

The standards set by Peter Collins as an educator and a scholar epitomized a dedication to integrity, honesty and rigour in the study of architecture. He excelled not only in the lecture hall, but also in the literary world (AIA Medal, 1977), and perhaps most importantly in his personal interest in the development of his students. Peter Collins published his first article in the RIBA Journal in June, 1953. In accordance with his wishes, it is reprinted below in his memory.

THE DE WAILLY AFFAIR

by Peter Collins.

THE ACADEMY of Architecture's spirited resistance to Louis XV's arbitrary appointment of Charles de Wailly as a senior member of that body is a detail of the French struggle against royal privilege which has up till now received little attention. To what extent it was a personal act of the king, as opposed to that of Marigny, the minister responsible, it is impossible to say. The Marquis de Marigny was the brother of Madame de Pompadour and like all upstarts he liked to assert his authority; de Wailly was assistant architect for Versailles, but it seems unlikely that the king would for this reason show a great personal interest in his advancement.

On 25 May 1767 the Academy received a letter, written the previous day at Marly and signed by Marigny, which declared that the king wished to appoint de Wailly direct to first class membership of the Academy, and thus fill a vacancy which had existed since the new royal statutes had augmented the Academy in 1756. The Academy, in obedience to the royal instructions, duly installed de Wailly, but decided to protest. For this purpose, a letter was drawn up by a sub-committee, and approved by the Academy on 1 June.

This protest claimed that in accordance with the first statutes established in 1717, appointments to the first class had always been made by promotion from the second class, and that de Wailly was showing no

little presumption in wishing to pass ahead of his colleagues by illegal means. Marigny's reply to the secretary of the Academy, dated from Versailles on 14 June 1767, was unequivocal and ominous: "I have received the representations which the Academy has thought fit to address to me regarding the King's nomination of M. de Wailly to fill the place left vacant, since its creation, in the first class. As the Academy began by properly respecting His Majesty's wishes, I shall not take these representations in bad part, but I am somewhat grieved to see that the Academy shows a faulty understanding of the situation. They should have perceived that the King is only using a right which belongs to him essentially, and which is quite distinct from those he has been good enough to grant to the Academy".

Upon reading this letter, the Academy appointed another larger sub-committee, who drafted another and longer letter which was approved on 30 June. This second letter restated the case, pleaded the danger of creating a precedent for ignoring the statutes, and dwelt on the mortification experienced by members of the second class at being thus passed over. It included the significant phrase: "Formal laws can only be abrogated by other laws equally formal". Marigny's reply was dated from Compiègne, 18 July 1767, and read as follows: "I have just given

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the King an account of the question raised by his Academy of Architecture, and I joined to my report the two letters of representations addressed to me. His Majesty orders me to inform his Academy that he is very displeased to see them complain against a favour he has thought fit to confer; none of his architects can ignore that he may, when he wishes and without regard to the forms he prescribed to his Academy for normal elections, place in the first class any person he may consider worthy of this distinction...I have shown this letter to His Majesty before sending it to the Academy".

The Academicians remained undaunted by Marigny's reply and, adding yet two more members to their special committee, charged these ten to draw up a placet for submission direct to the king. This placet, after recalling the honour of the king's attendance at a meeting of the Academy in 1719 (when he was nine years old), protests that the sole motives in objecting to de Wailly's election are the honour of the Academy, the maintenance of its regulations, and the desire to retain his royal protection. After repeating once more their rights as they understood them, and recounting the steps they had already taken in the matter, the placet terminates: "How great, Sire, will your Academy's affliction and distress be if it is no longer supported by the hope of soon seeing your anger cease. Deprived of its laws and of Your Majesty's protection, its existence would be more painful than its entire abolition". To this placet was appended a lengthy memorandum setting out once again the whole case in detail, and a deputation of four Academicians was appointed to take the documents to the court at Compiègne.

Having aroused the wrath and antagonism of Marigny, the deputation was in some doubt as to the best way to approach the king. It was finally decided to make use of the good

offices of Louis Phelippeaux, comte de Saint-Florentin, who filled the office of Minister of the Household, and who - what was far more important - disliked Marigny. But delay followed delay, and by 7 September 1767, the last meeting of the Academic session, the placet had still not been presented.

Suddenly, in the middle of the vacation, Marigny acted. On 2 October 1767 he wrote from Versailles: "The King has seen with renewed displeasure the manner in which the Academy is conducting itself, and notably its lack of respect and submission to His Majesty's latest orders, notified in my letter of 18 July. Informed, moreover, of the abuses which have crept into the Academy, and wishing to remedy these by substituting a body better able to fulfill his requirements, both for the teaching and improvement of architecture, His Majesty orders that until further notice, when he shall have made known his intentions concerning the new establishment he envisages, he has revoked and annulled not only the brevets of all the Academy's members, expressly forbidding them to qualify themselves by the titles conferred on them by the said brevets, but also the right to assemble and act together under the said titles or relative to their present possession of them until now. His Majesty has at the same time suppressed all appointments and functions relative to the said Academy, as well as the fees and emoluments resulting from the same".

But Marigny's antagonism had overreached itself, and his own humiliation followed swiftly. It can be imagined with what delight each Academician must have received the following letter from his hand, dated at Fontainebleau on 13 October 1767: "Monsieur le comte de Saint-Florentin has done me the honour of informing me that since your position as member of the Academy of Architecture was

authorised by a brevet emanating from him, as Secretary of State for the Royal Household, the revocation of your brevet, decided by the King on my report, can similarly only be effected by him. This being the case, the letter I wrote you on the second of this month must be regarded as not having been sent; His Majesty will let us know what he wishes to do in this matter through M. le comte de Saint-Florentin".

The end of this dramatic episode was contained in a letter from Saint-Florentin to Ange-Jacques Gabriel, the king's chief architect and President of the Academy. It was also dated 13 October 1767 and written from Fontainebleau: "I have informed the King of what has happened at the Academy relative to the reception of M. de Wailly, and of the letter you have lately received from M. le Marquis de Marigny. His Majesty's intention is that having nominated M. de Wailly to a place in the first class, into which he has been received by the Academy, he should continue to enjoy it, but His Majesty is quite agreeable that this example should in no way be taken as a precedent, or be prejudicial to the Academy statutes. His Majesty at the same time commands me to inform you that in terminating this matter concerning M. de Wailly, he desires that M. le Marquis de Marigny's last letter written on his behalf be regarded as not having been sent, and consequently members of the Academy shall still continue to hold their brevets. Nevertheless, His Majesty disapproves the Academy's conduct with reference to M. le Marquis de Marigny".

"It is requested that a copy of this letter be sent to all the members of the Academy".

For the next few months, the relationship between the Academy and the Marquis de Marigny was adorned by mutual exchanges of quite overwhelming politeness●