suggests '[The country house]... *dealt in family, continuity and territorial power*...[the town house]...*essentially a place of show*' (Porter in Stewart, 2009: 50). The conclusion to be made here equates with Dundas' political life, as his house at 19, Arlington Street was, like his attendance at Parliament, '*[O]ften temporary but always dazzling*'.

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