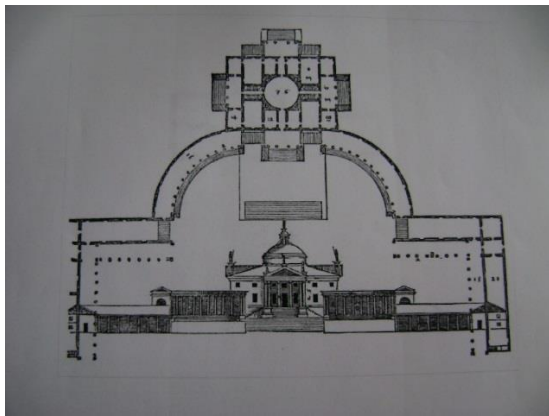


## Belle Isle, Palladio, and Carter's Grove: A formidable connection

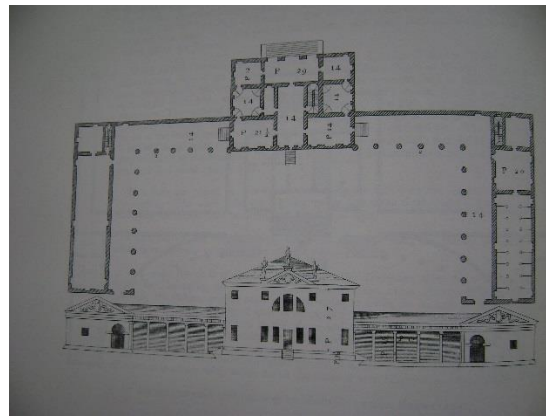
### Palladio's Influence on American Architecture

16<sup>th</sup> century Italian architect Andrea Palladio had a significant influence on Colonial American architecture. This influence can be traced back to the rebirth of classic Roman architectural design in the Italian Renaissance and the works and publications of Palladio and others. By the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the popularity of Renaissance classicism had spread through the entire European continent in part due to the publication of Palladio's designs and the popularity of Italy as a Grand Tour destination to see Palladio's buildings. In England, one influential figure who followed this classicism was Inigo Jones, an early proponent of Palladio. Inigo Jones's Palladian style buildings and designs spawned a late 18<sup>th</sup> century Palladian Revival in England. This English Palladian Revival had a strong impact upon Colonial American architecture of the Georgian Period of 1714-1830 exerted by means of numerous published works of designs.

Palladio's classic, I Quattro Libri, The Four Books on Architecture, and other books by Palladian followers such as James Gibbs, Robert Morris, Colin Campbell, Batty Langley, and William Salmon presented a visual and practical sense of classicism in design. From these pattern books, both amateur and professional American builders adopted rules of Classical proportion, detailed façade designs, and sample plans and elevations of the Palladian Revival style. The designs of the handsomely engraved plates were implemented in the colonies with enough skill to instill in American buildings a new sophisticated formality.

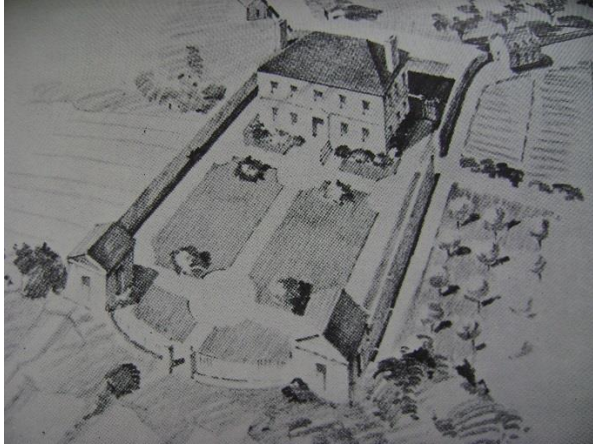


*Villa Trissino Meledo from I Quattro Libri*



*Villa Foscari from I Quattro Libri*

In America, Palladio's ideas translated well to the rural nature of the young country. Palladio took the large 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian farm with its many scattered buildings and unified the composition for a small villa. He raised his one important floor or *piano nobile* on a high basement that became the main living space of the family, with high ceilings for coolness in the hot summers and mezzanine rooms tucked into upper spaces. The two-story building was flanked with dependencies, to house farm services, laid out on either side of the main block to frame it symmetrically, often in a *five-part plan*. These wings were connected to the house by means of arcades, colonnades, or passages *creating a forecourt* and a single complex of spaces. This unification of spaces worked well especially in the south with the hot summers and with the necessity of housing services and laborers in outbuildings close to the main dwelling.



*Artist Rendering of a Forecourt, Main Block, and Dependencies*

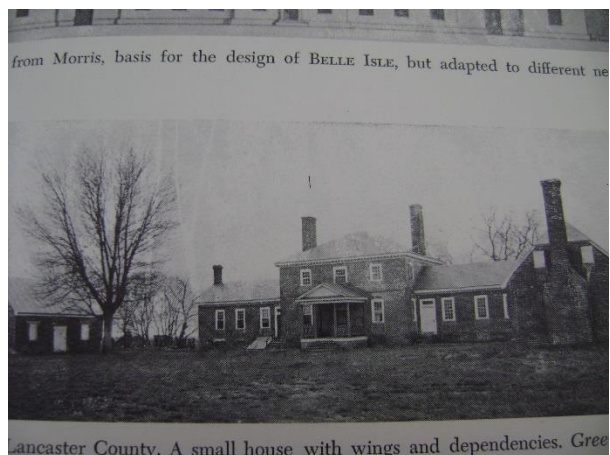
**The Palladian Influence on Belle Isle and Carter's Grove**

Belle Isle and its predecessor Carter's Grove are two examples of American Georgian period architecture influenced directly by the English Palladian Revival pattern books of Robert Morris, William Salmon, and James Gibbs. Built in the Mid-Georgian period, Carter's Grove, was completed in 1755 with a style based upon plates from James Gibbs's Book of architecture 1728 and William Salmon's Palladio Londinensis 1722.

The precedent set by Carter Burwell, builder of Carter's Grove, influenced Belle Isle builder Thomas Bertrand Griffin. Judith Burwell, the wife of Thomas Bertrand Griffin was also the daughter of Carter Burwell. Conceivably Thomas Bertrand Griffin would have spent time courting his wife at Carter's Grove and hence come under the influence of the Carter and Burwell families and their Palladian style mansions. Constructed in the Late-Georgian period, Belle Isle reflected a style based upon Robert Morris plate 33 in Select Architecture 1754 a publication likely found in the library at Carter's Grove.



*Carter's Grove, Original Façade and Dependencies*



*Belle Isle, Five-Part Plan with Forecourt*

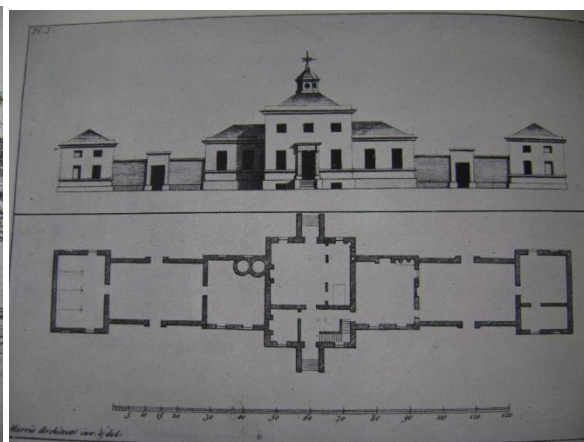
**Where did the long line of classicism and Palladian building traditions originate in the Carter and Burwell families?**

Carter Burwell was a member of two families with lengthy traditions of mansion building using established classicism from England in its various forms. In the mid-1730's, the uncle of Carter Burwell, Lewis Burwell III built Kingsmill, a Burwell plantation house. Kingsmill is described as an exact arrangement of the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg with dependencies projecting from the plane of the front wall of the mansion, closing the forecourt at either side in a Palladian villa format.



*Governor's Palace with Palladian style Forecourt Kingsmill Plantation, a Burwell mansion, dependencies*

From the Carter side, the grandfather of Carter Burwell, Robert (King) Carter built his mansion Corotoman, circa 1701, as a two-story brick on an elevated basement, with projecting corner pavilions and rich classical ornamentation. King Carter's use of classicism in his building program likely influenced the construction of his children's mansion houses such as Cleve built by his third son Charles. Built in the early 1750's, by Charles Carter, Cleve was a two-story brick center block with hipped roof and a string and water course. The façade and interior plan were designed in a style popularized by Palladian enthusiast, James Gibbs.



*Cleve, Square Main Block with Original Hipped Roof Example of Five-Part Plan Morris and Gibbs*

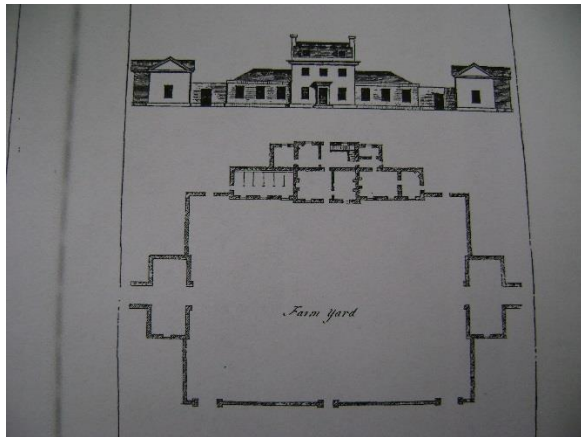
Following both the Burwell and the Carter family building schemes, Carter Burwell, father of Judith Burwell Griffin, nephew of both Charles Carter and Lewis Burwell III, built Carter's Grove in 1749-1755



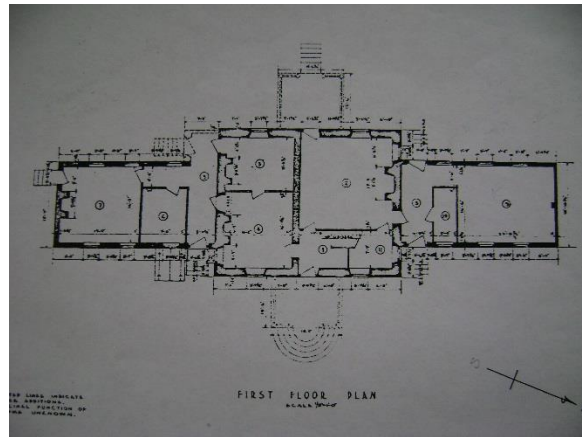
with almost identical plan to that of Cleve. Carter's Grove had a hipped roof, two story brick center block with water and string course. In addition, Burwell added two dependencies one attached with passage and one incomplete, in essence emulating the five-part plan of Gibbs's Palladian designs. Elaborate paneled interiors were installed using William Salmon's Londinensis as a guide book, known to have been purchased by Carter Burwell in 1751. The Carter's Grove house is considered a fine example of Mid-Georgian period architecture in Virginia.

**Belle Isle and the influence of Carter's Grove and Palladio.**

Belle Isle, a Late-Georgian period mansion, begun in 1767 by Thomas Bertrand Griffin exhibits a five-part plan with forecourt in the Palladian Revival style. The availability of pattern books by Palladian Revivalists in America and the physical presence of Judith Burwell Griffin's family home, Carter's Grove, would do more than suggest that Thomas Bertrand Griffin found the Palladian format the best model for his new house, Belle Isle. Based upon the wealth of his father and his wife's dower, a grand building was planned. Griffin's design for his house and dependences was based on a plate from Palladian follower, Robert Morris's Select Book on Architecture, showing the 5-part plan of a central block, wings, and dependencies connected by hyphens or colonnades forming a forecourt.



*Robert Morris Plate for Belle Isle*



*Belle Isle Floor Plan*

Belle Isle's central block has the look of a typical Late-Georgian period double pile, four square house, with four over four rooms. The house features a hipped roof, modillion cornice, beveled water table, narrow belt course, and segmental brick window and door arches. These were all elements found on the original façade of Carter's Grove. Belle Isle interiors were elaborate with all paneled rooms and fancy staircase just as in those of Carter's Grove. Two single pile, detached flankers(dependencies) of brick with clipped gabled roofs were also completed before Griffin's death in 1778 and formed a forecourt in the Palladian model. The exterior has visible signs called racking that Griffin built into the sides of the main block where Griffin had hoped to add wings that when added to the dependencies would complete the Morris design.

In 1786 Rawleigh William Downman acquired Belle Isle and in 1801-2 he initiated construction of the wings originally planned by Thomas Bertrand Griffin which reflected, with few changes, both Carter's Grove and Robert Morris's plan. The Morris plan had wings with clipped gable or hipped roofs and a central block with no exterior porticos. The Downman addition of the wings with straight gables and the addition of Tuscan porticos to both fronts, presented an articulation and architectural style associated

with turn of 19<sup>th</sup> century rather than late-Georgian 1765-1776. Fortunately, the later additions did serve to complete the five-part plan and forecourt of the Palladian small villa, so beloved by the Carter, Burwell and Griffin families.

### **Conclusion**

The legacy of Carter, Burwell and Griffin families is exemplified by their extensive building programs and their shared enthusiasm for classic design. From the Governor's Palace, Kingsmill, Cleve, Carter's Grove, to Belle Isle, a formidable connection can be made from Palladio, to English classicism including its Palladian Revival style, to fine Virginia Architecture in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

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