

**“Notes and Queries...” – That Wren Drawing**

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## **“Notes and Queries...” – That Wren Drawing**

In this article I will expand on work presented in ‘Haptic Insights’ (Fergusson Baugh 2018) and demonstrate the value of the methodologies proposed there on a case study reconstruction of the second Drury Lane theatre (1674) initially prepared for the THEATRON project . I will explore a history of this building through a procedural engagement with source material and the development of a virtual model. I will also explore how an apparently inconsequential inconsistency in the section can account for Langhans, Mulling and Koenig’s disagreement (and resolve which of them was right), and how a process of computer modelling suggests a haptic insight into a more human history of a drawing that has been forcefully torn up but retained and carefully conserved for 350 years.

Keywords: theatre, history, Sir Christopher Wren, Drury Lane, computer model

### **Reconstruction as Debate**

In *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture*, Marvin Carlson has noted that it was Brander Matthews’ intervention in the development of the study of theatre history as a discipline that asserted the importance of the study of theatrical space (Carlson 1989), and that focus on the physical nature of theatre is certainly one of the principles by which first theatre departments in the US (1924) and UK (1947) asserted the distinctiveness of their discipline. This early assertion of the importance of physical form manifested itself in a great deal of scholarly activity directed at acts of reconstruction during the middle part of the twentieth century. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the likes of Richard Southern, Richard (and Helen) Leacroft, Edward Langhans, Donald Mullin and Bruce Koenig, Robert Hume and Judith Milhouse produced an impressive catalogue of reconstructions of historical theatres, sometimes in consolidated volumes but more usually (and perhaps more importantly for scholarly debate) in the pages of discipline journals such as *Theatre Notebook*, *Theatre Survey* and the *Educational Theatre Journal*. The use of these journals to offer comment or rebuttal

through responding articles or ‘notes and queries’ sections appears to have been commonplace, and some of the debates engendered there were quite spirited. During the 1970s, the pages of *Theatre Notebook* became a forum for a ten year debate on the (sometimes vigorously) contested nature of the Dorset Gardens Theatre, precipitated by Langhans’ reconstruction published in *Theatre Survey* (Langhans 1972) that seems to have involved a significant section of the academic community<sup>1</sup>. Debates of this nature doubtlessly enriched the field as a whole, and were most animated where (as with Dorset Gardens) evidence was scant or contested. This article will focus on a similar debate on the nature of the second theatre on the site between Bridges Street and Drury Lane (1674) which invited contributions from Southern (1948), Leacroft (1951, 1973), Langhans (1964, 1966) and Mullin and Koenig (1966), a debate that was revisited by the work of David Thomas (1996, 1999) and THEATRON (2002) at the turn of this century.

In my article *Haptic Insights* published in the ‘On Models’ edition of this journal (Fergusson Baugh 2018) I explored the methodological value of computer reconstruction to the theatre historian and made reference to my own reconstruction of this theatre. In that article I explored the ways in which the **process** of computer modelling requires the researcher to account for their choices in more holistic (and consequently, more complete) ways, and that this mode of engagement often results in moments of intensely human, embodied understanding of the histories in questions as it requires the researcher to not only ask what the architect did but also why and (crucially) how. In this article I would like to examine that reconstruction in detail, exploring the history of the building through a procedural engagement with source material and the development of a virtual model (Fergusson 2007). I will also explore

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<sup>1</sup> See De Marley (1974), Spring (1977), Hume (1979), Spring (1980) and Hume (1982).

how an apparently inconsequential inconsistency in the section can account for Southern, Leacroft, Langhans, Mulling and Koenig's disagreement (and resolve which of them was right), and how a process of computer modelling requires the researcher to develop a degree of intimacy with source material that suggests 'haptic insights' into intensely human histories as processes of reconstruction come close to performances of re-enactment.

### **The Second Drury Lane Theatre – History and Context**

The second theatre on this sight occupies an important position in the history of English theatre. Following a brief location of theatrical activity in converted tennis courts in the early Restoration period (on the French model) both Patent companies built new theatres on the late 1660s, but it was the theatre at Drury Lane that was to become the model for a new English theatre that placed an emphasis on the close co-location of actor and audience and a dramaturgical focus on theatre artifice long after continental theatre had begun its transition to pictorial forms that aimed to 'transport' the audience<sup>2</sup>.

Very little pictorial evidence of the 1674 structure remains, so a detailed exploration of available evidence and research process is necessary in order to establish the status of knowledge claims relating to this reconstruction. My reconstruction is based on the Wren drawing of a playhouse section (Figure 1). Since the textual evidence is of variable reliability and often contradictory<sup>3</sup>, it is not possible to produce a

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<sup>2</sup> For an exploration of notions of 'transportation' in romantic scenography see Baugh's essay

"Baroque to Romantic Theatre" (in Wiles and Dymkowski 2013)

<sup>3</sup> Cibber for example clearly stated that in 1690 at least, the pit benches were curved, while the Wren section clearly shows straight benches. Mullin and Koenig (1966) use this discrepancy to dismiss Edward Langhans' conjectural reconstruction (Langhans 1964) on the grounds that it departs from the Wren section in this regard - though elsewhere in the article they also dismiss it for **not** departing from the Wren section.

reconstruction that can strictly conform to all of the evidence, though we will see the ways in which treating evidence as materials for making a computer reconstruction facilitates a more robust form of conjecture than was available to early reconstructors<sup>4</sup>.

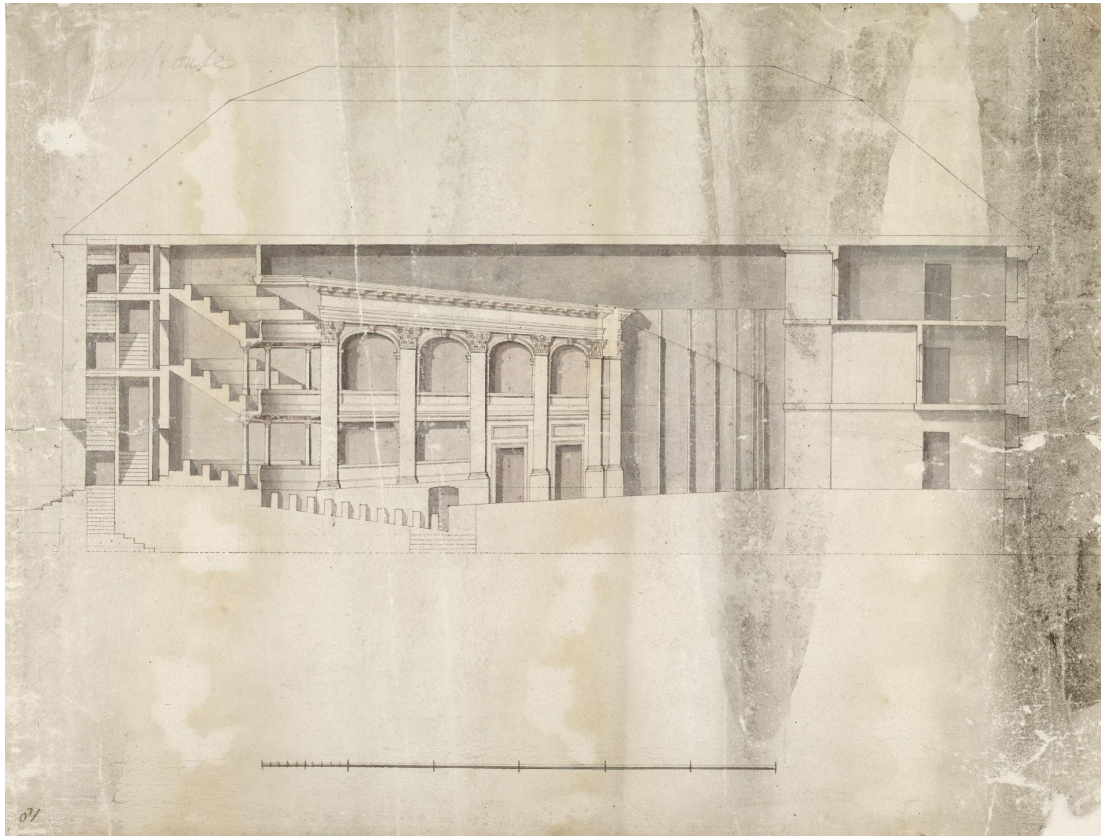


Figure 1. Section of an unidentified 'Play House'. All Souls College, Oxford available at <http://library.asc.ox.ac.uk/wren/>

All reconstructions of this space have been based on a drawing in the Wren holdings of All Souls College, Oxford, simply titled 'play house' (Figure 1). This drawing rediscovered by Hamilton Bell in 1913 has been adopted by most subsequent commentators as Wren's original (or at least initial) design for the theatre that opened in 1674. No contemporary accounts identify Wren as the architect of this space (indeed in

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<sup>4</sup> Tim Ingold characterises this relationship the maker has with material objects as

'correspondence' rather than interrogation (Ingold 2013).

1673/4 he was intensely occupied with preparation for the reconstruction of St Paul's Cathedral). The tradition that associates him with this theatre is founded on a passing comment in Colley Cibber's *Apology for the Life of the Actor* (Cibber 1740) the provenance of which has been questioned because of its apparent foundation on theatrical gossip of from the 1690s when Cibber joined the company. Bell's tentative association of this drawing with the 1674 theatre is based in part on the apparent dimensions of the plan which indicate a length and width (implied by the pitch of the mansard roof) that closely match the known dimensions of the building plot and this (along with Cibber's comment) bring some level of circumstantial security to the attribution.

Scholarly debate among the early commentators related to the nature of the missing plan that would have accompanied the Wren section. The principle matter for this debate has historically related to whether the Wren section is representative of a fan shaped or 'U' shaped auditorium<sup>5</sup>. Southern (1952, 1962), Leacroft (1973) and Thomas (1996) all interpret the section as fan shaped and Langhans (Langhans 1964) and Mullin and Koenig (1966) hold that the fan was added during the 1775 remodelling project by the Adam brothers. All commentators use the application of contextual information to support their conjecture but most assume that the plan contains less technical information than it really does, and make unnecessary conjecture where details of the

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<sup>5</sup> The arguments for each form are consistent across all commentators. Supporters of the fan shape cite the diminishing perspective apparent in the section, and note that convention suggests that this theme was continued in plan. Supporters of the 'U' shape cite Benjamin Wyatt's claim that "the original theatres in Drury Lane ...were all flat sided" (Wyatt 1813, 34), though the Adam ceiling designs demonstrate that Wyatt was at least in part mistaken in this respect.

plan can be interpolated<sup>6</sup> from key information that is explicit in the section, for example, as Bell noted, the pitch of the Mansard roof evident in the section can be used to interpolate the relative width of the building.

A close examination of the Wren section suggests that in order to develop a sense of the plan, one needs to establish only two key pieces of additional information and both relate to the balcony fronts. With a clear sense of the width of the auditorium where the side boxes meet the balconies and a supposition about the underlying geometrical principals adopted by Wren it is possible to confirm significant elements of the plan and this is where the propositional nature of the computer model is particularly useful because in order to do this, one must first choose to model either the fan shaped or the ‘U’ shaped plan.

Bell suggested a width of the exterior of the building based on the pitch of the roof but there is other evidence for the dimensions of the interior of the building. In 1775, David Garrick (then manager) engaged the Adam brothers to remodel the interior of the space and two ceiling designs remain in the collection at the Sir John Soane Museum (Figure 2). These designs clearly show a fan shaped auditorium and can be used to establish a great deal of information about the missing plan (and Southern, Leacroft and Thomas have all done so). Supporters of the ‘U’ shaped theory argued that the fan shaped auditorium was part of the alterations made in 1775. The first proposition for this reconstruction has assumed a fan shaped auditorium, the process of reconstruction offered strong suggestions (and in final analysis, most likely confirmation) that this was the correct choice.

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<sup>6</sup> I use the term ‘interpolate’ here in its mathematical sense to indicate data that can be securely established by an extension of known factors rather than a reliance on conjecture – which would render ‘extrapolated’ data.

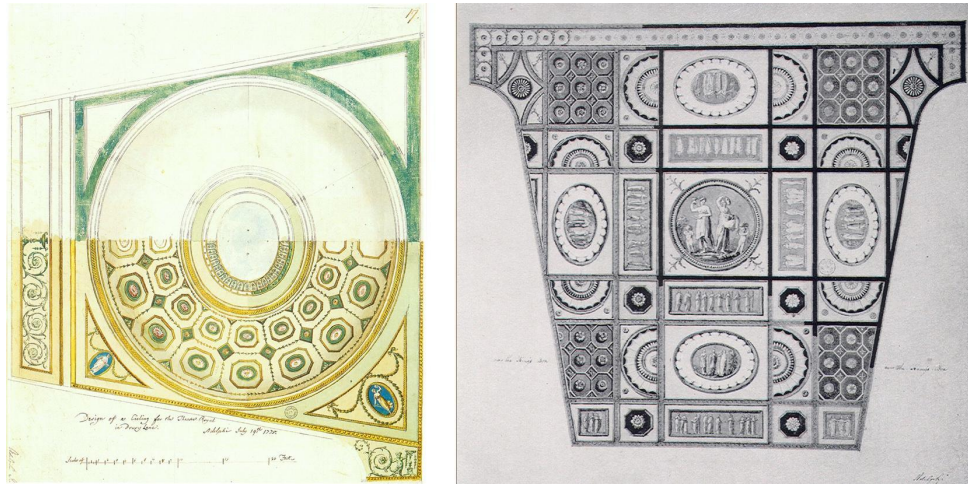


Figure 2. Two designs for the ceiling of Drury Lane Theatre. Robert Adam, 1775.

Photo: © Sir John Soane's Museum, London

## The Plan

This initial reconstruction then draws upon a minimal core of pictorial evidence to establish the plan (reserving other contextual evidence for confirmation); the Wren section, an engraving of a performance of *Ariadne* (Figure 3) which was performed at Drury Lane in 1674, and the pair of Robert Adam scale designs for the ceiling of the building (Adam 1775) undertaken for his 1775 refurbishment. As we will see, the precise match of elements of this known Drury Lane ceiling with the Wren section further indicates the likelihood of that drawing's connection with Drury Lane theatre.

In order to devise a plan for the theatre based on Wren's section and the Adam ceiling it is also necessary to make an assumption about the underlying geometry of the space. The section clearly indicates that there are a number of curved surfaces (balcony fronts, gallery benches etc) that will be expressed as arcs on the plan, and for the purposes of any reconstruction one must propose a method for arriving at the eccentricity of the ellipse on which these arcs sit.

For a number of reasons, it seems appropriate to assume that Wren proposed a plan that was based on circular rather than elliptical form. Wren's neoclassical

credentials are clear and his strong debt to the work of Andrea Palladio is evident in many of his major works... not least in his original plan for St Paul's completed the previous year in 1673. The 'Great Model' for St Paul's, approved by Charles II but rejected by the chapter of the cathedral was based on the form of a symmetrical Greek cross (favoured by continental architects and evident in the works of Palladio) and strongly featured circular forms, indeed, this was reason for its rejection. The model was criticised for not being of a proper 'cathedral-form', but it is likely that it was the form's strong association with Catholicism that underpinned this criticism. Wren himself was not a Catholic so we may assume that his interest in the form was of a purely architectural/geometrical nature and he seems to have taken this rejection particularly hard. Wren's son (also named Christopher) related some important aspects of this incident in the family history he compiled that was subsequently published as *Parentalia* by his own son, Stephen Wren. Christopher Wren (the son) is very clear that to his death, Wren the architect regarded this 'Great Model' for St Paul's as his finest work, and that the rejection of the model impacted on his attitude to his ongoing work in two ways. Firstly, that from 1673 Wren engaged in his work on the execution of the revised 'Warrant Design' with significantly less 'cheerfulness and satisfaction' than he was used to (Wren 1750, 282) and that secondly, he resolved to never again allow his designs to be subjected to public scrutiny as this 'subjected his business... to incompetent judges' (283). These observations lend circumstantial support to the notion that in 1674 Sir Christopher Wren might have temporarily absented himself from his exclusive Royal warrant to work on the reconstruction of St Paul's Cathedral in order to anonymously provide a plan for the new theatre in Drury Lane. This represents a moment of 'haptic insight' for the researcher, generated by the need to confirm the underlying geometry of Wren's plan. They also indicate that in 1673 at least, Wren was

prepared to stake his professional reputation on the purity of the circular form in neoclassical architecture (it would appear that when it came to ellipses, Wren was not given to eccentricity).

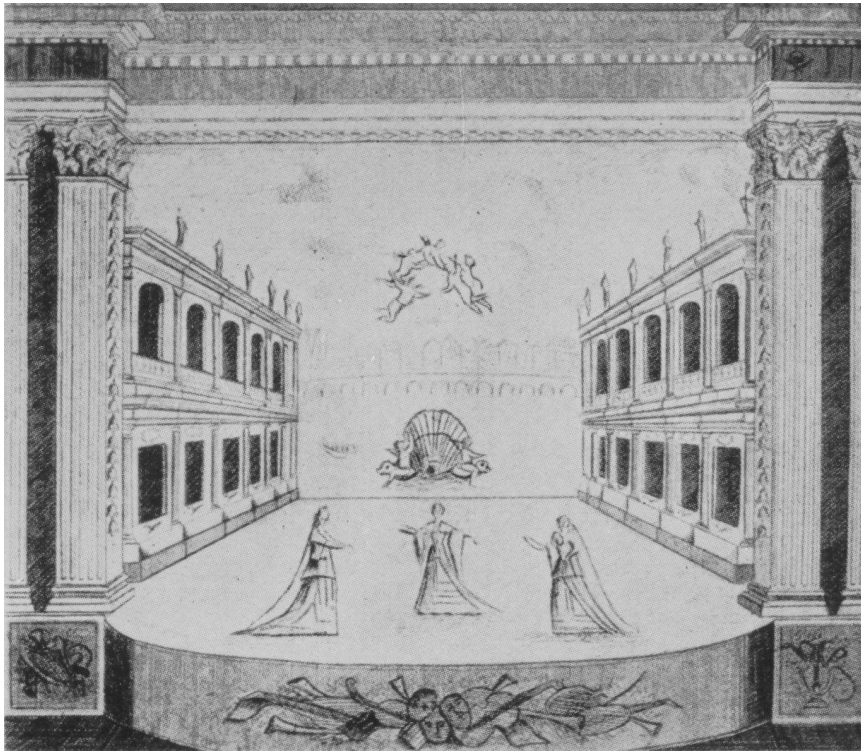


Figure 3. Setting for Grabut's opera *Ariadne*, (Parrin 1674), The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

The plan then is interpolated only from the Wren section, the Adam ceiling and the assumption that Wren was working to a circular form<sup>7</sup>. In order to minimise the possibility of conformation bias, the known width of the plot and geometrical analysis

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<sup>7</sup> This assumption is further supported by the fact that the maximum width of the auditorium suggested by the Adam ceiling (which also corresponds to the width suggested by Bell if one assumes that the all of the exterior walls are of equal thickness) exactly corresponds to the length of auditorium on the Wren section from rear wall to proscenium – indicating an auditorium forming a perfect, square rather than elongated rectangle.

of the finished plan have been omitted from the process of developing the plan in order to be used to check its accuracy on completion. The plan has been established as follows.

The Adam ceiling design indicates that the auditorium was recessed at its widest point, this is manifested as ‘lugs’ on the designs. These are most clearly observed on the second (rejected) design. Matching the scale of the Adam drawing to the implied scale of the Wren drawing, it is clear that the length of the ceiling matches the length of Wren’s auditorium, and that the ‘lugs’ of the Adam ceiling fit exactly in the short flat ceiling space at the rear of the auditorium before the roof is raised to accommodate the upper balcony<sup>8</sup>.

The following account of process is available as an animation in the online version of this article. From the section, it is possible to measure the depth of the arc of the balcony fronts. Thanks to the correspondence noted above it is possible to also measure their width from the ceiling design - at the point at which the ‘lugs’ intersect with the diagonal boundary. Taken together this means that we can establish three points on the curve of the (assumed) circle that describes the balcony fronts. From these three points we can interpolate the centre of the circle and by extension (which sits between the upstate stage doors), the plan of all of the concentric circles of the gallery benches and the forestage (Figure 4). It is true that Colley Cibber described the forestage as having a “semi-oval figure” (Cibber and Lowe 1889, 85) but we shall return to this apparent discrepancy later.

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<sup>8</sup> The correlation of these measurements further supports the proposition that the Adam brothers did not engage in structure changes in the general fan-shape of the auditorium.

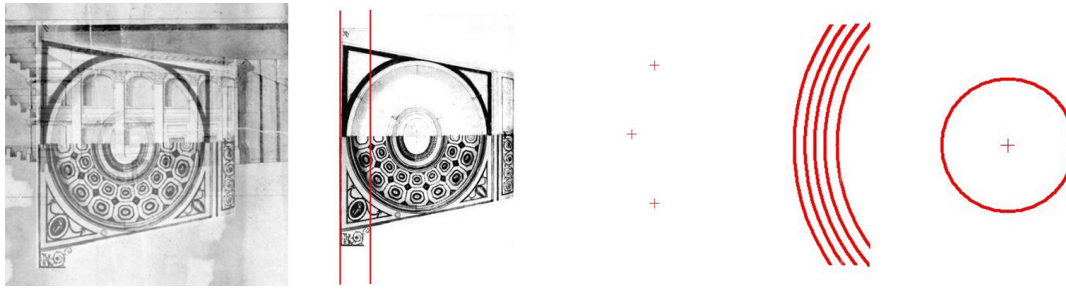


Figure 4. Establishing the curved elements of the plan – Fergusson 1999

It is worth pausing here to examine an ‘architectural inconsistency’ noted by both Langhans and Mullin and Koenig. Computer reconstruction presents the researcher with opportunities to explore alternative interpretations of the available evidence and an holistic experimental environment in which the impact of various choices can be seen on the whole model – this is Ingold’s notion of ‘correspondence’ in action, as we will see, in this model, judgements about the shape of the balconies are ‘answered’ by an increased strain on the interpretation of Wren’s arrangement of the load bearing pillars under the rear galleries. While, it is true that there is no plan or transverse section available, Wren clearly marked the longitudinal position of these essential structural pillars. Langhans notes that in his ‘U’ shaped reconstruction, these pillars meet the balcony fronts in a way that leave them unequally distributed with insufficient support in the central section. In a reconstruction based on a circular form, these pillars are equally distributed, indeed Wren’s pillars are **only** equally distributed if they are placed on an arc of a circle that has a centre between the upstage stage doors and is the concentric sibling of a circle that conforms to the width suggested by the Adam ceiling (again, supporting the deployment of this evidence within the reconstruction).

Having established the curved lines of the plan (and a stronger sense that the Adam designs reflect the original form of the building), it is possible to establish the

line of the side walls from the ceiling design. Aside from the conventions of diminishing perspective cited by Southern and Leacroft, there are in fact a number of reasons why the fan shaped auditorium seems more likely. As we have noted, Mullin and Koenig's claim that the fan was added during the Adam renovations is based on Bejamine Wyatt's assertion in 1813 (1966, 187) There are two significant reasons why this seems unlikely. Firstly, a contemporary account of the Adam remodelling emphatically asserts that there were no structural alterations:

At first View I was a good deal surprised to find that by some means or other the ingenious Artists had contrived to give an Appearance of greater Magnitude to the House. I knew it was *not* rebuilt, but only repaired. *The Public Advertiser*, 30 September 1775 (reproduced in Sheppard 1970, 46).

Secondly, while there were a number of alteration projects between 1674 and 1775, they were all carried out with the aim of increasing the seating capacity of the house or in one instance during Garrick management, to remove audience from the stage. The introduction of a fan shaped auditorium by narrowing at the stage end would effectively replace pit benches with box seats and consequently **reduce** the overall capacity. The alternative proposition, that they created the fan by widening the rear of the auditorium suggests that prior to remodelling the seats at the sides of the rear amphitheatre<sup>9</sup> had impossibly poor sightlines, being tucked behind the side boxes. Since (according to a contemporary visitor) these seats were occupied by "Persons of the best Quality", this seems equally unlikely (Misson and Ozell, 219-220).

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<sup>9</sup> David Thomas has identified the lower gallery behind the pit as an area that should correctly be described as the 'amphitheatre' and closely associates it with traditions in French theatre architecture (Thomas 1999).

A close inspection of the Wren section also offers additional evidence. Wren's shading is reasonably consistent throughout and seems to be suggestive of 'ideal' light not situated within the architectural space. The shadows for the pit benches are consistent in their angle and length – if the 'light' existed within the structure, one would expect that the shadows of the front benches would be longer and higher than those of the back benches but this is not the case. The shadows from the dentils on the cornice of the side walls and the keystones of the arches gradually lengthen from back to front. Since we have established that this does not indicate their **location** in relation to the 'light' it must indicate a changing **attitude** in relation to the light and a convergence of the side walls.

A critical final piece of evidence exists in a drawing prepared by the Adam studio for publicity purposes following the 1775 remodelling (Figure 10). The image clearly shows that entry to the pit entrance is via a rectangular door, but that this door is set within a blocked off archway. This clearly indicates that in respect of the side walls at least, their work was to renovate existing structure and not build new. The archway evident in the drawing is of the same shape and location as the one proposed by Wren (perhaps offering final confirmation of the status of the Adam ceiling design within this reconstruction).

Having established the lines of the curves and the fan shape from the Adam design, it is a simple matter of transcription to establish the transverse lines of the pit benches, pilasters, doors and arches, stage front, rake and setting (Figure 5). The termination of the gallery benches can be interpolated from the Adam ceiling design but they are also clearly marked on the section.

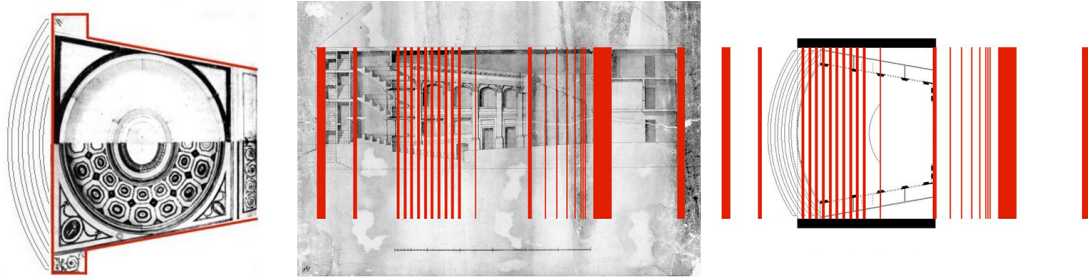


Figure 5. Establishing the straight elements of the plan – Fergusson 1999

And this is where the reconstruction reveals its most important insight. In respect of the termination of the benches of the amphitheatre it is not possible to reconcile the section with **any** interpretation of the plan because there is a mistake on the Wren section<sup>10</sup>. Once spotted the error is obvious to the viewer but in this case, it was revealed only because the computer based reconstructive process requires the researcher to account for evidence in a way that is holistically consistent.

Having established the centre of the arc that describes all of the benches, it is clear that the points at which Wren terminates the benches of the upper galleries also confirms the width of the auditorium (leaving room for a small access aisle). This is not the case in the amphitheatre where the fourth (and rearmost) bench has been terminated at the point where the second bench should end. A simple comparison with the upper galleries indicates that this should not be the case (Figure 6). If (and here we must remember that this is an assumption) the theatre is built on a circular form, as it is drawn, this back bench extends significantly beyond the walls of the theatre.

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<sup>10</sup> In truth, it is not the only mistake on the section. The evident ambiguity at the top of the proscenium is the result of a correction. New paper has been patched over an error, the new form has been ‘roughed’ in pencil and partly inked in before the drawing has been abandoned.

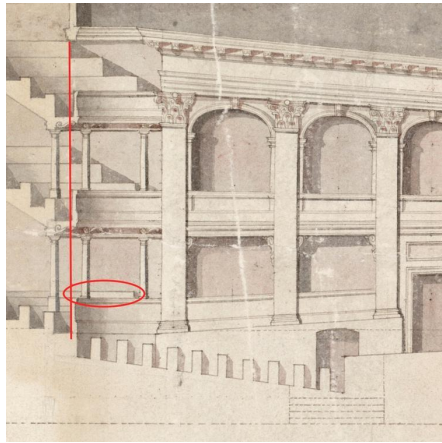


Figure 6. Drafting error on Wren section

It seems likely that this is an error caused by the fact that the much shallower rake of the amphitheatre means that the second and third benches are obscured by the balcony front. A close examination of the section supports this as construction points are visible and aligned as though all of the benches in all of the galleries have been marked up together. Working from the second (visible) bench backwards naturally places the first construction point where it is easy to mistake it for the termination of the rear bench.

If the theatre were constructed around an oval form (and Cibber claimed that it was) it would be possible to conceive of a plan where this is not an error, but the oval would need to be an extremely odd one and those (expensive) amphitheatre seats would have a somewhat restricted view. It is possible that this apparent contradiction was seen by Langhans as evidence that the auditorium could only be 'U' shaped but he has only been able to accommodate it by placing these benches against the side wall, perpendicular to the stage and almost completely obscure by the side boxes.

Here, we may be presented with another moment of 'haptic insight'. The section is close to completion. It has been drawn, inked and shaded. An error has been spotted at the proscenium. The error has been patched, pencilled and partially inked, at which point, work on the drawing has apparently stopped. The correction has not been

completed, the scale has not been marked up and the drawing lacks any text of attribution or authorship. It has however been torn through, twice. Again, a close inspection of the drawing provides additional insight. The tears cross at a single point. The downward tear has been executed with more force than the cross tear (which is less straight and shows more stratification). All of this can be accounted for if the first tear is carried out in anger (or frustration) and both pieces transferred to the dominant hand which naturally aligns the straight edges before a second tear is completed (with less anger or frustration – resignation perhaps). This is of course conjecture, but what is certain is that the drawing has then been retained and exceptionally well preserved. The drawing was originally part of a large collection held for reference by Wren at the Office of Works at Whitehall and retained by him on his retirement. The collection was subsequently broken up and sold by his son before being acquired and (partially) reassembled by the custodians of All Souls College, Oxford (see Geraghty 2007).

If we accept that this discrepancy is indeed an error then we can accept the proposed model, correct the error for the plan and need only establish the width of the proscenium opening. Unfortunately, there is no method to definitively establish this from available evidence, but the *Aridane* engraving (Figure 3) offers guidance. As noted above, it is not possible to reconcile all of the evidence as there are some contradictions. In this case we see a proscenium that comes to the front of the forestage which was clearly not the case. Mullin and Koenig have suggested that these might be painted side wings but it is equally likely that it is an example of a kind of artistic licence that was commonplace in such engravings<sup>11</sup>. The scenery is depicted as a coherent three

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<sup>11</sup> It is similar licence in only images of the interior of Dorset Gardens that energised the debate around that reconstruction. The surviving illustrations for Elkanah Settle's *The Empress of*

dimensional reality rather than observing the reality of the construction of perspectival settings and the image includes a degree of adornment to the front of stage that was unlikely to have been present as the austerity of the house was a deliberate feature of the design, contrasting it directly with the lavishly decorated Dorset Gardens Theatre<sup>12</sup>. With these caveats in mind we might then observe in the image the idea of a proscenium reflecting Wren's architectural style and of similar width to the curved part of a forestage that Colley Cibber describes a 'semi-oval'. From a strictly geometrical perspective, the plan developed here (Figure 7) does not have a semi-oval form but geometrical pedantry aside, such a phrase could also loosely describe the quarter circle suggested by the section. Indeed, a close examination of the *Ariadne* engraving reveals an ambiguity in this regard, where the forestage is shown as both semi-oval (on the left hand side) and quarter circle (on the right). If one reads this image as simply lacking a forestage, it shows that the front of the stage had a curved section rising within a straighter front line and that the width of the curve matched the width of the proscenium opening. Both of which are consonant with the proposed plan. So the form of the forestage here satisfies both the Wren section and (broadly speaking) Cibber's description.

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*Morocco* famously present the stage at Theatre as significantly taller and thinner than is plausible (Settle and Dolle 1673).

<sup>12</sup> Dryden's prologue on opening the theatre made references to the 'plain-built house' and the "mean ungilded stage".

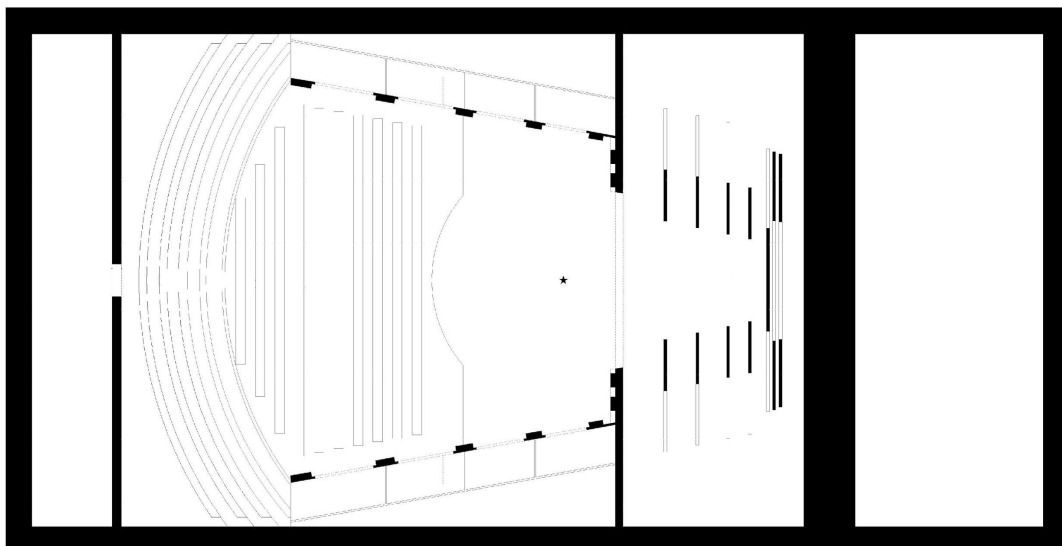


Figure 7. Conjectural plan for the Wren section. Fergusson 1999.

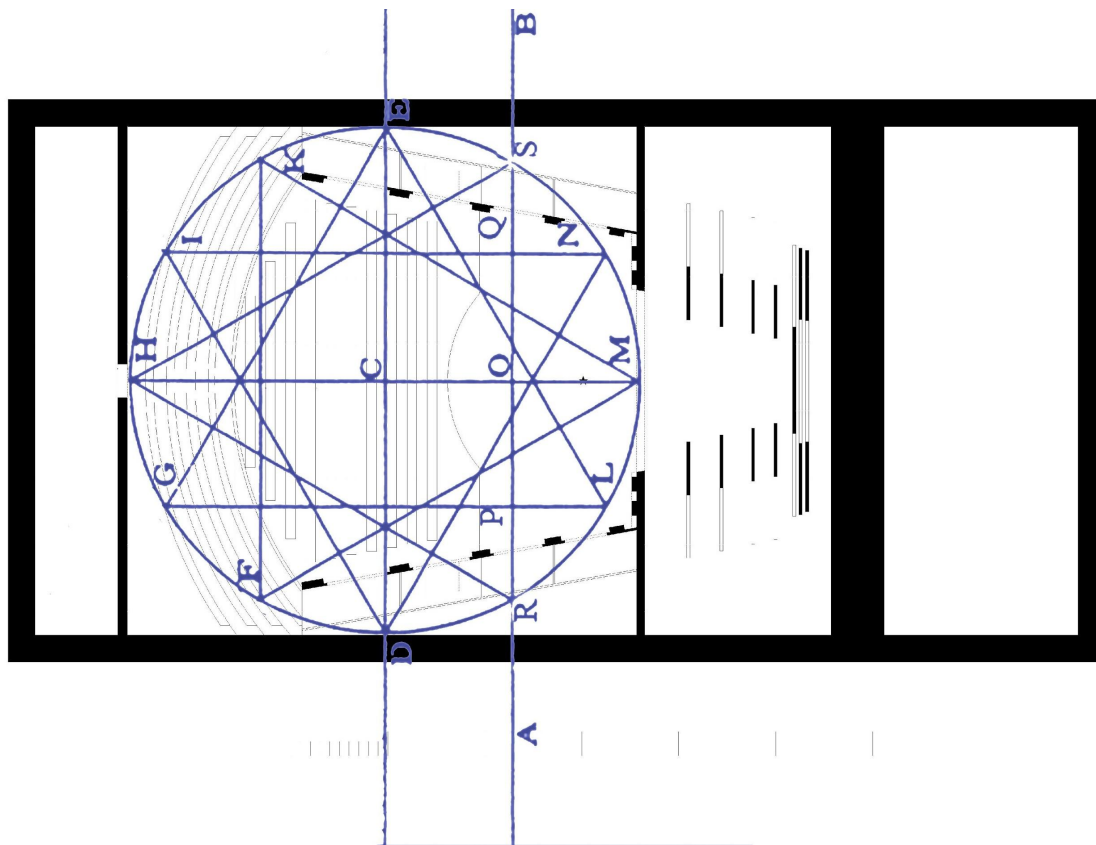
More importantly, a plan arrived at in this way also conforms to additional evidence not used in the reconstruction. This plan does indeed have an overall width of almost exactly 58 feet as Bell predicted from the slope of the roof on the Wren section and which is confirmed by the known dimensions of the plot. Furthermore, a *post hoc* analysis (Figure 8) based on Palladio's interpretation of Vitruvius' plan for a theatre (published in Barbaro 1556, 171) shows that this plan significantly conforms (with licence) to principles of Palladian architecture so evident in Wren's other work.

The location of a circle within the square of the auditorium and divided on (Palladian) Vitruvian lines<sup>13</sup> demonstrates that this geometry describes a number of significant features of the proposed plan (Figure 8). The lines MF and MK indicate both the width of the curved section of the forestage, and the end of the auditorium fan, the points G and I indicate the diameter of the rear gallery benches, K and F the second benches and the intersection of HS and HR with ID and GE the front benches. The balcony fronts are indicated by the intersection of FK with IN and GL. The centre and

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<sup>13</sup> Vitruvius' work did not contain any illustrations of his plan for a theatre but Palladio prepared an diagrammatic interpretation of the text for Barbaro's translation.

edge of the opening of the first arch is described by the points at which the side walls intersect with lines coming from D and E. The pit entrance is described by similar intersections. The line AB (which for Viruvius marks the *Scaenae*) on this plan sits within the main downstage actor entrances. The centre of all of the circles on the plan lies in the centre of a form extending point 'M' that strongly evokes the masonic square and compass emblem and places the geometrical focus of the seating at the point traditionally occupied in that emblem by the letter 'G' the significance of which has been debated but it has been suggested that it possibly refers to the value of geometry to the order<sup>14</sup>.



<sup>14</sup> The question of whether Wren was a mason has been debated. Until the mid-nineteenth century all commentators listed him not only as a member but as a Grand Master of the order. The debate is complex, he was clearly honoured in some way by the order for his work on St Paul's in 1691 but the nature of this honour has subsequently been contested.

Figure 8. Plan with Vitruvian analysis. Fergusson 2018.

Given the many ways in which the Wren section conforms to other evidence in ways that facilitate an uncomplicated reconstruction of the 1674 Drury Lane Theatre (with the exception of the noted error), it might at this stage be worth revisiting the provenance of Cibber's claim that Wren was the architect. The theatre opened when Cibber was in infancy and his earliest experience of the theatre was as a young man in the early 1690s. There are no other accounts, contemporary or otherwise that make similar claims and Cibber's assertion was made in the 1740s, in passing and only when criticising alterations made in the 1690s when he joined the company:

Spectators who may remember what Form the Drury-Lane Theatre stood in about forty Years ago, before the old Patentee, to make it hold more Money, took it in his Head to alter it, it were but Justice to lay the original Figure which Sir Christopher Wren first gave it (Cibber 1740, 365)

The statement and context does indeed carry a strong sense of theatrical gossip, but there is an alternative narrative. Colley Cibber's father Caius Cibber was a sculptor of Dutch origin who found himself in a position of unique opportunity following the fire of London as guilds relaxed rules restricting the admission of foreign craftsmen. He quickly established himself as an architectural sculptor of some repute and was engaged by Sir Christopher Wren on two projects, St Paul's Cathedral, where he was responsible for the frieze on the south portico depicting London as phoenix rising from the ashes and on the renovations to Hampton Court Palace. While it is unlikely that he was working with Wren in 1674 (the south portico was a later addition and Cibber himself spent some time in debtors prison in the 1670s), he was certainly working very closely with Wren in 1690 on Hampton Court Palace, precisely when the young Colley went to work at Drury Lane. The possibility that Cibber's claim was based not on theatrical

gossip but on family association gives it significantly more credence and should give greater weight to his opinion of the original theatre:

By this Original Form, the usual Station of the Actors, in almost every Scene, was advanc'd at least ten Foot nearer to the Audience than they now can be... But when the Actors were in Possession of that forwarder Space to advance upon, the Voice was then more in the Centre of the House<sup>15</sup>, so that the most distant Ear had scarce the least Doubt or Difficulty in hearing what fell from the weakest Utterance: All Objects were thus drawn nearer to the Sense; every painted Scene was stronger; every grand Scene and Dance more extended; every rich or fine-coloured Habit had a more lively Lustre (Cibber 1740, 365-366)

The reconstruction of this space (Figure 9) then demonstrates that the 1674 Drury Lane theatre was a small, intimate theatre with a genuine sense of shared space between actors and audience, in which the forestage does not relegate the importance of the scenography by foregrounding the actor, but energises it by offering the forward space as a 'bridge' between scenography and audience. A central characteristic of English theatre that lasted for well over a hundred years.

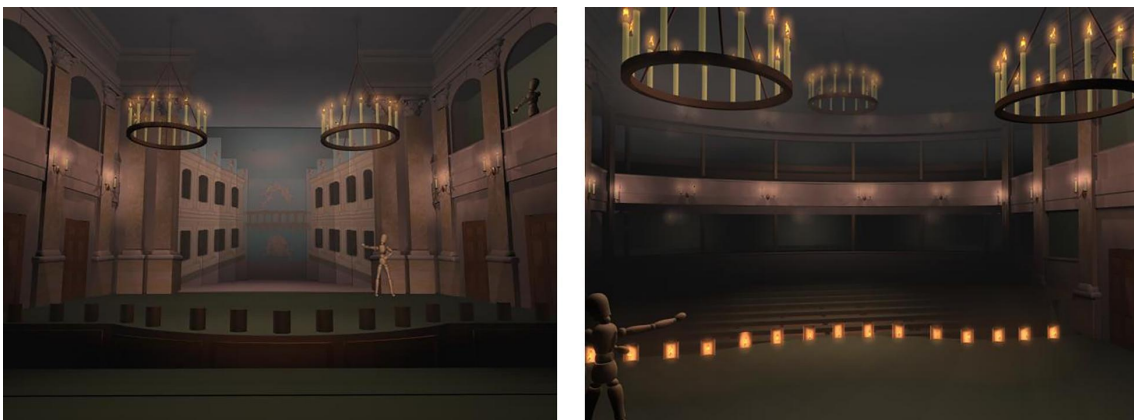


Figure 9. Reconstruction based on the Wren section – Fergusson 1999

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<sup>15</sup> The reconstructed plan shows that the centre stage position between the upstage doors is quite literally the centre of the seating.

In 1698, a visitor from France, Henri Misson described the interior, atmosphere and audience of the theatre:

The Pit is an Amphitheatre, filled with Benches without Backboards and adorn'd and cover'd with green Cloth. Men of Quality, particularly the younger Sort, some ladies of Reputation and Vertue, and abundance of Damsels that haunt for Prey, sit all together in this Place, Higgledy-piggledy, chatter, toy, play, hear, hear not. Farther up, against the Wall, under the first Gallery, and just opposite to the Stage, rises another Amphitheatre, which is take up by Persons of the best Quality, among whom are generally very few Men. The galleries, whereof there are only two Rows, are fill'd with none but ordinary People, particularly the Upper one (Misson and Ozell, 219-220)

There are few details known about the alterations which took place between 1764 and 1775 when Robert Adam remodelled the interior of the theatre. We do know that Garrick removed the audience from the stage and that there were some alterations to the boxes to recover the lost revenue. It is clear however from a comparison between the Adam engraving of the new interior and the computer reconstruction (Figure 10) that while there have been significant alterations to the arrangement of boxes, and the rear of the auditorium has been extended beyond the original square designed by Wren, the central **structure** of the auditorium remained much as it was in 1674. Perhaps more importantly, the **process** by which this conclusion is reached contributes enhanced understanding of the human histories involved and provides more than circumstantial evidence that suggests that the Wren section really can be accepted as a design for the second Drury Lane.



Figure 10. The interior of the auditorium in 1775. From R and J Adam *The Works in Architecture*. Photo: © Sir John Soane's Museum, London and computer reconstruction of the 1674 structure – Fergusson 1999

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