Seaton Delaval Hall, Ivo Dawnay (ed.)
Simple Pleasures: Little Things That Make Life Worthwhile

The first time I visited Seaton Delaval was in my third year as an undergraduate at Cambridge when I drove to Scotland in the passenger seat of a small, red Triumph Spitfire driven by my friend Adam Bennett, now working for the International Monetary Fund in Washington. We were visiting mausolea in preparation for my undergraduate dissertation. In volume 11 of H. Avray Tipping's monumental series of volumes published by *Country Life* on English Homes, there is a description of the circumstances which had led to the construction of the Seaton Delaval mausoleum:-

> John, the heir of the Seatons, perished in 1775, having been kicked in a vital organ by a laundry maid to whom he was paying addresses. Thus died the last of the Delavals by the foot of a buxom slut. Over the broken remains of so much hope, the dust of so long glory, his father raised a temple, less to commemorate his achievements than his genealogical significance. The old man stood, last of a dying race, surrounded by childless brothers and sisters, who had, all of them, given happy promise in their youth, and ordered the piling up of cyclopean stones for the reception of the least worthy, but the last of his line. The mausoleum was never consecrated, owing, tradition has it, to the exorbitant fee required by the bishop.

We liked the mock-heroic tone and Gibbonian cadences of this description and the fact that Tipping wrote about architecture as a record of people and historical circumstance, not of architect and design. I only half remember the house from that time, the incongruity and cruelty of its extraordinary landscape setting, close to Newcastle, with the north sea not far in the distance and the proximity of rough, Northumberland seaside towns.

The second time was driving down from Scotland with my children. We stopped at Seaton Delaval. This time the sun was shining and my children was slightly surprised by my extraordinary and wholly uncharacteristic excitement — in fact, ecstasy — as I jumped out of the car, ignoring passing traffic, in order to take a photograph from the ha-ha by the side of the road. I was inspired by the pleasure of returning to an indisputable architectural masterpiece, looming, hunched, with a restrained sense of potency, now half-ruined, but still powerful, representing so clearly Vanbrugh's response to the north of England and his ability to create blackened poetry in stone. In contrast to so many of Vanbrugh's buildings, not so much is known of the circumstances of its construction or of his relationship to his patron: all one has surviving is his response to the landscape of the north and his understanding of how to construct an architectural epic on a small scale, packing a punch and demonstrating his resistance late in his career to the smooth, bland correctitude of Palladianism.

The third time was more recently when I took my son and two of his friends, one of whom was studying architectural history at Oxford, on a Vanbrugh tour. We drove to Castle Howard one Friday afternoon in December, long after the end of the visitor season and were taken out to the mausoleum. The following day we went to Seaton Delaval. We walked around the ruins of the interior and saw once again the nobility of the stables.

In the end, it is architecture which makes my heart beat: the feeling of the manipulation of space in stone. Nobody does it in the same way as John Vanbrugh, the great playwright of architecture. It is not a simple pleasure, but a sophisticated one: so much deeper and more intense than life's more ephemeral pleasures, each generation creating places and spaces and architectural

experiences for generations beyond, the still unborn who can experience the resonance of past people in the corridors and staircases and fireplaces left hanging in mid-air by the loss of the intervening floors.

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Ivo Dawnay (ed.)