In 1753 Horace Walpole wrote, “I passed by Sir James Dashwood’s, a vast new house, situated so high that it seems to stand for the county as well as himself.” In Woolfe and Gandon’s *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1767) Kirtlington Park is described thus: “The seat of Sir James Dashwood, baronet. This edifice is erected upon an eminence in the middle of a large park, commanding a very extensive and beautiful prospect over a rich vale bounded by the Chiltern Hills, and a fine view of the university of Oxford. Of this five plates are given. The first is the general plan. The second contains plans of the principal and chamber floors. The third and fourth form a double plate, containing the principal front, the center consisting of a rusticated basement, which supports an Ionick tetrastyle, finished with a pediment. The offices are on each side of this front. The principal entrance is by means of a flight of steps, which leads into a hall; from whence are communications to the chief apartments. In the fifth plate is the south front, which has many decorations, and a flight of steps to descend from the principal floor to the park. The whole of this building is well executed with good stone of the country.” James Townsend in *The Oxfordshire Dashwoods* (1922) says, “The new house was then [at the time it was built] the finest mansion in the county with the exception of Blenheim Palace [the seat of the dukes of Marlborough].”

Sir James Dashwood succeeded his grandfather, Sir Robert Dashwood, the first baronet, in 1734, when just under nineteen years of age. He heard of his succession while he was abroad, making the Grand Tour. His full-length portrait, painted by Enoch Seeman the younger in 1737, shows him as a slender, handsome young man walking jauntily with cane through a wooded landscape, accompanied by his dog. A year later he married Elizabeth Spencer. He was a member of Parliament for Oxfordshire several times and held various offices in the county—such as High Sheriff for Oxfordshire and High Steward for the City of Oxford. He died in 1779.

The building of Kirtlington Park was begun in April 1742. Dashwood had come into a very considerable fortune, and old Northbrook House, the previous family seat, of which no trace remains today, presumably no longer came up to his standards. Part of the Great Wood of Kirtlington manor was cleared to make room for the new house. The trees cut down, consisting largely of oak and Spanish chestnut, appear to have been utilized in the building of the house. By August 1746 it was sufficiently well advanced for Sir James and his family to move in. However, the decoration of some of the principal
rooms continued over a period of years. As late as 1778 Mrs. Lybbe Powys noted that parts of the interior were still unfinished. In fact, the drawing room and saloon are said to have remained undecorated until the middle of the nineteenth century.

The dining room, acquired by the Metropolitan Museum twenty-five years ago but only recently installed, was probably completed about 1748, for the original overmantel painting (see p. 168), signed by John Wootton, bears that date.

Just who was responsible for the architecture and the decoration of the principal rooms is somewhat debatable. The Kirtlington accounts show payments in 1741 to Mr. Garrett, architect, and Mr. Gibbs (James Gibbs), architect; some years later the accounts list payments to Mr. John Sanderson. The previously mentioned plates in Vitruvius Britannicus accredit the architecture jointly to Smith, whose first name is not given but who may have been Humphrey Smith or William Smith the younger of Warwick, and J. Sanderson. An existing preliminary sketch for the ceiling of the dining room (see p. 164), of which the ornamental details were afterwards considerably changed, is signed "John Sanderson." Christopher Hussey (English Country Houses, Early Georgian, 1715–1760) thinks it likely that James Gibbs supplied a sketch for the design but that the actual details were entrusted to William Smith, who died in 1748, with whom John Sanderson was presumably associated.

This is, nevertheless, a hypothesis. Mr. Hussey also believes that on a basis of style the decoration of the Museum's room was probably executed by Thomas Roberts of Oxford, although no mention of his name has yet come to light in the Kirtlington accounts, possibly owing to the fact that his may have been a subcontract. Roberts did decorative work at Hartwell House, Buckinghamshire, and the drawing-room ceiling there has quite a few points in common with that of the Kirtlington dining room. The adjoining "Monkey Room," so called because of its ceiling painted with singeries subjects, is known from the accounts to have been carried out in 1745 by a French artist, J. F. Clermont. The stucco decoration of the library is attributed by Katherine A. Esdaile (Country Life Magazine, October 2, 1937) to an Anglo-Danish sculptor, Charles Stanley, who was working in England at the time. She also believes him responsible for the stone sculptures of the pediments over the main entrances to the house. Stanley's name, however, has not yet turned up in the accounts, again possibly because his was a subcontract.

It is obvious that the Kirtlington records do not tell us all we would like to know about the decoration of this distinguished and luxurious house. But of the quality and effectiveness of the work there can be no question. The dining room, with which we are primarily concerned, is a spacious apartment. It is approximately thirty-six feet long, twenty-four feet wide, and twenty
The dining room from Kirtling Park. Fletcher Fund, 1931. The overmantel picture is by John Wootton. At the far end is the portrait of Elizabeth Farren, later Countess of Derby, by Thomas Lawrence. Bequest of Edward S. Harkness, 1940. The gilt wood chandelier was given by Irwin Untermyer in 1950.
feet high. Three great windows in deep embrasures looked south over a beautiful park laid out by Lancelot ("Capability") Brown. However, the "fine view of the university of Oxford" mentioned in Vitruvius Britannicus seems to have involved wishful thinking, for Oxford is some ten miles away.

The overmantel, the door and window trims, and the dado are of wood enriched with superlative carving. The ceiling, the frieze, and the decorative motives on the walls are a tour de force of the stucco-worker's art. The delicately carved mantelpiece is of white marble, the doors of mahogany. The original oak floor was very likely cut from some of the trees felled to make room for the house.

The illustrations convey a good idea of the skilled and loving work that went into the creation of this fine interior. The sculptural character of the overmantel is brought out in a detail (see p. 158) showing one of the graceful terminal figures. The mantelpiece is said to have been actually ordered by the Sultan of Turkey but later acquired by Sir James. The pedimented frames of the doors, with their vigorously carved shell and foliate decoration, are outstanding. The simply paneled mahogany doors are enriched with egg-and-dart moldings and retain their original gilt-bronze hardware. The frames of the windows terminate above the dado in unusual foliate volutes. The shutters have egg-and-dart moldings and, like the doors, still possess their original gilt-bronze hardware.

However, fine as the woodwork is, the stucco decoration is even more remarkable. It is carried out in such an unsterotyped and spirited way that it is obvious that the stucco-workers were given a free hand within the limits of the general design. Balancing motives that at a distance appear to be the same reveal all manner of minor

*Mantelpiece of white marble. The lintel decoration has children wreathing a goat with a grapevine, birds holding garlands of fruits and flowers, scrolls, and acanthus leaves. The uprights have boldly carved drapery. Silhouetted against the wall are busts of maidens with garlands of flowers and fruits trailing into the dado.*
foreword by Sacheverell Sitwell, and a descriptive text by Margaret Jourdain. Here in a concise and informative way the problem of the stucco-worker in England and Ireland is appreciatively dealt with and various recorded names of craftsmen given.

The stucco decoration of the room from Kirtlington Park shows baroque and rococo influence, although rarely to the point of noticeable asymmetry. In fact, the one conspicuous instance of this may be seen in the cartouches beneath the two oval mirrors between the windows, where the flanking birds' wings are treated in a completely asymmetrical manner. Incidentally, these mirrors with their interesting decoration are perhaps the most unusual and striking features of the room. Surrounded by boldly modeled frames with foliate, floral, and shell motives, they appear to hang from points just beneath the cornice where the terminal ornaments consist of female masks with swags of drapery.

differences when examined carefully. The illustrations of details of the stucco show the stucco-workers to have been accomplished sculptors well capable of using their knowledge to interpret the designer's sketches. It is known that Italian stuccatori were employed by English architects and contractors to carry out this sort of work in numerous houses. The reader interested in this subject will find it well worth his while to glance at Country House Baroque (1940), which contains brilliant photographs of English and Irish stucco-work by Anthony Ayscough, a
The decorations adjoining the mantelpiece again feature female masks and are crowned by spirited eagles with spread wings (above left). Other motives, terminating in busts of women (above right), occur on each side of the large framed panel at the far end of the room. This panel, the corresponding one at the opposite end, and also the smaller overdoor panels, were apparently intended to be filled with paintings. A preliminary sketch for the room (see p. 166), although considerably altered in the final design, indicates paintings in the large panels and in two of the small ones, the central panel of the ceiling, and the overmantel. The drawing is described in script as a “Section of the Dineing Rome with pictures in ye Sides & Cieling and plaister frames & ornaments.” Another sketch (see p. 167), showing what may be paintings in
the central ceiling panel and two of the overdoors, is described as a “Section of the Dineing Roome w'th different Specimens of Sides & Cielings the ornaments of plaister.” Neither of these sketches conforms exactly to the decoration of the room as it was finally carried out, although the locations of doors, windows, and mantelpiece conform to the interior as completed. It is pretty obvious that the framed panels were intended for paintings, but that, as in the case of certain other English interiors of this same type, the paintings were never executed except for Wootton’s overmantel picture. The preliminary sketches just mentioned are unsigned and differ considerably in drawing from that for the ceiling signed by John Sanderson. The two large panels now hold framed English pictures of the eighteenth century, as indeed they very
A sketch for the decoration of the ceiling, signed by John Sanderson. The details were later altered.
Detail showing the stucco ornament at the top of one of the two large end panels of the room, including a section of the elaborately decorated frieze above
Preliminary sketch for the room, with paintings shown in most of the wall panels and the oval ceiling panel.
Another sketch for the room. As finally carried out, these designs were considerably changed in many details.
A romantic scene painted in 1748 by John Wootton (about 1686–1765) for the overmantel. A lady on horseback, accompanied by two gentlemen, converses with a group of peasants or gypsies. On the winding road, which leads through a natural arch to a castle and a wooded vale in the distance, may be seen a cowherd driving his cows.

likely did from the time the room was finished.

The same care was lavished on the ceiling and frieze as on the more easily visible decoration of the walls. Shell, floral, fruit, and foliate motives occur everywhere in great profusion. The central end and side panels contain masks symbolic of the Four Seasons with their appropriate attributes. That of Winter (see p. 163) conveys a good idea of the sculptural delicacy with which the ornament was modeled. The frieze throughout is heavily enriched with leaves and garlands of flowers and fruits upheld by beaks of birds and punctuated at intervals by inverted shells. Much of this intricate decoration is not only in high relief but frequently hangs free from the background.
The dismantling and reassembling of the stucco-work was not a simple problem. It was removed from the house in nearly two hundred and fifty sections with the old laths and timbers attached. For the better part of a year a crew of six ornamental plaster-workers were employed in preparing these sections for installation. This involved the removal of the ornament, section by section, from the laths and timbers, from which, in the course of the years, it had often become detached to a hazardous degree. It was then reapplied to a new background of wire lath and steel armatures. The restoration of such breakage as had inevitably occurred in transportation was next undertaken, after which the sections were hoisted into place and firmly fastened to the ceiling and walls. The narrow cracks between the different sections were then filled in. Since the woodwork had been previously installed, the flat plastering of the walls was next in order and finally the laying of the original floor of wide, parallel oak boards.

Before painting the room a microscopic examination was made of cross sections of paint taken from various parts of the plasterwork and woodwork. The room, as would be expected, had been repainted a number of times in its history. The examination showed that it had originally been painted throughout a soft off-white, a color that was popular in stucco-decorated interiors of the period. Thus was determined the present color, which provides a pleasant background for the contrasting colors in the paintings, the upholstery of the chairs, and the draperies. Notes of gilt are furnished by the beautiful carved gilt wood chandelier and the frames of the paintings.

Kirtlington Park, so far as the writer knows, is still intact with the exception of the dining room. It remained in the possession of the descendants of Sir James Dashwood until 1909, when it was sold to the Earl of Leven and Melville. Later the estate again changed hands. In 1931 the Museum, which was seeking at the time a distinguished mid-Georgian interior, was told that the dining room was available for purchase and, after proper inspection, decided to acquire it. Now that it has been recreated it is easy to imagine the handsome figure of Sir James in the elegant dress of his day moving among his guests against a lavishly decorated background unequalled in any English interior in this country.

A little over a year ago the Museum completed the installation of the famous Adam dining room from Lansdowne House in London. In view of this it was decided to furnish the room from Kirtlington Park as a drawing room. It is hoped that additional important and appropriate examples of English furniture will be acquired for the room from time to time.

The south front of Kirtlington Park. The grounds were laid out by “Capability” Brown.