

Thomas Wood and his Workshop

D. G. VAISEY

THE broad outlines of the life and works of Thomas Wood, the 17th-century Oxford stone-cutter, master mason and architect, are well known from the dictionaries of H. M. Colvin and Rupert Gunnis and from the articles of Mrs. J. C. Cole.¹ Details of the lives of such craftsmen are, however, sometimes very imprecise and, true to form, we have little hard fact about the life of the man who has been called the 'most elegant of 17th-century Oxford sculptors'.² We do not, for instance, know the date of his birth. We know from the parish registers of St. Michael at the Northgate³ that he died on 22 February 1694/5 and was buried in the church on 26 February, and the register states that he was 'aged 60 years'. However, a floor-slab in the church recorded that he died in his 52nd year,⁴ and this is probably nearer the truth, since, when he entered into a marriage bond on 15 April 1668 he gave his age as 'abt. 22'.⁵ It seems probable therefore that he was born between 1644 and 1646.

Writers have understandably concentrated on his work as a carver and architect, and have quarried the archives of the university and the diocese for information about his work in St. Mary's church in 1676 and the Old Ashmolean from 1679 to 1683, his rebuilding of the bishop's palace at Cuddesdon in 1679 and the tower of Deddington church from 1683 to 1685,⁶ his carving of the monument to Francis Junius in St. George's chapel at Windsor in 1679 and his work on Carfax conduit in 1686 and 1687. None of the authorities, however, appear to have noticed that Wood was also manciple of Balliol College.

The college register records that Thomas Wood was admitted to the offices of *promus et obsonator* there on 9 July 1686 in the place of Edmund Bradford who had recently resigned,⁷ and his signature occurs frequently in the bursar's buttery books at Balliol from that date until his death. After 1695 the name Thomas Wood continues to figure in the buttery books as manciple until the last quarter of

¹ H. M. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of English Architects, 1660-1840* (1954), 693-4; Rupert Gunnis, *Dictionary of British Sculptors, 1660-1851* (1953), 440; Mrs. J. C. Cole, 'William Byrd, Stonecutter and Mason', *Oxoniensia*, xiv (1949), 63; 'The Painting or Staining of Marble as Practised by William Byrd of Oxford and Others', *Oxoniensia*, xvii/xviii (1952/53), 193; 'The Building of the Second Palace at Cuddesdon', *Oxoniensia*, xxiv (1959), 49.

² Mrs. J. C. Cole, 'Carfax Conduit', *Oxoniensia*, xxix/xxx (1964/65), 149.

³ The original register is at St. Michael's church: a transcript is in the Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Oxon. d. 288.

⁴ I am indebted to Mr. H. M. Colvin for this information. The floor-slab cannot now be traced, since, following the fire in 1953 the church was floored in parquet.

⁵ *Allegations for Marriage Licences issued by the Dean and Chapter of Westminster, 1558-1699 . . .*, Harleian Society 23 (1886), 148.

⁶ To the references given by H. M. Colvin about Deddington should be added MS. Oxf. dioc. pps. c. 92, fol. 17.

⁷ Balliol College Archives, Register 1682-1781. In the register the name is spelt Woods.

1719, and in the following year a note in the hand of John Baron, the Master of Balliol, dated 29 February 1719/20, is stuck into the college register recording the nomination of Fanshaw Wearg 'into the places of Butler and Manciple, which Thomas Wood, lately deceased, held in this College'. These entries led Andrew Clark⁸ to assume that the same Thomas Wood was manciple from 1686 until 1719. But it is apparent from the parish registers of St. Michael that the Thomas Wood who was buried on 20 October 1719 was the son of Thomas Wood, the mason, and had been born to his wife, Alice, on 22 January 1678/9; he must therefore have succeeded his father as manciple in 1695 without leaving any trace in the college register.⁹

Thomas Wood, the mason, was sometimes termed 'of the university of Oxford'.¹⁰ Both his work for the university and his position at Balliol would have entitled him to privileged status as a servant to the university, although there is no evidence that he was ever matriculated as a privileged person. However, when he died intestate it was in the Chancellor's court that his widow sought administration of his goods, and in that court also that her own will was proved in 1700. Administration of Wood's estate was granted to his widow on 15 March 1694/5,¹¹ and it is evident that the estate had not been completely wound up when the widow died some 5½ years later, for on 12 October 1700 the daughter, Alice, entered into a bond to complete the administration.¹² It is interesting that in none of these documents is Wood termed 'stone-cutter' or 'mason': he is referred to as 'late whilst he lived manciple of Balliol College in Oxon'.

Six months after the first grant of administration, on 11 September 1695, the widow exhibited in the Chancellor's court a probate inventory of Wood's movable goods. This provides some interesting details of the contents of a late 17th-century master mason's workshop, and it is here printed.¹³ The inventory itself gives no evidence as to the whereabouts of this workshop, but it is probable that it was the tenement by the Octagon chapel where Wood kept the racket court and which was next door to the shop of William Byrd who had been Wood's master.¹⁴ When the widow Alice died in 1700 she was no longer living there, however, but was occupying a house in St. Michael's parish.¹⁵

In the transcript of the inventory which follows the original spelling has been retained though punctuation and capitalization have been modernized; 'ye' has been converted to 'the' and conventional contractions have been extended except in those cases where the extension is not obvious.

⁸ In his notes on members of Balliol College in Bodleian Library MS. Top. Oxon. d. 106, and in Balliol College library.

⁹ When Thomas Wood the son entered into a marriage bond in 1699 he was described as 'of Oxford University, manciple'. Bodleian Library, MS. Oxf. dioc. pps. d. 92/2, fol. 214.

¹⁰ E.g. in MS. Oxf. dioc. pps. c. 92, fol. 17.

¹¹ Oxford University Archives, Administrations Tu-Z.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Oxford University Archives, Inventories T-Y.

¹⁴ Mrs. J. C. Cole, 'William Byrd, Stonecutter and Mason', *Oxoniensia*, xiv (1949), 65, and H. E. Salter, *Oxford City Properties* (Oxford Historical Society, xxxiii, 1926), 18, 322-3.

¹⁵ Her will, dated 7 September and proved on 12 October 1700, is in Oxford University Archives, Wills W-Y.

An inventory of the goods & chattles of Thomas Wood late deceased taken the 11th of March in the yeare 1694/5.

	£	s.	d.
In the shopp			
The statue of a Roman slave	10	0	0
2 cupits, a horse, a large marble table	1	12	0
A piece of white marble, 2 pieces of white marble 4 foot square ..	1	10	0
A slab of white marble 3 foot long, 1½ over		7	0
A table of white marble 2 foot square, a slab of allibaster & 2 square pieces		15	0
A piece of marble 1 foot solid, a table of marble 3 foot long, 2 broad ..	1	0	0
A block of whit-hors stone, 3 blocks of Burford stone		11	0
26 white & black michells 16 inches square, ¹⁶ a table of marble 2 foot square	1	9	0
A square piece of marble with a superscription & trophies on each side ..		8	0
2 marble morters, a small monument with a black marble table ..		6	6
A dial with books round it		2	0
	17	18	6 ¹⁷
In the inner shop			
A small monument in allibaster, a monument of whit lais ¹⁸	1	10	0
A sheild of allibaster & a cast ovall frame		5	0
A ovall table of white marble 2 foot long, 1 foot ½ over		6	0
A piece of white marble 2 foot long, 1 foot ½ over		5	0
A bastard marble stone		10	0
	2	16	0
In the room behind the shop			
In the said roome : 2 stone figures legin posture, ¹⁹ 3 cupits, 2 idiots, 1 cupit volans	3	1	0
2 cast heads, 1 bronz head of K. Charles the 1st, a marble font ..	2	10	0
	5	11	0
Over against his house in the street			
3 bastard stones of marble, a roulng stone for a garden	4	10	0
60 foot of Burford stone, a piece of white marble	3	10	0
3 ordinary grave stones, 2 pieces of stone against the house	2	6	0
	10	6	0
In the yard below stairs			
60 michells 16 inches square, 30 michells 12 inches square	5	0	0
2 stone morters, one load of sand		4	0
	5	4	0

¹⁶ A mitchell was a square or rectangular slab of Purbeck stone dressed for use in paving.

¹⁷ Recte £18 os. 6d.

¹⁸ Presumably lias or lyas, a blue or white polishable limestone.

¹⁹ I.e. in a lying posture.

		£	s.	d.
In the inner yard below stairs				
12 michells 12 inches square, severall pieces of allibaster	1	2	0
60 michells of different sizes	4	0	0
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Sum total of trading goods		48	17	6 ²⁰
The housold goods				
In the hall				
A table & 4 leather chairs		3	6
In the parlour				
8 leather chairs, 3 tables, 7 pictures	2	13	0
A looking glass, hangings & window curtains		16	0
In the chamber over the parlour				
One feather bed, bolster & 2 pillows, 3 blankets, 1 rug & a counterpain		3	8	0
Curtains, vallins, a bedstead & 7 chairs & 2 stooles	1	10	0
2 tables, a pair of stans & a looking glass, 3 pictures, hangings, window curtains, fire irons, shovell, tongs & bellows	3	0	6
The chamber over the hall				
Bed, bolster & pillow, 2 blankets & a rugg, bedstead, curtains & vallins, 6 chairs, 1 table, fire irons, shovell & tongs, 1 picture, a looking glass & hangings	3	15	0
The garret over the hall				
One bed, bolster & pillows, 2 blankets, 1 rug, bedstead, curtains & vallins, 1 chest, 8 paire of sheets at 10s. per paire, 7 paire at 5s. per paire, 4 doz. of ordinary napkins at 5s. the dozen, 2 dozen of diaper napkins, 6 table cloaths, 2 diaper table cloaths, 12 towels	11	4	6
In the inner garetts				
2 small beds with bolsters, coverletts & blanketts, 2 old bedsteads	1	2	0
In the roome over the shop				
2 tables, 1 couch, 6 chairs, bed, bolster, 2 pillows, bedstead and curtains, the hangings and looking glass	2	18	0
In the kitchen				
1 table, a rack, fender, andirons, a pair of bellous, fireshovell, tongs & torke ²¹ , 1 jack, 2 spitts, 1 tin dripping pan, 4 smoothing irons, 2 brass 2 tin candle sticks, 4 dozen of pewter plates, 7 pewter porringers, 2 pye plates, 8 dishes, a warming pan, pestle & mortar, 8 matted chairs, 2 brass potts, 1 brass ladle, 1 small kittle, 1 larger, one iron dripping pan, 2 skilletts, 2 sawce pans, a tin snuf dish and snuffers		4	4	0
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Sum total of housold goods		34	14	6
Two houses, a little shop, a stable and a piece of ground valued at	400	0	0
To add to the goods in the shop : 6 figures, 4 small figures, a dyall body & globe	2	15	0
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		437	9	6

²⁰ Recte £46 19s. 6d.²¹ Probably 'forke' was intended.