Introduction

Bolsover Castle, overlooking the Doe Lea valley in Derbyshire, and Nottingham Castle, overlooking its city, are among the most dramatic of seventeenth-century great houses. This article proposes an explanation for the re-building of these two medieval castles that is based upon the social circumstances of the family and household responsible for the work. Separated by sixty years, the two buildings appear to be very different yet share the same remarkable patron. William Cavendish (1593–1676) became Viscount Mansfield, then Earl, Marquis and finally Duke of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.1 He is celebrated for his extravagant entertainments for Charles I in 1633 and 1634 and his governorship of Prince Charles, the future Charles II. In 1618, he married a local heiress, Elizabeth Bassett, who became the mother of his children before dying in 1643. William was commander of the king’s army in the north during the Civil War and went into exile for fifteen years after losing the battle of Marston Moor in 1644. His second marriage took place in Paris in 1645, to Margaret Lucas, lady in waiting to Henrietta Maria and also a prolific writer.2 He lived in Antwerp, where he wrote his famous book on horsemanship, until 1660. At the Restoration, he returned to live mainly at his family home at Welbeck Abbey in Nottinghamshire until his death in 1676. The Little Castle at Bolsover was begun by William’s father Charles Cavendish (1553–1617) and William himself added interior decoration and further buildings on the site. He commissioned Nottingham Castle at the very end of his life: work began when he was over eighty.3 William’s passion for building, as this article will suggest, was shared by his whole family.

Bolsover Castle is well known to architectural historians, but a comparison with the less familiar work at Nottingham Castle provides a new explanation for the earlier project. Like many great houses, Bolsover and Nottingham Castles have been seen as bids to win courtly status. They illustrate a familiar story of the gradual arrival of classical ideas in English architecture. This suggests
William Cavendish’s growing erudition and signals his wish to move in the advanced circles of the court. Yet there is an alternative version of politics that exists alongside the expected story of magnificence and the struggle for court advancement. It will be argued here that the fruits of William’s architectural patronage were consumed by his family and household, as well as by the great of the realm. His houses can be read as examples of court culture, but they also provide an archaeological record of the micro-politics of his household.

Architectural historians have often made connections between building and political power. As long ago as 1899, Thorstein Veblen identified the phenomenon of ‘conspicuous consumption’ – the expenditure of money to win respect – and the links between a prince’s magnificence and his policy are well known.4 In 1978, Mark Girouard memorably described the courtier houses of this period as ‘power houses’.5 William Cavendish’s buildings can certainly be seen as fitting into this pattern: he was offered the Garter partly because of having ‘Lived in his Contrey [county] in as great honour and splendour as any of the Nobility’.6 Yet his ambitions for winning power at court remained partly unfulfilled. Friends, enemies and historians have all occasionally treated him with derision and scorn, and his architecture does not seem to have ‘worked’ as straightforward conspicuous consumption. Cedric Brown has pointed out similar ambiguities in relation to William’s famous royal entertainment at Bolsover in 1634.7 In architecture, William’s intention may have been to produce courtly buildings. But he did not possess the control over the building process necessary to eliminate the local references introduced by the household members and craftsmen who were also involved. Although the decoration of Bolsover Castle can be linked to William’s acquisition of a rich wife and a peerage, he built Nottingham Castle at a time when these things were less important to him. His wives were dead, he had retired from court, and was ‘above eighty years of age’ when work began in 1674.8 These contrasting circumstances suggested the alternative approach set out in this article.

The change in direction is worth emphasising because the view persists that architecture was inextricably bound up with the ‘high politics’ of court and parliament, and that architectural styles reflected the ideological divisions leading toward the Civil War. Writing as recently as 2000, Kevin Sharpe complains about the still-widespread but misconceived view that Charles I’s ‘patronage of continental mannerist art distanced court taste from a national and popular aesthetic, and . . . undermined trust in the king’.9 Timothy Mowl and Brian Earnshaw, for example, oversimplify the Cavendish architectural patronage as a ‘diametrically opposite stylistic direction to the Palladianism . . . of the monarchy’.10 Bolsover and Nottingham Castles provide difficulties of interpretation just because they are neither purely classical nor purely local in inspiration. Likewise, William’s court career was marked by ambivalence about whether he was to aim for national or local popularity. Despite his peerages and success in local government, his court career was characterised by a failure to achieve the offices he hoped for. Even a hostile witness such as Lucy
Hutchinson could claim that ‘no man was a greater prince than he in all that Northerne quarter, till a foolish ambition of glorious slavery carried him to Court’. After his lavish entertainment for Charles I in 1633, William wrote that he had ‘hurt [his] estate much with the hopes’ of a court office, and would ‘labour no more of it . . . loth to be sick in mind, body and purse’. In the 1660s, he thanked heaven for some money received unexpectedly, ‘though his Earthly King and Master [Charles II] seem’d to have forgot him.’

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Portland archive containing William Cavendish’s family papers supports the suggestion that household politics have more relevance than court politics to the question of building and power. Alice Friedman uncovered a comparable situation behind the building of Wollaton Hall and future case studies may support a similar story. William’s architectural patronage stands out today partly because so much of it survives. If physical remains existed, for example, of the seventeenth-century work at Syon or Northumberland House (London), the tenth Earl of Northumberland would have a stronger reputation as a patron. The first Earl of Strafford, like William, built both in Bolsover’s native/classical style at Wentworth Woodhouse (Yorkshire) and in Nottingham’s Baroque palazzo style at Jigginstown in Ireland; both are now lost. The Duke of Buckingham’s water gate at York House survives, in the British classical style, but his work at Burley-on-the-Hill (Rutland) remains mysterious except for the stables, which shared many features with William’s at Welbeck. The exuberance of Bolsover and Nottingham Castles marks them out as rare survivors of the previous century’s tradition of prodigy houses rather than the new tradition of restrained boxes such as Coleshill (Berkshire), Wilton (Wiltshire) and Gunnersbury (Middlesex) that William’s more classically-inclined contemporaries were building. The Cavendish household had maintained its architectural momentum from the Elizabethan period onward, which meant that the inhabitants of local settlements, tradesmen and even workmen from distant family estates in Northumberland became accustomed to building projects. Lawrence Stone identifies a pattern among the Cecils and other families whereby a great burst of building resulted in ruin. Malcolm Airs presents examples of more conservative projects paid for out of current revenue over a period of ten years or so. But Elizabeth (‘Bess of Hardwick’), Countess of Shrewsbury (c.1527–1608), is the only comparable patron whose building programme lasted nearly a lifetime. Her grandson, William Cavendish, followed her example.

In each of these cases, the nature of the seventeenth-century design process allowed the involvement of a wide range of participants. The finished building was not the patron’s unmediated stylistic choice. His scope for autonomous action was limited by the family or household on whom he relied to carry out his orders. The word ‘family’ was used in two senses: both for blood-relations and for the household as a whole. When William Cavendish was away from home, for example, he continued to pay the servants who ‘had then dyett [meals] in his Grace ffamily’.
identified itself strongly with the former. The household, as well as William’s own children, felt threatened by his second marriage to Margaret Lucas. They feared that she ‘would break up the familie and goe to Rant at London’. The family will be examined in both senses here, as interactions within both groups can be seen as important influences on building.

The household records in the Portland Archive show that just as the family competed for higher wages, access to William Cavendish himself, and even seats at the hierarchical tables in the Hall, control over the building process was also contested. The finished product must reflect some of the concerns of the administrators and household officers involved, especially as the status of the architect was not yet secure and much of a design was decided during the course of construction. The archaeology of a building such as the Riding House at Bolsover shows that major changes were made on site, presumably following a visit from either William or one of the superintending officers paid to make regular inspections.

Furthermore, there was no clear-cut division of labour between a patron interested in architecture and a professional designer. William’s father, for example, once mentioned the plan of a house he had designed himself on which something had been ‘mistaken by the drawer in [his] absence.’ This implies that he used a draughtsman as an amanuensis, even if only to work up the very roughest of ideas. William wrote that he and his son were not such good ‘arketecturs’ as his father, but insisted that Nottingham Castle was to be completed after his death according to a model he himself had made. The design process was obviously a team effort.

The creative genius of John Smithson, the best-known designer connected to William Cavendish, has long been recognised, but it is anachronistic to picture him as an independent professional dedicated to design. His duties also included land surveying and he must be seen in the household context: after a period of living on call at Welbeck Abbey, he moved out to marry. He lived at Kirkby-in-Ashfield, his wife’s family home, before renting his own house in Bolsover. He illustrates the permeable nature of the household and its close connections with the surrounding estates; members reaching maturity set up households of their own. However, tenants frequently complained about the difficulty in getting building work agreed and put in motion.

Other household officers and even blood relations were also temporarily seconded to projects to act as surveyors or financial administrators. For example, Henry Lukin, a household officer living at Welbeck, was paid expenses for supervisory visits to the construction work at Bolsover. Reports on the work underway at Welbeck Abbey in 1608 were sent to William’s mother as she was the project manager. Household officials had much to gain from their role in building projects: members of the Kitchen family worked as labourers on the building of Bolsover’s Little Castle before becoming yeomen and marrying into the gentry. By 1660, one William Kitchen had acquired the honorific ‘Mr’ along with valuable building
contracts. He was not only a builder, but had also become a household servant of William’s son Henry.30

William Cavendish’s peripatetic life meant that he often had to order work by letter. In the 1660s, he ordered a new stair and window in his Riding House at Welbeck via his steward, Andrew Clayton. Clayton was to order the designer Samuel Marsh to ‘make a draughte’ or plan for the work, and then to instruct a craftsman called Richard Martin to build it.31 Clayton reported back to William when the work was completed.32 William himself, therefore, can have had little control over the appearance of the finished result determined by Clayton, Marsh and Martin. Mr Benoist, tutor to William’s sons, performed the same role as intermediary between surveyor and patron in 1672 for work at William’s London house. He sent William copies of the mason, bricklayer and carpenter’s bills.33 While William was in London, he was sent household accounts from his Nottinghamshire houses vaguely listing sums spent ‘in buildings and Repayrs’.34 Although the scale of works mentioned here is minor, William was also absent and had to reply upon Clayton to report on the major rebuilding of Bolsover’s Terrace Range in the 1660s.35 In each case William as patron is at the end of a chain of command through household officer to surveyor to the craftsmen.

Calculating the cost of building as a proportion of income, it becomes clear that, unlike most other patrons, William managed to commit a regular proportion of his annual income to building, rather than bursts of high expenditure on short-term projects. In the entertainment performed at Bolsover Castle in 1634, a troupe of dancing builders made the point that building was a normal part of life for this household.36 In these circumstances, how did William’s relatives and household contribute to the decision to build at Bolsover and Nottingham? The next two sections will examine the family background to the time when the decisions to carry out the projects were taken.

Bolsover Castle

The fascinating wall paintings in the Little Castle at Bolsover have been studied both as the apogee of a short-lived court fashion and as an example of iconographic self-fashioning.37 There is, however, a revisionist argument yet to be made that sets the Castle into its social situation. These decorative interiors may be seen as an aspiring courtier’s intended destination for a royal visit, but a more immediate explanation lies in William Cavendish’s complicated relationship with his family, especially his Talbot relatives whose arms appear on the Star Chamber’s fireplace.

The Little Castle, begun in 1612,38 was initially the project of William Cavendish’s father. ‘By an unlikely miracle’, wrote Mark Girouard in 1966, it survives ‘as an almost untouched expression in stone of the lost world of Elizabethan chivalry and romances’ (Figure 1).39 Charles Cavendish’s rebuilt
medieval keep is now conventionally seen as the high point of a short-lived trend for Jacobean medieval nostalgia. ‘Bolsover remains architecture’s solitary but supreme monument to the lost Renaissance’, wrote Roy Strong, who connected the fashion to the short-lived court of Prince Henry. ‘Here is a building which matches exactly the scenario of the Prince’s court, the superimposition onto the Gothic past of the new classicism as an expression of an historic British continuum’.40 But it is not widely realised that Bolsover is more than just an example of a court fashion, it also contains important family references to Northumberland.

Charles Cavendish’s second marriage in 1592 was to Katherine Ogle, the daughter of a Northumbrian baron. Her family home was Bothal Castle near Morpeth. The ancient barony of Ogle was revived for Katherine after the deaths of her father and elder sister. This barony was William Cavendish’s only inherited title, and was especially important to him as only the third generation after a family’s gaining a peerage could claim to be a ‘Gentleman of Blood’.41 The ‘Northumberlade landes’, worth a colossal annual £2395, were accounted for separately in the family’s estate surveys.42 Servants from Northumberland formed a significant but discrete group in William’s household; one day in 1671 ‘all the Northumberland men were called before their Graces in the Gallery’.43 They seem to have been a particularly independent-minded and quarrelsome body. ‘I percieve the Northumberland men are one of them guiltie to another’ complained John Booth, tenant at Bothal Castle, ‘and so they nether dare displace nor displease one another least all should

Figure 1 The Little Castle at Bolsover, begun 1612 by Charles Cavendish, completed and decorated by William Cavendish 1618–21. English Heritage.
come out'.44 Seen in section, Bothal Castle obviously shares some similarities with the rebuilt keep at Bolsover (Figure 2). Girouard has suggested that the Little Castle was Charles’s romantic homage to his Northumbrian wife, and also a tribute to her family’s medieval barony.45

Bolsover also fits into a more local tradition of Renaissance mock-castles in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, such as Shireoaks and Barlborough Halls. There is a regional context of innovation: although Worksop Manor (Nottinghamshire), Oldcotes and Chatsworth (Derbyshire) are lost or changed, Hardwick Hall (Derbyshire) and Thorpe Salvin Castle (Yorkshire) survive to indicate that this was a county-wide phenomenon as so often when neighbours begin to compete.46 There was certainly competition between Bess of Hardwick’s children, the brothers Charles and William, later first Earl of Devonshire. A quarrel during Bess’s lifetime (resulting from Charles’s friendship with her estranged husband) had repercussions for the next generation. The rivalry re-emerges in a poem by William’s daughter Jane, written after 1643. Her father, whom she names William the Conqueror, had been made a marquis and therefore of a higher rank than the house of Devonshire:

Thus your great howse, is now become the lower
And I doe hope the world shall euer see
The howse of Charles, before your Willms bee47

Charles’s family certainly took precedence by rank by the 1640s, and the physical ‘howse of Charles’ at Bolsover was built to reflect this intention. The Cavendishes also sought to outdo other neighbours in building prowess. Charles would have been provoked to build at Bolsover by two towering houses visible across the valley. Sutton Hall, home of Sir Francis Leake, was built by 1595, and consisted of high state rooms and large windows.48 It was this building, according to folklore, that had goaded Bess of Hardwick to build her last great house, Oldcotes, on the neighbouring hilltop. Hearing about Leake’s project, she decided to build a house ‘as splendid for owls as his was for men’, hence the name Owlcotes/Oldcotes.49

But what was this rebuilt castle at Bolsover for? It has been seen as a fantasy, an aberration, a stylistic cul-de-sac, and a house for pleasure and seclusion, but without the question of its use specifically being addressed. The seventeenth-century urge towards privacy, solitude and study, is well known. It is expressed architecturally through a lodge at some distance from the main house just as Bolsover Castle is seven miles from the family home at Welbeck Abbey.50 Patricia Fumerton provides the most fully-developed exposition of the idea with respect to Bolsover. She argues that the identity of an aristocrat, who shied away from the onslaught of intimates, is revealed only through the peripheral and ornamental.51 She sees the complicated planning of the Little Castle as a series of interconnected houses, ‘retreat upon retreat [leading] to a dance of subdivision and unfixedness. The small group of guests invited to the banquet
would break up into even smaller parties, each with its own “house.” In support of this, there is evidence for the Castle as a place of retreat in the very small number of letters William Cavendish addressed from there. After William’s son Henry’s death, Henry’s wife retreated from Welbeck to Bolsover to grieve. Although this provides a convincing psychological background to the project at Bolsover, the intended audience of intimate guests has yet to be considered. There is some new evidence to suggest that it consisted of members of William’s family, especially his cousins, with whom he was engaged in an
argument about money.

The physical evidence suggests a change in intention during the course of decorating the Little Castle. Charles Cavendish must have planned it for use by both himself and his wife; the latter left the use of her chamber at Bolsover to her daughter-in-law in her will. From the heraldry it contains of the Cavendish and Ogle families, her room was probably the north-west chamber on the top floor. However, the mention of a particular chamber for the owner’s wife has disappeared from the inventory made at the time of William’s
death. William completed the decorative schemes of the Little Castle after his father’s death in 1617; a surviving ‘note off all [his] busineses att london’ includes ‘Bolsover furneshinge payntinge & carving’. This London trip has long been known from the drawings made by John Smithson, but the note provides new evidence that William planned the decorative schemes in 1618, just after his marriage to the heiress Elizabeth Bassett.

Yet the decorative schemes that William Cavendish commissioned over the next few years were not appropriate for a wife, as they celebrate lust. Rosalys Coope and Timothy Raylor both have noted the choice of Hercules as a key figure in the Castle’s iconography. The use of the virtuous hero who nevertheless sometimes erred can be read as a metaphor justifying William’s own occasionally intemperate or sensual behaviour. Hercules’ choice between Pleasure and Virtue is dramatised by the choice between the ‘Elysium’ and ‘Heaven’ closets off the Little Castle’s main bedchamber. Unusually, Pleasure is privileged over Virtue by the fact that Hercules himself is found in the Elysium closet’s frieze, where he relaxes in female company (Figure 3). The fountain below the Elysium closet’s window also features the figure of Venus surrounded by Priapic beasts and lascivious satyrs. By contrast, there is no evidence that Welbeck Abbey contained decoration of this kind. Richard

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**Figure 3** Hercules with other occupants of Mount Olympus, shown as a wall painting on the frieze of the Elysian Closet, the Little Castle, Bolsover. *Lucy Worsley.*
Andrewes’ poetic characterisation of the two houses is often quoted: Bolsover is ‘for sight’, ‘to feast in’, ‘a pearl’ and ‘a pendant of the ear’, while Welbeck is described as ‘for use’, ‘well-mended’, and as a ‘saddle’. These therefore represent the roles of the mistress and the less exotic but more reliable wife. Lawrence Stone has pointed out that this was a standard division of labour in aristocratic marriages; the wife and mistress served complementary functions. William’s poems imply that he certainly sought the fulfilment of sexual needs from mistresses. One of them makes a metaphorical pass at the Countess of Rutland, and another suggests that members of his household, ‘younge Lust-eye wenches’ among the laundry and chambermaids, were also the objects of his attention. The suggested audience for the reading of the iconography at Bolsover’s Little Castle, then, was not his wife. The message justifying adultery would have made sense to William’s male social contemporaries, able to recognise the references and understand the distinction between wifely and pleasurable love. At least two of William’s uncles (Gilbert Talbot and Henry Cavendish) had illegitimate children. The next section will suggest that the expected guests at Bolsover were William’s cousins, specifically the Earls of Pembroke, Arundel and Ruthin. In 1618, William needed to impress them because they could and eventually did arrange a peerage for him.

William Cavendish received his viscountcy through Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel (1586–1646), and William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke (1580–1630), sons-in-law of his uncle Gilbert Talbot, seventh Earl of Shrewsbury. William’s grandmother, Bess of Hardwick, had married George Talbot, sixth Earl of Shrewsbury, as her fourth and final husband. The union was strengthened by the simultaneous marriages of four of their children: Bess’s Henry and Mary married George’s Grace and Gilbert (future seventh Earl) respectively. This Talbot connection proved important to Bess’s youngest son Charles. He was brought up in the company of Gilbert Talbot and shared an ‘intire and constant Friendship’ with him. It was from the Talbot as much as the Cavendish connection that Charles’s influence derived. Charles naturally acted as trustee for his sister, Gilbert’s wife, when Gilbert handed Welbeck Abbey to her. Gilbert then transferred it to Charles’s own use in 1607. Shortly afterwards Bolsover Castle came the same way, leased on generous terms and then purchased from Gilbert in 1613.

Charles Cavendish became Bolsover’s owner in a transaction that formed part of a complicated web of loans binding him to his step-brother; he had lent Gilbert £16,000 that was never fully repaid. This loan explains Charles’s acquisition of the site on such generous terms, and some of his son William’s subsequent financial difficulties. Gilbert died in 1616 and Charles in 1617, and William was executor of his uncle Gilbert’s will. The difficulty of William’s position comes over in some jottings to his mother. He noted that as executor he could be liable for Gilbert’s debts, and unlikely to see his father’s loan repaid. On the other hand, he could manipulate the situation to his benefit by preventing Gilbert’s daughters and their husbands from
receiving their inheritance until Gilbert’s debts were settled. William wrote out his bargaining positions:

First to see whethr wee can gett the money which I thinke will hardlye bee.
Secondlye iff nott thatt to gett itt in Lande which I thinke will hardlye bee com-
pased eyther.
Thirdlye iff neyther off these then the offer your La:ps made them, which is the
Honor off A Viscounte

These demands were based on the assumption that he would not renounce his trust without payment, even though ‘the Lords will bee wonderfull ernest with mee aboute partinge with the Exseqetorship’. Many years later, William finally handed over the executorship to Gilbert’s grandson Henry Howard with the comment that it would cost him many thousands of pounds, ‘because I [Howard] had a conscience, and that he himself had none’. Despite the superficial courtesy of the surviving letters, William’s private remarks show that this was a bitter family feud.

William’s appointment as executor was generally thought to be a thankless task. Chamberlain commented in May 1616 that William’s co-executor, Secretary Winwood, had entered into a great busines of beeing executor (together with young Sir William Candish Sir Charles sonne) to the earle of Shrewsburie . . . I conceve yt is but in trust, and so shalbe litle the better for yt, but he will find yt a great toyle to content all parties and a great deale of envie he will bring upon himself as yt were gratis.

To add to William’s difficulties, his father and his co-executor both died in 1617, in March and October respectively. During his final illness, Charles had called William to his bedchamber to promise him ‘a legacy of fiftene hundred pounds’ with a further £666 to William’s brother, but left his family short of cash. His widow, executrix of his will, found herself unable to meet its provisions. On 25th September 1617, presumably with workmen at Bolsover Castle still to be paid, she gave William’s brother the produce of two granges instead of the promised money. In cash terms, William was by no means rich, and Katherine also ‘kept [William] and his Family at her own charge for several years’.

Conceiving an ambitious decorative scheme in these inauspicious circumstances was therefore a risky roll of the dice in the game of buildings and power. Comparison is possible with another William Cavendish, first Duke of Devonshire, who began to remodel Chatsworth under similarly difficult conditions. A contemporary remarked that ‘Under these Streights and Confusions He laid the Design of Building, like a Merchant that was to make the greatest show when nearest breaking; or a desperate Gamester loosing so much that he would throw at all’. It was a clearly a house fit for a viscount that William set about furnishing in 1618. By 1620, when the Pillar Parlour fireplace was completed with a viscount’s coronets, William’s actual status matched his projected status as it was expressed through his house. The link
between building and increased social status is clear, but the mechanism by which William’s elevation took place was his family relationship with the Talbots. The house he built, therefore, was decorated with Talbot heraldry and with an iconographic message that they would understand and enjoy. Sir John Woodford noted bluntly in November 1620 that:

"ffor the accommodating of some disputes betweene the heyres of the late E. of Shrewsbury, & Sr. William Cavendishe a Nephew of the E. of Devonshire . . . it hath beene fownd out as expedient to create the said Sr. William at the request of the heyres above mencioned Vicount Mansfield, wch is newly donne by pattent."

In effect, writing off the Talbots’ debt was the price that William paid for his honour. William himself gives the final confirmation of what happened: ‘for my one [own] experience’ of buying a viscountcy, he wrote, ‘I had little more than the quittinge of an olde debt’. William Cavendish invested heavily in the Little Castle’s interior, where he caused a clear and expensive change in decorative direction after his father’s death. Not only did he add the figurative paintings, but architectural paint research also makes it clear that there were two schemes. An earlier, plainer scheme was reworked into a richer and more lavish interior typical of court circles, and it is convenient to attach one phase to Charles and one to his son. Charles’s scheme, perhaps unfinished, was strikingly stark and gloomy; appropriate to the neo-medieval castle he had built. It included doors of a deep red and walls of incised false-ashlar plaster finishes (now hidden beneath later figurative paintings), and must have created an austere, almost menacing, fortress-like impression. On the other hand, William’s interiors were more conventional for the late Jacobean court, with the new tricks of perspective in the paintings and decorative stencilling on the panelling. William was bringing Bolsover into line with the expectations of the court, and his cousins were probably his first audience. So the castle can be seen as a shrewd gamble taken by an aspirant viscount to impress his relations. However, this explanation cannot also hold true for the building of Nottingham Castle fifty years later, when he had already received the ultimate accolade of becoming the Duke of Newcastle.

Nottingham Castle

William Cavendish’s final period of building activity took place in the 1660s and 1670s. In contrast to the earlier years, he was not active at court, and
many considered that he had retired to the country in high dudgeon at not being given more responsibility. Although he was made Lord Lieutenant of Nottinghamshire and a Gentleman of the Bedchamber in 1660, he did not attend his installation as a Knight of the Garter in 1661. The citation for the latter stated that William ‘now pleaseth himself in his old age in a private life, in his country, honoured and esteemed by all men’. However, this retirement was not entirely voluntary as William was no longer welcome at court. His chaplain sympathetically preached on an appropriately architectural text from Psalm 118 at Welbeck in 1661: ‘This Stone which the builders refused, is become the Head-stone of the Corner’. William was busy repairing his estates (damaged during his exile) and it was a time of financial strain. Yet, as in 1618–20, he spent lavishly on building.

Despite these very different circumstances, it will be argued here that the relationships within the family, as opposed to public life or court ambition, are the common factor explaining the decision to build Bolsover and Nottingham Castles. It is now widely realised that the seventeenth-century household, a seemingly monolithic institution from the outside, was insecure in its identity. Lena Cowan Orlin has shown that although the state made the householder responsible for moral order within his family, social history reveals that ‘domestic roles and duties were contested in practice.’ This fluidity in relationships has been identified by Cynthia Herrup, for example, in the household of the second Earl of Castlehaven (1593–1631), where quarrels between father and son parallel William’s own family life. An examination of the period during which Nottingham Castle was planned suggests that competition and disorder was the norm within the Cavendish household. Despite the inauspicious circumstances, a new building project provided a focus for the household’s energies.

William Cavendish purchased the site of Nottingham Castle outright in 1662, having leased it for many years from the Manners family. A comparison with the eighth Earl of Rutland’s own project at Belvoir Castle (Leicestershire) in the 1650s and 1660s shows that William’s ambitions for Nottingham were local rather than national in scale. John Webb was summoned from London as architect for Belvoir, although Webb’s austere Palladian designs were later modified by the local mason/architect Samuel Marsh. Marsh adopted a slightly quirky classicism generally written off as ‘less sophisticated’ than Webb’s. Marsh was to fall into a similar relationship with Sir Christopher Wren in his work at St John’s School, Appleby Magna, in the same county. Marsh’s being called in to modify the projects of these ‘national’ architects suggests that his work met local expectations in a way theirs did not. At Nottingham Castle he appears to have been involved (albeit in a close relationship with his patron) from the start. George Vertue described the building as ‘a Noble pile . . . Marsh being the Architect for these. works’. Nottingham’s decorative, exuberant, but provincial character emerges from comparison, for example, with Webb’s simpler designs for
the family of William’s old adversary the Earl of Pembroke for Durham House (London).  

Samuel Marsh gradually became designer to the extended Cavendish family. A native of Lincolnshire, he had served the Devonshires at Chatsworth and it is likely that he worked for William’s daughter-in-law’s family at Thoresby Hall (Nottinghamshire). Nottingham was not his first project for William Cavendish: he was described as surveyor for the rebuilding of the Terrace Range at Bolsover in 1668. However, there are suggestions that this project was marred by acrimony. Works were overseen on William’s behalf by Andrew Clayton. He visited on a regular basis, but was shortly to enter his great quarrel with the Cavendishes about his record-keeping and financial probity. William ordered Clayton to buy cheap lead for the gallery roof, little knowing that Clayton was involved in a scheme with other servants to snap up the best bargains in Derbyshire for re-sale in London on their own account. Notes left by Marsh on the failings of the inept building contractor, Joseph Jackson, claim that if given a position of responsibility, Jackson ‘would gether a hansom estate’ at his employer’s expense. The desire to begin a completely fresh project at Nottingham is understandable.

No accounts survive for the early stages of Nottingham Castle, but William Cavendish ‘lived so long as to see [it] raised about a yard above the ground’. He made his final will on 4th October 1676. ‘I have begun’, he wrote, ‘to carry up a considerable Building at Nottingham Castle, wch I earnestly desire may be finished according to the forme and modell thereof by me layd and designed’. He also specified the means of achieving this financially, with expenditure of £2000 a year. Marsh received payment on three further occasions between 1679 and 1681, once ‘in full for ye front Stairs at Nott’ and once for ‘Nott Castle’. These payments by Thomas Farr, who worked for William’s son Henry Cavendish, are also recorded in Henry’s wife’s account book; once again a female family member was given financial responsibility. She adds that by 1679 Marsh also received wages of £10, having become a regular member of the household. This demonstrates how Marsh, like John Smithson, had became firmly embedded within his client organisation, rather than advising it from an independent position. His designs must therefore have reflected household needs, as well as the personal wishes of his patron.

At first sight, Bolsover and Nottingham Castles are completely dissimilar, one largely gothic and the other largely Italian in inspiration. However, after finishing the Little Castle at Bolsover, William added two further ranges in a classical mannerist style that has much more in common with Nottingham. There is also a strand of more programmatic classicism in other designs connected with William: his remodelling of a nunnery to create Newcastle House, Clerkenwell (probably early 1630s), the unexecuted design for the rebuilding of Ogle Castle in Northumberland (published 1657–8), and his brother’s work at Slingsby Castle, Yorkshire (1630s).
J. Belcher and M.E. MacCartney noted the relationship between Nottingham Castle and Rubens’s plates in *Palazzi di Genova* in 1901. William had lived for more than ten years in the *Rubenshuis*, the painter’s residence in Antwerp, and could be expected for that reason alone to take an interest in Rubens’s publications. At Nottingham, the finished design is an amalgamation of Rubens’s plates. The detail around the attic storey windows and the broken pediments topping the lower windows follow Rubens’s drawing of the Villa Cambiaso, for example, and the rhythm of the giant pilasters could have come from *Palazzo Spinola*. Nottingham therefore shares the eccentric, agglomerative interpretation of its source material as earlier work at Bolsover and other Cavendish properties, though cast in a new, more Baroque, mode.

However, like Bolsover’s Terrace Range, Nottingham Castle’s plan still had a medieval-type hall entered from the long side, rather than a centrally-positioned one on the Renaissance model. This latter was a feature seen in Derbyshire as long ago as the 1580s at Hardwick as well as at Slingsby Castle forty years before Nottingham’s building. In fact, it is possible that Nottingham Castle was not intended to be innovative or striking. It can be seen as a second attempt to achieve the perfection of a design – for a *palazzo* roughly along the lines of Michelangelo’s designs for the Capitol in Rome – that had already been attempted in the Terrace Range at Bolsover in the 1630s (Figures 4 and 5). The two buildings shared the same basic visual ingredients of windows, pilasters and staircases, similarities that are obscured by their dissimilar styling. Even battlements similar to Bolsover’s can be seen in a projected view of Nottingham Castle, published before it was complete, although in the event a balustrade was built instead (Figure 6). Nottingham, like Bolsover, can also be seen as a home-grown, odd version of classical architecture. Adrian Woodhouse notes its deficiencies in terms of classicism such as ill-spaced windows and broken string-courses.

It is this repetitive element in William Cavendish’s architectural patronage that hints at long-term motives for building, as well as a series of *ad hoc* reactions to situations such as court appointments. We have seen that the decoration of Bolsover Castle was, in the short term, intended as a place to entertain and impress William’s powerful cousins. This final section will argue there was another family relationship that dominated the last twenty years of William’s life. William and his second wife were at odds with both his son and certain of the household servants. William once again used building as a way out of a difficult social situation: in this case, to unite his household, but to exclude his son.

William Cavendish’s will decreed that his son Henry should complete Nottingham Castle, but several later writers give a misleading impression of his level of involvement. According to Charles Deering, the trustees for the work’s completion were Samuel Marsh, Richard Neale, Richard Mason and Thomas Farr, who was a member of Henry’s household. Thomas Chambers Hine repeats this inaccurate list in the nineteenth century, as does Geoffrey
Figure 4 The Terrace Range at Bolsover Castle, built for William Cavendish in the 1630s. English Heritage.
Figure 5. John Clee's east elevation of Nottingham Castle, published in Charles Deering’s *Historical Account of the Ancient and Present State of the Town of Nottingham* (Nottingham, 1751) facing p. 170. By permission of The British Library.
Treuze in the twentieth. However, William’s original will mentions neither Marsh nor Farr. Dated only three months before William’s death, the will specifies the sum of

Two Thousand pounds a yeare by even and equall Quarterly payments be paid out of my Personall Estate into the hands of my Trusty Servants Richard Mason of Newark and Richard Neale of Mansfield Woodhouse . . . to be . . . imployed and disposed in the carrying out of the said worke, and the paying and defraying of and for materialls, workmens charges

The will also makes provision for what would happen if Henry, as executor, should fail to hand over the money: the trustees would be entitled to certain of his lands. Thomas Farr was only a witness to the will, not a trustee. The document is couched in a way that implies that Henry was not to take an active part in the completion of the building, except to supply the necessary money under pain of penalty.

Tensions between William and Henry Cavendish emerge clearly from the last sixteen years of William’s life. Henry’s elder brother had died in 1659 and Henry suddenly found he had the title and role of Viscount Mansfield. He was ordered by his exiled father to move from his rented house at Thorpe Salvin Castle to Welbeck as a caretaker. In later years, Henry looked back fondly on his time at Thorpe Salvin, before he became William’s chief heir. On his deathbed, he said he had ‘never lived so well & contentedly as hee did there’. At the Restoration, William’s unexpected return from exile meant that Henry had to leave Welbeck. Homeless once again, he began a transitory life-style between a rented house in Lincolnshire and an inn in London.

Money, unsurprisingly, was another point of contention between father and son. Henry lived on an allowance from his father. In 1663, Henry’s
financial situation had become so parlous that he had to give William ‘a brief account how [he] came to be eight thousand pounds in debt’. He claimed that £6000 had been spent since William had forced him to move back into rented accommodation. A copy of an extraordinary petition survives (c.1674) in which Henry begged to be allowed to return to Welbeck. He argued that it would save money, since William would reduce his allowance upon ‘giving us leave to live with you’. Henry wanted to return to Welbeck in order to protect his family’s financial interests. ‘I would lay down my life’, he wrote in 1665, ‘for my deare Wife and my Children at any time to Establish ym in a great and Plentiful estate’. There is therefore considerable evidence for Henry’s perceived financial insecurity. An old man’s relationship with his son and heir was obviously important. Yet William jeopardised it by tying up money in building projects. In planning Nottingham Castle, perhaps William intended to make a concrete and long-term statement about Cavendish greatness before his unsatisfactory son took over. He was, in fact, spending his son’s inheritance.

Possibly Nottingham Castle was intended for William Cavendish’s grandson Harry (1662–1680). ‘Sweet Harry,’ William called the younger Henry, and in 1670 he boasted that although his own children disliked Margaret, ‘Harye loves my wife bettere then anye bodye, & shee him I thinke’. This idea of family continuity and the continued refinement of a design over the course of a century certainly had something to do with William’s own father. Margaret wrote that William bought the castle of Nottingham, because ‘it being a seat which had pleased his Father very much, he would not leave it since it was offer’d to be sold.’ It was as if the Cavendishes, having achieved worldly success, could simply refer to their own family style instead of having to concern themselves with court fashions. Charles II himself made the importance of breeding clear in his letters to William. He duly weighed ‘the greate & extraordinary services pformed by’ William with ‘the noblenes of [his] Birth & Family’ when awarding the Garter. Similarly, William partly ‘earned’ his dukedom by his loyalty, but additionally, ‘his Virtues are accompanied with a Noble Blood, being of a Family by each Stock equally adorn’d and endow’d with great Honours and Riches.’

Another area of discord between William and his son in the period during which the Nottingham Castle project was conceived was Margaret Cavendish’s jointure. ‘I am very mallencholy’, wrote Henry in 1671, ‘finding my Father more perswaded by his Wife then I could thinke it possible’. The sorest point was William’s perpetual enlargement of Margaret’s inheritance at Henry’s expense. William could not understand Henry’s concern: he wondered that Henry ‘should trouble himself with nothing’, and claimed that ‘jeloseyes, doubtts, feares & whispers are too womanishe for mee to trouble my selfe with’. However, the fact remained that Henry’s stepmother and his father’s building project were both consuming the money that Henry longed for to provide security for his own children.
Several writers on Margaret Cavendish have identified her unpopularity within the household.121 Henry’s hostility towards his stepmother was shared by many other household members. According to a group of servants who conspired against Margaret in 1670, she sought ‘to inrich her seffle for a second husband’, and aimed to ‘ingrosse the whole revenue into her hands, and Confound all retainers to the famelie’.122 She aroused hostility through her role in rigorous estate management; it was said, for example, that she ‘was very severe in punishing those of the Forest in Nottinghamshire, taking away all the cattle that were not branded’.123 Margaret’s key servant, Sir Francis Topp, was also deeply unpopular. William’s daughter Jane wrote that Topp ‘inttends non of my Lord Chilldern any good’.124 Jane and Henry’s dislike of their stepmother and her servants may therefore have strengthened William’s determination to increase her jointure at his children’s expense, and to exclude them from his own concerns such as building projects.

A competitive relationship between a peer and his heir is not unusual. Tension spilled over into the wider household for the second Earl of Castlehaven, for example, who was successfully accused of rape and sodomy by his son and heir, and beheaded in 1631. This son and his wife, who made the accusations, said Castlehaven had abused a lord’s privileges to cause disorder within the household. The arguments in the trial were not about homosexuality, but about the duties and privileges of the head of a family.125 Likewise, William’s poor relationship with his heir resulted in accusations of sexual impropriety, which illustrates the depth of disorder in the Cavendish household. It is significant that the disaffected servants chose to attack Margaret through this means. They wrote an anonymous letter accusing her of adultery with Topp with the intention that that William would expel both from the household.126 It was an accusation that must have been capable of gaining currency, and Margaret was elsewhere known as ‘Welbeck’s illustrous Whore’.127 Royalist gossip had long reported that William himself was fond of ‘witty society (to be modest in the expressions of it)’.128 In addition, Henry’s plea to return to Welbeck was inspired, he wrote, by ‘some young women who being presumptuously and extravagantly ambitious do with their foolish thoughts fill town and country doing what they can to dishonour your Grace’.129

These quotations illustrate the issues being discussed in the household at the time when the major building project at Nottingham was conceived. William’s heir was forced to live in rented accommodation, while his father tied up Henry’s future income in his stepmother’s jointure and in a building project. William’s wife was unpopular as a force for change and efficiency within the household. William and Margaret together were subjected to scurrilous intrigues, including accusations of adultery and promiscuity. In this situation, it seems likely that a major new project must have provided a new beginning and a new focus for the household. As we have seen, the building process engaged a wide cross-section of the household’s members and they were used

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to adopting the necessary roles. This was a more productive alternative to
their occupying themselves in gossip about their master’s sexual exploits or
poor relationship with his heir. Furthermore, work began on site immediately
after Margaret’s death, as if the project (which must have been long in the
planning) finally came on site to distract its patron at a time of loss. 130

We have seen that a Cavendish building project involved many people in
the family and household beyond those directed involved on site. The two
projects – the interior decoration of the Little Castle at Bolsover in the
1610s, and the re-building of Nottingham Castle in the 1670s – had a com-
mon background of family tension and disagreement. Building was a concern
that outlived William’s ambitions on the national stage. Bolsover Castle was
decorated at a time when William aimed at court advancement, but achieved
it through the means of blackmailing his relations for favours. Nottingham
Castle was built at a time when William, now in retirement, was anxious to
express the lasting status of his family through architecture and to subdue his
household’s criticism of his wife and relationship with his heir. These pro-
jects therefore reflect much more than a simple ambition for power at court.
They also show that building was an activity firmly rooted in the micro-polit-
ical world of the household and family.

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Mark Hines, Maurice Howard, Tim Raylor and anonymous readers for The
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although any errors remain the author’s own.

Notes

2 See R. W. Goulding, Margaret (Lucas) Duchess of Newcastle (Lincoln, 1925);
Douglas Grant, Margaret the First. A Biography of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess
of Newcastle (London, 1957); Kathleen Jones, A Glorious Fame, the Life of Mar-
3 Margaret Cavendish, The Life of the thrice Noble, High and Puissant Prince
William Cavendishe, Duke, Marquess and Earl of Newcastle, etc. (London, 1667),
p. 91; Robert Thoroton, The antiquities of Nottinghamshire, extracted out of
Records, Original Evidences, Leiger Books, other Manuscripts, and Authentick
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6 Bodleian Library, Ashmole 1110, fol. 170r.
10 Timothy Mowl and Brian Earnshaw, Architecture Without Kings, the rise of Puritan classicism under Cromwell (Manchester, 1995), p. 169.
13 Cavendish, The Life . . . (1667), p. 188.
20 The Nottinghamshire Archives (hereafter NA) DD 2P/24/73, fol. 6.
21 The University of Nottingham, Hallward Library, Department of Manuscripts and Special Collections (hereafter UN) Pw 1/315, fol. 1.
24 BL Add MS 70499, fol. 356; The National Archives, Prob.11/353 (formerly PCC Hale, quire 22); a copy exists at NA DD 6P/1/19/30.
26 See, for example, UN Pw 1/51; 1/138; 1/455.
27 NA DD 6P/1/25/3, Period 2, (24th December 1612 – 23rd January 1613).
28 NA DD 3P/14/19 (the letter is misleadingly catalogued in the Nottinghamshire Archives, probably explaining why it has escaped notice previously).
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29 eg. NA DD 6P/1/25/3, (27 November – 11 December, 1613).
30 NA DD P/8/134.
32 UN Pw 1/669.
33 UN Pw 1/16 (9 July 1672).
34 BL Add MS 70499, fol. 237.
35 UN Pw 1/669.
36 BL Harleian MS 4955, fos 199r–202, ‘The King and Queene’s Entertainment at Boulsover, July 1634’, by Ben Jonson.
42 eg. UN Pw 1/331.
43 UN Pw 1/315.
44 UN Pw 1/25.
47 Bodleian Library, Rawlinson Poet 16, p. 35, ‘On my Hon:ble Grandmother, Elizabeth Countess of Shrewsbury’.
52 *ibid.*, p. 129.
53 UN Pw 1/309.
54 NA DD 6P/1/19/18.
55 BL Add MS 70500, fos 110r–111v.
56 UN Pw 1/553, fos 1r–2r.

I am grateful to Nigel Llewellyn for his discussion on this point.

Rosalys Coope undertook research for the Department of the Environment in the 1970s, but see especially Raylor (1999).

BL Harleian MS 4955, fol. 67b.


Henry ‘wenches lov’d more than his wife’ (Bodleian Library, Rawlinson Poet 16, p. 35, ‘On my Hon:ble Grandmother, Elizabeth Countess of Shrewsbury’) and William paid an allowance to ‘a by blow of ye . . . Erle of Shrewsburie’ (UN Pw 1/47).


NA DD P/50/69 (20 December 1608); DD P/50/70 (19 August 1613).


UN Pw 1/554, fol. 1.

UN Pw 1/553.

UN Pw 1/147, Henry Howard to Henry Cavendish (13 July 1676).


The National Archives, Prob.11/129, (formerly PPC Weldon 62, quire 62); NA DD 6P/1/19/10.

NA DD 6P/1/19/12–13, deed in settlement of the will of Charles Cavendish (25 September 1617).


The National Archives, SP Series 81, Vol.19, Part 2, No.176, John Woodward to Sir Francis Nethersole (7 November 1620).

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Ibid.


83 Bodleian Library, Ashmole 1110, fol. 171.
84 Clement Ellis, A SERMON Preached on the 19th of May 1661 . . . Before His EXCELLENCY WILLIAM Ld MARQVIS of NEWCASTLE. at his House of WEL- BECK (Oxford, 1661), Prefatory letter.
87 Cavendish, The Life . . . (1667), p. 91; UN NeD 3850.
90 Ibid., 69–74.
92 NA DD 2P/24/73.
93 Clayton justifies himself against accusations of fraud in NA DD 2P/24/73.
94 Strong, Letters (1903), p. 57; UN Pw 1/503.
95 UN Pw 1/624c.
96 Charles Deering, Nottinghamia vetus et nova, or an Historical Account of the Ancient and Present state of the town of Nottingham (Nottingham, 1751), p. 186.
97 See note 24.
98 NA DD 6P/7/2/238 (1 November, 1679; 11 June 1681).
99 NA DD 6P/7/2/237.
102 UN NPE P 4/5/3, plan of the ‘Principal’ storey, Nottingham Castle (1769).
105 Deering, Nottingham (1751), p. 186.
107 The National Archives, Prob. 11/353 (formerly PCC Hale, quire 22); a copy exists at NA DD 6P/1/19/30.
108 BL Add MS 70499, fol. 351.
109 UN Pw 1/292/6c.
110 For example, UN Pw 1/40; Pw 1/374.
111 BL Add MS 70500, fol. 13.
112 UN Pw 1/74.
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113 BL. Add MS 70500, fol. 26.
114 BL. Add MS 70500, fol. 53.
116 Bodleian Library, Ashmole MS 1112, fol. 47r.
119 BL. Add MS 70500, fol. 33.
120 Ibid., fol. 37.
122 UN Pw 1/315, fol. 1.
124 UN Pw 1/90.
126 UN Pw 1/315, ‘A true Narrative and Confession of that horrid Consperacie, against her Grace Margarett Duchees of Newcastle acted at Welbeck, October the 31st last past’ (1671).
127 Bodleian Library, Ashmole MS 36, fol. 187.
129 UN Pw 1/74.
130 Trevor Foulds has also noticed this conjunction of dates, ‘Nottingham Castle Ducal Palace’, unpublished report for Nottingham City Council (2000), p. 2.

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