



they were caught doing any work other than for him, even a sketch for their own amusement. Adam's clients, however, venerated his abilities and for thirty years simply couldn't give him enough work. The Adam brothers became a kind of architectural industry. They owned quarries, a timber business, brickworks, a company for making stucco and much else. At one point they employed two thousand people. They designed not just houses but every object within them – furniture, fireplaces, carpets, beds, lamps and everything else down to incidental objects like doorknobs, bell pulls and inkstands.

Adam's designs were intense – sometimes overwhelming – and gradually he fell out of favour. He had an inescapable weakness for over-decoration. To walk into an Adam room is rather like walking into a large, over-frosted cake.

Indeed one of his contemporary critics called

him 'a Pastry Cook'. By the late 1780s, Adam was being denounced as 'sugary and effeminate' and had fallen so far out of fashion that he retreated to his native Scotland, where he died in 1792. By 1831, he was so thoroughly forgotten that the influential *Lives of the Most Eminent British Architects* didn't mention him at all. The banishment didn't last terribly long, however. By the 1860s his reputation was undergoing a revival, which continues now, though these days he is remembered more for his rich interiors than for his architecture.

The one thing all buildings had in common during Adam's day was a rigorous devotion to symmetry. Vanbrugh, to be sure, didn't entirely achieve symmetry at Castle Howard, but that was largely accidental. Elsewhere, however, symmetry was adhered to as an immutable law of design. Every wing had to have a matching wing, whether it was needed or not, and every window and pediment to one side of the main entrance had to be exactly mirrored by windows and pediments on the other side regardless of what went on behind them. The result often was the building of wings that no one really wanted. Not until the nineteenth century did this absurdity begin to end, and it was a remarkable property in Wiltshire – one of the most extraordinary ever built – that started the process.

Above: Robert Adam, greatest of the eighteenth-century celebrity architects, whose design for the Great Hall at Syon House in Middlesex (opposite) illustrates the Roman influence in his work.

